

MINISTRY REPORT TO CLASSES AND COUNCILS

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Chaplaincy Ministries

The Director of Chaplaincy Ministries, Herman Keizer, Jr., officially retired on July 1, 2008, but remains working half-time until his replacement is selected.

Chaplaincy Ministries endorsed eleven new chaplains in 2008—three in the U.S. and one in the Canadian militaries, four in healthcare, one in hospice, one in corrections, and one in developmentally disabled ministries. Only five chaplains retired this year. One concern for this ministry is the number of chaplains near retirement age. We need to continue the kind of growth we saw in 2008.

Chaplaincy Ministries worked with the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship to put resources for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) on-line (<http://www.calvin.edu/worship/resources/ptsd/index.php>) helping churches become veteran-friendly. We thank God that all of our chaplains who served in combat have returned safely after ministering to our Armed Forces with diligence and compassion.

Working with the Office of Social Justice, Chaplaincy implemented some of the recommendations of the Restorative Justice and War and Peace Reports.

Along with Home Missions and local churches, Chaplaincy Ministries helped plant a church in a Michigan prison. God's presence was evident as he prepared the corrections personnel and made them supportive of a church plant.

Pray for employers of chaplains as they face the problems of an economic slowdown. Help them to see that the spiritual/religious dimensions of human life require special tending in difficult times and that the chaplain is a valued asset for the organization.

Committee for Contact with the Government

Throughout 2008 there was plenty of talk about hope in political campaigns on both sides of the border. The CRC's Committee for Contact with the Government (CCG) has worked for hope since 1968. In those 40 years, we have experienced small signs of hope and more than a few challenges to justice. So, in 2008, we pursued Christ's ministry of reconciliation with patience and persistence. Some highlights follow.

CCG worked with Project Ploughshares, the Canadian Council of Churches, and other CRC partners to encourage peace as a priority in Afghanistan. CCG has enjoyed good discussions with Members of Parliament from the major political parties on this key part of Canada's international responsibilities. CCG was honored to have its work on Afghanistan profiled in the *Canadian Journal of Peace Research*.

CCG is excited about new cooperation with the CRC's Urban Aboriginal Ministry Centres and the Canadian Aboriginal Ministries Committee. Together we are learning how our denomination can act for justice and reconciliation with Aboriginal people—in the spirit of the Prime Minister's historic June 11, 2008 apology to Residential School Survivors.

In June of 2008, CCG was pleased to release the first edition of Mobile Justice – our monthly electronic news source. Mobile Justice includes articles on CCG's core issues—Peacebuilding and Aboriginal Justice—and profiles the good work of our partners in justice work. You can subscribe to Mobile Justice at www.crcna.org/ccg, at ccg@crcna.ca, or by contacting us at 800.730.3490.

Disability Concerns

In 2008, a number of councils and church care teams wondered how best to care for people with long-term challenges. In response, Disability Concerns and Faith Alive Resources co-published a training booklet by John Cook called *A Compassionate Journey: Coming Alongside People with Disabilities or Chronic Illnesses*. The first printing of 1000 sold out; the second printing is now selling. Disability Concerns received a grant from Sustaining Pastoral Excellence to lead workshops based on the booklet. About 150 people attended the workshops.

Churches hungry to include people with disabilities in their life and ministry sent over 350 people for training at conferences and workshops that were sponsored or led by Disability Concerns.

About two-thirds of Christian Reformed classes and half of Christian Reformed churches have disability advocates. Over 40 Regional (classis) Advocates were trained in helping churches.

Over 65,000 copies of our newsletter, *Breaking Barriers*, went out each quarter to churches that subscribe to it. They distribute it to enhance their ministries with people with disabilities.

Disability Concerns was able to reach a wide audience with the publication of a series of devotionals in the August *Today* and with feature articles in *The Banner* and *Reformed Worship* by the Director of Disability Concerns, Mark Stephenson.

When a pastor from Ontario contacted us about making a pulpit area accessible, we sent his request to our Regional Advocates in Canada who sent him two pages of ideas and several pictures. Much of this information is available to anyone on the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship web site.

Dynamic Youth Ministries

Calvinist Cadet Corps: The Cadet Corps had an interesting year in 2008, but there is no doubt about what constitutes the highlight of the ministry year. The International Camporee in August drew more than 1,300 participants to property near Burk's Falls, Ontario. By now, most readers of *The Banner* or Cadet publications are well aware of what happened. God sent rain. Rain fell for 22 of 27 days leading up to camp, and it rained every day at camp. The result was mud—an unbelievable amount that got deeper every hour. A camporee is normally held for eight days, beginning on Wednesday. This one was cut short. Emergency evacuation began on Saturday with all campers safely moved to a nearby hockey arena by Sunday afternoon.

Hearing of this, a person might infer that the camporee was a disaster or a flop. Actually, the opposite is true. Campers saw the love of Christ poured out by those around them as the men and boys shared food and dry clothing and helped each other during the evacuation process.

Many Cadets in attendance pledged to return for the next International Camporee as junior counselors. The 2011 International Camporee in Michigan promises to be another memorable event.

GEMs Girls' Clubs: Celebrating 50 years of God's faithfulness was indeed a highlight of GEMs Girls' Clubs in 2008. Girls and leaders currently involved in the ministry, as well as women who have been involved in GEMS or Calvinettes in the past, had the opportunity to look back and see the faithful hand of God leading and guiding the ministry and helping it grow. Over and over again the baton of faith has been handed down to the next generation by women who love God and have found great delight in serving God by mentoring girls.

Youth Unlimited: As Youth Unlimited (YU) enters 2009, we reflect back on God's faithfulness throughout 2008. Through YU events, nearly 3,000 youth and youth leaders took on the challenge of learning about and taking action to "Right the Wrong" in this world. As we look over the many testimonies, it is obvious that God's light shone brightly this past year!

We are now preparing to focus on what it means to "Live Inside Out" based on Romans 12:1-2, which says "Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it..." (Eugene Peterson's *The Message*). YU loves ministering to youth through events and supporting church efforts in youth ministry through the provision of resources and trainings. If there is anything we can do to help or serve you please contact us at www.youthunlimited.org.

Faith Alive Christian Resources

The Banner closed the fiscal year 2008 in the black, has maintained on-time delivery, and, according to our many informal sources, still seems to enjoy the confidence and appreciation of the bulk of our readers. Last spring's donor appeal again surpassed our goal, for which we are very grateful.

In order to assure ourselves that we are still on target, we will again contract with an independent marketing firm to conduct a large survey of *Banner* readers and potential *Banner* readers for an objective look at how we're doing. The results of that survey will help us decide what changes, if any, are needed for the magazine and/or our website (www.thebanner.org).

World Literature Ministries (WLM):

World Literature Ministries continues to pursue global publishing opportunities to transform lives and communities worldwide. In Russia, for example, fifteen thousand translated copies of Calvin's *Institutes* have been distributed.

During fiscal year 2008, Libros Desafío, the Spanish publishing imprint of WLM, increased its sales by 4.8

percent, demonstrating the continuing need for theologically sound leadership materials in Spanish-speaking countries.

Products:

- For forty years, the late Jacob D. Eppinga's column, "Of Cabbages and Kings," was the hands-down favorite of readers of *The Banner*. Eppinga was a master at using the ordinary things of life to point readers to the extraordinary grace of God. To honor his legacy, Faith Alive published *It's All Grace: The Best of Eppinga*, a collection of forty of his best-loved articles.
- *Nurture*, Faith Alive's new lively and attractive bimonthly newsletter, helps families share faith together. In just a few months, subscriptions have grown to over 9,000 copies with glowing feedback.

Loan Fund

Last year the Christian Reformed Church Loan Fund celebrated its 25th anniversary. The Loan Fund was incorporated in 1983 with assets of \$2.5M consisting primarily of loans receivable transferred from the Church Help Fund. Since that time assets have grown to over \$36 million and the Loan Fund has made over 160 loans totaling over \$57 million to CRC churches across the United States.

Because of the difficult economic climate, calendar year 2008 was a year of slower growth for the Loan Fund. Loans totaling over \$3 million were made to seven churches in six different states. Loans receivable increased 9% to \$29.8 million and notes payable increased 8% to \$30.2 million.

The ministry of the Loan Fund thrives and grows thanks to thousands of CRC investors who use some of their investments to support the growth of the Kingdom and at the same time earn a good rate of interest on those investments.

For more information go online at www.crcna.org/loanfund or contact us at 616-224-0829, 800-332-0012, or crlf@crcna.org.

Pastor-Church Relations

A single word seems to summarize Pastor-Church Relations (PCR) for 2008. It is *transitions*.

While there have been the usual/unusual tasks of education and intervention there have been many transitions:

- In our ministry there has been further progress in setting up a certification process for staff ministries in the churches.
- Church Visitor training and planning has continued in some classes.

- Our staff had to move out of current offices to prepare for a new office suite. At the end of 2008 we made the move to the new offices.
- John Vander Lugt, former registrar at Calvin Seminary, has retired from our Ministerial Information Service Committee after about 20 years of working with it and the PCR Advisory Committee. John has been an invaluable asset to our process of helping "match" pastors and congregations. Thanks, John!
- Since 1999, Bob Walter has served as a Transitional Ministry Specialist with PCR. He is retiring in early 2009.
- In January, 2009, Duane Visser is retiring from his thirteen-year position as director of PCR. 2008 has been a year of transitioning as PCR prepared for his retirement. Norm Thomasma was named the new director. By the end of the year Cecil Van Niejenhuis, of Edmonton, AB, will fill the vacancy created by the shift in Norm Thomasma's position. We will be welcoming Cecil to this new position in March, 2009.

A personal note from Duane reads: "Working with pastors, congregations, and staff has been a rich experience. I cannot begin to name all of the people I have had the privilege of meeting and walking with. Thanks for these opportunities. And blessings to each of you in your ministries."

Race Relations

The Office of Race Relations along with the antiracism teams of the agencies joined together to form the Race Relations Team. This new team encompasses the denominational buildings in Grand Rapids and Burlington as well as the Back to God Ministries International in Palos Heights. The team exists to develop and implement strategies for moving toward a work environment that is free of racism.

The Dance of Racial Reconciliation (DORR) has been offered internationally. In June, a DORR workshop was presented to a group of pastors and lay leaders in Ecuador, after which many of the participants took the training to become DORR facilitators. The same scenario played out in July in the Dominican Republic. We now have indigenous leaders in both countries.

The Office of Race Relations is working with Faith Alive and Home Missions to develop a DVD and study guide on racial reconciliation to be distributed to our churches throughout North America. This project should be completed in 2009.

In December, Rev. Esteban Lugo and Rev. David Koll traveled to Dearborn, Michigan, to meet with Dr. Basem Qusous at the Arab-American Friendship Center. The center provides quality educational services for Arab immigrants to encourage understanding among cultures and friendship among people. It is through friendship that they can share God's love. Dr. Qusous and his wife will also be ministering at the Multiethnic Conference in June 2009.

We continue to rejoice in the progress of our work as we see the movement of God and his great power. To God be the glory forever and ever.

CRWRC

Through God's grace and the generous support of the Christian Reformed Church, CRWRC was able to respond to disasters, poverty, and injustice around the world in 2008. CRWRC responded to disasters—both natural and human caused—in 30 countries in 2008 and worked in nearly 4,000 communities to create change.

CRWRC continued to respond in places like Sudan and Zimbabwe where conflict and injustice have left millions in need.

When cyclone Nargis devastated much of Myanmar/Burma, CRWRC distributed food and emergency supplies to thousands of families and is now helping people rebuild their lives by distributing fishing boats, tools, and seeds.

In North America, CRWRC's Disaster Response Services volunteers gave nearly 300,000 hours of their time to help disaster survivors assess needs and rebuild their homes.

In December 2007, CRWRC launched a three-year "Embrace AIDS" campaign to raise awareness about AIDS and solicit financial and prayer support for those living with the disease around the world. By December 31, 2008, CRWRC had raised \$2.4 million for this campaign. CRWRC also launched a sub-campaign aimed at exciting and motivating young people to get involved in the fight against AIDS. For more information, visit www.iEmbraceAIDS.com. The next "Embrace AIDS" Sunday will take place on May 10, 2009. Please reserve time for this in your church calendars.

Opportunities for collaboration with CRWRC are many. Please prayerfully consider how you might engage with and support this important ministry in 2009. For photos, videos, and more information, visit www.crwrc.org.

Partners Worldwide

Around the world, Partners Worldwide (PWW) is seeing hope restored through job creation. This year, our small business network of entrepreneurs around the world created 1,650 new jobs and retained 16,812 jobs . . . praise God! These new jobs help lay the foundation for positive, sustainable change that impacts the lives of over 10,000 people living in areas of poverty. We are so blessed by how God is working through business people to facilitate economic and spiritual transformation.

2008 was a year of continued growth in the business ministry of Partners Worldwide. 310 business and professional people from over 26 countries and 24 states were encouraged and equipped in their calling when they attended our International Conference – "Business as Ministry 2008: Partnering to End Poverty."

2008 marked the launch of our Engage-Equip-Connect Strategy which seeks to engage more business people into the Business as Ministry movement, equip them with the tools and resources needed for effective cross-cultural partnerships, and connect them using improved technology and applications to improve access to critical information.

PWW Launched the Jobs2Hope Initiative, which will create and sustain 1,000 plus jobs targeted for caretakers of orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs), volunteers caring for HIV-AIDS affected people, and older OVCs. These jobs will bring hope for a better future, as they provide increased incomes and sustainable support of more than 5,000 individuals affected by HIV-AIDS and their families in Southern Africa.

Thank you for your continued prayer and support which is instrumental to our carrying out the vision and mission of Partners Worldwide.

Calvin College

Calvin hosted two classis meetings for Grand Rapids North and Kalamazoo at the Prince Conference Center on January 20. After morning meetings in separate rooms, the classes came together for lunch, a conversation with President Byker, and the opportunity to watch some of the Presidential Inauguration and all of the January Series lecture featuring D. Michael Lindsay's presentation on "Powerful Faith: Evangelicals in American Culture." A time for discussion and fellowship followed.

As the college of the CRC, Calvin is eager and willing to assist classes and regions by hosting meetings on campus, or by providing programming for retreats or a Day of Encouragement in the U.S. and Canada. The college has also started a campus visit program for older-adult groups from area churches, which has been well-received. Please contact Carol Rienstra at crienstr@calvin.edu to discuss possibilities for these opportunities.

The February Board of Trustees meeting included sixteen faculty interviews for reappointment or tenure. The interviews are most inspiring for the trustees as they hear how faculty members integrate faith and learning and mentor students. Trustees attended the 17th annual faculty dinner for the Presidential Award for Exemplary Teaching, and heard a presentation on the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship led by Dr. John Witvliet. Trustees also attended the public dedication events for the new Spoelhof Fieldhouse Complex which will meet the health and wellness needs of the campus community for generations to come. See www.calvin.edu for further information.

Calvin Theological Seminary

In 2008, Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) had a large graduating class of 82 persons from all of its degree

programs including 42 M.Div. graduates who were part of a group of 53 new candidates for ministry in the CRC.

These M.Div. graduates were the first to complete the seminary's three-year-old Ministry Formation program, which involves students in small, mentored groups practicing ministry in local churches throughout three years of their time in seminary.

The changes begun in the new Ministry Formation program were followed by bigger changes at CTS in 2008, including the faculty's adoption of new M.Div. and M.A. programs to begin in the fall of 2009, a switch from quarters to semesters beginning in the fall of 2009, and a renewed internal organizational structure that will serve to undergird these changes.

Other seminary highlights from 2008:

- Discerning Your Calling workshops and retreats were held at Calvin, Kuyper, Dordt, Trinity and Redeemer University Colleges.
- 90 pastors and church leaders acted as mentors to our students and met regularly to provide support and advice.
- Over 60 Continuing Education events were held on campus and around North America, serving over 6200 attendees.
- Our CTS online lecture archive was accessed over 34,000 times as people viewed and listened to lectures, town hall discussions, and chapel talks.
- Our Center for Excellence in Preaching website exceeded 10,000 different online visitors per month who accessed that growing treasure of resources for preachers.

See www.calvinseminary.edu for more information and resources.

Back to God Ministries International

Back to God Ministries International looks back on 2009 as a remarkable year of service within God's Kingdom.

Perhaps the most notable event of the past twelve months was the change of name from *The Back to God Hour* to *Back to God Ministries International* (BTGMI). The change was implemented by Synod in order to better reflect the full scope of the agency's mission. Back to God Ministries International, as its name implies, is committed to an international multi-media ministry that both broadcasts the gospel and disciples those who respond to the gospel call. Other ministry highlights of 2008 follow:

- Several new English programs have hit the airwaves this year. In the spring, BTGMI launched *Walk the Way*, a one-minute program inviting listeners to reflect upon the way God is working in their lives. In the fall, BTGMI launched *Under the Radar*, a program that combines music with Christian testimony. BTGMI continues to

produce *The Back to God Hour*, a program that now has aired for almost seventy years.

- New Listener Community groups continue to be formed in Indonesia. BTGMI is working with CRC World Missions to train coordinators for these groups, which meet to discuss programs aired through radio broadcasting.
- A new ministry center in Brazil is under construction. This center will be a launching pad for new ministry in South America and beyond when the building is completed in 2010.
- Chinese broadcasting has launched a new website specifically designed to reach children. At a major conference held in Hong Kong, BTGMI staff handed out over 10,000 CDs and pieces of literature to visitors from all over mainland China!

Back to God Ministries International thanks you for your partnership in media ministry!

Home Missions

God was clearly at work through Home Missions in 2008. Working through our twelve North American ministry teams, Home Missions introduced people to Jesus in *new churches*, in *mission-focused* congregations, on *college campuses*, in *small groups*, and through *Christian schools* in New Mexico.

One of the primary ways we reach people is through new churches, formed from Home Missions partnerships with Christian Reformed churches and classes. In 2008, we committed to supporting 30 new congregations across North America. Many of these new ministries are urban, multicultural churches like *Open Door Fellowship of East Harlem*, which started this year in the heart of New York City's gritty East Harlem neighborhood.

Home Missions also helped more than 43 CRC congregations focus on outreach through mission-focused church grants. We supported 23 campus ministries in the U.S. and Canada and conducted discipleship training through our small group ministries.

The Home Missions-sponsored small group and evangelism conference, "In Community," was held in Lombard, Illinois. More than 500 people attended this inspiring three-day event and were challenged, encouraged, blessed, and equipped for ministry that extends to every corner of the United States and Canada.

The year 2008 was also a year of exciting changes for Home Missions. Perhaps the biggest change was the retirement of John Rozeboom, who led Home Missions for twenty-two years. He has been temporarily replaced by Ben Vandezande, who previously led the Home Missions Central and Eastern Canada ministry team.

Home Missions thanks Christian Reformed churches and members and is grateful for the prayers and generous financial support given this year.

World Missions

Amazing things have happened this year at Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) through the grace of God and his faithful people. Roughly 9,000 people came to Christ through work done by CRWM and her partners worldwide. World Missions also helped establish over 70 new worshipping communities this year.

One of the efforts to reach the unreached yielded the translation of the New Testament into the Pular language, which is spoken by 10-16 million West Africans. Around the world, CRWM is helping to train and mentor over 5,000 Christian leaders, including 750 youth leaders in Latin America alone.

Work began in earnest this year around an initiative to recruit North American librarians and send them overseas to help our partner Christian institutions of higher learning. The purpose is to provide training and mentorship to librarians in areas such as purchasing and multi-media.

The year of 2008 also brought World Missions close to other agencies and institutions through partnership. One such partnership is between Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI), our partner Haitian church, and World Missions. In this partnership, BTGMI sends out broadcasts encouraging people to learn more about Jesus by calling the station. World Missions provides a person on the ground to follow up with the callers and help them plug in to a local partner church.

Overall, God has blessed the ministry of World Missions, and his people have continued to be involved in a variety of ways, not the least of which is giving in the midst of financial turmoil. We are grateful to God and to His Church.