

## FALL 2017

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## A Season of Change

It is “Back to School” season and the time of year when we kick off a new round of church activities and ministries. Wherever you live, even if the leaves of your trees don’t change color, autumn is a time of excitement and change.

This is true for the Christian Reformed Church in North America as well. As a denomination, we are continually on a path of growth and renewal that is undergirded by a firm foundation of Reformed thought and tradition. Just as a child doesn’t jump from grade 2 to grade 7, the changes in the CRC also follow a pathway of specific, gradual movement.

As we head into this new ministry year, we are excited to take the next steps in this process. For example, in October we will hold the first meeting of our new Council of Delegates governance structure. We are grateful for all of the prayer and work that has gone into this transition and for the people who have been appointed to serve in this capacity. We pray that they will govern well and that our denomination will be blessed by their leadership.

Another exciting change follows on the heels of a summer event. In August, nearly 850 Christian Reformed people came together for a new kind of experience: Inspire 2017. This gathering brought members of our denomination together from across North America and helped all of us encourage each other, worship together, and find inspiration as we seek to follow the Spirit’s leading in ministries nearby and far away. In the wake of this event, attendees are connecting with their home congregations to explore new approaches and seek new pathways of faithfulness. We pray for renewal and inspiration in all of our local congregations.

One of the greatest changes taking

place is in our global mission area. As of July 1, Resonate Global Mission has emerged with vigor and vision in the union of Christian Reformed Home Missions and Christian Reformed World Missions. Following Synod 2017’s challenge to us all to strengthen our efforts in congregational revitalization, church planting, and evangelism, Resonate Global Mission has an exciting and significant role to play. Please continue to pray for the Resonate staff in their work to help all of us develop further in our spiritual journey, learning how to disciple others.

The following pages provide additional reports on the progress that the CRCNA and its ministries have been making in the past few months. I hope that these ministry reports will encourage you as you continue on this exciting journey in which God is leading us.

Steven Timmermans  
Executive Director, CRCNA



## Back to God Ministries International

As the CRCNA media ministry for nearly 80 years, Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI) continues to use technology and media to proclaim the gospel, disciple believers, and strengthen the church throughout the world. We take the Word of God to people, right where they are, so that they can reframe their lives in the gospel.

- In April, BTGMI hosted a retreat in Kalamazoo, Mich., for our international ministry leaders. Together they worshiped, gave reports, shared ideas, and collaborated on ways they could adapt each other’s media outreach projects in various cultural contexts.

Hindi ministry leader A.K. Lama shared, “It was encouraging to be in the midst of the people of God. I had much to learn from them, and I am indeed challenged to do things differently and better.” We conduct these retreats every 18 months; the next is scheduled for fall 2018.

- In addition to growing the follower base of the *Be Thou My Rhythm* app, our Chinese ministry has recently hosted and attended ministry conferences in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, and North America. These conferences have led to the publication of multiple resources, including a series on evangelism and the first Chinese book published on Christian communication, *Christian Public Communication: Theology, Theory, and Practices*.

- Our Russian team continues to share the good news with the Russian-speaking world. We hosted a ministry conference in Yekaterinburg, Ukraine, where Vadim, a young professional, gave his life to Christ. “Vadim approached our staff to thank us for bringing the gospel into his life,” reported Rev. Sergei Sosodkin, BTGMI Russian ministry leader. Vadim is now a member of a local church and involved with the missionary and diaconal activities of his congregation.

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

## Resonate Global Mission

Christian Reformed Home Missions and Christian Reformed World Missions are now Resonate Global Mission. We are excited for the fresh initiative to which God is calling us! Resonate brings the gospel to people, neighborhoods, communities, churches, and the world, to embolden them in participating in God’s mission and faithfully proclaiming and living out the good news of Jesus.

Each one of us is a missionary. We all have a calling; we all have a voice. As a single mission agency, we are now better able to equip the Christian Reformed Church for that calling—for living and sharing the good news, so that it goes out in every direction like an expanding, amplifying sound.

- The ministry work of Home Missions and World Missions will continue to be honored through Resonate Global Mission—sending missionaries, developing leaders, evangelizing, discipling, planting churches, and doing campus ministry. We will equip pastors and leaders both here in North America and around the world.

- One of the biggest opportunities we can now tackle as Resonate is cross-cultural ministry. The barriers of distance and geography become less and less challenging in today’s increasingly globalized, connected culture. All over the world we are finding opportunities to work with people from every culture and background!

- We are committed to be a partner with your church in mission. We believe that if we are to go far, we must go together with you. One way we can work together with your church is through our regional staff. In 14 regional offices around the world, we have people on the ground who know the context and can help your church join God’s mission there.

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

## Timothy Leadership Training Institute

TLTI celebrates 20 years of ministry in 2017! A training project that started with Calvin Theological Seminary professors and World Missions missionaries in East Africa now serves church leaders in 30 languages in more than 40 countries worldwide.

We are grateful to Stephen Tuuk for serving our Lord through Timothy for the past five years, beginning with two years as a board member and following up with three years as president and chief executive officer. Under his leadership, Timothy expanded the reach of its ministry and reorganized internal operations.

In July, Gary Bekker began to transition from serving as director of Christian Reformed World Missions to becoming the director of TLTI. Since World Missions and Timothy were affiliated for some time, he is well acquainted with TLTI’s effectiveness in training church leaders to share the gospel in their communities and to

disciple believers in their congregations.

In fact, Gary has been involved with Timothy almost from its beginning, first as academic dean at Calvin Theological Seminary and then as director of World Missions. He often shares his excitement in seeing and hearing how Timothy Leadership Training revitalizes pastors in their calling as they learn how to preach and do the work of ministry better because of their training.

We are also pleased to share that, along with this transition, Global Coffee Break and Educational Care joined the TLTI organization in July. Like TLTI, these programs focus on adult non-formal education. We are looking forward to growing our ministries both nationally and internationally together.

Many thanks to the people and agencies of the Christian Reformed Church for their support and prayers these past 20 years! Please watch for continued reports of changed lives and transformed communities.

[www.tlti.org/](http://www.tlti.org/)



## Pastor Church Resources

Recently over 340 CRC pastors participated in a research project, *Flourishing in Ministry*, conducted by the University of Notre Dame. The focus was on pastors’ well-being in 12 areas. After completing the survey, each pastor received a personalized report. If a CRC pastor in active congregational ministry hasn’t taken the survey, he/she is still able to do so and to receive a personalized report. Contact our office for details: [rschelhaas@crcna.org](mailto:rschelhaas@crcna.org).

The well-being survey has been completed by thousands of pastors in Canada and the United States. Here’s a glimpse of some of the CRC’s results. On average,

- CRC pastors are flourishing in spiritual well-being and score just a bit higher than the “average” pastor.
- CRC pastors’ burnout score is just a bit lower than that of the “average” pastor.

- CRC pastors' person-fit work score is in the flourishing category and is the same as that of the "average" pastor.

CRC survey respondents say that

- "work" feels like their calling in life (98%).
- stress from "work" negatively affects home life several times a month (32%).
- in most ways, life is close to their ideal (63%).
- on most days, they feel enthusiastic about ministry work (77%).
- income from ministry work alone is sufficient to meet family needs (55%).

The researchers note the following:

- A recurring theme is that life as a pastor is difficult and that it seems there is sometimes nowhere to turn for help.
- When a pastor has a good, strong relationship with the congregation, he/she has a higher sense of "job satisfaction."

For the full report, see

[www.crcna.org/SPE](http://www.crcna.org/SPE).

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

## Chaplaincy and Care Ministry

In April, Rev. Sarah Roelofs began working as the new Director of Chaplaincy and Care. In her first months as director, she wrapped up preparations for our Annual Chaplains Conference in June, which capped the celebrations of our 75th anniversary year as an official ministry in the CRCNA. About 100 retired, active, and prospective chaplains and their family members participated as we reviewed our past and dreamed about our future. In the past few months, Sarah has continued to attend binational chaplaincy conferences, visit chaplains and churches, and collaborate with other ministries throughout Canada and the United States.

We are thankful to see how God has continued to bless our ministry. Chaplaincy and Care is raising up new leaders in the denomination to be sent out by the church. In the past two months, four new chaplains have been endorsed and have joined our ministry. This brings our total to 14 newly endorsed chaplains this year. We now

number more than 157 full-time and part-time military and civilian chaplains in a variety of institutions and settings in both Canada and the U.S. 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 awarded over \$28,000 in training grants in 2016-2017 so that chaplains receive specialized training to equip themselves as qualified, professional chaplains. During the summer, we reviewed and awarded seven grants to prospective chaplains. Our training grants are funded mainly by active and retired chaplains, as well as a few churches who feel called to equip future leaders for ministry outside the church.

Please contact Chaplaincy and Care ([chaplaincy@crcna.org](mailto:chaplaincy@crcna.org)) with any questions about our ministry or how to become a chaplain.

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

Our report to Synod 2017 was well received. One primary feature was an extended report on the developments of the office of commissioned pastor. At the request of Synod 2016, the committee presented to Synod 2017 a variety of suggested changes to the Church Order and Its Supplements pertaining to this office.

As Synod 2017 approved these changes for proposal to Synod 2018, synod also asked the committee to review and make suggestions for an updated format of this portion of the Church Order, with use of a document called the Commissioned Pastor Handbook. This work is currently under way.

We continue to be busy in the work of communicating with seminary students regarding the new 24-month candidacy process. We have worked with each of the classes and with Calvin Theological 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.

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

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

## Ministry in Canada

This fall marks the launch of the Bridge App across Canada. Over two years of development, piloting, and improvements have contributed to developing a local-church-based, missionally focused communications tool for every church. This app is being launched first in Canada and then will hopefully become available in the U.S. as it develops and improves even further. We are thankful to Extreme Technology of Beamsville, Ont., for their development of this app together with the CRCNA Canadian Ministries Office. Their generosity and the generosity of some key donors have afforded us this project, which normally would have cost about \$500,000.

Already in the rollout of its pilot version, the app gives evidence of making a positive impact. Churches are reporting increased viewers of their Sunday-morning services and a large impact on the prayer community. Partnerships with various ministries and agencies ranging from Back to God Ministries International to Ravi Zacharias Ministries have also been important.

For more information on the app and to see how it can make an impact for your church, visit [thebridgeapp.org/site/home](http://thebridgeapp.org/site/home).

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

## Classis Renewal

(No report this quarter.)

[network.crcna.org/classis](http://network.crcna.org/classis)

## Church Renewal Lab

The Church Renewal Lab is committed to developing communities of grace focused on the gospel and communities of blessing focused on

justice and mercy. We believe congregations of grace and blessing will remain attractive no matter the cultural headwinds.

To date, the Lab has served more than 60 churches in the CRCNA through a two-year renewal journey. Active cohorts are located in the Great Lakes region, northern Alberta, and Classis Columbia. New cohorts launch in June 2018. Contact the Lab at [churchrenewal@calvinseminary.edu](mailto:churchrenewal@calvinseminary.edu) for more information.

A renewal newsletter featuring fresh ideas, best practices, a coach's corner, and renewal updates is sent out twice a month. To be included, please send a request to the address above.

Besides the two-year renewal process, the Renewal Lab serves churches and classes in various ways, including pre-classis training events, half-day renewal retreats, individual and congregational coaching, congregational viability assessments, and discipleship training. Let us know if we can serve you.

The second annual "More and Better" conference is scheduled for February 4-7, 2018, at Sunlight Community Church in Port St. Lucie, Fla. Sunlight's emphasis on gospel preaching and life-on-life disciple making has led to 600 persons' coming into the life of the church through evangelism in the past 10 years. Contact the Lab for information about this gathering.

In the coming year, the Lab is moving to an affiliate relationship with Calvin Theological Seminary to provide greater flexibility and broader reach. More information is coming.

[calvinseminary.edu/the-renewal-lab/](http://calvinseminary.edu/the-renewal-lab/)

## Ridder Church Renewal

(No report this quarter.)

[westernsem.edu/journey/ridder](http://westernsem.edu/journey/ridder)

## Reformed Leadership Initiative

The Reformed Leadership Initiative (RLI) is in the transition phase of a two-year collaborative approach for developing pastors and congregational leaders for ministry and mission in the CRC and RCA.

At a spring face-to-face gathering of RLI's twelve coleaders and Imple-

mentation Team members, our coleaders shared the many ways in which they support 50 participating congregations in six learning networks of pastors and congregational leaders. They are using various processes, resources, and models for developing leaders. Each coleader team discussed current and anticipated project outcomes, surprises, and wonderings. The learning was quite helpful.

A highlight of this four-day gathering was to hear stories about how personal lives and churches are being transformed and influenced by the project. This gathering gave coleaders the benefit of face-to-face coaching as a team and in one-on-one sessions. These sessions were particularly helpful for our thinking about how to transfer what we've learned into action plans for developing leaders beyond the life of this project.

Subsequent to this gathering, a project brief was designed with the intent of capturing RLI's process, practices, and guiding principles, as well as a vision for next-generation leaders. We see it as a helpful tool for churches, classes, regional leaders, pastors, and congregational leaders in a variety of ministry contexts. See [network.crcna.org/sites/default/files/documents/ProjectBrief.pdf](http://network.crcna.org/sites/default/files/documents/ProjectBrief.pdf).

Our coleaders spent their summer staying connected with learning networks through video-conference coaching sessions. Each network is in the process of planning its final RLI network gathering by the end of the year.

We thank you for your support and prayers!

[crcna.org/ministries/initiatives/together-again](http://crcna.org/ministries/initiatives/together-again)



## Worship Ministries

### Free Webinars

While many of our worship leaders and committee members would like to have additional training, many find it difficult to find the time or financial resources to attend conferences and events. To help address that need, Worship Ministries has begun offering free webinars that allow for some interaction with the

presenter. In addition, the webinars are recorded and posted on the Network to allow anyone 24/7 access to the wealth of information provided in the webinars, as well as links to additional resources. To date, the following webinars are available:

- [Worship: Can I Be Included?](#) —Josh Friend
- [Training Youth for Worship Leadership](#) —Dr. Eric Mathis
- [Training and Leading Worship Teams](#) —Greg Scheer
- [Worship in a Diverse World](#) —Rev. Sandra Van Opstal
- [Work and Worship](#) —Dr. Cory Willson

To stay up to date on the latest webinar offerings, sign up for our monthly e-news at [crcna.org/Worship](http://crcna.org/Worship).

### Peer Learning Groups

Peer learning groups are starting up again. This year we are offering three books to choose from:

- [Essential Worship: A Handbook for Leaders](#) by Greg Scheer
- [You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit](#) by James K. A. Smith
- [The Church of All Ages: Generations Worshipping Together](#) Howard Vanderwell, editor; essays by nine writers—pastors, teachers, worship planners

For information on joining or forming your own peer learning group, go to [network.crcna.org/worship/worship-peer-learning-groups](http://network.crcna.org/worship/worship-peer-learning-groups).

### Events

In the past few months, Worship Ministries also coordinated worship at Synod 2017, led a workshop at a Presbyterian Church in Canada conference and at Inspire 2017, attended the Hymn Society of the U.S. and Canada, and taught at the Theological Education in Africa conference led by Resonate.

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

## Calvin Theological Seminary

*From Across the Globe:* International student orientation took place on Aug. 21, reflecting again the global reach of Calvin Seminary. This year, students are coming from Costa Rica, Korea, China, Rwanda, Brazil, Ethiopia, India,

and Taiwan, as well as the United States and Canada. We invite prayers for these international students as well as all our other new and returning students. The new academic year began formally on Wed., Sept. 6, with Dr. Karin Maag marking Calvin Theological Seminary's 142nd year of ministry service in the context of the 500th anniversary year of the Protestant Reformation.

#### *Reformation Commemoration*

*Resources:* The Spring/Summer Forum of Calvin Seminary focused on the five solas of the Reformation and is available online at

[calvinseminary.edu/wp-content/uploads/Spring-2017-Forum.pdf](http://calvinseminary.edu/wp-content/uploads/Spring-2017-Forum.pdf). You may also find these articles cross-linked with material published in *The Banner*.

In addition, Calvin Seminary will host an event Thurs., Oct. 5, at the Calvin College Chapel on the topic "What can Protestants and Catholics Learn from One Another Today?" CTS Professors Dr. Ronald Feenstra and Dr. Karin Maag will be joined by Dr. Jared Ortiz of Hope College and the Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Grand Rapids, the most Reverend David John Walkowiak. The event is open to the public.

*Response to Charlottesville:* As we welcome students from various cultures and contexts, it is important to note that this welcome is from the heart of the gospel. A statement noting our commitment is now posted on our Calvin Seminary webpage along with a Spanish translation at

[calvinseminary.edu/2017/08/15/statement-regarding-recent-events-charlottesville-va/](http://calvinseminary.edu/2017/08/15/statement-regarding-recent-events-charlottesville-va/).

Thank you for praying for our students and staff as we begin a new year!

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

## Calvin Institute of Christian Worship

• Check out new [audio, video, and print resources](#) on the CICW website from the "Taking Your Church to College" event, including resources from professors Brian Bolt, Maria Cornou, Kristin Kobes Du Mez, Christina Edmondson, Roland Hoksbergen, Young Kim, Tracy Kuperus, Won Lee, Neal Plantinga, and Benita Wolters-

Fredlund, as well as worship service resources from our June Vital Worship Grants Colloquium.

• We are celebrating the release of our new children's book [En la mesa de Dios/At God's Table](#), a bilingual resource about the Lord's Supper with vibrant illustrations by Joel Schoon-Tanis. This makes an ideal book for families, church libraries, and Sunday school classrooms. Free copies were distributed at the Inspire 2017 conference.

• We published a new volume in the CICW Liturgical Studies series with Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishers: *The Theater of God's Glory: Calvin, Creation, and the Liturgical Arts*, by W. David O. Taylor.

• Save the date for the 2018 Symposium on Worship: Jan. 25-27, cosponsored with the Center for Excellence in Preaching and featuring learning sessions on preaching, congregational song, the Psalms, faith formation, income disparity, church planting, mental health, the sacraments, prayer, antiracism, visual arts, and much more. The worship theme is "Jesus Did Many Other Things As Well . . .": The Eastertide Gospel."

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



## Faith Formation Ministries

*Growing a Storytelling Culture at New Life CRC, Guelph, Ont.*

In the fall of 2016, New Life CRC in Guelph, Ont., joined a cohort of 18 CRC congregations focused on "Strengthening Your Congregation's Faith Formation Culture," and decided to concentrate on the spiritual discipline of sharing faith stories. Their Faith Formation Ministries (FFM) coach – team leader Syd Hielema – met with them, and they laid out a strategy to (a) discern which places in congregational life were the most "ripe" for this emphasis so that it could organically build on existing strengths, and (b) brainstorm simple ways in which storytelling could be added to a variety of ministries. Then their experiments began, starting with a women's group and GEMS.

In the spring, coach Hielema was invited to lead a congregational meeting focused on wandering young adults, and he began by inviting everyone present to share with another person there the story of their faith journey as they transitioned from adolescence to adulthood. Hielema had allotted fifteen minutes for this exercise, but it was clear that the group of 50 or so participants wanted to continue much longer.

The exercise demonstrated just how encouraging, enlightening, and community-building our sharing of our faith stories can be. New Life's cohort team has solid plans in place to continue their experiments during the final six months of the project.

Focusing on faith storytelling is the most popular choice among FFM's 18 cohort congregations, illustrating a deep longing that FFM has discerned throughout the CRCNA for our testimonies to flow from our tongues more readily and freely. FFM's Faith Storytelling Toolkit is also one of its most popular online resources ([crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits](http://crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits)).

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

## Calvin College

Calvin College is a top-ranked liberal arts college that equips and empowers its more than 3,700 students and 65,000 alumni to think deeply, to act justly, and to live wholeheartedly as Christ's agents of renewal in the world. This fall, we are excited to welcome students from around the corner and across the globe who bring with them the highest average GPA on record for an incoming class of students, at 3.75.

We celebrate the achievement of a longtime professor and a member of the Class of 1954, Alvin Plantinga, who served on the philosophy faculty for nearly two decades. He will be celebrated as the 2017 Templeton Prize winner during a reception at the Field Museum in Chicago in September. The Templeton Foundation has described his work at the intersection of Christianity and philosophy as revolutionary. Plantinga joins an esteemed group of 46 prize recipients, including Mother Teresa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and the Dalai Lama.

This fall also signals the completion of some renovations around campus. The

largest project has been the renovation of the Hiemenga Hall corridor and three classrooms, along with two new lounge areas.

In 2016-2017 our athletics teams demonstrated excellence on the court, in the pool, and on the field. The college won its 11th national championship, claimed league titles in nine varsity sports, and took home the league's all sports award, the Commissioner's Cup, for the third year in a row. In addition, in 2016-2017, Calvin tied a school record with 14 teams earning league honors for having a cumulative team GPA of 3.30 or above.

This past May, more than 900 students representing 60-plus majors graduated from Calvin College. Our most recent annual employment and grad school report shows that 99 percent of our grads are professionally employed or in graduate school within nine months of graduation. In addition, we are excited to launch "Calvin LifeWork," an innovative cocurricular program, this fall with the Class of 2021.

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

## ServiceLink

(No report this quarter.)

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

## Dynamic Youth Ministries

### Calvinist Cadet Corps

"God Seeking Us" is our theme for the 2017-18 season, based on Ezekiel 34:11. Cadet clubs are starting up in over 500 churches across North America this fall. In these clubs, men will be showing boys how God is seeking each of them individually and wants to live in relationship with them. Along with the example of the shepherd looking for, and looking after, his sheep, the boys will be introduced to other ways in which God is working in their lives—and what their response should be.

This year's theme was introduced at Camp Elk Run, held in the Black Hills of South Dakota this past July. Over 1,200 men and boys spent a week enjoying the outdoors, engaging in many activities and service projects, and growing together and with God. We were excited that the numbers of boys, counselors, and staff volunteers

exceeded our expectations. The weather was excellent, and we are thankful that God blessed all who attended.

Our international ministry continues to thrive, specifically in Kenya, where men continue in leadership training and where churches are looking for a ministry to help boys find purpose in their lives. The Kenyan Cadet leadership continues to look for ways in which they can become more self-sufficient.

We appreciate your continued prayers and support as we strive to help boys learn what it truly means to be "Living for Jesus."

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

### GEMS Girls' Clubs

(Girls Everywhere Meeting the Savior)

For the past 59 years God has used GEMS to touch the lives of women and girls across North America and beyond. We have a lot to celebrate!

God continues to call GEMS to be a global ministry, and we are excited about the ways he is leading us to live out our name and reach girls everywhere. In addition to having nearly 800 clubs nationwide, GEMS is currently active in 15 countries.

GEMS is committed to making sure every resource we produce points every girl—no matter her background or location—to the truth of God's Word. This season, all clubs are being invited to become Global Partners. Clubs who choose to participate will receive all kinds of resources to engage their girls and help them develop a global perspective.

As always, leadership training is a vital component of the GEMS ministry. In July, over 450 GEMS counselors gathered to be trained and equipped on the campus of Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa. Counselors learned what it looks like to walk "In His Steps," reflecting this year's theme based on 1 John 2:6. Through main stage sessions, devotions, workshops, and a theme-night experience, counselors absorbed what it means to accept Jesus' invitation to follow him—to receive his love and live like him.

Next year we will be celebrating GEMS' 60th birthday at the 2018 GEMS Conference at Redeemer University College in Hamilton, Ont.

Encourage the GEMS counselors in your church and communities to attend as we celebrate God's faithfulness over 60 years!

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

### Youth Unlimited

This summer 28 congregations hosted a week of SERVE ministry. Nearly 1,400 youth and leaders from 140 Christian Reformed congregations served at those 28 sites! In the process, the students collectively gave over 39,000 hours of hands and heart service in the name of Christ.

As often is the case with these experiences, when space is created for a student to worship, read the Bible, serve others, share in small groups, and pray, the Holy Spirit moves powerfully! I strongly encourage you to visit [youthunlimited.org](http://youthunlimited.org), where you can connect to our Facebook, Twitter, or blog postings to see pictures and read stories of impact. The church is alive, and your students are a significant part of the living, breathing church!

This summer at every Youth Unlimited SERVE experience the Scripture focus came from the book of Mark. The theme was "Authentic Community." Through this theme we wrestled with what it means to be in community with God, our church, our family and friends, and the people around us who don't know Jesus Christ. Please join Youth Unlimited in praying that the work of the Holy Spirit in each student has a ripple effect in churches and communities across Canada and the United States!

Youth Unlimited is truly honored and blessed to be able to serve the CRC and its students. We do not take this calling lightly. You have our commitment that we will continue to give 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 would like to join us in this great adventure of investing into students and the church, please contact us. We would be honored to serve with you!

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

## World Renew

### *Community Development*

Did you know that World Renew works primarily through local churches and Christian partners? In a recent newsletter Steve Sywulka (team leader for Southern Africa) shared about a visit to Mozambique. With support from World Renew and the Diocese of Niassa, eight communities in this region are striving to reduce mortality and improve nutrition.

The commitment of the health volunteers is inspiring. Some are walking or biking long distances to serve at the health center or to receive training. What motivates them to sacrifice so much to help others? "We want to help our community," says one volunteer. "We want to learn new things," offers another. But most of all, says another, "God sees what we are doing." We praise God for the faithfulness of these local volunteers, and for your offerings that make these programs possible.

### *Disaster Response*

One of the most overwhelming global stories emerging is that of the plight of so many refugees around the world. World Renew has provided assistance to nearly 140,000 Syrians displaced by the conflict in Syria since 2012.

Thanks be to God for inspiring his people to donate funds to World Renew to assist victims of conflict and natural disasters.

Domestically, Disaster Response Services is working in Alberta, Arkansas, British Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Ontario, Quebec, South Carolina, Texas, and West Virginia. Learn more at [worldrenew.net/drs](http://worldrenew.net/drs).

### *Upcoming offering dates:*

Oct. 9 (Canada) and Nov. 23 (U.S.):

Thanksgiving

Nov. 5: World Hunger Sunday

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

Dec. 25: Christmas

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

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

## 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, religious persecution, and climate change.

In the past quarter, the Centre for Public Dialogue...

- together with World Renew and the Office of Social Justice, developed a toolkit to help congregations mark World Refugee Day ([crcna.org/WorldRefugeeDay](http://crcna.org/WorldRefugeeDay)).
- piloted a new Citizenship Advocacy training to equip congregational members for advocacy meetings.
- supported CRC members in their advocacy for people around the world affected by hunger and poverty through an online action alert with World Renew. In the past year, Canadian CRC members have contacted their elected representatives more than 600 times through our online action alert system about a variety of justice concerns.
- led a KAIROS Blanket Exercise at Northumberland Christian School in Cobourg, Ont., that led to a strengthened relationship with a local First Nation community.
- along with the Office of Social Justice, provided a platform for CRC people to share thought-provoking articles about justice through our blog, *Do Justice*. Top articles on *Do Justice* this quarter include an interview with Professor Roy Berkenbosch of The King's University about tutoring Omar Khadr, a reflection from Professor emeritus Jim Payton of Redeemer University College about books that have made him more aware of his privilege, and an article from Professor Matthew Tuininga of Calvin Theological Seminary about John Calvin's view of social justice.

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

## Canadian Aboriginal Ministry Committee

(No report this quarter.)

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

## Office of Social Justice

Churches recognize the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church on Nov. 5 or 12. This year our worship resources focus on the persecution and witness of the Coptic Church in Egypt, with 2 Corinthians 4:8-10 as the theme Scripture. Free [bulletin inserts](#) to help churches remember the persecuted church are available from Faith Alive.

We hosted the "[Speaking Up for a Faithful Budget](#)" series on *Do Justice*. The series focused on the fact that as followers of Christ we have an opportunity to use the power of advocacy to call for a faithful national budget—one that protects and defends people who are vulnerable. The proposed U.S. federal budget for the 2018 fiscal year includes dramatic cuts to programs that support people who are poor both domestically and abroad. It affects abortion, creation care, immigration, hunger, refugees, and many more issues that shape the ministries and mission of the Christian Reformed Church. In the series we heard directly from people in the pews, congregational leaders, and community leaders about how they and the people they serve would be affected by the proposed budget.

Together with World Renew and the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue, we developed a [toolkit](#) for congregations to recognize World Refugee Day throughout June.

The Climate Witness Project has heard from 450 CRC members in 71 congregations across the U.S. and Canada who are committed to education and advocacy around climate change. Twenty-five of those members participated in [Evangelical Climate Advocacy Days](#) in Washington, D.C., where they marched at the People's Climate March, received advocacy training, and met with their members of Congress.

As part of our Advocacy Works series on *Do Justice*, Megan Van Kooten wrote [a blog](#) about how she learned to view advocacy as a spiritual discipline while attending Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington, D.C., to learn about criminal justice reform.

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

## Safe Church Ministry

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

Safe Church responds to hundreds of requests for assistance each quarter. Yet our strategy involves training volunteers in each congregation and in every classis to build communities where the value of each person is honored and where people are free to worship and grow free from abuse. And where abuse has occurred, the response of the church is critical; the Lord's compassion and justice are needed.

At Safe Church we are pleased to have Eric Kas as our new Safe Church associate. Eric is a pastor who also works part-time in church planting. Please pray with us as we prioritize and organize our work to allow us to better serve congregations and develop effective safe church teams across the U.S. and Canada.

We've recently partnered with Faith Formation Ministries in producing [Ten Ways to Make Your Church a Safer Place](#) ([network.crcna.org/safe-church/ten-ways-make-your-church-safer-place](http://network.crcna.org/safe-church/ten-ways-make-your-church-safer-place)). The first item on this list is "Pay attention to abuse prevention. A safe environment doesn't happen by itself; someone needs to pay attention and take action. It's well worth our effort! Identify a group of people in the congregation to work together to prevent abuse and create a safe environment for everyone. Make sure the group includes council representation."

Who's paying attention to abuse prevention in your church? This is an important thing to think about as we enter a busy fall ministry season.

Safe church ministry works only when we all work together.

[crcna.org/safechurch](http://crcna.org/safechurch)  
[network.crcna.org/safe-church](http://network.crcna.org/safe-church)

## Race Relations

The Office of Race Relations is mandated by synod to help Christian Reformed churches work through the knotty issues of race in North America. Lately our staff have been thrust into conversations in reaction to the recent American presidential election and events in Charlottesville, Va.

Canadian coordinator [Bernadette](#)

[Arthur](#) wrote in her recent newsletter, "I believe that there are two kinds of people in this world: those who learn primarily through personal experience and those who learn primarily from the experiences of others. Charlottesville and the United States as a whole is offering humanity a learning opportunity at great expense to themselves."

How shall we respond to these learning moments? In his newsletter, Race Relations advocate [Rudy Gonzalez](#) cautions us that "the real power [in North America] is with the silent majority that stands by as evil beliefs and assumptions are repeated and made into social realities. . . . The good news is that Christ has come to break down the satanic strongholds that bind our nation[s] and threaten the power of the church to expand God's kingdom." The church shall not remain silent on these critical issues.

Race Relations has been conducting conversations with the help of publications such as Chris Meehan's book [Growing Pains](#) on the racial struggles between Lawndale CRC and Timothy Christian School in the 1960s. In addition, book discussions were held at churches and in the denominational building on Debby Irving's *Waking Up White*. The discussions sparked greater awareness and a desire to change attitudes and behaviors.

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

## Disability Concerns

(No report this quarter.)

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

## Partners Worldwide

This summer we were honored to attend and present at Inspire 2017 and convene with other members of the CRC. Another highlight of the summer season was this year's Sea to Sea cross-continental bicycling mission we cosponsored with World Renew. Sea to Sea raises funds and awareness to help end poverty.

This year 135 cyclists traveled over 4,000 miles, raising over \$1.58 million to support the work of Partners Worldwide and World Renew. We are humbled and incredibly grateful for the cyclists, volunteers, and all who made Sea to Sea 2017 possible!

As we head into the fall season, we are excited to celebrate our 20th year

as a ministry. We invite you to celebrate with us at [PW@20](#), to be held Thurs., Sept. 28, at 6:00 p.m. in Grand Rapids, Mich. PW@20 will be a relaxing, meaningful time to connect with others who are passionate about ending poverty through business. While sharing a meal together, we will take a brief look back at the past 20 years and provide an exciting update on our vision for the future!

We'll also be gathering this September for the [North America Partnership Summit](#)—a motivating, collaborative event for entrepreneurs, business professionals, and leaders working in U.S. communities. While learning from real examples and firsthand accounts, we'll explore how to create opportunities and end poverty in the U.S. through partnership.

We hope to see you this fall! Visit our [blog](#) to stay up on the latest Partners Worldwide news and to hear remarkable stories of impact from around the world.

*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](http://partnersworldwide.org)