

## STORY 2

### AIRPORT MEETING SPARKS FRIENDSHIP

Patrick Jok was passing through Philadelphia after a church conference and thought it might be a great opportunity to reach out to the Christian Reformed church there. A pastor from the Sudanese Reformed Churches in South Sudan, Jok was interested in exploring closer relations with Reformed churches in North America. Debra Ortiz-Vasquez, who attends Spirit and Truth Fellowship CRC in Philadelphia, responded to Jok's request and met him before he returned home.

"I drove to a hotel where he was staying," she said. "I heard his story about what is going on in South Sudan. He talked about living in unstable conditions because of the war. A lot of churches had been burned down. We prayed together, and I asked what he might need. All he asked for was Bibles."

Ortiz-Vasquez sent an email to a women's group from her church to ask for help with this request, and they gathered more than a dozen Bibles in one night for Jok to take back to South Sudan with him.

"It was a small thing," said Ortiz-Vasquez, "but it started a relationship. Now we stay in touch, and he sends us emails with updates about his family and his church with requests for prayer."

Photo courtesy Patrick Jok



## STORY 3

### NEIGHBORS IN SERVICE TOGETHER

"It's an extension of serving Jesus in a way that is practical and helps people." Rev. Mike Maroney of First Presbyterian Church in Chatham, Ont., said; "I think it's remarkable the amount of houses [we've worked on]."

For more than seven years, First Presbyterian and First Christian Reformed Church in Chatham have dedicated one week each summer to undertake a joint mission project that would serve their community. The church members have painted, built wheelchair ramps, constructed fences, done general carpentry repairs, replaced eaves troughs, helped with landscaping, and cleaned up around neighbors' homes — all free of charge.



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## ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

# Engaging the World at Our Doorsteps and Our Family across the Globe

Christian Reformed Church Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee

Cover photo courtesy The Chatham Daily News





## Ecumenical Relations

The Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC) has been appointed by the synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America to help our denomination engage and participate in the life of the global church and to address issues of an interfaith nature.

**Ecumenical** refers to our desire to treasure, preserve, deepen, and demonstrate the unity of the worldwide church. In our global world there is a seemingly vast array of choices when it comes to Christianity. We believe that even in the face of these differences we are called to reflect the unity of Christ. When we are united, we reflect the shared gift we have all received from God in Christ Jesus. When we are divided, our differences can become a stumbling block to our witness to others.

We form **ecumenical relationships** for this reason. We encourage local congregations to worship, witness, and work with neighboring churches that are part of the Christian community and unequivocally witness to Jesus Christ (in the spirit of Belgic Confession Art. 29). We also encourage congregations to learn from new neighbors—refugees and immigrants—who bring with them rich histories and faith stories.

For more information about the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee, for a list of churches with whom we have ecclesiastical relationships, or for more ideas about ecumenical activities for local churches, see

[crcna.org/eirc](http://crcna.org/eirc)



Photo courtesy The Banner

### STORY 1 CUBAN CONNECTIONS

“I saw the old guitar on a shelf on the second floor of the tiny Christian Reformed church in downtown Havana, so I picked it up and started strumming, then quietly began to sing one of my favorite songs, ‘Open the Eyes of My Heart, Lord.’ Suddenly I heard other voices in English and Spanish singing along. I looked up and the other people in the room—from Alberta and Toronto and Grand Rapids and Minnesota and Havana and Jaguey Grande, Cuba—we were all praising God and singing. And the eyes of my heart were opened. God’s presence was real in that upper room, in that tiny storefront church not two blocks from the Cuban capital buildings,” writes Dan VanKeeken, chair of Cuba Connection, a committee of Classis Alberta North (a regional group of churches).

While sharing a name with the Christian Reformed Church in North America, the CRC in Cuba is its own, unique denomination. It regularly receives support and encouragement from various CRCs in North America. LaGrave CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich., has contributed financial support, education, and materials to the Cuban CRC since the late 1950s. Plymouth Heights CRC, also in Grand Rapids, fosters fellowship between its adults with disabilities and those in Cuban CR churches. Hillside CRC in Cutlerville, Mich., sends mission teams to teach English and to train church musicians. Classis Minnokota regularly sends funds and missions teams. And Alberta’s Cuba Connection has helped with a variety of needs, including building a church parsonage and sending medical supplies.