

# MINISTRY REPORT TO CLASSES AND COUNCILS



## FALL 2015

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Dear Reader,

This issue of the Ministry Report includes a [short survey](#) about the report, how you use it, and whether there are ways that it can be improved. A few minutes spent responding to the questions will help us to serve you better.

The survey also seeks to determine the effectiveness of the CRC's specialized ministries in meeting your needs as you engage in ministry. Your attention to this section of the survey is also appreciated.

You will notice some changes in the way the Ministry Report looks. We've redesigned and reorganized it to reflect the streams of ministry – a new way of thinking about the things we're called to do as co-workers in God's Kingdom.

Thanks for all you do to make it possible,

Henry Hess, Director of Communications



## Back to God Ministries International

Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI) is committed to reframing lives with God's story by proclaiming the gospel, discipling believers, and strengthening the church throughout the world. Thanks to your support through ministry shares, gifts, and offerings, people are hearing God's Word and coming to faith in Christ.

The Lord continues to open the hearts and minds of Muslims in the Middle

East. A young Saudi couple responded to an online interactive broadcast that BTGMI produces in partnership with MERF (Middle East Reformed Fellowship) and Words of Hope. *"To us and assuredly to many more like us, Issa al-Masih (Jesus the Christ) represents the most appealing revelation of Allah (God)."* Pray for the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit as we proclaim gospel truth in the Middle East.

In partnership with the Presbyterian Church of Brazil, BTGMI Portuguese ministry produced and distributed 220,000 copies of a special *Family Cada Dia* devotional. Pray with us that this discipleship tool will help renew families and culture of people living in Brazil.

Conflict in Ukraine has disrupted people's lives. Last year BTGMI partnered with local churches to create a hotline for refugees to call. We recorded not only hope-filled messages, but also provided practical information about churches where they could receive assistance. This year our goal is to expand that ministry in partnership with the local churches.

We plan to produce up to 10 one-hour live broadcasts on local Ukrainian FM stations, and make the broadcasts available online. We will offer information about sources of humanitarian aid such as Christian relief agencies, government assistance, food pantries, and church events. Pray that God will use these efforts to bring gospel hope to hurting people in this part of the world.

[backtogod.net](http://backtogod.net)

## Home Missions

We have seen the Holy Spirit at work bringing new hope and missional energy to the many areas of our

ministry. Home Missions is engaged in coaching, training, renewal, innovation, and so much more through our regional teams which come alongside our 1,103 congregations.

- In Nanaimo, British Columbia, Andrew Turkstra leads a discipleship ministry called Breakthrough Ministries. As part of his ministry, Turkstra personally knocks on doors of local businesses throughout the city of Nanaimo, seeking to build relationships and share the gospel. He has visited over 400 different businesses, many of which have been open to the idea of a visiting chaplain. "God keeps reminding me that this whole thing is about people," says Turkstra. "I see people differently now."
- In Stockton, California, pastor Martin Sisneroz leads Open Door Community Church, which is a place of refuge 24 hours a day. "Worship takes place everywhere, all the time," says Sisneroz. "We are urging people to move into different facets of life and proclaim, 'This is church, too!'"

Sunday worship at Open Door Community Church reflects this philosophy, and regularly includes service projects, prayer walks, and community barbeques.

- During Synod this past June, delegates at the annual meeting overwhelmingly approved a proposal to join Christian Reformed Home Missions (CRHM) and Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) into one global missions agency. As the two agencies begin the joining process, both agency directors look forward to new possibilities for ministry as a result of this change.

[crcna.org/pages/crhm.cfm](http://crcna.org/pages/crhm.cfm)

## World Missions

For Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM,) the summer months began with an orientation and commissioning of volunteers. During the orientation, volunteers used the theme "One Body, Many Parts" to explore how they would soon be using their gifts while also learning from the gifts that God gave others on the mission field.

Twelve long-term missionaries also

took part in orientation and commissioning this summer. These newly-appointed CRWM missionaries will serve in Lithuania, Mexico, and the Middle East. At the orientation, all of the missionaries shared the unique ways that God called them to their upcoming ministry roles.

"God has a sense of humor of putting things together in ways that you would never expect," said one missionary. "There were so many amazing 'coincidences' in making this happen."

Now CRWM is looking forward to filling positions for five more individuals or couples to fill other open positions. You can find descriptions of these open positions in Asia, Haiti, Uganda, and West Africa, at [crcna.org/jobs](http://crcna.org/jobs).

A final highlight for CRWM this summer came during synod in June. At that time, delegates at the annual meeting overwhelmingly approved a proposal to join Christian Reformed Home Missions (CRHM) and Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) into one global missions agency. As the two agencies begin the joining process, both agency directors look forward to new possibilities for ministry as a result of this change.

As CRWM Director Gary Bekker noted, "This is about liveliness of the gospel in the CRCNA . . . and serving the Lord of the ages in the age where he has placed us."

[crcna.org/pages/crwm.cfm](http://crcna.org/pages/crwm.cfm)



## Pastor-Church Relations

To better serve our churches and pastors, the staff of the Office of Pastor-Church Relations has focused on streamlining the Church Profile Form and Ministerial Profile Form and developing a more user-friendly process for accessing and updating these forms. We are very thankful for the assistance of the Information Technology support team, the Ministerial Information Service Committee, other denominational staff, and pastors.

With the use of a portal, the enhanced

system will allow direct access to the profile forms, for pastors looking for a call and churches looking for a pastor. There will be less engagement of a "middle person" between the pastor and the church. There will also be a matching feature to the online profile forms where the pastor or church can access their own profile and see a listing of possible matches to their profile. We hope this direct connection will better aid conversations between pastors seeking a call and churches seeking new pastors. The hope is to have the minister portals ready later this year, with the portals for churches available at a later date.

The Ministerial Profile Form is available for Ministers of the Word and recent seminary graduates who are candidates eligible for call. Forms for the Church Profile and Ministerial Profile, which have both been completely redone as well, are already available on the Pastor-Church Relations website at [crcna.org/pcr](http://crcna.org/pcr) and The Network. The Pastor-Church Relations office is available to answer any questions you might have. We want to know how well the new system is working for you.

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

## Sustaining Pastoral and Congregational Excellence

*Spiritual Vitality in Pastors* is a new project for ordained (Minister of the Word and Commissioned) CRC pastors. Its goal is to see pastors learn habits of mind and heart toward spiritual growth in self and community. Participants will be placed in four-person groups that will be together for the duration of the 16-month project. Each group will choose and discuss a book. The pastors will engage in three assessments that will describe personal and professional tendencies—part of their spiritual formation.

In January 2016, all participants will gather for a 48-hour retreat, during which plans will be made for the coming year. Those plans will include one-on-one quarterly meetings with a spiritual director and group meetings every six weeks. In January 2017, all will meet for a second retreat to gather

the learning and growth of the past year.

Invitations have been sent out to all ordained pastors. An application form needs to be completed and submitted by September 21. There is room for 16 pastors to engage in this spiritual formation journey. The cost to each participant is \$200. The balance of the expenses will be covered by the project. Funds have been made available from a matching grant from the Pastoral Excellence Network [cpx.cts.edu/network](http://cpx.cts.edu/network). CRC contributing ministries are Sustaining Pastoral Excellence, Pastor-Church Relations, and Faith Formation Ministries.

For more information please contact Lis Van Harten at [lvanharten@crcna.org](mailto:lvanharten@crcna.org).

[crcna.org/pages/spe.cfm](http://crcna.org/pages/spe.cfm)

[crcna.org/pages/sce.cfm](http://crcna.org/pages/sce.cfm)

## Chaplaincy and Care Ministry

Our summer quarter began with our annual Chaplains' Conference which was held at the Prince Center in Grand Rapids, MI. We enjoyed seeing 63 of our current and retired chaplains in attendance, plus spouses, students, Advisory Committee members, and visitors that totaled over 100 participants.

Our keynote speaker, Dr. Harold Koenig of Duke University, was connected via webinar technology that allowed our audience to interact live with him (from his office in Durham, NC), while others who were not able to attend in person could connect online. The technology worked well and may become a format used by us and similar groups in the future.

During that conference, our Advisory Committee met and discussed several policy and procedural changes. More importantly, we also interviewed and approved two more candidates for endorsement, bringing our total number of chaplains to 133. We also noted that the growing number of applicants for endorsement suggests that we will continue to see growth in this ministry of outreach to our world.

This growth and the growing number of requests for training grants challenges us to be more deliberate about asking for support from our current and former

chaplains, plus the churches and individuals who see this as an important extension of God's kingdom in this world.

We are currently sending out letters to encourage churches to schedule a Chaplain's Sunday on Nov. 22, 2015. We are planning another round of visits to Christian colleges and seminaries, while also beginning plans for our 2016 Chaplains Conference (June 9 - 11, 2016). At this event we hope to begin launching a year of recognizing our 75th anniversary as a denominational ministry.

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

## Candidacy Committee

The Candidacy Committee is the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church that coordinates and facilitates the ordination of pastors. We provide assistance to individuals, churches, and classis leaders as they navigate their way through the process of becoming a Minister of the Word or a Commissioned Pastor within the CRCNA.

The Candidacy Committee works closely with Calvin Seminary, in order that graduates of the Master of Divinity (M.Div) program and the Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (EPMC) are ready to be recommended to synod as candidates for ordained ministry.

The EPMC program is required of those who earn their M.Div. degree at a seminary other than Calvin. It enables students to learn about the CRC in a way that will enable them to effectively minister in it. The Candidacy Committee has been involved in refining the program in the past few years, and Synod 2015 gave its blessing to the latest set of program adjustments (see Acts of Synod 2015).

We also presented to Synod 2015 a proposal that will require all potential candidates to have two years of purposeful and consistent interaction with a mentor, a local ministry, and a regional classis before they are presented to synod. In coming months we will work with potential candidates and their mentors, or help them find mentors, and we will work with classis teams to implement this new process. Pray for our team as we launch this new feature of the candidacy process.

The focus of our work is on those preparing for ordained ministry. This past June, Synod approved candidacy for ordination for forty-four persons. You can see their photos and profiles at [crcna.org/candidacy](http://crcna.org/candidacy). Others are preparing for ministry as Commissioned Pastors, or preparing to move their current ordination into the Christian Reformed Church. Our goal is to come alongside of each of these persons and their ministries. We are very grateful for an active partnership with servant-leaders in each of the classes, as this task requires a very personal front-line presence.

More about our work can be found by going to our web page, cited above. Our staff person, Rev. David Koll ([dkoll@crcna.org](mailto:dkoll@crcna.org)), Director of Candidacy, is also eager and willing to respond to any questions or concerns.

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

## Classis Renewal

Synod made several decisions that will have major impact on how the classis works and what it does. This builds on the momentum of the "classis renewal" movement, which has its roots in an interagency task force already underway more than 25 years ago.

With very limited resources of budget and staff, the task force worked with classes, offering encouragement, resources, consultation, and opportunities to gather classis leaders for conversation.

Now, with the decisions of synod, the momentum picks up significantly. Denominational leadership is convening a group of people representing a broad range of resources, with the objective of taking a hard look at the WHAT and the WHY and the HOW of classis, and more importantly to listen, and to engage classis leaders in a discovery process that will generate innovation.

Classes that have gone through renewal and have worked hard at sustaining the changes have good stories to tell about best practices. And a half dozen more classes are now engaged in the process of re-visioning and renewal.

For more information, call Karl Westerhof, Classis Coach, at 616-241-1691.

## Church Renewal Lab

The Church Renewal Lab is a two-year renewal journey for the purpose of developing intentional missional congregations that make more and better disciples who transform lives and communities for Christ.

The Renewal Lab is an extension of the Institute for Global Church Planting and Renewal at Calvin Seminary and works collaboratively with the CRCNA to come alongside congregations that have plateaued or are in decline, along with any congregation seeking to refresh their mission focus.

The Lab guides churches through a 3-step process of “listen...imagine...do.” During this process the Lab provides: eight renewal courses (“learning labs”), a peer learning environment, congregational involvement, coaching, team development, accountability and trained interns. Participants travel in cohorts of 6-12 congregations that launch every June.

Participating congregations journey towards:

- identifying a unique mission-focused vision
- developing tools for making more and better disciples
- putting Gospel central in every aspect of ministry
- changing congregational culture through a focus on congregational health
- reflecting the priorities of the early church as described in Acts 2:42-47

Forty-one Christian Reformed congregations have participated or are participating in the Church Renewal Lab. In June the first cohort beyond the West Michigan area was launched in Northern New Jersey.

Besides the two-year renewal process the Church Renewal Lab also offers renewal retreats. A late September/early October retreat tour is scheduled with retreats in Lynden WA, Seattle WA, Sunnyside WA, Portland OR and Chino CA. More information about the Church Renewal Lab can be found on the Calvin Seminary website or by calling the Renewal Lab director, Keith Doornbos, at 616-957-7064.

## Ridder Church Renewal

In January of this year, after leading Pillar Church (Holland, MI) through the Ridder Church Renewal process and our own transformation into a new day of ministry, I became the director of Ridder Church Renewal (RCR) at Western Seminary in Holland. RCR began in 2008 as a collaborative effort to provide continuing education to pastors and teams of church leaders.

Named after Bud and Lenora Ridder for their passion to develop church leadership, the focus of Ridder Church Renewal is on the transformation of pastors and leadership teams to be better equipped to lead churches in a rapidly changing world. RCR teaches pastors and leaders to live into the values of integrity, authenticity, courage and love while learning to practice ministry skill sets needed in leading transformational change in local congregations.

It's a challenging and deep process for pastors because it asks us to accept responsibility for ourselves and our own transformation in ways that are often left alone in the day to day workings of the church. This process has led to many stories of transformation in the lives of pastors and, consequently to change in the culture of their churches. At a time when cynicism about the church is high and many congregations easily fall into resignation about the future, or quick-fix schemes, RCR is working with a “long obedience in the same direction” approach.

This is a collaborative effort of the RCA, the CRC and Western Theological Seminary. This fall, RCR will begin another 30-month cycle of learning events for pastors and church teams from CRC and RCA churches in six regions of the US and Canada (British Columbia/Northwest Washington, the Heartland, Wisconsin, Great Lakes, Ontario, and New York/Albany).

So far we have about 90 churches enrolled in our process and room for a few more. Pray that God would bless this new series of events to bring about further growth for the kingdom and transformation of churches and communities. Contact Chris DeVos

## Reformed Leadership Initiative

A new opportunity to be “together again” has come to the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) and the Reformed Church in America (RCA) in a two-year pilot project for developing local congregational leaders at all levels in the U.S. and Canada.

The pilot meets the need for equipping leaders with a biblical vision of the church and kingdom, who are personally being formed and growing in the image of Christ, and competent to lead thriving congregations in their ministry context.

The Reformed Leadership Initiative (RLI) is made possible through the generosity of The Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation. A partnership between the CRCNA, RCA, Calvin Theological Seminary and Western Theological Seminary will serve local congregations as they engage in mission and ministry.

The RLI will create and support six Congregational Leadership Learning Networks (CLLN) in diverse geographical and ministry contexts in North America. The CLLNs are the first step in developing a diverse, distributed network for congregational leadership training.

Each learning network will provide a space for participating congregations to:

- learn from, and with, one another
- share tools and models for leadership development
- implement and reflect on what they learn
- encourage fidelity to the Reformed tradition
- do this all in relationships of high accountability, creativity, and innovation

The CLLNs will be led by a local team of co-leaders (one from the CRCNA and one from the RCA for each network). These leaders will be supported by staff members from each denomination. For further information see

## gospel proclamation and worship

### Worship Ministries

Every week Christian Reformed congregations from 5 individuals to a 1,000 strong gather to worship in at least 13 different languages, in spaces from living rooms to large auditoriums. Worship happens in urban and rural contexts, emerging churches and long established ones, with organ and praise bands, choirs and hip-hop, Native American, European, African American, Korean, Latino, Chinese, Vietnamese.... We are people of great diversity. What do we all hold in common as CRC congregations as we worship? What does it mean for us as Reformed Christians to worship in spirit and truth in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

The Westminster Catechism says that humanity's primary goal is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Each week, the church gathers to do just that. And as we glorify God, we also hear God's will for our lives, how we are to be the church where we work, live, and go to school – how to be Christ's representatives here on earth joining in the work that the Spirit is already doing.

Recognizing the importance of our weekly worship, the CRCNA has launched Worship Ministries to come alongside those who are doing this pastoral work week in and week out, by creating networks for mutual support, finding and creating needed resources, and helping each church deepen the questions they ask around worship, as together we discern what it means for us to worship in spirit and truth. This means connecting with pastors, worship leaders, planners, musicians, artists, dancers, scripture readers...you!

#### **This is where we can use your assistance.**

1. While we have databases with information on pastors we don't have similar information on other staff and volunteers. Could you take a moment and send us the contact information for the key people in your church or classes?  
Email: [worship@crcna.org](mailto:worship@crcna.org)

2. There are many ways to engage around the conversation of worship already. Please encourage your worship folk to check out [crcna.org/worship](http://crcna.org/worship) to find out more.
3. Pray for Worship Ministries particularly for discernment as our advisory committee is formed and helps to develop a strategic plan that arises from the church for the church.

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

### Calvin Theological Seminary

#### **New Faculty Appointments**

June 15, 2015, was a special day in the history of Calvin Theological Seminary. On that evening, the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church heard interviews of two candidates for appointment: Dr. Matt Tuininga – Assistant Professor of Moral Theology and Mr. Cory Willson – Assistant Professor of Missiology. Synod enthusiastically affirmed both appointments. Dr. Tuininga will begin his appointment as of July 1, 2016, and Professor Willson began his appointment on July 1, 2015. To see video of Dr. Tuininga's interview, click or go to: [goo.gl/0hWiXR](http://goo.gl/0hWiXR). To see video of Mr. Cory Willson's interview, click or go to: [goo.gl/pQ62bm](http://goo.gl/pQ62bm).

#### **Candidates for Ministry in the Christian Reformed Church Presented**

Also on this day in June, Synod approved 44 new candidates for Minister of the Word to serve in the Christian Reformed Church. This presentation event is one of the high points of every Synod—and for Calvin Seminary, since every candidate receives training at Calvin Theological Seminary, with the majority completing a Calvin Seminary degree. You can find articles and coverage of the presentation of the Candidates for Minister of the Word at: [cncna.org/synod](http://cncna.org/synod)

#### **Calvin Seminary Updates Synod on "New" Ministry Programs**

Every few years, Calvin Seminary is invited to make a half-hour presentation to all delegates at Synod. This year, President Medenblik described for Synod how a 139-year

old-seminary continues to be "refreshed" by new ministry initiatives such as Distance Education, Hispanic Ministry Program and a joint prison ministry program with Calvin College called the Calvin Prison Initiative. An article with video presentations can be found here: [goo.gl/lvkOxs](http://goo.gl/lvkOxs)

#### **Facing Your Future Program**

On July 8, 2015, 29 soon-to-be high school seniors or first year college students arrived on campus to launch with us the 17<sup>th</sup> year of Facing Your Future (FYF). FYF is a three-week intensive through which these students explore their calling in life and vocation. It combines theological and reflective study at Calvin Seminary with hands-on ministry experiences hosted by churches in Salt Lake City, Utah; Roseland-Chicago, Illinois and Austin, Texas.

Thank you, church, for all the ways your prayers are used by God to lead, guide, and sustain Calvin Theological Seminary. Please keep praying.

[calvinseminary.edu](http://calvinseminary.edu)

### Calvin Institute of Christian Worship

During 2015, the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship (CICW) hosted 1600 guests at the Calvin Symposium on worship (including 600 from Christian Reformed Churches and over 300 students), awarded 30 Vital Worship grants to worshipping communities across North America, co-sponsored worship conferences in Mexico, South Africa, and Uganda, hosted a consultation on bi-lingual Spanish-English worship resources, and served over 30,000 visitors per month on its website and social media outlets.

From these conversations, the following key topics have emerged that will be featured at the next Worship Symposium (Jan. 28-30, 2016) and in future CICW online and print resources:

- How can worship serve as a central faith formation and discipleship practice for both children and adults, for both seekers and life-long Christians?
- How can worship services, like architecture, feature "universal design"—being planned from the

start to welcome the participation of persons across the spectrum of abilities and disabilities?

- How can musical and artistic leaders in worship approach their work as “pastoral musicians and artists,” with a heart for providing care, nurture, and spiritual growth through how they plan and lead in worship?
- How can Sunday worship strengthen Christians for faithful engagement in the workplace all week long?
- How can public prayer practices be strengthened to include not only personal health needs and congregational concerns, but also the needs of local neighborhoods and faraway cultures and countries?
- How can Christians prepare to commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 in ways that cherish the renewal of the church experienced during this period, acknowledge the changing context of Catholic-Protestant relationships after Vatican II, and take note of the new context for this major commemoration in light of the explosion of Christianity in the global south?

Working closely with CRC Worship Ministries, the Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary, and other CRC agencies, CICW prompts learning about these questions in its workshops, conferences, and classes, and shares learning about these through its website and publication series with several major publishers.

[worship.calvin.edu](http://worship.calvin.edu)



## Faith Formation Ministries

By now every CRC congregation has received a denim-blue brochure that describes our Children at the Table Toolkit (CAT). It's the first in a series of on-line toolkits that we are preparing at FFM. If you'd like to explore it, go to [crcna.org/faithformation](http://crcna.org/faithformation), and click on “toolkits.”

Why are we preparing toolkits?

4. **Toolkits are flexible and each congregation can discern which tools in the kit will serve in their context.** One-size-fits-all recipes and programs are not appropriate for congregations. Each congregation has its own context, its own history, its own character, and its own mission. Why didn't Paul send the same epistle to every one of his churches? Each one needed its own particular guidance.
5. **Toolkits contain a wide variety of resources, stories, and ideas, and one can pick and choose which will best serve.** In addition, FFM provides coaches who will provide guided toolkit tours for any who ask.
6. **An on-line toolkit is interactive, and can be continually updated and revised.** The CRC is blessed with many creative, pioneering leaders. We need places where the fruit of their explorations is shared with all! The on-line toolkit is a gathering place for best practices and experimentation stories, and these learnings will continue to be added to the kit as they become available. Though the CRC is very spread out geographically, on-line toolkits allow us to form neighborhoods of learning and mutual encouragement.
7. **As more toolkits are prepared, we will create bridges between the toolkits.** We at Faith Formation Ministries have several more toolkits in the pipeline, including ones focusing on Public Profession of Faith and the Intergenerational Church. These two will contain obvious links to the Children at the Table toolkit. How do we honor the rich significance of profession of faith in fresh ways now that it is no longer directly tied to admission to the Lord's table? As children become partakers at the Lord's table, how might we surround this practice by growing as an intergenerational church that celebrates God's faithfulness across all generations?

An east coast pastor sent us this email after receiving the CAT brochure: “You did a great job, and I can only imagine how much work this was. This is an answer to prayer. I am very passionate about the stuff you are working on and eagerly await more resources. There is

a lot of inertia in many CRC congregations like mine and I hope this will encourage a more proactive approach with children and young adults going forward. Please send me 25 more copies of the brochure.”

His email made our day. It reflects the fact that our deepest longing at FFM is that we will be given the insight to develop tools that congregations can use to strengthen the power of God's grace and truth through their ministries across all the generations.

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

## Calvin College

Calvin is a dedicated community of faith and discovery, a place that offers students from around the globe the habits of heart and mind that will equip them to make a difference in the world. We are continuing the important work of extending our reach into new audiences, to expand our campus culture and to become a more diverse community.

The annual Calvin Symposium on Worship is a three-day conference sponsored by our Calvin Institute of Christian Worship (CICW) and the Center for Excellence in Preaching. The 2016 presenter list already includes numerous well-known North American leaders as well as a number of notable speakers with experience in international contexts.

[worship.calvin.edu/symposium](http://worship.calvin.edu/symposium)

The Calvin alumni association has announced the 2015 Distinguished Alumni recipients, graduates who model the words of our mission statement and “think deeply, act justly and live whole-heartedly as Christ's agents of renewal in the world.” For 2015 we are honoring Dr. Kimberly Olthoff '82, the Donald Guthrie professor of surgery and department chief in the division of transplantation at the University of Pennsylvania Medical Center, and Dr. Steven Wiersma '83, country director/Uganda for the Center for Global Health of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Michelle Loyd-Paige, our new executive associate to the president for diversity and inclusion, and Eric Washington, history professor and director of our African and African

Diaspora Studies program, wrote a new book called *We've Come This Far by Faith*. The book, said Esteban Lugo, director of the CRC's Office of Race Relations, will help churches move forward to discuss and address the many matters of race that they face in today's world. Kudos to Loyd-Paige and Washington who are living and leading with courageous conviction on these important issues.

[crcna.org/news-and-views/new-book-looks-crcs-african-american-family-members](http://crcna.org/news-and-views/new-book-looks-crcs-african-american-family-members)

In all we do at Calvin—in our teaching and learning, in athletics and the arts, in campus life and community activities—we aim to live *Coram Deo*, before the face of God.

[calvin.edu](http://calvin.edu)

## ServiceLink

For the last two years ServiceLink has been working in partnership with CRCNA mission agencies, Youth Unlimited and the RCA in assessing the standards we use to send teams overseas for ministry opportunities.

This assessment has taken us through every element of what we do (or maybe don't do) in order to establish best practices and high standards for not only working with mission teams, but also how we work with sending churches and those in host communities where teams will spend their time.

The process we've been going through uses the Seven Standards of Excellence in short term missions (SOE) which is an accrediting and resourcing body for those who send, receive, facilitate and support short-term mission (STM) endeavors.

Currently those involved in this process are SOE Affiliate Members, but working towards the Accredited membership. By going through this process, adopting these standards and displaying the SOE logo on our websites, we are demonstrating that we strive for Christ-centered and effective missions strategies, partnerships and stewardship.

The process has been a challenging one and will require a two-day peer review at the end of it all, but once accreditation has been achieved, our agencies will be known for having met

or exceeded the highest best practice standards established for short-term missions.

Included in the assessment process, we have also been working on a curriculum that will benefit and support all those involved with a short-term mission team – not just the goers, but also the sending churches and host-receivers. The curriculum is called “Changed For Life” and will be used by our mission agencies and available to churches when complete.

We hope and pray that the work done to establish high standards for our mission teams and the curriculum being developed will not just focus on an isolated event, but have long term impact that goes beyond the trips themselves.

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

## Dynamic Youth Ministries

### Calvinist Cadet Corps

Cadet counselors and their families assembled in London, Ontario for their annual convention this year. There they introduced the theme for the 2015–2016 season — *Hooked on Christ*. It's based on Matthew 4:19, and yes, it was proposed by a few avid fishermen. During the year, men will be showing boys two things: the wonders of being personally united with Christ and the duty and joy in bringing others to Christ. The key is connectedness. The London convention boasted a healthy attendance, and we were especially delighted to see a good number of new and young counselors and their families.

The director transition continues. At the time of this writing, Dick Broene is still the Cadet executive director. However, it appears that Steve Bootsma is getting closer and closer to approval by the USA to come and take the position. There are a few hurdles yet, so please pray for the transition, and that God be glorified through it all.

[calvinistcadets.org](http://calvinistcadets.org)

### GEMS Girls' Clubs

(Girls Everywhere Meeting the Savior)

GEMS Girls' Clubs focuses on girls discovering how much God loves them and His special purpose for them in the

Kingdom. But in our world, this truth is masked with lies and opposition. With that in mind, we are thankful for the interest and the growth throughout North America and around the world.

Please pray for our new clubs, particularly in the southern states, where there has been significant increase. Cover our current clubs in prayer too, for increased attendance and more counselors.

One of our goals is to translate materials into Spanish. There is high demand for our curriculum to be available to meet this outreach need. We continue to follow God's leading, believing He will open the right doors for the resources needed.

We are in need of prayer and financial resources for our international GEMS training, on-line training, and our Sister Club program. Relationships are strengthening with those in Columbia, Mexico, Philippines and Spain. Since 2006, GEMS' has been training leaders in Zambia. Now we are being called to take this model and adapt it to reach more girls everywhere.

At GEMS we believe every girl needs to know Jesus Christ. Our theme this season is “Choose Truth” based on Psalm 119:105. All year we actively equip girls to choose God's truth in a world that's giving them false messages. We desire for every woman and girl to be walking with our Savior, increasing their thirst for Him and His Word.

Thank you for continuing to uphold the GEMS Girls' Clubs ministry in prayer. We are honored to partner with the Christian Reformed Church as we, together, equip girls to live radically faithful lives in service to the King.

[gemsgc.org](http://gemsgc.org)

### Youth Unlimited

This summer, over 160 CRC congregations sent 1,900+ students to a Youth Unlimited *Serve or Live It* experience. As often is the case with these types of experiences, when you create the space for a student to worship, read the Bible, serve others, share in small groups and pray, the Holy Spirit moves powerfully! I strongly encourage you to visit us on Facebook, Twitter or at our blog, where you can see the pictures of students in action and read their stories. The Church is alive and your students are a

significant part of the living, breathing Church!

At every Youth Unlimited experience this year, the focus was on how to take what Christ is doing in that one week and apply it to the next 51 weeks of the year. I'm confident that the work of the Holy Spirit at the 30 Youth Unlimited experiences and in the lives of 1,900 students will have a ripple effect felt in churches and communities across Canada and the United States.

Youth Unlimited is truly honored and blessed to be able to serve the CRC and its students. We do not take this calling lightly. You have our commitment that we will continue to give you our very best. Your students and the Church are the way Christ will shine his light and love in our world and we desire to help them shine brightly!

If you desire to join us in this great adventure of investing into students and the Church, please contact us - we would be honored to serve with you!

[youthunlimited.org/](http://youthunlimited.org/)



## World Renew

Thanks to your continued partnership, World Renew has seen God working in many ways over the past few months.

- Disaster Response Services volunteers have responded to floods in Texas and Oklahoma.
- Countless other volunteers have served at sites around the world including Nepal.
- Small farmers in Mozambique have been able to feed their families and earn extra income through sustainable agriculture practices that protect and nourish the land.
- Churches in many places, including South Sudan and West Africa, are praying and pushing for peace.

As we carry out this work, World Renew is constantly working to improve our programs and find ways to better integrate disaster response with rehabilitation and long-term resilience. Without proper rehabilitation, emergency aid and disaster response

may continue to be needed. Similarly, without purposely working towards long-term resilience, rehabilitation programs won't be effective.

In the Turkana region of Kenya, for example, communities suffered many years of debilitating drought. While World Renew's immediate response included distributing emergency food and other assistance, today we are helping these same farmers learn how to sustainably produce food even in times of drought. Read more stories like this one and sign up for our e-newsletter at [worldrenew.net](http://worldrenew.net).

Please also prayerfully consider participating in the following this fall:

- World Hunger Sunday, Nov. 1. This year Peter Fish turns 20 years old! [worldrenew.net/worldhunger](http://worldrenew.net/worldhunger)
- Thanksgiving Day. In Canada, consider designating your offering to Free A Family® at [worldrenew.net/faf](http://worldrenew.net/faf) and in the US, consider Thanksgiving Day as a launch for the Gift Catalog campaign
- Gift Catalog. Encourage your congregation to choose gifts that help people in need and arrange a Christmas Day offering [worldrenewgifts.net](http://worldrenewgifts.net)
- Pray for ministry staff around the world and our new U.S. Director, Carol Bremer-Bennett.

World Renew does not receive ministry shares. Instead, we rely on individual donations and special offerings from churches like yours.

[worldrenew.net](http://worldrenew.net)

## Centre for Public Dialogue

[crcna.org/pages/publicdialogue.cfm](http://crcna.org/pages/publicdialogue.cfm)

## Canadian Aboriginal Ministries Committee

[crcna.org/Canada/aboriginal-ministry/canadian](http://crcna.org/Canada/aboriginal-ministry/canadian)

## Office of Social Justice

Creation and climate care, restorative justice, and a broken U.S. immigration

system were major education and advocacy topics for OSJ.

Caring for creation includes caring for our climate, so OSJ (along with many other Christian churches and missions) is launching a campaign to raise awareness and equip the CRC to respond to the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris (COP 21). Governments from all over the world will be gathering in November 2015 in order to negotiate a global treaty on carbon emissions and adaptation assistance to the poor.

This has become urgent due to a rapidly changing environment in many places where we do missions, relief, and development. If ratified and implemented, these agreements could address important root causes of climate instability while protecting and assisting people who are most directly affected.

As part of our denomination's global witness, OSJ is recruiting small groups of creation care "faithful" in 30 congregations in the U.S. and Canada. We will provide them with resources to educate themselves and others on creation care in general and on the critical follow-up required by hoped for COP 21 agreements. As part of this education and advocacy mission, a group of 3-4 CRC members will travel to Paris in early December to participate as official observers and to supply regular reports to constituents back in the U.S. and Canada.

To contribute to the crowdfunding campaign for this effort and to read more about how the CRCNA will be recruiting 30 congregations to get actively involved in the process, visit the Do Justice blog ([dojustice.crcna.org](http://dojustice.crcna.org)) and read the Let's Partner Toward Climate Justice piece.

For churches and small groups that want to learn and put into practice restorative justice, conflict resolution, and reconciliation practices, OSJ has been partnering with Safe Church and the Office of Race Relations to offer a workshop called Restorative Practices for Congregations. Restorative Practices are a set of tools to build relationships, have tough conversations, and restore harm. At a Restorative Practices for Congregations training, participants will learn how to become restorative families, congregations, and

communities. To learn more about when these workshop are being offered and to sign up for them please contact Kate Kooyman ([kkooyman@crcna.org](mailto:kkooyman@crcna.org)).

[crcna.org/pages/justice.cfm](http://crcna.org/pages/justice.cfm)

## Safe Church Ministry

*Safe Church Ministry equips congregations in abuse awareness, prevention, and response.*

184 congregations and individuals interacted with us, and over 400 currently receive our newsletter and/or prayer guide each month.

Safe Church Ministry has been participating regularly in the Justice, Inclusion, Mercy, and Advocacy working group to promote themes of justice, as well as in congregational services groups to coordinate efforts in working more effectively with congregations.

In April, Safe Church partnered with Pastor-Church Relations to offer a webinar, [Healthy Boundaries in Ministry Relationships](#) (look for it at [network.crcna.org](http://network.crcna.org)). A special strategic planning meeting was held with representatives from Canada and the U.S. to help identify goals and set priorities for Safe Church Ministry. Safe Church also participated in an event at Calvin College to raise awareness about sexual assault on campus, and helped facilitate a workshop on domestic abuse.

In May, Safe Church made presentations at 3 Grand Rapids area classis meetings in an effort to increase awareness and revitalize safe church activity in the area. Safe Church also partnered with the offices of Social Justice and Race Relations to sponsor, "Restorative Practices for Congregations" facilitated by Shalem Mental Health Network.

At Synod, in June, Safe Church was called upon to assist in committee deliberations regarding reinstatement of church leaders after sexual misconduct. Further consideration is needed on this topic. A summer student intern was hired (10 hrs/wk). She will focus on follow-up for *Circle of Grace*, a safe environment program used by an increasing number of CRC congregations ([crcna.org/SafeChurch/education-best-prevention](http://crcna.org/SafeChurch/education-best-prevention)).

[prevention](#)). We've also been busy preparing for Abuse Awareness Sunday 2015, coming up on September 27 ([crcna.org/ministries/denominational-ministry-programs/safe-church/resources-abuse-awareness](http://crcna.org/ministries/denominational-ministry-programs/safe-church/resources-abuse-awareness)). [crcna.org/SafeChurch](http://crcna.org/SafeChurch)

## Race Relations

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

## Ministry in Canada

We have been blessed in the pursuit of work that lends itself to true engagement both nationally and locally.

- The Faith and Justice project rolls its way through Canada by way of a dramatic presentation, encouraging churches to make a difference in their communities in several areas of Social Justice.
- The CRC in Canada was invited as the only Protestant denomination to present at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in regards to Actions for Reconciliation.
- We have developed ministry resources geared to local leaders that are specific to the Canadian context in the form of a directory of Ministry in Canada.
- Our response to items brought to us by area churches continues to take shape. In loving and connecting with immigrants and refugees (specifically from Syria and Iraq), a significant amount of time was given to developing resources. You can expect to see a video become available to your church soon which will encourage participation at a variety of levels. Other items, like a response to physician-assisted suicide, are also being developed.
- Relationships to upcoming ministry leaders in the CRC, such as candidates coming from Calvin Seminary or stated clerks serving our churches, are growing in frequency and health.
- A pilot project is being developed with Classis Niagara that will see the denominational office in Burlington work together with an electronic communications team to learn by

serving local churches in new ways, in the areas of leadership development, community outreach, and resourcing.

- All of this can be learned about by visiting the new website, [crcna.org/Canada](http://crcna.org/Canada), which will be increasingly populated with helpful content geared toward ministry leaders in the unique context of Canada.

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

## Disability Concerns

Several years ago, Disability Concerns (DC) received a call from a church, because they had two women with intellectual disabilities who wanted to join one of the church's small groups. At that time, there were no materials for engaging people with and without intellectual disabilities in a Bible study. Friendship Ministries' new curriculum will fill that gap.

Although Friendship and DC are separate ministries, they work closely together. DC's director, Mark Stephenson, serves on the Friendship board, executive committee, and curriculum committee. Stephenson has assisted in the development of the new curriculum.

"I'm excited about the new material for several reasons," Stephenson says. "The current Friendship curriculum is aging, and the new curriculum fills a couple of gaps. Many higher functioning people with intellectual disabilities do not attend Friendship groups because they are looking for something deeper. And churches can use the new materials in many more settings than the old was designed for."

The new Friendship curriculum can be used with both "traditional" Friendship groups and small groups. Friendship's publicity says that the new material, "is designed to enable the small groups that are common in many congregations to intentionally include and empower people with intellectual disability to fully participate."

Friendship's mission is to "share God's love with people who have intellectual disability and to enable them to become an active part of God's family."

Stephenson says, "The first unit is on courage, and that's appropriate. Friendship is exploring new territory

with this new series. I'm confident that it will help them fulfill their mission now, as they did in the past with the old material."

Interested churches/groups can pilot test *Courage* for free. See [friendship.org/courage](http://friendship.org/courage) for details.

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

Affiliates (BAs). This builds up permanent local capacity designed to catalyze entrepreneurs and job creators and to celebrate business as a calling to do God's work.

[partnersworldwide.org](http://partnersworldwide.org)

## Partners Worldwide

Planning is underway for the Global Agriculture Summit transpiring March 2-4, 2016 at Dordt College. Partners Worldwide and Dordt College are hosting this event, and we're excited that World Renew is now a partnering organization. This Summit converges an international group of leaders from the fields of agriculture, business, community development, and the Christian academy for an intensive two days on how Christians, farmers, and NGOs can work together to restore our world. This year's summit will focus on alleviating hunger and poverty. Pray that word will spread to many about attending this event.

We are blessed that there is growth and engagement in so many of the 25 countries where we work. Pray that our early efforts in El Salvador may progress in spite of gang violence that has left hundreds dead.

We are grateful for our growth in India, as well. However, we're still looking for Business Affiliates to walk alongside the Local Community Institutions based in India. Please pray that God will lead us to the right team of experienced businesspeople who will partner with our growing network in India, and please let others in your church know about this opportunity.

Thank you for your involvement, support and prayers for the work of Partners Worldwide. We look forward to partnering with more CRC businesspeople and churches.

About Partners Worldwide: Partners Worldwide mobilizes long-term, hands-on global relationships to form a powerful Christian network that uses business as the way to create flourishing economic environments in all parts of the world. We create partnerships with Local Community Institutions (LCIs) to provide mentoring, training, access to capital and advocacy by engaging Business