In This Issue

Director of Denominational Ministries of the CRCNA
Congregational Support
  - Abuse Prevention
  - Committee for Contact with the Government
  - Disability Concerns
  - Dynamic Youth Ministries
  - Faith Alive Christian Resources
  - Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action
  - Pastor Church Relations
  - Race Relations
  - Sustaining Congregational Excellence
Diaconal Ministries
  - CRWRC
  - Partners Worldwide
  - Sea to Sea 2008 Bike Tour
Educational Institutions
  - Calvin College
  - Calvin Theological Seminary
Mission Organizations
  - Back to God Hour
  - Home Missions
  - World Missions

**Director of Denominational Ministries**

Have you ever found yourself in a place watching all the action and thinking, “Wow, there is so much life here”? I find myself thinking this most often in places where youth are involved. They bring an energy and excitement that we who are over 40 puzzle about.

In the Christian Reformed Church, our average membership age is around 50. This is a challenge that weighs on my heart because I love the Christian Reformed Church and I believe God has great plans for our future. The children and youth must be at the core of our focus in denominational ministry and churches. They are the future of God’s kingdom! As members of the CRC, we all must take responsibility for nurturing and engaging youth and children in God’s kingdom work.

As you read through these reports, you will see a sincere desire to be intentional about children and youth within our ministries. Our prayer is that we, as the Christian Reformed Church, stay intentional about Jesus’ words in Matthew 19:14 “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

**Abuse Prevention**

Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me….” These are the words of a **Nurturer**. Jesus invites children – and adults – to know him as a kind and gentle friend. Jesus’ words in Mark 10 lead to action as he takes the children in his arms and blesses them. His kind words are followed by his gentle actions.

A child safety policy can imitate this beautiful illustration of nurturing children. A safety policy usually begins by stating that children are precious and vulnerable, and therefore they deserve our protection. Those are kind words addressed to children and adults in the congregation. Out of our desire to protect children from harm, we prescribe certain actions for everyone to follow. Those actions become the child safety policy. Now we have the kind words followed by gentle actions that serve to protect children and keep them safe.

Your church’s child safety policy is more than words on a page. It is more than rules and obligations. It’s a symbol of your commitment to nurture the children in the congregation.

**Chaplaincy Ministries**

At first blush, it may seem that chaplains have very little to do with the topic “Nurturing Our Children and Youth.” If this report was about those who work specifically with youth, I could name only a few chaplains – like Gloria Kroeze at De Vos Childrens Hospital in Grand Rapids, Michigan or Eric Evenhuis who counsels young people in Upland, California. Both of these chaplains deal with young people in crisis due to terminal illness or behavior problems. These two chaplains have powerful ministries and wonder-filled stories to tell.

If we take a deeper look, we see that almost all of our chaplains work with youth. Our prison chaplains are
Concerned for children who struggle with being separated from a parent and who carry the social stigma of having an incarcerated parent. Also, some of our most magnificent ministries involve chaplains who work with families of people who are sick, dying, developmentally disabled, or leaving for war torn areas.

I recall watching a chaplain minister to a family whose father was seriously injured in an automobile accident. The small six-year-old son walked into the horror of the emergency room and saw his dad hooked up to tubes and covered in blood. The boy shrunk back from the sight, eyes brimming with tears. As the little boy sobbed and wept, the chaplain knelt down, hugged him, and wept with him. The nurture given in that moment will live in that boy’s memory and may surface in other moments of fear and bewilderment — the remembered hug will bring comfort and a sense of nurture again and again. Our chaplains are indeed very intimately involved in nurturing youth.

**Committee for Contact with the Government**

Church groups in Canada (denominations, ecumenical groups and para-church organizations) have a rich history of working together with passion, enthusiasm, and a good deal of collaboration for justice and peace. The CRC’s Committee for Contact with the Government (CCG) appreciates this history of collaboration and deliberately builds partnerships into its work because principled discussion, worship, and prayer with faithful friends enriches our perspectives on faith and justice. For this, CCG commends the Canadian Council of Churches, The Evangelical Fellowship, KAIROS, Canadian Foodgrains Bank and more than a few others!

Beyond these institutional connections CCG is also privileged to learn from and work with young members of the CRC community. Enthusiastic interns and working group members, often in their university years, have been an important part of CCG’s recent dialogue on peace with justice. Whether through research, popular writing, or passionate participation in debate, these good people have shaped CCG by their profound Christian commitment to living for shalom. Some of the fruits of this collaboration and community can be found at [www.crcna.org/ccg](http://www.crcna.org/ccg).

**Disability Concerns**

When Alec and his family began attending First CRC, they were welcomed warmly by this outreach-oriented congregation. However, Alec’s Sunday school teacher and Cadet counselors discovered quickly that Alec was a handful. He got out of his seat frequently, talked out of turn, dominated the leader’s attention, and sometimes broke things. After one particularly trying Sunday morning, Alec’s exasperated teacher said to the Sunday school superintendent, “I hope I never see Alec in my class again.” She didn’t really mean it, but that morning Alec’s behavior brought her to tears.

Should First Church ask Alec’s parents to keep him home? Or tell his parents that he needs more discipline at home? Or require one parent to be with Alec at all times? These approaches would only serve to drive this family away from the church.

Alec’s parents face this same behavior at home and may be very good parents with a particularly challenging child. Alec may have a diagnosis with letters like FASD, ADHD, or ASD. Alec and his family need First Church to love Alec without accepting inappropriate behaviors. First Church might be his family’s last attempt to find a congregation where they can worship as a family.

What should First church do? They should pray for Alec and his family. They should let Alec’s parents know their concerns and reassure them that they will work to make Alec’s time at church a positive experience for everyone. They should get help. Disability Concerns wants to help you find the resources and expertise to include Alec and his family in the life and ministry of your church. Please contact us at 888-463-0272 or [disabilityconcerns@crcna.org](mailto:disabilityconcerns@crcna.org).

**Dynamic Youth Ministries**

Nurturing faith in the lives and hearts of children and youth is the overarching mission of the ministries of Dynamic Youth Ministry. Following are a few glimpses of how that plays out.

**Youth Unlimited**

Millions of today’s youth need to hear about the good news of Jesus Christ and his calling for their life. This summer, Youth Unlimited will reach youth by offering:

- **Missions Experiences (SERVE & ENCOUNTER)** and Convention – Participants are challenged individually and corporately to leave an impact for Christ on their local communities and across the world.
- **Where U At? Urban Conference** – Churches working with inner city youth have an opportunity to share the love of Jesus Christ in a new and exciting way.
- **Compass 21 and Youth Leader Support – Meeting** the needs of those serving youth within the local church results in youth feeling supported, loved, and understood.

**Calvinist Cadet Corps**

Every three years, the Cadet ministry works overtime to squeeze an enormous amount of nurturing into one 168-hour event. This is the year. In August, the Cadets will hold their International Camporee near Burk’s Falls, Ont. There the boys and men are isolated from sports, electronics, and other diversions while in a wilderness setting. They will live in small groups of ten, building their own shelters, cooking their own meals, having devotions, and enjoying plenty of other activities. They will return changed forever.
Through our annual theme this year, *Abba I belong to You*, GEMS counselors have sought to help girls clearly understand what it means to be God’s children – to be daughters of the King! Some 23,000 girls have participated in this deeper study and life application of God’s Word.

Faith development and nurture is also taking place through:

- The special relationships formed between girls and their counselor/mentors
- Intimate times of worship and prayer in club and at Believin’ It Girlz Tours
- Badge activities that girls work on together and individually
- Inspiring, age appropriate stories and articles that appear in SHINE *brightly* and *Sparkle* magazines which challenge and encourage girls to become activists for Christ
- Participation in GEMS life-defining, summer camp program called Get Connected! Camp

On his way home from a board meeting in Grand Rapids, a Faith Alive board member met an old seminary friend. He asked what curriculum his church was using. “Oh, some evangelical material,” the friend responded. “I don’t really know. I don’t get into that.”

Some of you remember the “old” days when catechism was separated from Sunday school. It was easy to tell which was most important. Catechism was taught by the pastor or an elder while parents made certain their kids memorized the Q&As. Sunday school lessons were taught by whoever could be recruited for the job – not necessarily those with teaching gifts.

Twenty years ago, the Board of Publications (now Faith Alive) decided to combine catechism and Sunday school lessons following the thought that doctrine is best understood as it arises out of the great ongoing biblical drama of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation.

Unfortunately, too many churches leave the selection of Sunday school curricula entirely to staff or volunteer coordinators who may or may not understand a Reformed approach to the Bible. As a result, some churches teach the Bible as a series of moral lessons illustrating Christian virtues. Others use curricula that tell the stories of the Bible with no unifying theme, scope, or sequence.

In addition, a surprising number of churches change curricula every other year or so. When that happens, children’s biblical education becomes a hodgepodge rather than a carefully planned sequence that teaches the overarching story of salvation.

We believe that the spiritual health of each generation depends on teaching them the Bible from a distinctively Reformed perspective:

- The Bible presents us with one whole story of God’s loving relationship with creation. Each story can only be properly understood in relation to the whole.

- What we know about God and ourselves is best learned not through doctrinal formulations (important as those are), but through seeing how God is revealed in the biblical stories and finding ourselves in them.

- Reducing the Bible’s teachings to moralistic themes seriously compromises its message and impact on our lives. *How* we teach the Bible to the children profoundly shapes the way they think and live. Faith Alive curricula, *LIfe, Walk With Me*, and *Kid Connection*, are all built around a solidly Reformed view of the Bible and are based on a thorough understanding of the variety of ways children learn.

Pastors and elders are charged with making sure that children in their congregations are getting the best possible Christian education based on the Reformed faith, playing an active role in choosing Sunday school curriculum to help achieve that goal.

The Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action (OSJHA) has always had a good track record when it comes to youth engagement in the church. Jason Fileta, our field organizer, has visited over twenty college campuses, speaking at conferences and empowering student organizations to further their faith walk on the path of social justice.

CRC Justice Seekers, our online social networking site, has over 100 members of all ages with ongoing healthy dialogue about such issues as ecojustice, immigration, and recommended resources. Become a justice seeker and submit your own photos, videos, and more at [http://justiceseekers.ning.com](http://justiceseekers.ning.com).

We actively encourage young and emerging leaders to attend our events, as well as those of our partner organizations. Latest activities include a tent painting to raise awareness about Darfur at Calvin College, prayer stations on the Millennium Development Goals, and a recent learning trip to the Middle East.

In addition, OSJHA staff regularly submit justice-themed articles to *eQuip*, a publication put out by Youth Unlimited, to encourage youth to become active in their faith communities. Recent topics include hunger and homelessness in the U.S., HIV/AIDS, and integrating justice into worship.

Pastor-Church Relations appreciates the priority of nurturing our children and youth and is committed to doing that well. Many congregational staff are dedicated to children and youth ministry. The Staff Ministry Committee, working under the purview of Pastor-Church Relations, recently created a credentialing process for non-ordained church staff which is now being reviewed by others for implementation. Congregational ministry staff persons who have proven themselves in the areas...
of character, knowledge and skill provide a critical component for all congregational ministry including ministry to children and youth. Additionally, continuing education funds for church staff, as well as for pastors, are available may be applied for online (www.crcna.org)

Indirectly, but no less importantly, Pastor-Church Relations assists congregations to have difficult, but necessary, conversations and to work through conflictive issues. Observing parents and other adults of the church wrestle through tough issues and situations and move toward resolution provides our youth with a realistic understanding of the challenges of congregational life and serves to build resilience in the next generation of congregational leaders. Conversely, when children and youth watch their parents or other adults become disillusioned with the church or leave the church after a painful conflict, it undermines their appreciation for the church and their desire to stay connected with it as adults.

Pastor-Church Relations is committed to the development of healthy congregations. This includes the observable phenomena that adults are excited about following Christ in community and that their children and youth “catch” that excitement. Pastor-Church Relations is working through education and intervention to increase the likelihood that this happens in congregations of the CRCNA.

**Race Relations**

The Office of Race Relations has continued to expand. We are seeing more requests for information about our ministries and for the services we offer, especially in race relations presentations and workshops offered to our churches, institutions, and agencies in the United States and Canada.

This year, we began a global ministry. We have gone to the Dominican Republic to present the Dance of Racial Reconciliation (DORR) workshop and to contextualize it for the Dominican/Haitian context. We plan to conduct the contextualized workshop there in July 2008. We are also planning a preliminary trip to Ecuador to work on contextualizing DORR for that country with hopes to conduct workshops there later this year. Strides are being made in the Canadian context as well, as the work of Steve Kabetu, Race Relations Coordinator, is expanding into other provinces besides Ontario.

On another exciting front, we have begun the process of developing a youth version of DORR. We believe that our youth see racism differently from adults and need to be equipped to identify and dismantle it in their church, school, and world. This is one way in which the Office of Race Relations is involved in the nurturing of our youth.

Still, the overwhelming progress of race relations can only be explained this way: If we honor God, he will honor us. Our office is committed to taking a biblical approach in all our ministries so that God’s people in the Christian Reformed Church in North America and in other places realize our identity as God’s diverse and unified family.

We continue to rejoice in the progress of our work as we see the movement of God and his great power. To God be the glory forever and ever!

**Sustaining Congregational Excellence**

Healthy congregations are intentional when nurturing their children and youth. There’s no one best way to do this. Each church is unique. Every body of believers does things a little differently—which is great! Creativity is something that we look for when reviewing health & renewal (HR) proposals. To date 31 HR grants have been awarded. A number of these are directly related to nurturing children and youth. Here are some examples.

West Coast Community Church in Delta, BC is in the middle of a project to enable and support youth in developing a healthy, personal relationship with God. The project is training young people to be leaders. The church recently reported that attendance at youth events has greatly increased. Unchurched teens make up 75% of the group.

Joy Community CRC in Los Angeles, Calif. will soon begin their King’s Kidz program. Community children will be invited to participate in creative indoor and outdoor activities which will develop them both spiritually and physically. All members of the congregation are being encouraged to support the program that will include vacation bible school, kid’s camp, and a Christmas concert.

Friendship Community CRC in North York, Ont. kicked off their Discovery Zone junior church program in February. Not only will the program nurture the children who attend, it will also nurture the youth of the congregation as they develop leadership skills while working with the other children.

Mission Hills Community Church in Mission, BC is focusing on training individuals to be youth leaders. Several individuals attended the Canadian Youth Workers’ Conference and are now putting what they’ve learned into action. Within the congregation there has been a renewed desire to see young people discipled.

If your congregation would like to consider submitting a proposal for a project, check out the SCE website at www.crcna.org/sce.

**CRWRC**

A CRWRC survey of various age groups regarding their potential interest in an HIV/AIDS campaign found that today’s youth want engagement and meaningful experience before supporting a cause. If they don’t find it, they create it. They are innovators and entrepreneurs. Alison Nirula, six, and Charis Wildeboer, five, of Clearview CRC in Oakville, Ont. were so moved by an HIV/AIDS video shown in their church on World AIDS
Day that they made and sold Christmas tree ornaments to raise money for CRWRC’s Embrace AIDS campaign. CRWRC is inspired by the initiatives of young people who are eager to make a difference in God’s world. We create opportunities like the following for youth and children to get personally involved in development work.

- Online and print resources to encourage children ages five to fourteen learn more about international development. The annual children’s project teaches kids about issues relating to poverty while helping them find ways to personally make a difference in people’s lives.
- Embrace AIDS group on Facebook, the popular online social networking tool connecting 67 million people from all over the world. Here youth can recruit friends to join the Embrace AIDS cause, discuss the issues related to HIV and AIDS, plan events, and raise money for the campaign.
- Youth to Youth for young people ages 16-18 who hunger for a more intense introduction to international development. Participants will complete a 12-month distance learning component in language skills, cultural understanding, and biblical studies in international development prior to travel. Then they will gain valuable cross culture experience learning alongside their African peers on an 8-week discovery adventure in Africa during summer 2009. Just four to six spaces are available; youth are encouraged to request an application packet by emailing youthtoyouth@crcna.org or calling (616) 241-1691.

For more information, contact Greg Elzinga at 616-224-5874 or gregge@partnersworldwide.org.

Sea to Sea 2008 Bike Tour

Throughout the world, a child under the age of five dies every three seconds due to preventable causes such as hunger and disease. In Africa, 15 million children have become orphans because of HIV/AIDS. Millions more in North America go to school hungry every day. Jesus said “let the little children come to me” and he called his church to preach good news to the poor, bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim freedom for the captive, and release the oppressed (Luke 4).

This summer’s Sea to Sea Bike Tour is responding to that call by increasing awareness about poverty and injustice, increasing active involvement in ministry with and for the poor, and increasing funding for CRC-partner programs aimed at ending the cycle of poverty for children, families and communities locally and globally.

The tour begins June 28 in Seattle and ends nine weeks later in Jersey City on August 30. More than 200 riders are participating, making this the largest bike tour of its kind to cross North America. Not riding? You can follow along by purchasing a copy of the “Shifting Gears” devotional booklet filled with daily maps and meditations (available in May; pre-orders accepted online by April 1); go online (www.SeatoSea.org) during the tour to read cyclist’s blogs, view photos, and download video updates; attend a celebration rally; make a donation to support a cyclist; and pray for the riders, support crew, and organizers. Before the tour is over, ask God how he may want to use you, your church, and your classis to respond to his call for compassion and action on behalf of all his children.

Partners Worldwide

Partners Worldwide affiliate, All Kids Can Learn International (AKCLI), is working in Africa to address the problem of the over one million AIDS orphans. The Villages of Hope partnership, located in Zambia, is training young adult (18-25 years) orphans in commercial conservation farming and entrepreneurship, while being brought into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Over 50 orphans have already been employed, providing sustainable income for over 120 additional orphans in their care. The Villages of Hope is serving as a catalyst for economic and spiritual empowerment.

Partners Worldwide has built a network of over 2,000 business-members, many of whom are CRC members. Over 200 of these business-leaders travel each year to work with our affiliates—like All Kids Can Learn International—to engage directly in the fight against global poverty. They have direct relationships and long-term partnerships with entrepreneurs in areas of poverty, often finding their lives radically changed through these partnerships. Poverty and advocacy become personal. Spiritual warfare becomes real. Faith is not taken for granted. Their passion to transform the world, also transforms their own lives, businesses, churches, and communities.

Calvin College

When Calvin’s spring break rolls around, a sizeable contingent of students bypass the conventional beach trip for a chance to work in less relaxing locales. In early March, 110 students—double last year’s total—and eight mentors participated in service-learning spring break trips, traveling to eight sites around the country to serve alongside worthy nonprofit organizations and to learn about cultures other than their own. Three of the trips this past March represented a growing partnership between Calvin and several Louisiana communities to help these towns recover from hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005. A fourth trip brought students to Rehoboth, New Mexico—one of Calvin’s most enduring partnerships—to work with the Christian school association there. Other trips involved volunteer efforts in Boston, Kansas City, Pittsburgh, and Knoxville through a variety of service partnerships.

Lori Gesink, Calvin associate director of service-learning and the coordinator of the trips, emphasizes “The service-learning center is committed to partnership. Without partnership, it’s not service-learning—it’s
volunteerism, or charity." Gensink offers "It’s the reciprocal relationship of coming alongside an agency for a week so that we can learn, and they can get extra help. Our students get much more than they give." The relationships between Calvin and the agencies served are not only reciprocal, many are of long duration.

**Calvin Theological Seminary**

Although seminaries may not be thought of as places for nurturing children and youth, Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) actually is such a place. While some seminary students are quite youthful themselves, all of them have opportunities to learn about youth and youth ministry. Over the past few years, the faculty and staff at CTS have focused on children and youth in a variety of ways.

CTS offers an assortment of courses in ministry to youth and children such as “The Pastoral Care of Youth,” “Family Ministries,” “Christian Nurture of Children,” “Foundations in Youth Ministry,” “Youth and Their Culture,” and “Models of Ministry to Youth.” The seminary also offers a youth ministry track within its master’s degree program in educational ministry.

In August 2007 the seminary faculty hosted a consultation on youth ministry, inviting 26 people from around North America to inform us about their ministries and to suggest ways to prepare seminarians for work in youth ministry or for working with youth ministers. CTS is also working with the Association of Reformed Youth Pastors to electronically publish a series of papers on youth and family ministry.

CTS faculty members lead workshops at the Youth Unlimited Convention and at the Jubilee Conference of the Coalition for Christian Outreach, reaching thousands of high school and college-aged youth. CTS also offers smaller “Discerning Your Calling” events at local churches. Our continuing education office cosponsors events for seminarians, pastors, and Christian educators about youth including a recent day-long seminar on “Youth, Formation, and Intergenerational Worship” and a summer conference on “Googling Youth.”

**Home Missions**

Where did our young adults go? Unfortunately, that is a question the Christian Reformed Church is grappling with today. Consider these sobering statistics, presented at a recent Christian Reformed Home Missions board meeting:

- From high school graduation to age 25, there is a 42 percent drop in weekly church attendance.
- By age 29, the drop in weekly attendance increases to 58 percent.
- In the 100 Korean-speaking CRCs, 80 percent of youth leave the church.

In addition to engaging in fervent prayer about this critical issue, Home Missions is becoming more intentional about nurturing our church’s youth. Our desire is to cultivate an atmosphere within the CRC that will foster youth retention.

One way we are doing that is by inviting young people to participate directly in our ministries. For example, the Home Missions board recently voted to enhance its relationship with younger CRC members by designating two at-large board seats for youth (twenty-three being the maximum age limit). A slate of candidates for these two positions will be selected with the assistance of Home Missions Campus Ministry leaders Peter Schuurman and Joyce Suh. Nominees will then be presented to Synod 2008. Diversity will be encouraged.

Home Missions is looking at other ways to get young people involved as well, recognizing that this will require major commitments of time and effort from our churches, campus ministries, and other funded ministries. Campus Ministry is one area in particular where we hope to make a greater impact in young lives.

Home Missions is also actively involved in nurturing children through two Home Missions Small Group evangelistic programs: Story Hour and Little Lambs. Story Hour leaders, trained by Home Missions Small
Group Ministry Developers, use Bible storytelling and other activities to teach children ages four to six the basics of the Christian faith. Little Lambs is a play curriculum that uses activities and Bible stories to guide two-, three-, and four-year-olds as they start their faith journey. Instructors use hands-on activities and guided play to help these children learn about God’s love. Together, Story Hour and Little Lambs currently reach more than 500 Christian Reformed congregations and nearly 400 congregations from other denominations.

**World Missions**

Christian Reformed World Missions is tasked with leading Christian Reformed congregations in extending God’s Kingdom – a kingdom where all believers are children. In this spirit, World Missions strives to engage children and youth through programs and partnerships like the following:

- **Hosting an annual missions-themed, poster drawing contest for children to 18 years of age.** The winners are recognized on our website. Those with exceptional entries get to see their art turned into bulletin covers that are made available to every Christian Reformed congregation in the United States and Canada.

- **Providing lists of missionary kids’ birthdays and addresses to GEMS and Cadets program leaders so our youth in North America can develop pen pal relationships with our youth abroad.**

- **Partnering with Youth Unlimited, a hub for Christian Reformed youth, by referring missions-minded youth to the Serve and Encounter programs; both are great starting points for young people who are interested in missions.**

- **Offering an annual, summer-long Summer Missions Program (SMP) where 18- to 30-year-olds experience cross-cultural missions and learn from missionaries who are being used by God to declare his kingdom worldwide.** SMP stresses spiritual growth, learning through service, and increased knowledge of God’s Kingdom. Many SMP alumni have returned to serve with CRWM through both short- and long-term commitments, and many others have gone on to serve with other mission agencies domestically and internationally.