SPRING 2016

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Back to God Ministries International
Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI) serves the CRC as its worldwide media ministry, providing resources that reframe lives with God’s story.

- Celebrate with us that for more than 50 years we have proclaimed the gospel in Latin America and throughout the Spanish-speaking world. We produce three Spanish radio programs broadcast on nearly 600 stations, and two television programs that air on more than 200 channels. Contacts made through leadership training workshops open doors for us to receive air time at no cost to the ministry. In October 2015, our Spanish team led a first ever training event in Cuba. Synod has recommended that churches take an Ascension Sunday offering for BTGMI Spanish ministry. An informative video and bulletin inserts are available through BacktoGod.net/get-involved/for-churches or may be requested at info@BacktoGod.net.

- ReFrame Media, our English outreach team, continues to work with the CRC’s Faith Formation initiative to provide discipleship and evangelism resources to churches and individuals, including Today devotional materials, resources to strengthen the family, an online ThinkChristian.net blog to help readers apply faith to life, and more. One adult Sunday school class in Oregon uses Think Christian as a basis for weekly class discussions.

- Our Chinese ministry team is providing leadership in using new media for outreach in China. Praise God for an effective January 2016 conference in Taiwan. More than 100 Chinese media leaders from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Korea met to discuss strategy for the challenges new media ministry brings. Pray that this event will be a catalyst to continue building bridges for advancing the gospel in China.

Thank you for faithful prayer and financial support through ministry shares and gifts from churches and individuals to help proclaim the gospel, disciple believers, and strengthen the church.

backtogod.net

Home Missions
God desires to be in a relationship with all of us — and with our neighbors and colleagues who don’t know him. Home Missions is committed to answering God’s call to bring shalom to lives and communities. We’re working to start and strengthen churches and develop disciples and campus ministries that bring transformation to ourselves, our neighbors, our communities, and our world. Here are just a few examples of the work God is doing through Home Missions:

- Peace Reformed Church in South Holland, Ill., committed to reaching out past racial segregation in their community. To do this, they decided to call a black pastor to their church. Of 82 pastors who applied, Glen McCarthy was chosen. Glen’s previous experience includes a three-year internship as a church planter at Loop (a Home Missions church plant in downtown Chicago).
• The campus ministry at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, has recently been reestablished. Half-time campus ministry leader Dan Brown reports that he has been able to interact with over 100 students and has a core group of 13 students. The main weekly event is Meal on Monday, where students eat, have fellowship, and engage with Christian Reformed community members in the neighborhood.

• Home Missions is hosting weekly Learning Lunches for pastors and ministry leaders in the Great Lakes region. Each of the lunches features a topic that leaders gather to discuss and share with regard to experiences and challenges. One theme was “Nested Congregations” – churches that host congregations of a different ethnicity in their church space. One pastor who attended because she was curious about the topic was approached later by an African-American congregation needing a place to worship. The words from the gathering encouraged her to step out in faith to develop this new ministry partnership.

crcna.org/pages/crhm.cfm

World Missions

Traditionally when people envision ministry through CRWM, they imagine someone from North America going overseas to serve in another country. Although this is a major aspect of our work, God has been opening doors for more reciprocal, cross-cultural ministry. One example of this is seen in our facilitating visits from believers around the world to North America.

In January a group of 16 teachers from South Korea visited Christian schools in West Michigan and in Ontario. Many of the Christian schools in South Korea have been around for only about 15 years, so the teachers came to witness a Christian school setting with a longer history, as part of CRWM’s Educational Care program.

“We were so encouraged as we witnessed Christian education at the classroom level,” said Ma Byong Shik, reflecting on his visit. “We will return to South Korea with many practical insights that we can use right away.”

CRWM’s Cohort of Missioners program has also crossed borders into North America. A native of Costa Rica, Guissell Brenes’ Cohort experience began in Nicaragua. She gained skills in community building and explored her calling into ministry. Then she came to the United States to assist in workers-rights training for Spanish-speaking individuals.

CRWM also assisted in hosting individuals from Asia, Hungary, Kenya, Romania, Russia, and Ukraine to attend the annual Symposium on Worship at Calvin College. These ministry leaders from around the world gathered to learn more about, be refreshed in, and give a unique perspective on worship.

As CRWM moves forward in the joining process with Home Missions, we are excited to see what new opportunities for reciprocity between North America and the rest of the world God will provide.

crcna.org/pages/crwm.cfm

Timothy Leadership Training Institute

Timothy Leadership Training Institute is making a difference in congregations and communities around the world.

There are not enough formally trained ministers to provide the needed leadership of growing churches worldwide. The TLT program is designed to fill this gap, because it goes where these leaders live and work.

Materials are written in an inductive style using training manuals alongside the Bible. After each manual, participants create action plans to take back to their congregations.

• In Ethiopia, 87 participants have been receiving their training in English. The first TLT manual has been translated into Amharic and they eagerly await the translation of the next two manuals so that they can continue training others in their churches and communities, who will then also become Basic Trainers.

• In Ivory Coast, Master Trainer André Iba reports, from a very poor area near the Guinea border where people live at a subsistence level, that his regional church

budget went from $8,000 in 2014 to about $14,000 in 2015. He attributes this to TLT training, especially in the area of stewardship.

• In Myanmar, 12 church leaders were certified as Master Trainers in January. Six TLT manuals have been translated into Burmese, and some of the new trainers have already started to equip others in their local churches.

• In Haiti, a new manual was introduced specifically to help people vote for their country’s leaders with a critical and intentional approach. The multiplication effect of TLT has allowed for many people to receive this training, equipping Haitian citizens to think about their responsibility for choosing good leaders based on solid biblical principles.

We appreciate the support and encouragement from the people and agencies of the Christian Reformed Church, and we look forward to continued reports of changed lives and transformed communities.

http://www.tlti.org/

Pastor-Church Relations

Last quarter we reported that two familiar staff persons were moving on to other ventures. This quarter we introduce some new names and faces and approaches to the PCR work.

Providing administrative coordination and project support is Jenna Dutton. Jenna comes with experience in event and logistics planning and a ready spirit to tackle new challenges that arise in PCR’s work to serve congregations and their leaders. Jenna is a quick study and a hearty worker already benefitting the team.

Rev. Samantha DeJong McCarron has recently begun as the new Ministry Assessment Coordinator. Working 12 hours a week in PCR and 8 hours a week at Calvin Theological Seminary, Sam’s presence represents progress
made as six different ministries collaborate to enhance vocational assessment for pastors and other church leaders.

Another new person is also anticipated. At the time of this writing, a search and selection process is under way to identify a new Classis Renewal Coordinator. Tasked with carrying on the long-running classis renewal work as well as helping to implement the Better Together recommendations for equipping classis functionaries, this classis renewal coordinator will provide a connecting link for classes and denominational ministries.

One other change that affects the face of personnel in PCR: the Ministerial Information Service (MIS), which manages the profiles of pastors and churches during the calling process, is in the midst of a transition that may take about a year to complete. Formerly housed in PCR, MIS is moving to be included as part of the Yearbook project and staff. During the interim, PCR and Yearbook staff collaborate to fill gaps and maintain this key system that serves churches and pastors.

crcona.org/pcr

Sustaining Pastoral and Congregational Excellence

Plans are under way for the fifth biennial Pastors’Wives Conference to be held in San Diego, Calif. Up to 100 women will gather for the two-day November event focusing on “Oasis of Grace: Resting in God’s Goodness.” Rev. Heidi De Jonge (Westside Fellowship CRC, Kingston, Ont.) will be the keynote speaker. Attendees will engage in worship, deep conversations, prayer, and times of encouragement and rest.

Fifty-five pastors recently formed eight Peer Learning Groups focusing on topics such as Old Testament preaching, leading larger churches, and ministering to those affected by crime. The pastors journey together for about a year, exploring their topic of choice as well as encouraging, supporting, and praying for one another. Often these groups provide the only setting where pastors feel they can be themselves and share their ministry joys and challenges openly and honestly. Almost 200 groups have formed since SPE began in 2003.

In April, 15 pastors and their spouses gathered in Minneapolis, Minn., for a Pastor Couple Learning Event. The 48-hour event allowed the couples to explore their “stories” and to enjoy time together away from the daily demands of ministry and family life. This was the ninth event held for pastor couples. The next event, a first, will focus on clergy couples—both husband and wife are ordained. Currently, there are 24 clergy couples in the CRC.

The Spiritual Vitality for Pastors project brought the 16 participating pastors to a January retreat in Comfort, Tex. The pastors were able to spend time in their cohorts, explore spiritual disciplines, and engage in soul-stirring conversations. They will spend 2016 meeting in their cohorts and working with a spiritual director. The project will wrap up next January with a final retreat.

crcona.org/pages/spe.cfm
crcona.org/pages/sce.cfm

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry

As we ended 2015, we counted 14 new chaplains endorsed and eight who retired. This indicates a reversal of the trend a decade ago, when more were retiring than joining – somewhat due to a significant influx of mid-career chaplains in the 1980s.

We currently oversee a group of 138 endorsed chaplains scattered throughout the U.S. and Canada (plus a few overseas due to military assignments). Our list of “prospectives,” “students,” and “inquirers” has grown to over 60 individuals. This expanding awareness of and interest in chaplaincy appears to be generating a 5 percent growth rate in our overall number of chaplains per year. These pastoral care specialists find themselves in various kinds of ministry in institutions ranging from hospitals to hospice, and from military to manufacturing (workplace).

We have made significant preparation for our next annual chaplains conference, scheduled to occur on June 9-11, 2016. Two prominent speakers will each address the current trend toward reuniting psychology and spirituality. We also plan with this conference, and at synod just after it, to begin the celebration of our 75th year as an official chaplaincy office. Historical details are being collected, a short video is being produced, and other appropriate attention is being given to this mile marker.

All of this, of course, has budget implications—especially in an era of little growth in Ministry Shares. This means that some time must be devoted to fundraising. These efforts have resulted in over $60,000 raised in 2015 to supplement our regular budget and to provide $10,000 - 20,000 per year in training grants to upcoming chaplains.

We were able to visit a number of our chaplains (in Iowa, Denver, Ontario, and Alberta) and several educational institutions (Redeemer, Kuyper, Cornerstone, King’s, Western Seminary) during the past year. We have several more visits planned for this spring (Trinity College and Calvin Seminary). We typically enjoy speaking with 10 - 30 students in each location.

crcona.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 the process of becoming a minister of the Word or a commissioned pastor in the CRCNA.

In the spring of each year, one main area of focus is the process of approving individuals who wish to be approved by synod as candidates for ordination as ministers of the Word. The process involves completing a Master of Divinity degree and a variety of denominational requirements. This year we have 50 individuals who are near completion of the process. The Candidacy Committee this spring is conducting interviews with each one, through adjunct teams gathering across North America. It is encouraging to meet these individuals, hear their stories, and note their giftedness and readiness to serve. The
candidacy web page of the crcna.org site offers information on current candidates and will soon also offer information on the potential candidates.

A number of other routes to ordained ministry also exist, and the candidacy committee is working to partner with ministries and individuals using these routes. Nearly a dozen persons ordained in other denominations have transferred their ordination to the CRCNA since synod met in 2015. Numerous persons and ministries have also been served and advised relative to the office of commissioned pastor.

Finally, the candidacy committee is actively engaged in a variety of projects and discussions related to pastoral ordination. Among these is the question of whether it may be possible to offer a Spanish language path through the candidacy process. Another area of concern is that of facilitating Continuing Education practices for ordained pastors. Finally, a major report on the practice and uses of the office of commissioned pastor has now been completed and will be presented to Synod 2016.

Contact Rev. David Koll (dkoll@crcna.org), Director of Candidacy, with any questions or concerns.

crcna.org/candidacy

Ministry in Canada
(No report this quarter.)

crcna.org/Canada

Classis Renewal

Synod 2015 made major changes in the Church Order regarding the office of deacon. Synod encouraged churches to reexamine the office of deacon and its structures. Deacons are called to build on their strong history and give leadership to the church as it works for transformation of its community. The vision of synod is that as churches seek new ways to be good neighbors, they will look to deacons as leaders to connect church and community.

Deacons will now also be delegated to classis and synod meetings, as the church wants and needs to hear the diaconal voice at all levels. It’s important that classes reexamine regional plans to be sure to include the diaconal perspective—one that cares deeply about the transformation of people and place.

In 2016, delegates to synod will examine the role of the deacon in the broad context. They will ensure that the work of mercy and justice at local, national, and international levels is a valid expression of the denomination’s vision and is well connected to congregations and supported by them.

A number of classes have begun to use these changes in Church Order as a launch pad for new approaches at both church and regional levels. The ministry of justice and mercy, carried out effectively, is a powerful means of bearing witness to Christ and making the church more relevant in its context locally, regionally, and nationally.

Andrew Ryskamp, former director of World Renew – US, has been asked by Steve Timmermans to give some time to coordinate support as congregations and classes work on these changes. You may contact him at andrewryskamp@crcna.org to tell about what’s working in your church or classis, or if you would like more information. crcna.org/resources/other-resources/classis-resources

Church Renewal Lab

The Church Renewal Lab is the flagship of the Institute for Global Church Planting and Renewal at Calvin Theological Seminary, and it is one of several expressions of the seminary’s commitment to serve the local church. At the Renewal Lab’s heart is a desire to develop intentional missional congregations that make more and better disciples who transform lives and communities for Christ. The Lab accomplishes this by “Changing the Atmosphere” (shifting the culture) and “Journeying to Mission” (developing a strategic plan).

An important key to congregational renewal is to work backwards from our future rather than simply forward from our past. Most congregations are structured for the latter as they do ministry habitually rather than intentionally, basing ministry programming on past practices rather than future goals. This approach, unfortunately, creates incremental growth in a society experiencing exponential change. The Lab seeks to help congregations imagine a God-preferred, mission-focused, culturally relevant future by asking and answering three questions: Who are we (now)? Where are we headed? How will we get there?

To date, three cohorts of 11-19 congregations have participated in the two-year renewal journey. A fourth cohort is being assembled that will launch, the Lord willing, this June. Qualifications for participation include the following:

✓ a desire to be more mission-focused in the totality of ministry
✓ a willingness to invest energy and prayer in visioning and planning for the future
✓ a leadership team willing to take the risks that change demands
✓ a committed core of individuals willing to serve on a renewal team
✓ a belief that Christ can use your congregation to make a redemptive difference in your community and beyond

Interested congregations should contact the Lab’s project director, Keith Doornbos, at kdoornbos@calvinseminary.edu or 616-566-4413.

calvinseminary.edu/the-renewal-lab/

Ridder Church Renewal
(No report this quarter.)

westernsem.edu/journey/ridder

Reformed Leadership Initiative

The Reformed Leadership Initiative (RLI), a CRC and RCA leadership development collaboration, held a successful equipping event in January to support the leadership of six Congregational Leadership Learning Networks (CLLN) in the U.S. and Canada. The intent of this event was to

• provide an opportunity for the co-leaders to get to know each other and their ministry context, to spend

crcna.org/Canada
time with their coach individually and as a team, and to reflect on why, what, and how we are entering this work together.

- prepare the co-leaders to facilitate a “Taste and See” event in their location for pastors and congregational leaders to gain a better understanding about the CLLN; to identify potential leadership challenges and opportunities; and to imagine how a learning community could strengthen its leadership development at all levels and help our churches thrive in their own ministry context.
- begin discussions about how to organize effective CLLNs and expect fruitful outcomes.

Our first “Taste and See” event, facilitated by Mike Johnson (CRC) and Dave Bartlett (RCA), was exciting and encouraging. Almost 30 pastors and congregational leaders of ten churches gathered at The Bridge in Johnson, Iowa, to learn about a CLLN, to share current leadership challenges and opportunities, and to ask questions and pray together about making a commitment to become part of this network. Several of these churches see the value of a CLLN and believe the timing is right; they have already made a commitment.

The other CLLNs will have “Taste and See” events in March, April, and May. The RLI Implementation Team is grateful for an opportunity to serve our churches. Please pray for God’s continued guidance and provision for this great work!

crncna.org/ministries/initiatives/together-again.

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Worship Ministries

Worship Ministries had its first advisory committee meeting in November and has been blessed by the diversity of voices around the table that have helped in discerning key concerns and opportunities in the area of worship across our denomination. Our next meeting will be in April, hosted by Madison Avenue CRC in Paterson, N.J. In conjunction with that meeting, staff and advisory members are looking forward to conversations with area churches around the topic of intergenerational and multiethnic worship.

**Networking**

Worship Ministries has a monthly e-newsletter aimed at keeping those involved with worship informed of events, resources, and a Facebook group for networking. Please encourage your church to subscribe at crnca.org/worship, and urge your worship leaders to join the Facebook group.

The conveners of 13 peer-learning groups were able to meet at the Calvin Worship Symposium to share what they have learned as group leaders around the topic of worship in times of tension. Worship Ministries also hosted a dessert reception for CRC worship leaders at this same event. Next fall we will be beginning new peer-learning groups.

**Strengthening**

Staff from Worship Ministries, Pastor-Church Relations, and the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship presented a workshop at the Calvin Worship Symposium titled *Worship in Times of Tension*. This workshop was videotaped and will be made available on the Worship Ministries website.

**Resourcing**

Check out Worship Ministries website at crnca.org/worship for various types of resources. Can’t find what you are looking for? Don’t hesitate to email (WorshipMinistries@crnca.org) or give one of our staff a call (1-800-333-8300).

crnca.org/Worship

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Calvin Theological Seminary

**Calvin Prison Initiative** – Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary are partners in ministry in many ways. One of the latest endeavors in deepening our mission was to provide a college degree behind bars. On September 8, 2015, the first semester of the Calvin Prison Initiative began with 20 students at Handlon Prison in Ionia, Mich. To read more about how God opened up these prison doors, please read this article on the Calvin College website. It describes the program’s roots, the impact it is having on the students in prison, and how it is helping to change the culture within the prison.

**July 19-21, 2016: Conference on Loving Your Neighbor Today**

Jesus tells us, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” But what does that mean for us today? Does loving our non-Christian neighbors mean evangelizing them or engaging them in dialogue? How do we love those who are hard to love because they suffer from dementia or trauma? Calvin Seminary invites you to attend a conference that will ask, from a variety of perspectives, “What Does ‘Love Your Neighbor’ Mean Today?” The conference features Dr. Richard Mow, Professor of Faith and Public Life and President emeritus at Fuller Theological Seminary, as well as many of the newer faculty members at Calvin Seminary. To learn more or to register, please visit our website or contact Ms. Chloe King at cjk087@calvinseminary.edu.

**Summer 2016 Pastoral Internship**

If your church or organization might want to offer a pastoral internship for a Rev. Seminary student, please contact Director of Mentored Ministries Rev. Al Gelder at ag094@calvinseminary.edu or Administrative Assistant Chris Wright at cwright@calvinseminary.edu by March 7.

Thanks for your continued support and prayers for CTS as a learning community that forms church leaders who cultivate communities of disciples of Jesus Christ!

calvinseminary.edu

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Calvin Institute of Christian Worship

Our learning at the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in this new year is best reflected in several new publications, web resources, and the feedback from our 1,500+ participants at the annual Symposium on Worship this past January.

New books:

- *Worship in the Joy of the Lord: Selections from Chip Stam’s Worship Quote of the Week* (CICW BOOKS, an imprint of Calvin Press). This is a curated...
Faith Formation Ministries

If it ain't broke, broker it.

Lynda Burke stood in front of 100 workshop participants and described how her church, Sonlight Community CRC in Lynden, Wash., used the Building Blocks of Faith to strengthen their children’s ministry during Advent and to shape an elders retreat this past fall. Her story was filled with creative energy, adventurous joy, and hope, and it served to inspire and encourage other congregations to use these Building Blocks innovatively as well.

Sonlight Community is one of 15 CRC congregations participating in “The Building Blocks Cohort” organized by Faith Formation Ministries. This cohort works with a simple but profound concept (developed by Robert and Laura Keeley) that sees faith-life as founded on these four basic building blocks: we belong, we understand our place in God’s story, we live with hope, and we are called and equipped for kingdom service.

Lynda’s story about Sonlight embodies a key value for us at Faith Formation Ministries: congregations are carrying out wonderfully creative ministry in all kinds of fresh ways, and one of FFM’s chief callings is to give them a platform to share their newfound wisdom with others. In other words, we at FFM serve as brokers between innovative practices and longings for renewal.

Just as a broker in business facilitates the exchange of goods and services between two parties, so we provide facilitation between congregational leaders.

The beauty of brokering is that both the gift that is shared and the longing for ideas live in local congregations. In the past months, FFM has served to broker practices related to intergenerational worship, hiring youth workers, inviting children to the Lord’s table, developing storytelling practices, mentoring, and more.

Do you have a gift or a longing? We can broker it.

crcna.org/FaithFormation
The biggest news for Cadets recently was that the director transition is concluding. God has reminded us that his timing is not always the same as our timing. Steve Bootsma, the new executive director, has received the necessary immigration clearances and has now moved to Grand Rapids from Kitchener, Ont., and has started in the Cadet office as of February 15. We are grateful for God’s watchful eye over this entire process and are thankful for Dick Broene’s willingness to fill in as needed while we awaited Steve’s arrival. We pray for Steve and his family as they transition to their new home and job.

Our Kenyan coordinator, Daniel Nandwa, was able to visit a number of churches, clubs and regional meetings during his three-week visit to Ontario and Michigan in January. His message regarding the ministry of Cadets in Africa was well received by many, leading some to step forward and commit to help financially sponsor new clubs in Kenya. These sponsorships are an answer to prayer as we are up to 82 clubs in Kenya at this time. Four men from Michigan will be traveling to Kenya this summer to provide counselor training and to build relationships with the Reformed Church of East Africa, which sponsors most of these clubs.

Our annual meetings, which we call Congress, were held in Grand Rapids in early January. Men from across Canada and the U.S. met for three days of worship, fellowship, and deliberations. Several new badges were approved for the boys to work on, and new members were elected to our executive committee, replacing those whose terms had ended.

decl in Kenya. Two staff from GEMS went for a week to introduce the ministry to over 75 church leaders and pastors in Nairobi and surrounding cities. The new GEMS Girls’ Clubs Coordinator, Dr. Munyivah Kitavi, is busy training all who want to join in the ministry, and they are expecting over 25 clubs to begin soon!

GEMS staff also visited the Esther School, an outreach ministry of GEMS, in Chongwe, Zambia. Currently 121 children attend the Christian school and are becoming ambassadors for Christ. God is working in amazing ways, bringing the gospel and changing lives in the surrounding Zambian communities through the staff, the children, and the school administration!

If you or someone you know is interested in the GEMS Girls’ Club ministry, please share our website gemsgc.org or have them email Kristine@gemsgc.org.

Thank you for continuing to pray and support the GEMS Girls’ Clubs ministry, and may God be glorified in all that we do.

gemsgc.org

Youth Unlimited
Youth Unlimited’s heart is to serve every Christian Reformed congregation by providing life-changing, faith-forming events that include scriptural teaching, time for personal devotions, corporate worship, prayer, and focused community service. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we believe these disciplines will provide each student with a better understanding of what faith in Jesus Christ really means and how to live that out day-to-day.

We’re grateful this year to be working more closely with Christian Reformed churches because of influential movements such as Faith Formation Ministries and the Canadian Youth Ministry Pilot Project, and we are excited to see how this will enhance our opportunity to best serve Christian Reformed congregations!

The theme of Youth Unlimited’s 2016 28 Serve experiences will be “Make Change. Be Changed” (based on the gospel of Mark). We are praying that God uses this Scripture and theme to help students encounter the person of Jesus Christ in very real ways during their time at Serve. Held in tandem with their ministry of service, relationships with peers and mentoring from small group leaders, this program experience will allow students to meet more fully the Savior who humbly came to serve so that this love would be poured out for us.

Youth Unlimited is truly honored to serve students and youth leaders from Christian Reformed congregations. We do not take this calling lightly. You have our commitment that we will continue to give 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 in students and the church or you simply need a refresher on who Youth Unlimited is, we would enjoy connecting! You can find us at www.youthunlimited.org or by emailing jeff@youthunlimited.org.

youthunlimited.org/

World Renew
To inspire hope in communities where chronic poverty crushes the body and soul is nothing short of miraculous. And yet your prayers, involvement, and support for World Renew in 2015 inspired just such hope in 1,841 communities among 838,298 people who live in 40 countries.
Your church received World Renew’s annual report in February. Here are just a few highlights that show incredible hope:

- Through World Renew, 223 North American congregations engaged in justice and advocacy around such issues as poverty alleviation, environmental stewardship, and refugee policies.
- World Renew’s ministry was supported by 3,211 volunteers who donated 254,569 hours, equivalent to the work of 122 full-time employees for one year.
- World Renew supported or provided emergency food, assistance, and medical care for 96,950 people affected by violence in Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon.
- World Renew Disaster Response Services volunteers assessed the needs of 5,529 North American disaster survivors and repaired or rebuilt 697 homes.

Through your relentless compassion for the poor and your commitment to God’s purposes, World Renew can reflect on 2015 with deep gratitude and look forward with endurance inspired by hope. It is our earnest prayer that in the days ahead the church worldwide will continue to grow in both the local and global communities, that justice for people living in extreme poverty will prevail, and that all who suffer hunger and want will have the opportunity to build on their resilience.

For more information about how your church can get involved by holding giving campaigns, volunteering, advocating, and praying, visit http://worldrenew.net/church-resources.

Centre for Public Dialogue

This quarter the Centre for Public Dialogue developed a three-year strategic plan with our grassroots steering committee (the Committee for Contact with the Government). Our core issues (Indigenous justice and refugee justice) remain the same, but we’re looking forward to working with partners on climate change and human trafficking, and to increasing our emphasis on equipping Christian citizens for advocacy.

We worked with Canadian Ministries and a task force on a submission to the Parliamentary Committee on physician-assisted death, emphasizing Synod 2000’s position that a high priority should be placed on palliative care. We are also beginning outreach to the newly elected Members of Parliament on all our key files.

We’re working hard to live into the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada. We are working with the Canadian Aboriginal Ministry Committee and the Board of Trustees to develop follow-up actions to the TRC’s visionary work. We also developed a pledge that individuals can use to commit to holding themselves, the government, and their communities accountable to implementing these historic recommendations.

We’re also beginning to practice lessons learned from the Justice and Faith Project. We partnered with World Renew on their Rio Coco trip to help them design a transformative learning experience for participants. The aim is that participants visiting Indigenous communities in Nicaragua will simultaneously learn about Indigenous issues in Canada and return to their communities ready to engage with their Indigenous neighbors.

Finally, on our Do Justice blog (shared with the Office of Social Justice) we began a series of practical Lenten justice activities. With the difficult conversations of Synod 2016 in mind, we are also developing a series about staying in dialogue through difficult conversations. You can sign up to receive updates here.

Canadian Aboriginal Ministry Committee

The Canadian Aboriginal Ministry Committee (CAMC) has the specific role of educating and mobilizing CRC members and congregations to live in reconciled relationships as covenant (treaty) people before our Creator.

CAMC works toward three goals:

- **Awareness and Education** of CRC members and communities of the shared history of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada, of the present lived reality of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, and of the need for reconciliation and renewed relationships

- **Engaging and Building Relationships** with our Aboriginal neighbors to better understand each other and journey down the path of justice and right relationships

- **Advocacy and Seeking Justice** for Aboriginal peoples

Sunday, June 19, 2016, marks the day for the CRC to devote to Aboriginal Ministry. This year, the theme for Aboriginal Ministry Sunday is “Creating a New Family.” Using the painting titled Creating a New Family from the series Kisemanito Pakitinasuwin: the Creator’s Sacrifice as the image for the bulletin, we are reminded that God created families for us to be in relationship with one another. We also are being built together with all other people into a community where the Creator lives through the Holy Spirit. As followers of Christ, we are instructed to live at peace with each other and to pursue unity with the brothers and sisters we have received from the Creator.

The prayer campaign for missing and murdered Indigenous women is now available online at https://aboriginalministry.wordpress.com/worship-resources/month-of-prayer/. We invite you to pray for all people involved, to meditate on Scripture, and to be guided by the 7 Sacred Teachings practiced within Aboriginal Culture as outlined in the prayer guide.

The paintings Kisemanito Pakitinasuwin: The Creator’s Sacrifice are now home in Regina, Saskatchewan. A great number of people came for the celebration of the homecoming in November 2015. Included in the evening’s celebration was a pipe ceremony, a feast, a viewing of the paintings, a theatrical reading of an excerpt from a play based on the paintings, and singing and speeches. The event made for a wonderful commemoration and end to the tour.

The Canadian Aboriginal Ministry Committee will have two new members joining at the spring meeting, as one member’s term has ended and a member will be added to our
Office of Social Justice

Immigrants Are a Blessing, Not a Burden events, refugee resettlement, the Paris Climate Agreement, Live Justly for Lent series, mass incarceration, and aboriginal justice prayer events are the recent emphases in the Office of Social Justice’s (OSJ) education and advocacy efforts.

Since the launch of the Immigrants Are a Blessing, Not a Burden campaign last October, more than 600 people have signed the pledge committing themselves to change the conversation in the U.S. More than 200 people have contacted their elected officials, and groups have gathered in Grand Rapids, Mich.; Holland, Mich.; and Washington, D.C., to celebrate the blessing that immigrants bring to their communities. To learn more, visit BlessingNotBurden.org and like the campaign page at facebook.com/BlessingNotBurden.

The Office of Social Justice also provided educational resources about refugee resettlement, the current refugee crisis, the refugee screening process, and ways to get involved. Visit dojustice.crcna.org/article/aftermath-attacks to view some of those resources.

OSJ led a four-person CRC delegation to the United Nations Climate Conference at the end of December as part of the Climate Witness Project. To learn more about the Paris Agreement visit dojustice.crcna.org/article/5-things-know-about-paris-climate-agreement. Visit the Action Center at crcjustice.org to view the action alerts about the Paris Agreement.

OSJ launched a series on the Do Justice blog with practical justice activities that people can do at their schools, homes, congregations, and communities during the season of Lent. Visit dojustice.crcna.org to view the different posts in the series.

OSJ encouraged people to participate in a vigil in Grand Rapids to pray for an end to mass incarceration. We also promoted the Canadian Aboriginal Ministry Committee’s (CAMC) month of prayer for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada. To learn more about the CAMC month of prayer, visit their Facebook page at facebook.com/CanadianAboriginalMinistry.

crcna.org/pages/justice.cfm

Safe Church Ministry

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

Our office recorded about 200 interactions with congregations and individuals this quarter, on topics such as safe church teams, awareness, abuse situations, and policy. Each month more than 500 people receive our newsletter, prayer partners receive a prayer guide, and ongoing conversation happens on The Network.

Safe Church was in Minnesota to facilitate a weekend strategic planning meeting, in California to lead a full-day educational event, and in Ontario to provide workshops at Day of Encouragement events. Additional learning and conversations happen remotely via virtual technology, including an Advisory Committee meeting and training for new team members. All these activities are designed to help congregations prevent and respond to abuse more effectively. Additional resources can be found on our website.

CRC Safe Church was excited to partner with Samaritan SafeChurch, a national organization committed to building a movement to end child sexual abuse. A webinar was produced: The Church’s Role in Ending Child Sexual Abuse. It’s now archived on the Network. Find this valuable resource at http://network.crcna.org/safe-church/churchs-role-ending-child-sexual-abuse.

Work has been completed on a Safe Church synod committee report reviewing Church Order Articles 83-84. It will appear in the Agenda for Synod 2016 and will hopefully contribute to good conversation around the important issue of church leader sexual misconduct.

Please pray for the director and for volunteer safe church team members as we continue to walk alongside and offer consultation in difficult and complicated situations of abuse that arise in CRC congregations. Pray also for our ongoing work to help build communities in which the value of each person is honored and abuse is unthinkable.

crcna.org/safechurch

Race Relations

(No report this quarter.)

crcna.org/race

Disability Concerns

As followers of Jesus Christ, we commit ourselves to lifelong faith formation—praying, working, and longing that Christ be formed in us. Through our print, video, and online resources as well as conferences and other events, Disability Concerns comes alongside people in churches to help them form faith that is vibrant, resilient, compassionate, and hospitable.

Faith formation includes understanding one another better. About 25 percent of people in North America will experience a mental health crisis at some point in their lives. When you add immediate family, the figure swells: above one-third of your congregation that will be directly affected by a mental illness at some point in their lives.

For the past several years, we have sent messages to churches in certain regions to inform them of our “Mental Health Speakers Bureau.” The speakers we recommend make presentations to churches on a variety of mental health issues. Currently we have speakers available in central California, northwestern Iowa, western and northern Michigan, Edmonton, and the Hamilton and eastern Toronto regions of Ontario.
If your church is in any of these regions, we will send you a message soon telling you about the speakers who are available and the topics they can address. If your church is not in the regions listed and you know of a person who may be able to serve well in our Speaker’s Bureau, please be in touch: disabilityconcerns@crcna.org. crcna.org/disability

Partners Worldwide

We are continuously praising God for our growth and impact around the world—now having created and sustained over 103,000 jobs!

Through our partner Hope for the Nation in Sri Lanka, businessman Chandranathan Nixon has been able to create and sustain a fraction of these jobs through his business Nick International. The business has grown to include over 175 staff members in six cities in just a few years. One of the staff members is Asokan, who was once a troubled young man who worked at Nick International for a short while before leaving. After accepting Jesus as his Savior with the help of Chandranathan sharing the gospel and praying, Asokan returned to Nick International and is now a manager supervising 60 staff members and working closely with Chandranathan.

This is just one inspiring story about the work we are doing to end poverty through business. Read more about Asokan and find other powerful stories, along with our financial summary, in our 2015 Impact Report at www.partnersworldwide.org/impactreport.

As we continue to praise God, we also pray for him to look over parts of the world in which we work that are going through adversity. Please join us in praying over Latin America as they are dealing with the Zika virus crisis. We pray for the safety and health of our staff members and partners in this region, as well as all Latin Americans. We also pray for Haiti as there is much unrest surrounding the recent indefinite delay of the presidential election. Pray that God keeps Haitians safe and peaceful and watches over our staff and partners in Haiti.

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 use partnerships to build up permanent local capacity designed to catalyze entrepreneurs and job creators and to celebrate business as a calling to do God’s work. Subscribe to our blog at partnersworldwide.org/subscribe.

partnersworldwide.org