

MINISTRY REPORT TO CLASSES AND COUNCILS



SPRING 2017

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Gathering Together

Dear partners in ministry,

Have you had a chance yet to participate in a Christian Reformed Church gathering? Springing from the report [Cultivating Binationality in the CRCNA](#), the CRCNA has hosted a series of events over the past year to bring people together to stimulate conversations around the mission and purpose God has for local congregations and the CRCNA as a whole.

The first of these events was the [Canadian National Gathering](#) last May. This was soon followed by [Engage](#), a multiethnic gathering that took place just before Synod 2016. In February 2017, I had the opportunity to attend the third event in this series—NEXT: A Summit for a New Generation of Leaders.

The NEXT conference brought young people and emerging leaders from across North America to Port St. Lucie, Fla., for a time of worship, fellowship, visioning, and learning. NEXT was held at Sunlight Community CRC on the same weekend as several other CRC events, including a Coffee Break retreat, a stated clerks meeting, and a conference put on by the Church Renewal Lab at Calvin Theological Seminary.

Bringing all of these diverse groups together on one weekend was a logistical juggling act, but the results were worthwhile. I heard again and again from various participants that it was a blessing to worship and learn alongside brothers and sisters of different ages and ethnicities and to be united in our diversity.

If you haven't attended a gathering yet or want to experience this type of Christian fellowship again, consider joining me at [Inspire 2017](#) from August 3-5 in Detroit, Mich. Inspire 2017 is a new kind of CRC event geared toward

equipping, encouraging, and inspiring the people of the Christian Reformed Church.

Keynote speakers such as Ann Voskamp and Richard Mouw will challenge us in our ministry. Workshops and breakout sessions will equip us with new ideas and techniques on a wide variety of topics. And CRC members of all ages from all corners of the continent will connect with each other to share ideas and worship together.

I look forward to seeing you there.

Steven Timmermans
Executive Director, CRCNA

Back to God Ministries International

Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI) aspires to see the gospel change the hearts and lives of people around the globe. On behalf of the Christian Reformed Church, using technology and media, we take the Word of God to people, right where they are, so that they can reframe their lives in light of who God is.

- The BTGMI board made the decision to centralize the BTGMI U.S. ministry offices in Grand Rapids, Mich. BTGMI will be selling the International Ministry Center in Palos Heights, Ill., and relocating the day-to-day administrative operations to the denominational building in Grand Rapids by July 1, 2018. This move will allow BTGMI to focus even more strategically on sharing the gospel with people around the

world and increase relationships with the CRC, allowing for more opportunities to focus on discipleship and providing the highest-quality materials to established churches. Please be in prayer for BTGMI staff during this transition.

- *Think Christian*, an online magazine produced by ReFrame Media, the English outreach of BTGMI, provides community where Christians discuss how to bridge the gap between faith and culture. Some churches, such as Sunnyslope CRC in Salem, Ore., have created their adult Sunday school curriculum around the publication. Doug VandeGriend, the class leader at Sunnyslope shares, “The purpose of the class is to communally learn, literally, how to ‘think Christian’ about whatever the subject.” *Think Christian*, along with all of the ReFrame Media ministries, will be offering information on how it can assist your church at the [Inspire 2017](#) event this summer.
- Seventy couples from several states in Brazil attended the BTGMI Portuguese ministry annual married couples conference this past year. The outreach event helped couples restore their relationships and renew hope in their marriages through worship and speakers. A woman named Duda participated in the retreat and shared, “[My husband and I] have greatly enjoyed being able to attend the conference. It was a blessing for our marriage.” Praise God for this ministry!

[BacktoGod.net](#)

Home Missions

Christian Reformed Home Missions thanks you, your congregation, and your classis for your faithful support of God's mission in North America. Your support for Home Missions helps people in Canada and the United States realize that they are part of Christ's victory. God is on the move in North America. In congregations, campuses, neighborhoods, workplaces, families—together we seek to join God in mission.

- Home Missions welcomed three new regional leaders who will work with local mission leaders to develop strategies for mission in their areas. Rev. Marco Avila will lead the

Eastern U.S. region, Rev. Rich Braaksma will lead the Western Canada region, and Rev. Ben Katt will lead the Western U.S. region.

- Home Missions is partnering with 43 church plants, including four new partnerships in Lincoln, Neb.; Detroit, Mich.; Wyoming, Mich.; and Grand Rapids, Mich. Additionally, 11 church planters are receiving coaching, training, education, and apprenticeships, thanks to grants from Home Missions made possible by the support received from churches—thank you!
- Home Missions supports 40 campus ministries throughout the United States and Canada. Four new campus ministers began work this fall, and another two are in the process of being hired. A growing edge is the development of campus ministries that are extensions of a local congregation, as well as ecumenical partnerships to place campus ministers on various campuses.
- Home Missions continues to support Coffee Break and Small Group Ministries through conferences, webinars, coaching, and training. We released new *Discover Your Bible* study materials in Fall 2016, including Discover Colossians, Discover Ruth, and four new stand-alone lessons. Coffee Break is also expanding its global ministry with new groups and training in many countries including Korea, South Africa, and India.

[crhm.org](#)

New Mission Agency

At the February Board of Trustees meeting, Zachary King, was interviewed and recommended to be the director of the new mission agency. This appointment will go before Synod 2017 for ratification.

In the meantime, the second tier of ministry directors have been appointed:

- Director of International Ministries (Africa and Europe) – Ron Geerlings
- Director of International Ministries (Latin America and Asia) – Joel Huyser
- Director of U.S. Ministry Teams – Amy Schenkel

- Director of Canadian Ministry Teams – Steve Kabetu
- Codirectors of Advancement and Mission Support – Lois Craven and James Vanderlaan
- Director of Capacity Building and Innovation – Moses Chung

Regional leaders for North America and international regions have also been appointed:

- Eastern U.S. – Marco Avila
- Western U.S. – Ben Katt
- Midwest – Peter Kelder
- Great Lakes – Amy Schenkel
- Western Canada – Rich Braaksma
- Eastern Canada – currently vacant
- South/Southeast Asia Regional Mission Leader – Joyce Suh
- Central America Regional Mission Leader – Steve Holtrop
- Mexico and Caribbean Regional Mission Leader – Luis Pellecer
- Middle East Regional Mission Leader – *confidential for security concerns
- Europe Regional Mission Leader – Steve Van Zanen
- Eastern/Southern Africa Regional Mission Leader – Mwaya Wa Kitavi
- West Africa Regional Mission Leader – Ron Geerlings

<https://www.crcna.org/news-and-views/team-leaders-named-new-mission-agency/>

In all of these appointments, we look forward to better serving congregations and connecting members of the Christian Reformed Church to ministry in North America and around the world. Taking part in [Inspire 2017](#) will be an exciting time to share new ways in which this cross-cultural ministry is taking shape and to invite others to join God in this work.

World Missions

At [Inspire 2017](#), participants will have conversations with one another about a wide array of ministries and find solace in the fact that they are not alone in some of their struggles. During this time of renewal, they'll also hear from Ruth Padilla DeBorst, a CRWM missionary who encourages

and works alongside local ministry leaders in Costa Rica.

Here are a few more highlights from missionaries who are seeing the positive results of collaborative ministry around the world:

- Missionaries in Africa who use CRWM's Educational Care (EC)—a learning program that encourages and assists educators and schools with limited resources—met all together for the first time. This was a time to partner together in order to share improvements they have witnessed in teachers and classrooms and to communicate best practices they have found for using the EC program. They also witnessed the graduations of a few EC groups. “Everything was put into the context of teaching as an act of worship,” said one of the graduates.
- CRWM's Ben and Amy Meyer are coplanting a church in Mexico with a national couple. As they partner in this ministry, they've been able to see how God is using their different strengths to complement one another for effective ministry. At the end of 2016 they organized five small group Bible studies in homes in the community. Approximately 45 people are a part of at least one of these groups. In 2017 they hope to begin monthly worship services as a larger group.
- A missionary couple in West Africa has been mentoring and training a small group of core leaders in Christian education from their region. Now three of the leaders from that group were recently recognized for their growing skills and were elected as members of the national association of Christian schools. In this new position, they'll be able to share what they've learned from the missionaries with a greater number of people. “That stood out as an independent confirmation of the Lord's high calling we sensed upon his life,” say the missionaries.

crwm.org

Timothy Leadership Training Institute

As a result of our mission to equip ministry partners globally, we were able to increase our reach to church leaders in over 30 countries in 2016.

As the second largest populated country in Africa, **Ethiopia** is being transformed through pastors of Christ's church who are learning how to care for people and their families, reaching communities for Christ. These training groups have been organized through Woldeyesus Bufebo, national director of Bible League Ethiopia, in coordination with Christian Reformed World Missions. He shares that TLTI has been the right program for church leaders in Ethiopia seeking to reach a confused generation through better preaching and teaching.

The training group in Ormoc City, **Philippines**, is being led by Bob Edmondson of Global Training Network and includes representatives from seven different churches. Two of these churches had been experiencing some “bad blood” between them, but bringing these pastors together for training has helped to bring healing between the congregations. Within this same group, the church that hosted the training has a pig named “Blessing” living on the church property. This pig is the result of an action plan developed to put into practice the previous training on sustainable development.

A recent graduate of trainings held in **Sri Lanka** through Verre Naasten of Zwolle, the Netherlands, Prabhath de Silva has started two training groups of his own, one in English and the other in Sinhala. He has been working through the manual *Caring for God's People* with both groups and reports action plans from participants who have been visiting the sick, sharing the gospel, passing out tracts, and inviting neighbors to church.

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

www.tlti.org/



Pastor Church Resources

Pastor Church Resources continues to walk alongside church leaders and pastors navigating the challenges of life together as the body of Christ in today's world. We assist leaders and leadership groups in mapping out healthy processes for discernment on issues such as evaluation practices, search processes for a next pastor, dealing with conflicts, identifying necessary conversations, and training toward actually having these conversations. Our goal is to empower local church leaders and pastors by encouraging them to ask a variety of questions—to be curious about how things currently function and how they might function. If we are the body of Christ, in what ways might the mind of Christ and the Spirit of Christ shape our posture?

In facing the challenges of leadership, we are particularly mindful of the need for leaders to care for their own well-being, even as they care for the well-being of the church. There are inner struggles and wrestles to name and explore. “Am I doing enough? Am I doing too much? How might I move toward being restful, resilient, and engaged? How might I accept and engage the ‘tugs-of-war’ that play in my mind and heart?” Serving as leaders in local congregations and other arenas of service can lead us to places of emotional, relational, physical, and spiritual fatigue. To what may we attend that will provide us more balance and joy in ministry?

For that reason, we are delighted to participate in the upcoming [Inspire 2017](#) conference by way of a workshop led by Rev. Norm Thomasma. After serving as a church planter and parish pastor for 20 years, Rev. Thomasma has been with Pastor-Church Resources for 14 years. He will bring his experience and his passion for the health of a leader's spirit to this workshop designed to encourage participants “Toward More Joyful Service.”

crcna.org/pcr

Sustaining Pastoral Excellence

Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) began 14 years ago with a goal of creating a culture of pastoral excellence. This didn't mean that pastors would strive to reach "excellent" on an achievement scale. Rather, it meant creating a culture in which pastors would be supported, encouraged, and nurtured in their faith, and where they'd engage in learning while deepening relationships. Look what has happened since then.

First, the numbers:

- 834 ordained pastors have participated in a peer learning (PL) group. That's 76 percent of our pastors, representing 65 percent of CRC churches.
- 273 PL grants have been awarded to 205 distinct groups.

Second, the impact:

- "SPE peer learning groups have made my ministry more fruitful and more satisfying and have extended my service in my church."
- "More than anything else, this group has been like life-blood for me. I've come to find that in our positions, groups like this are vital."

Third, what's new:

- The 2015 Spiritual Vitality for Pastors project allowed 16 pastors to engage in a 16-month spiritual formation journey that included assessments, retreats, spiritual direction, group meetings, and coaching. Plans are being made to sustain this opportunity.
- As of 2016, Ministry Assessments for vocational fit are available to pastors. A "good fit" is best for both pastors and congregations. A pastor responded, "Within days of receiving my assessment report, I received an email from a church asking if I'd be interested in an open position. As a result of the report, I decided that the church wouldn't be a good fit for me."

A culture of pastoral excellence has been created and is blessing both pastors and congregations. To God be the glory!

crcna.org/sce; crcna.org/spe

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry

In recent months this office has been busy with planning for our upcoming June Chaplains Conference (capping off our year of 75th-anniversary celebration), updating our forms and data in preparation for a change of leadership (our current director will be retiring in April 2017), and processing applications for endorsement.

For our annual conference in June our planning team has chosen the theme of "Pioneers Past and Present." Rev. Scott Hoezee, coauthor of *Flourishing in the Land* (a history of the CRC with a significant chapter on the origin and growth of chaplaincy) has agreed to be our keynote speaker. We look forward to his thoughts on how chaplaincy fits into the missional aspect of the kingdom and thus into the structure and purpose of the CRCNA.

In the past five months we have added another 10 endorsed chaplains to bring our total to 153 full-time and part-time military and civilian chaplains in all sorts of institutions and settings in both Canada and the U.S. Additional pastors and students continue to contact us by phone or email to begin exploring chaplaincy—an almost weekly occurrence. Our list of inquiries and "in process" names now exceeds 75.

We have begun planning another round of visits to Christian colleges and seminaries, starting off with a full day Chaplaincy Fair at Calvin Seminary on Mar. 9.

At the February BOT meeting, Sarah Roelofs was appointed to be the new director for Chaplaincy and Care Ministries. This appointment should allow for some overlap time with the current director in order to facilitate a smooth transition. Please pray for this rapid transition time in a period of rapid growth and significant activity.

crcna.org/chaplaincy

Candidacy Committee

The Candidacy Committee coordinates and facilitates the ordination of ministers of the Word and commissioned pastors in the CRCNA, providing assistance to individuals, congregations, and classes in this process.

We have been busy this past quarter in the work of communicating with those in seminary regarding the new 24-month candidacy process. We have worked with each of the classes and with Calvin Seminary to identify and contact students who hope to be approved by synod as candidates for minister of the Word. We're grateful for the large number of pastors and other leaders who are agreeing to spend time on a monthly basis as mentors to these emerging leaders.

Our report to Synod 2017 is nearly complete, and it will be available in the *Agenda for Synod* which will appear in April. Included in our report is an extensive response to synod's request for further direction in the use and administration of the office of commissioned pastor.

We also are collaborating with other denominational ministries in programs that assist pastors (and their ministries, by extension). These include the newly functioning Continuing Education for Pastors committee, the vocational assessment ministry now functioning under the leadership of Pastor Church Resources, and the Student Funding Task Force appointed by Synod 2016.

We continue to welcome any questions and requests for help in the areas surrounding pastoral ordination. Contact our director, Rev David Koll.

crcna.org/candidacy

Ministry in Canada

On Sunday, Jan. 29, a new tool hit the local church for a trial run. Three churches in Classis Niagara are participating in an experiment that will equip them, their church members, and the community they are trying to reach with an app on their cell phones. The Canadian Ministries Office partnered with a local IT firm (Extreme Technology) to create what is hoped will develop into a useful tool for churches across the denomination. The pilot project is expected to run for several weeks.

The app is meant to be missional by providing short apologetics videos for seekers. It also collates several CRCNA feeds to engage the mind, provides a daily *Today* devotional reading from Back to God Ministries International, links into the denominational websites, and aims to create a praying community. For verified users in local churches, there are online church directories, specific prayer content, announcements, a calendar for local church events, and links to specific local church video content like sermon feeds. There's more . . . but stay tuned. The app is only beginning in its use.

One recent story during the rollout of the app at Providence CRC in Beamsville, Ont., summarizes the excitement and potential connection of it into a multigenerational body. After a brief presentation following the church service and a prayer for the app's success, a visiting 13-year-old ran up to the presenter without hesitation and demanded to know how he could get that as soon as possible in his church!

If stats are correct, there is a 20X stronger relational link made through the use of an app than through a firm's website. It is our hope that the app will help the CRC and its local churches and the broader communities we are a part of to build stronger relationships.

crcna.org/Canada

Classis Renewal

Classis Renewal helps classes to be as healthy and helpful as possible for the sake of congregational and regional ministry.

- There were two conferences in early 2017 for classis leaders: one for the stated clerk and a classis leader from each Canadian classis, and another for U.S. stated clerks.
- Currently plans are under way for a multiday gathering of leaders from four classes.
- Renewal conversations are also happening with individual classes around the CRC.

network.crcna.org/classis

Church Renewal Lab

Mike Breen of 3DM Network famously said, "If you make disciples, you will always get the church; but if you try to build the church, you will rarely get disciples." He also said, "The reason the missional movement may fail is because we're pretty bad at making disciples."

The Church Renewal Lab held a conference in Port St. Lucie, Fla., on Feb. 5-8 focused on making more and better disciples (titled simply "More and Better"). The gathering was held at Sunlight Community CRC. Sunlight is zealous for disciple-making, with 593 persons coming to faith through evangelism in the past 10 years. (Sunlight's pastor, Scott Vander Ploeg, is part of the Lab's core teaching team.) Additionally, new believers at Sunlight have been intentionally disciplined into a deeper life in Christ. In fact, eight have been licensed to preach, several are enrolled in a seminary certificate program, and three are now serving as church planters. At the core of this disciple-making movement is gospel-telling and "Life on Life" discipleship.

The Church Renewal Lab seeks to train congregations in the art of disciple-making. It is one of five tools in the Renewal Lab's toolbox that includes a visioning tool, a gospel-telling tool, a disciple-making tool, a church vitality tool, and an implementation tool.

A new cohort of Renewal Lab congregations launches this June. [Contact the Lab](#) for information. The Lab has recently begun publishing a twice-monthly newsletter featuring fresh renewal ideas and best practices among renewal congregations. Send an e-mail to the above address if you would like to be added to our mailing list.

The Renewal Lab eagerly anticipates this summer's [Inspire 2017](#) Conference (Aug. 3-5 in Detroit). Look for our breakout session titled "The Four Essentials of Renewal."

calvinseminary.edu/the-renewal-lab/

Ridder Church Renewal

This spring, teams of congregational pastors and leaders from 96 churches will gather in six regions of the U.S. and Canada. These gatherings will provide training in adaptive leadership skills and values and offer ways to measure missional effectiveness. Ridder Church Renewal (RCR) aims to increase the capacity of pastors and church leaders to take on the challenges of making disciples in a changing cultural landscape.

Further, at a time of polarizing, volatile political and religious conversations, RCR seeks to develop pastors and church leaders who offer a less-anxious presence while increasing the ability to define ourselves as followers of Christ. In early 2018, RCR will begin a new series of learning events in various regions of the U.S. and Canada. Look for promotional materials this summer.

westernsem.edu/journey/ridder

Reformed Leadership Initiative

The Reformed Leadership Initiative (RLI) supports six Congregational Leadership Learning Networks (CLLN) in a RCA/CRCNA collaboration. Four of these networks are in Central Iowa, New Jersey, Northern California, and Hamilton, Ont. Two of the networks are ethnic specific: a Korean-speaking network in Newark, N.J., and a Spanish-speaking network in Paramount, Calif. No two networks are the same, featuring various ministry contexts, church sizes, ages and numbers of participants, and frequency of meetings. A strong sense of commitment, sharing, openness to listening, and learning characterize these gatherings.

Each congregation is part of a Congregational Leadership Equipping Team (CLET) within their network. With the help of a trained coach, each CLET meets monthly via phone to focus on specific topics as they imagine moving forward to identify a process for developing leaders. It takes time, patience, and communal listening for the Spirit's guidance to bridge the gap between the current reality and God's desired future.

In one network, where recruiting churches was initially a challenge, the Spirit helped the CLET to see and hear what he was already doing in their

churches. They shared passionately and with conviction about next steps for growing leaders.

The CRCNA and the RCA need leaders at all levels of church and kingdom who are grounded in a biblical vision of church and kingdom, personally formed and growing in the image of Christ, and competent to lead thriving congregations in contextualized and mission-focused ministry. These learning communities are the first step in developing a diverse, distributed network for congregational leadership training.

RLI participants are open to learning opportunities. We were represented at the NEXT Conference in Port St. Lucie, Fla., in February to equip emerging leaders. It was an amazing learning experience! We will be at [Inspire 2017](#) to continue our journey of following the Spirit's leading for developing leaders.

We thank you for your support and prayers!

crcna.org/ministries/initiatives/together-again



Worship Ministries

Peer Learning Conveners at Symposium

As part of our Peer Learning Book Group program, the conveners are given free registration to the Calvin Symposium on Worship, thanks to the generosity of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. This gives us the opportunity to meet together in person, develop relationships, and learn more about each church's local context. Our time together is always too short but rich. One common theme that surfaced among the participants from various churches was how stretched they felt as worship leaders. If paid, they tend to work more hours than they are paid for to accomplish what is asked of them, and sometimes they are asked to do things for which they have no training. But these are dedicated volunteers and staff, and they keep doing what they can, relying on a variety of resources. There was also an expressed need for reconciliation in churches and how worship might play a role in bringing people together. Another common theme was the

desire to learn best practices for developing and leading worship teams.

ReformationDay500.com

In response to synod's request for resources to use in commemorating the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation, Worship Ministries has chaired an ad hoc committee with various ministry representatives as well as representatives from Calvin College and Seminary, the Center for Excellence in Preaching, and the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. A number of resources are being assembled and should be available by Apr. 1 at ReformationDay500.com. Resources include links to videos, group and individual studies, books, journals, teaching resources for all ages, worship planning materials, and a growing list of events. If you have an event or resource you would like to see included on this webpage, please email ReformationDay500@crcna.org.

crcna.org/Worship

Calvin Theological Seminary

Convocation at Handlon Prison

Feb. 10, 2017, brought a unique opportunity to see God at work behind prison bars. Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary are ministry partners for the Calvin Prison Initiative. Seventeen students have completed enough course work to be awarded a Certificate in Ministry Leadership. Representatives from the college and seminary were witnesses to this historic "first-time" event, and Academic Dean Ronald Feenstra gave the convocation address. CTS Board member Heather Garretson will present material on prison ministry at [Inspire 2017](#).

Updates on Professors

Please join us in giving thanks for Dr. John Cooper's years of faithful service to Calvin Theological Seminary (1985-2017) as professor of philosophical theology. Professor Cooper is scheduled to give a "last lecture" on Fri., May 5, at 3:00 p.m. in the Seminary Auditorium. This presentation will be recorded and made available on our website.

Please join us in giving thanks for Dr. Dean Deppe's years of faithful service to Calvin Theological Seminary (1998-2017) as professor of New Testament. Professor Deppe is scheduled to give

a "last lecture" on Thur., Apr. 27, at 3:30 p.m. in the Seminary Auditorium. This presentation will be recorded and made available on our website.

We are looking forward to being joined by two new faculty members in July 2017: Dr. Young Ahn Kang as visiting professor of philosophical theology and Dr. Gary Burge as visiting professor of New Testament and as faculty development specialist. Dr. Kang served for many years as professor of philosophy at Sogang University in Korea. Dr. Burge has served as professor of New Testament at Wheaton (Ill.) College since 1992. Both are excellent teachers and scholars. We look forward to their contributions to our community of learning.

Commencement 2017

May 20 is scheduled to be the date of the next Calvin Seminary commencement. This year we anticipate that among those who graduate there will be 30 graduates from each of our two Spanish-language certificate programs. Please join us in giving thanks for these students and the communities of support that surround these students.

calvinseminary.edu

Calvin Institute of Christian Worship

This spring the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship is grateful for

- a [conversation](#) with CRC pastor Josiah Chung on passing along faith to new generations.
- our partnership with the Center for Excellence in Preaching and another wonderful year of learning and worship at the Symposium on Worship. CRC pastor Sandra Van Opstal delivered a plenary address on "Glorifying God in a Diverse World: Next Steps in the Journey." She also participated in a consultation with CRC ministry teams from Faith Formation, Social Justice, and Worship Ministries.
- our collaborations at the Symposium on Worship with Calvin Theological Seminary professors Danjuma Gibson on trauma and lament, Mary Vanden Berg on dementia and worship, and Cory Willson on faith, work, and worship.

- the new family prayerbook *Teach Us to Pray* written by CRC pastors Lora Copley and Elizabeth Vander Haagen. At the Symposium on Worship, 1,500 copies were distributed to attendees.
- Vital Worship grantee Mustard Seed School (New Jersey), who hosted gospel artist Trey McLaughlin to engage with their 100+ middle school students (grades 4-8), teachers, and local friends. They wrote, "It was the best kind of disruption! Gospel music. Dancing. Worship. Snacks. Pizza. (Singing works up an appetite!) With exuberance and humor, Mr. McLaughlin taught us songs in three-part harmony. Pushed us to move with the music, to worship with our bodies as well as our voices."

worship.calvin.edu



Faith Formation Ministries

This quarter we released two new online toolkits: one for churches interested in finding new and creative tools to engage people of all ages, and one to strengthen the practice of professing our faith.

The [Intergenerational Church toolkit](#) is an online resource collection that equips congregations to cultivate a culture that nurtures faith in God and fosters relationships between people of different generations. The resources in the toolkit are divided into five sections. The first two sections focus on creating a culture in which people of all ages know they belong, and on becoming an intergenerational church instead of *just doing* intergenerational things. The remaining three sections contain practical ideas for how people of all ages can learn and grow, serve, and worship together.

The [Professing Our Faith toolkit](#) offers resources that help churches craft relevant, welcoming profession of faith practices that encourage members to affirm their baptism by publicly sharing their love of and commitment to Jesus Christ. The toolkit contains ideas for

- building a culture of commitment in your congregation.

- encouraging and inviting people to profess their faith.
- preparing people of all ages to publicly profess their faith.
- celebrating professions of faith in worship.
- considering how to usher people into the full responsibilities of confessing membership.

The exciting thing about these toolkits is that many of the resources within them come from CRC churches themselves! The focus of the resources in these toolkits is practical rather than conceptual. These toolkits respond to requests from churches for materials that can help inspire and cultivate the faith of the people in their congregations.

Visit our new toolkits at crcna.org/FaithFormation/Toolkits.

crcna.org/FaithFormation

Calvin College

We are pleased to announce the accreditation of the master of accounting program, which will begin in fall 2017. This endeavor will provide traditional undergraduates with an opportunity to complete a bachelor's and master's degree within five years.

We are now moving forward with an extensive program to encourage high school students to make Calvin their college choice. We are excited to be able to feature the new Calvin LifeWork program (calvin.edu/lifework/) as an important Calvin distinctive.

Our Service-Learning Center runs a long-standing program called the Residence Hall Community Partnerships program. Each residence hall has a lasting relationship with a local nonprofit organization, and each year they engage in a variety of activities designed to be of mutual benefit. It's a fantastic manifestation of our mission statement to equip students to think deeply, to act justly, and to live wholeheartedly as Christ's agents of renewal in the world.

Calvin is hosting a series of lectures this spring on "just citizenship," looking at opportunities for citizens to make a difference in society. Centered on the question of what it means for Christians to think deeply and act justly in this time of political uncertainty, the series will challenge citizens in the

U.S. and elsewhere to promote actions that will bring renewal into people's lives, to transcend the divisions that separate political parties, and to find common cause in our calling to be imagebearers of God. These events are free and open to the public.

As the college works each day toward active engagement with and fulfillment of our mission, as we seek to educate the students who have been entrusted to us, and as we work to be faithful caretakers of creation and culture—in all that we do—we humbly serve a good and glorious God.

calvin.edu

ServiceLink

(No report this quarter.)

crcna.org/servicelink

Dynamic Youth Ministries

Calvinist Cadet Corps

As the calendar turns to spring, we approach the end of another Cadet season. Since September, almost 10,000 boys have had the opportunity to "Get in the Game," being led by more than 4,000 men in over 500 clubs throughout North America. Boys have had opportunities to gather with other clubs for campouts, snow derbies, and pinewood derby car races. Men have had opportunities to gather locally and regionally for training and encouragement as they continue to serve God through this ministry.

This summer the Calvinist Cadet Corps will gather together at Camp Elk Run for our international camporee being held in the Black Hills of South Dakota. We are planning on over 1,000 men and boys' spending a week of outdoor activities and learning how God is seeking us. Our theme is based on Ezekiel 34:11.

Our annual meetings, which we call Congress, were held in Grand Rapids, Mich., in early January. Men from across Canada and the U.S. met for three days of worship, fellowship, and deliberations. A decision was made to allow Independent clubs (those not in a regional council) to operate as Christian Cadet Clubs and not use the word Calvinist in their name. The hope is that churches that appreciate our materials and our approach to mentoring boys will be able to promote a club

in areas where the term Calvinist may have a stigma attached to it. In this way we look forward to reaching new neighborhoods and communities, letting more boys know what it means to be "Living for Jesus."

We continue to covet your prayers as we strive to find ways to reach many more boys and help them to grow more Christlike in all areas of their lives.

calvinistcadets.org

GEMS Girls' Clubs

(Girls Everywhere Meeting the Savior)

This season GEMS Girls' Clubs around the world have been learning more about God's love. Together, women and girls have been studying the ideas presented in 1 Thessalonians 3:12 and gaining a greater understanding of what it means to accept God's love and how it overflows to others.

For many clubs, seasons will be wrapping up soon with a variety of celebrations. Some counselor teams host family gatherings and award badges to girls, and many engage their entire congregations in a GEMS Sunday service where girls are able to highlight what they have been doing throughout the year.

Leadership training continues to be a vital part of the GEMS ministry. This April, women from around the United States and Canada will be meeting in Grand Rapids, Mich., for an intensive weekend of training and support. These volunteer leaders will learn about new curriculum and materials from the GEMS staff. They will then return to their local areas to train, encourage, and support nearby clubs.

Preparations are also under way for the annual leadership conference at Dordt College this coming summer. Each year this event equips counselors to mentor and lead well while inspiring them in their own faith.

Finally, GEMS is excited to welcome a new executive director to the team. Cindy Bultema will be joining the GEMS staff and helping to carry out the mission and vision of the ministry through her leadership.

gemsgc.org

Youth Unlimited

In 2017, Youth Unlimited is excited to have 27 Christian Reformed congregations hosting a SERVE experience, with four of them hosting for the first time! It will take approximately 160 churches sending a youth group to carry out the missional opportunities of these SERVE host churches. While the students are serving Jesus on behalf of the local church, they will spend the week studying Scripture from the gospel of Mark.

A student's experience on SERVE challenges them to step out of the daily temptations of everyday life to focus on God. They will start each day with personal devotions and then spend time worshiping, praying, serving and discussing within small groups how to apply faith into daily life. As they serve on behalf of Jesus Christ through the local church, they are given a picture of how God intended a local church to live. Many students return home with ideas to enhance their own church's missional outreach.

Youth Unlimited is also excited to enhance its partnership with Faith Formation Ministries (FFM) in 2017. Youth Unlimited and FFM will share a full-time position to enhance each ministry's youth ministry programing. This partnership will enable Youth Unlimited to have a Canadian staff member, living in Canada, leading our SERVE efforts in Canada!

Youth Unlimited loves partnering with Christian Reformed congregations to disciple students. May God find us faithful to living into such a great calling! If you are interested in hosting a SERVE experience at your church or sending a group of students on SERVE, let's connect!

youthunlimited.org

loving mercy, doing justice

World Renew

With gratefulness to churches like yours, World Renew is able to help people who are suffering from disaster, poverty, and injustice to change their stories to include hope.

There is a story behind each of these statistics found in the 2016 annual report recently mailed to churches:

- Disaster Response Services (DRS) volunteers represented 27 denominations.
- With your support, World Renew helped 217 people resettle in Canada.
- 274 North American congregations were engaged in international church partnerships.
- 296 North American churches were involved in justice activities with World Renew.
- The Global Volunteer Program placed 559 volunteers.
- 1,363 international communities joined World Renew through a local church or outreach ministry.
- 796,279 lives were transformed by World Renew's development, disaster, and justice programs.

The complete annual report is online at worldrenew.net/annualreport. We are thankful for your offerings that make our work possible. Please remember that World Renew does not receive ministry shares, relying instead on the generosity of God's people to help those in need.

Coming to Inspire 2017?

Visit our booth or sign up for these workshops to learn more about the work of World Renew and how your church can get involved:

- "Global Experience Inspires Local Church in Community"—how the work of World Renew with its global church partners in community development can inspire and equip local churches in U.S. and Canada as they seek to connect effectively and missionally with their neighborhoods.
- "Live Justly"—how to help people live justly in six key areas of life

(advocacy, prayer, consumption, generosity, creation care, and relationships).

- “Welcoming the Stranger”—understanding refugee and immigration systems and how congregations can provide care and welcome the stranger.

worldrenew.net

Centre for Public Dialogue

The Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue works with congregations to do justice so that each of God’s imagebearers has the opportunity to thrive. Our current focus areas are Indigenous justice, human trafficking, refugee justice, and climate change. Highlights this quarter include the following:

- We teamed up with several other CRC ministries to hire Cindy Stover, the CRC’s new Justice Mobilizer in Canada. She’ll be connecting with churches in the coming months to hear about their interest in justice issues and to support them in their learning and action. Welcome, Cindy!
- CRC people in Canada have been eager to advocate for refugee welcome this quarter! We saw an enthusiastic response to a recent online action alert that linked CRC members to their elected representatives to advocate for stronger refugee resettlement. You can join them at crcna.org/publicdialogue/action-centre.
- We also partnered with Citizens for Public Justice to speak up for meaningful climate action, building on the Synod 2012 report on creation stewardship.

From our blog *Do Justice* (a joint project with the Office of Social Justice):

- We are excited to have seven columnists from across Canada and the U.S. writing for the blog regularly, reflecting on the call to do justice from their local contexts. See what they have to say at dojustice.crcna.org/columnists.

- Working with worship leaders in Canadian CRC congregations, we gathered worship resources from CRC ministries that help in shaping our communities to offer our lives as living sacrifices to our justice-loving God. See “[5 CRC Justice Worship Resources You Might Not Know About](#).”
- We reflected on some of the times when we saw God’s hand at work upholding and restoring his creation in 2016 in Canada. Check out “[2016 Justice Highlights](#)” on *Do Justice* to read more.

crcna.org/pages/publicdialogue.cfm

Canadian Aboriginal Ministry Committee

(No report this quarter.)

crcna.org/aboriginal

Office of Social Justice

The Christian Reformed Church has a long and faithful tradition of refugee resettlement, both in the U.S. and Canada. In light of that tradition and the changes to refugee policy in the United States, we sent out two action alerts, [one for the U.S.](#) and [one for Canada](#), in partnership with the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue, encouraging CRC members to contact their elected officials in support of refugee resettlement. Over 900 people contacted their elected officials through those action alerts!

Following our call to welcome the stranger, defend the cause of the vulnerable, and seek justice for the oppressed, we are encouraging CRC members and congregations to join the Matthew 25 Movement. The Matthew 25 Movement is a U.S. national Christian movement formed in response to threats of American policies that will harm vulnerable people, particularly immigrants, Muslims, and people of color. People can join the movement by [signing a pledge](#) to protect and defend vulnerable people, and congregations can become Matthew 25 congregations by visiting crcna.org/Matthew25.

We also encouraged churches to commemorate [Sanctity of Human Life Sunday](#) in January by creating a

number of worship resources and bulletin inserts for them to use. This year we lifted up those who were grieving the loss of a child by highlighting the story of Eloise, who was born at 25 ½ weeks and after 31 beautiful days of life went to be with Jesus. In her short time on earth, Eloise touched the lives of many, teaching about the value of every life created in God’s image, no matter how fragile or small. This year 30 churches in both the U.S. and Canada ordered over 5,100 bulletin inserts to commemorate the day.

We are excited to have seven columnists from across Canada and the U.S. writing regularly for our *Do Justice* blog (a joint project with the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue), reflecting on the call to do justice from their local contexts. See what they have to say at dojustice.crcna.org/columnists.

At the February Board of Trustees meeting, Reggie Smith was appointed to serve as director for both the offices of Race Relations and Social Justice. He will now enter into a time of transition until Peter VanderMeulen’s retirement in June.

justice.crcna.org

Safe Church Ministry

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

The Safe Church office records over 100 interactions with congregations and individuals each month. We help to build communities where the value of each person is honored and where people are free to worship and grow free from abuse; where abuse has occurred, the response is compassion and justice that foster healing.

Safe Church is looking forward to filling an associate position that will focus on developing [safe church teams](#). The Safe Church conference in November was attended by over 50 people from 22 different classes. It inspired some to revive or start new safe church teams in their own congregations and classes. Supporting these efforts is critical! Pray for a successful staff transition and increased staff capacity to respond to this need.

A trauma healing equipping event, co-

sponsored with World Renew, was attended by the maximum number of people (36); others had to be turned away. Those who attended appreciated learning about this proven method for [trauma healing](#) ministry. Pray that we may acknowledge and effectively respond to the hidden wounds of trauma among us.

Safe Church mini-grants will help fund lay-led projects in Waterloo, Ont.; Manhattan, Man.; Edmonton, Alta.; and perhaps even more locations in 2017. More information is available on our website.

Awareness is a necessary part of effective abuse prevention and response. In a letter to her classis clerk, a conference attendee shared a quote that “shot right to the point of Safe Church: What we don’t know can hurt them!” In addition to web [resources](#), we are happy to offer presentations and special events, including a workshop at [Inspire 2017](#).

Safe church ministry works best when we all work together.

crcna.org/safechurch

Race Relations

(No report this quarter.)

crcna.org/race

Disability Concerns

Kathleen Deyer Bolduc’s book *The Spiritual Art of Raising Children with Disabilities* is addressed to parents but does not give parenting advice.

Instead, Bolduc invites readers to join her on a spiritual journey that begins with the shattering pain of asking questions that cannot be answered and continues toward new creation and new community. She and her husband, Wally, have three children, including Joel, who has autism and anxiety and has manic episodes.

Bolduc pictures the art of parenting as the creation of a mosaic. The work of art begins with broken fragments. “Everything I valued in my life before Joel’s birth had to be rethought and revalued—intelligence, efficiency, logic, self-control. . . . I came to understand that Jesus turns the cultural belief—that brokenness is to be avoided at all

costs—upside down. Christ challenged me to face and embrace my brokenness, as well as Joel’s brokenness so that God’s power might be released within both of us” (pp. 2-3).

She encourages readers to embrace their brokenness and look for ways in which God is making a new creation. Her own journey led her to search for connection with God in a world that frequently brought difficulty, struggle, pain, and frustration. Along that journey she discovered spiritual disciplines and practices including meditation, lectio divina, and being guided by a spiritual director. In the process, Bolduc became a spiritual director herself.

The above is an excerpt from a resource review on the Disability Concerns site of the Network (network.crcna.org/disability). Search there to easily find thousands more resources that can help you today in ministry in your church.

crcna.org/disability

Partners Worldwide

Looking for a unique way to fight poverty? Join Sea to Sea, a cross-continental bicycling mission. Sea to Sea raises awareness and funds to help make an impact on people’s lives through the work of Partners Worldwide and World Renew. Whether participating in the full nine-week ride, a one- or two-week segment, or a leg of the journey—there are many ways to get involved! We currently have 96 registered riders, and we hope to have up to 120 by the end of March. Help us reach our goal at seatosea.org.

We are also looking forward to the [Inspire 2017](#) gathering this August. Partners Worldwide’s session “Business: A Christian Calling?” will offer energizing insights on how business and the church can pursue God’s kingdom together.

As we anticipate Sea to Sea and Inspire 2017, we also pause to celebrate our 20th year of ministry. What started as a small group of Kenyan and American businesspeople has grown remarkably to become a network of thousands in 27 countries around the world! In partnership with local institutions and volunteer mentors, we have provided entrepreneurs with mentoring, training,

access to capital, and advocacy tools. These four elements catalyze job creation in communities of unemployment and poverty while encouraging businesspeople to pursue their calling to do God’s work.

As we reflect on our 20 years, we are more resolved than ever to end poverty for good. With a proven model and a network of supporters, we know that ending poverty is possible and we eagerly anticipate how God will continue to use us around the world. Thank you again for your faithful partnership. Please pray for guidance and wisdom as we continue to pursue the calling God has placed on our hearts.

Partners Worldwide ends poverty through business so that all may have life and life abundant. To stay in touch, follow Partners Worldwide on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

partnersworldwide.org