

# MINISTRY REPORT TO CLASSES AND COUNCILS

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## Deputy Executive Director and Executive Director - Emeritus

The theme for our reporting this time is “Transitions and Renewal.” Within the ministry organizations we are part of there are a lot of transitions at the moment. Back to God Ministries International, Calvin College, Calvin Seminary, Home Missions, the Denominational Offices, and Dordt College have recently experienced or are anticipating major changes in leadership.

There is a loss associated with transitions. Faithful servants leave and move on; new leadership comes and anticipation of what is to come increases. Joy and anxiety—fear and hope—challenge and opportunity are all part of transitions.

One of the benefits of leadership transition is the potential for renewal. Organizations need that—people need that. Renewal is what keeps all of us healthy, challenged, excited and effective. Please read the attached reports with the glasses of transition and renewal. In both God is present. In everything God is faithful. In all things we give him glory.

## Chaplaincy and Care Ministries

Transitions probably happen more often in chaplaincy than in the parish, partly because chaplains often work for businesses and institutions which are constantly changing to keep up with technology, budget realities, or the competition.

Demand for hospital staff has decreased while hospice providers continue to grow. The full time military is decreasing in size while demand for reserves and national guards remains strong.

Our chaplaincy core has grown from 117 a year ago to 122 today, the highest number since our chaplaincy core began 70 years ago.

Transitions can be positive, negative, or neutral. Renewal, on the other hand, implies a positive future projection. We can perceive renewal in the fact that area CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) providers are working together to see that there are growing opportunities for these unique pastoral care training units to meet a growing demand.

We also see growth in interest in chaplaincy by way of increased opportunities to talk to students about chaplaincy at various Christian colleges and seminaries. This year we have done so at 13 different institutions with significant student interest at each.

We are currently taking the initiative to bring together representatives from Calvin Seminary, World Missions, Home Missions, SPE (Sustaining Pastoral Excellence), and Pastor Church Relations to address the need for a common source for assessment of gifts and aptitudes that may help determine, for students and ministry providers in transition, where they may find their best ministry fit.

## Disability Concerns

Disability Concerns, along with Faith and Hope Ministries of Classis Quinte and Disability Concerns of the Reformed

## Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action

Church in America, have begun a story project called Stories of Grace and Truth, which can be found at [www.crcna.org/stories](http://www.crcna.org/stories).

We are collecting stories, poetry, videos, and photos of artwork from people who have mental illnesses and from people who support them. With permission, these stories, poems, videos, and photos might be used in print and online to build greater understanding about mental illness.

Authors/artists are encouraged to reflect on questions like these: How has the hard-hitting truth of mental illness impacted you or your family? What are the challenges, the struggles, in your life from day to day? Where have you experienced moments of grace or difficulty in your faith journey?

The goal of the Mental Health Task Force of CRC Disability Concerns is to promote safe dialogue about mental health within the body of Christ. The task force comprises therapists, parents, and chaplains from both Canada and the United States.

Everything submitted will be kept private until released by the author. When necessary, authors may request that their name be withheld. We will not publish anonymous submissions. Submissions can be sent to [stories@crcna.org](mailto:stories@crcna.org) or to Disability Concerns, Attn: Stories, 2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49560. If you have questions, please call Mark Stephenson, director of Disability Concerns, at 888-463-0272.

## Faith Alive Christian Resources

### Publishing

Publishing is transitioning into broader categories, multiple content formats, and expanded distribution outlets. Categories providing growth include global publishing, adult spirituality and devotionals, small group studies, and Christian living. Digital book formats (e.g. Kindle) are representing an increasing percentage of titles sold by Faith Alive. Sales of Faith Alive books through new distribution outlets such as Amazon continue to grow.

### Marketing Communications

Faith Alive is growing in its presence on a number of different social media outlets. Currently Faith Alive is connected through Facebook, Twitter, *foursquare*, and LinkedIn. Our current efforts are targeted to gaining new followers on Facebook and Twitter, posting to our followers at least three times per week. We are intentionally using our social media platforms as conversation starters and introducing new products.

### Banner

The Banner continues to transition its ministry from a primarily print-based magazine to an e-zine that gathers the best content for its monthly print editions. While challenging, that next step in our journey to provide the best possible "kitchen table" conversation spot for our denomination has already paid rich dividends in reader response and interaction, in additional content that we could otherwise not have published, and in engaging folks who would otherwise not look our way.

As we gain experience in this new way of fulfilling our synodical mandate, we're already glad we took the extra effort. Let us know what you think!

The spring months are easily optimistic; time for birth, growth, and re-energizing. It's less so in the fall, with shorter days and dropping leaves - this is not the season to get excited about renewal. It seems especially difficult this year, while the Horn of Africa is experiencing its worst drought in fifty years.

Almost half of the world's population lives on \$2 a day or less; 800 million people live in slums; and over 850 million people suffer from food insecurity or chronic undernourishment. Some of these facts are not new, and yet they never seem to get easier.

This fall, the Office of Social Justice hosted a second year of the Show of Hands campaign, an initiative to raise awareness and support for the Millennium Development Goals. These goals have a target date of 2015, a mere three years from now. Will poverty end by 2015? Of course not. But the fight for justice doesn't come with an expiration date.

The OSJ – with CRWRC – is currently supporting three young journalists as they travel across Africa with a caravan of hundreds of other youth, learning and sharing about climate change. We're partnering with the Office of Race Relations to offer a new immigration curriculum to churches. And our continued partnership with Hope Equals continues to bear fruit as we work toward peace in the Middle East.

The Office of Social Justice celebrates its small wins. And we keep working and praying for a world where justice and shalom reign.

## Pastor-Church Relations

The staff of Pastor-Church Relations is often engaged in the opportunities and challenges of congregational and pastoral transitions. Four specific ways this happens are:

A cadre of **Specialized Transitional Ministers** has been developed to assist congregations through times of transition. This cadre continues to grow as do the requests for their services. The corps of STMs gathered in November, 2011 for three days at the Prince Center in Grand Rapids to share resources and expand their repertoire of responses to congregational transitions.

The staff of P-C R is developing a pastor search training tool. The goal is to enhance the process of congregations communicating with pastors and pastors communicating with congregations.

An initiative is underway to transition the processing of congregation profiles and pastor profiles to a web based system. This could allow for easier access to the process and a more efficient flow of information between pastors and congregations.

Also Rev. Cecil Van Niejenhuis and Rev. Norm Thomasma have been facilitating retreats for pastor couples sponsored by Sustaining Pastoral Excellence. The theme of these retreats has been "Navigating the Transitions of Life and Ministry". The Old Testament story of Jacob has helped deepen these conversations and to see that God often uses times of transition to reveal himself in remarkable and life changing ways.

## Safe Church Ministry

The transition from an interim position to Director of Safe Church Ministry was bigger than anticipated. I didn't realize how many things had been "put on the back burner" thinking that they would be the concern of the next director. Now here they are on my plate.

The challenges are overwhelming and the opportunities exciting. How can people of passion be engaged and equipped to help churches effectively prevent and respond to abuse? What are the best ways to involve key leaders to determine the priorities and focus for Safe Church Ministry? What will motivate, mobilize and encourage more people to become involved so that no one feels alone in this work?

The answers are not always clear. Safe Church Ministry depends on the Lord; He desires His church to reflect His character, in all its relationships. That means there is love, respect, dignity, mercy and justice and NO abuse, ever.

### Highlights:

New Resources:

- *Safe Church Ministry: A Church Leader's Role* (a new web-based resource) is designed for all council members and other church leaders. It gives an overview of Safe Church Ministry and builds understanding about the dynamics and effects of abuse.
- *What does Safe Church Ministry Do?* (An introductory power point presentation) is posted to our website in both English and Spanish!
- Over 25,000 bulleting inserts, "*Is it Abuse?*" went out to churches for Abuse Awareness Sunday

Presentations & Training

Safe Church presentations at fall Classis meetings

- Joint sponsorship with Office of Social Justice - Restorative Practices training
- New Safe Church Team Training on the topic of Domestic Violence
- Ongoing direct consultation with those seeking information and assistance

## Race Relations

The Office of Race Relations has experienced transitions and renewal as we continue to move forward with our ministries. In our pursuit of greater impact of ministry through partnerships, we continue to develop effective ministry partnerships with several of the denominational agencies, the Specialized Ministries of the CRCNA, and the Reformed Church of America.

Several of the collaborative projects include the development of the Dance of Racial Reconciliation II (DORR II) workshop. We now have the curriculum, and hope to conduct a pilot workshop in early 2012. We have also seen transitions and renewal with the first ever DVD called *Facing Racism*, which was developed in partnership with Home Missions, Faith Alive, and Product Services to assist churches to engage in the dialog of racial reconciliation. The DVD has been mailed to every CRC church for their use.

The development of a Dance of Racial Reconciliation Small Group Study is proceeding and is now at the editing stage. At the request of synod and in partnerships with the Office of Social Justice and the Reformed Church in America, we developed a workshop for churches on Immigration Reform. On November 4 we trained a number of facilitators so that the program is ready to pilot in the spring.

Renewal continues through Race Relations Scholarships—awarding over \$11,000.00 in scholarships this year to students in our colleges.

For all these initiatives that have become working programs, we give God the glory.

## Sustaining Congregational Excellence Sustaining Pastoral Excellence

In 2003, the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) program was introduced to the CRCNA. While the program components have evolved over the years, the overriding goal remains: to support and encourage pastors and pastors' spouses.

Since the beginning, SPE has been funded by a generous grant from Lilly Endowment. This funding will soon end. Synod 2010 mandated the Board of Trustees "to explore options for continued funding for SPE after the Lilly Endowment [funds] end". Synod 2011 "expressed thanks that the BOT has responded to the call to provide funds to continue SPE even after grant funding is completed".

As we head into 2012, the best parts of SPE (pastor learning groups, pastors' spouses' conferences, and pastor couple learning events) will continue with denominational funding.

Synod 2006 requested a plan be prepared to promote healthy congregations to assist local congregations using the Synod 2005 approved Ministry Share. As a result, the Sustaining Congregational Excellence (SCE) program was launched. It was patterned after SPE. Its overriding goal is to create and sustain healthy congregations—specifically in smaller congregations.

As 2012 begins, SPE and SCE will undergo a transformation of sorts. For the pastors, pastors' spouses, ministry leaders, and congregations, nothing will change. The programs will continue on as they have been. The same staff will be answering the phones/email. The same activities/events/grants will be offered. The same procedures for grants will be in place.

The transformation or change taking place will be internal. Rather than having an Implementation Team for both programs, there'll be one. Processes will be streamlined. Administratively, this is a positive move.

One thing you, the reader, *will* notice is that there will only be one article in the Ministry Reports to Classes and Councils from here on in. Stay tuned for future reports from SCE/SPE.

## CRWRC

Through CRWRC's Embrace AIDS ministry, many people learn to cope with an HIV- positive diagnosis, and transition from despair to renewed life.

Take Maracha Santoline, for example. After her two daughters passed away from AIDS, Maracha fell ill and decided to get tested through one of CRWRC's health care programs. Despite an HIV+ diagnosis, Maracha's life has improved thanks to the skills she developed. Through CRWRC's partners, she has learned about proper nutrition and health care, and also found employment. She now earns an income and is caring for herself and her grandchildren.

CRWRC celebrated stories of hope like Maracha's with CRC congregations on December 1, World AIDS Day. For more information, visit [www.embraceaids.org](http://www.embraceaids.org)

In addition to its AIDS campaign and community development work, CRWRC is responding to several severe disasters. CRWRC is providing aid following flooding in Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Pakistan. In addition, staff and volunteers continue to provide food and water to 150,000 people in the face of the severe drought in Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia.

Long-term relief efforts also continue in response to the earthquake and tsunami in Japan, the earthquake in Haiti, and conflict and famine in Sudan. In North America, CRWRC's Disaster Response Services (CRWRC-DRS) is responding to communities damaged by tornadoes in southern USA and in Goderich, Ont.; wildfires in Alberta; and flooding along the east coast, Alaska and Quebec.

Please continue to keep CRWRC in your prayers as we respond on your behalf to poverty, disaster, and injustice around the world.

## Calvin College

On May 20, 2011 President Gaylen Byker publicly announced his decision to retire at the end of the 2011-12 academic year. Gaylen Byker came to Calvin in 1995, planning to stay 10 years. Soon, he and others laid out a five-year strategic plan, started a capital campaign and built faculty, staff, curriculum and facilities over a period of 17 years. He noted, "When exciting things are happening and when the mission of the college is being carried out, it makes it difficult to step down and pass the torch.

"I am confident in the direction that the college is heading, and I am fully assured by the work of the board of trustees that the college will continue the momentum gained over the past decade. I am also pleased that the college is currently in good financial health, something that I wanted to make sure of before I retired.

"I covet your prayers for a smooth transition for both the college and me. I also urge you to be in prayer for the next president. I have full confidence knowing that he or she will be joining a dedicated team of Christians who are committed to the mission and Reformed identity of Calvin College."

A Presidential Search Committee has actively worked to discern God's will for the new president of Calvin, expecting to gain Board approval and make an announcement of a candidate by February, 2012. The new president is expected to be interviewed at Synod 2012.

## Calvin Theological Seminary

A new President, Rev. Jul Medenblik, was inaugurated as the 7<sup>th</sup> President of Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) on October 15, 2011. This event culminated a transition process where there are many new persons in roles at Calvin Seminary. Visit the Calvin Seminary website – [www.calvinseminary.edu](http://www.calvinseminary.edu) to find out who is new, but also what continues (like the Center for Excellence in Preaching).

With the fall, Calvin Seminary welcomed back students as well as welcomed new students. Some statistics to note are that enrollment is currently at 310. 130 persons are enrolled in the Master of Divinity program. 82 percent are male and 18 are female.

While students from a Christian Reformed Church background make up the majority of students, CTS is blessed with students from 30 different denominational backgrounds and from 20 different nations. For example, 53 students (17%) come from South Korea.

Calvin Theological Seminary continues to prepare for a significant transition – the introduction of a five year on-line Master of Divinity cohort program which is scheduled to begin in the fall of 2012.

The reach of CTS as a provider of Reformed theological education can only be enhanced by this new ministry tool of reaching and educating students in the setting and context where they live and minister.

Thank you for praying for the students and the new ministry programs being developed.

## Canadian Ministries

The Canadian Ministries office of the CRC has put a strong emphasis on reconciliation and renewal of relationships. Recognizing that each church and classis has a unique character and circumstances, resources are available for learning and staff resources to facilitate dialogue on how to respond to God's call.

An example of this is the "reForming Relationships" art tour that has just begun its cross country journey. Currently the series of paintings called "Kisemanito Pakitinasuwin – The Creator's Sacrifice" which depict Christ's suffering, death and resurrection in Woodland Cree style are at Wanuskewin Heritage Park in Saskatoon. The delegates of Classis Alberta South – Saskatchewan, and members of area First Nations visited the gallery and reflected on our Lord's sacrifice, and on our cultural responses.

More efforts toward reconciliation are taking place. In Halifax, Steve Kabetu of the Race Relations office in Canada and a group of people from the All Nations CRC attended the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's National Event. Also, the "Blanket Exercise," an activity that facilitates dialogue while explaining the history of Aboriginal people's interactions with European settlers, has been experienced at Classis meetings, at "Day of Encouragement" events, at colleges and universities and in churches.

The Centre for Public Dialogue has been actively researching Indigenous education as an issue of great importance in the journey of reconciliation. CRC members are

encouraged to participate in this dialogue, and to join the dialogue with our political representatives about constructive solutions to the present issues in education for Indigenous youth.

## Back to God Ministries International

Back to God Ministries International experienced transition in leadership with the death of Director Bob Heerspink in October. Rev. Jimmy Lin, Chinese ministry leader, is serving as interim director while the board searches for a new director. We praise God for capable international staff to carry out the ministry vision established by Rev. Heerspink.

The vision for media ministry includes harnessing new modes of communication for Gospel outreach. As increasing numbers of people worldwide receive information through smart phones and mobile apps, BTGMI media teams are developing ways to deliver our evangelistic and discipleship programming through mobile web technology and social media.

- The *Today* devotional, published by ReFrame Media (BTGMI English outreach) is available through daily email, website, mobile website, RSS feed, Kindle subscription, and now iPhone and Android apps. In the past six months since the *Today* iPhone app was launched, it has been viewed over 700,000 times. We've received more than 2,300 comments just through the app.
- Our Chinese ministry is now reaching thousands of people in mainland China through two new blog sites and weibo (similar to Twitter). In North America—and beyond—our Chinese Facebook pages have exponentially multiplied the ways we are able to share the Gospel with Chinese-speaking people.
- Our Arabic web-based chat room engages seekers, especially Muslims, in conversations about the Christian faith. This provides a safe way to respond to their questions and lead them to biblical truth.
- BTGMI Spanish team members led workshops in North and South America, training people from various ministries to use social media for outreach. Our Russian ministry team conducted social media training for youth leaders from Christian churches in Russia.

## Home Missions

### A Time of Renewal

For the past two years, led by Interim Director Ben Vandezande, Home Missions was preparing for the agency's next chapter. During this time, Home Missions celebrated a powerful sense of God's leading, most evident in the appointment of Rev. Moses Chung as new director.

Prior to Chung's hiring, the agency embarked on a new strategic plan, which culminated in the creation of our new

strategic priorities: multiplying new churches and campus ministries; helping churches discern their place in God's mission; and raising up diverse missional leaders.

Home Missions sees a strong sense of renewal in Chung's arrival, which gives fresh leadership that empowers Home Missions to translate these new priorities into action.

### Listening to God

Home Missions is now in a time of great renewal as it continues to pursue its mission of transforming lives and communities by catalyzing and cultivating Gospel movements.

This can be seen in our increasing reliance on prayer and discernment. For example, Home Missions has become more serious and intentional about prayer, as evidenced in the extended times of prayer at a recent fall kickoff event with staff members and at the October Board meeting. Chung has also invited the denomination to join together in a grassroots prayer movement, praying for new leaders, renewed congregations, new ministries, and thousands of new believers.

We are actively listening to what God is calling us to do individually, in our congregations, at Classis levels, in regions, in the denomination, and in *our* mission field—North America.

## World Missions

In 1911, two South African missionaries sent by the Dutch Reformed Church Mission, a member of the Sudan United Mission (SUM), sailed up the Benue River to work among the Tiv. This fall, the Church of Christ in Sudan among the Tiv (NKST) of Nigeria celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary since they first heard the Gospel.

For the first 25 years the missionaries worked among the Tiv, no more than 25 people professed Christ. But, God continued to work in people's hearts. The Christian Reformed Church was asked to take on mission efforts among the Tiv in 1954. The Tiv church became an official denomination and CRWM expanded on existing medical and educational ministries. As the church grew, Christian Reformed World Missions reduced its missionary activities in the area.

Today more than 500,000 people attend NKST church services on Sunday mornings. The NKST operates more than 500 primary schools, 50 secondary schools, and one university. Graduates from these schools have taken leadership positions in Nigeria and beyond. One graduate, Professor Iyorwuese Hagher, is currently Nigeria's High Commissioner to Canada. Another, John Orkar, taught at Calvin College and served in Nigeria with the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee.

CRWM continues to partner with the NKST in its Christian education, evangelism and discipleship, and leadership development efforts.

Thank God for His faithfulness through the last 100 years and the 100 years to come.

## Dynamic Youth Ministries

### Youth Unlimited

Over the past few years churches have witnessed Youth Unlimited make several transitions in an effort to support them as they minister to young people.

In 2009 YU launched a leadership development initiative which has developed youth worker soul care retreats across North America, increased the number of youth ministry trainings, improved existing resources like Equip Magazine, established intentional youth worker networks through youth ministry leadership consultants and even offers a trip to Israel for the purpose of enhancing a youth worker's biblical understanding and ability to teach the Bible.

Another significant transition was the re-invention of YU's large event. The switch from Convention to Live It! was made in response to the way today's youth learn and have a desire to experience faith in action. As a result of the Holy Spirit's work through the first Live It, another event was birthed for youth called The Marion Project. We are humbled to be part of God's work and blessed by the new opportunities he gives us to serve his people!

YU is committed to being anchored to the rock (God's Word), but geared to the times (relevantly meeting the needs of churches, youth workers and youth today)!

### **Calvinist Cadet Corps**

Transitions. Currently the Calvinist Cadet Corps is undergoing a transition in leadership. Elections will bring us a new president, replacing Mike VanderMeer who has held that position for the past six years. An appointment will give us a new chaplain, replacing Rev. Ron Noorman, who has served as Corps chaplain for 24 of the past 27 years. Please pray with us that the new leadership will provide what God desires for the ministry. Results are not known at the time of this writing, but both changes will take place, Lord willing, at the congress meeting in early January.

Three other noteworthy items of possible transition will take place at Congress. One is a proposal to allow the Calvinist Cadet Corps to change its name. A second is to develop a Web system for Cadets which would allow all clubs and councils to be connected in a much greater way than is currently possible ... think of something like a Facebook exclusively for Cadets. The third proposal is to develop within each region a "mentorship" office, using experienced Cadet counselors to help new or struggling clubs succeed.

## **Partners Worldwide**

Through the ministry of Partners Worldwide and the growing network of Christian business professionals in the global church of Christ, God continues to affirm people in the marketplace who are renewing His world. Reflecting on the history of Partners Worldwide, we celebrate God's faithfulness in transitions He called us to make, and renewal He has guided us through.

When Partners Worldwide began in 1996, businesspeople within the Christian Reformed Church lived out their passion and calling in the marketplace, and faithfully nurtured this infant organization. We're thankful for ways this global movement of "business as mission" was implemented and grown within the CRWRC. There, we witnessed God working in and through the CRC and around the world to bring about spiritual renewal in the marketplace.

In 2005, God called us to transition into a partnering relationship with CRWRC and CRCNA. We thanked Him for His faithfulness as we pursued the vision of "Business as

ministry for a world without poverty," especially as it became more evident that God's scope for business as mission reaches far beyond denominational, class, or cultural traits.

Today, business as mission is gaining traction around the world. Each day, more church and business leaders discover that God has created the marketplace as a means to reconcile all things, working through businesspeople Mondays through Saturdays. In this new transition, we pray for God's guidance through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. We seek to understand more each day, as we serve God and seek His renewal in the world alongside our partners in the CRC and the global Christian church.