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## Our Journey 2020

Dear partners in ministry,

I hope that by now the words *Our Journey 2020* will be familiar to you—that you will have heard a presentation (or perhaps delivered one), browsed the [OurJourney](#) page on the CRCNA website, read the booklet inserted in the October issue of *The Banner*, or watched the *Our Journey* videos. I also hope that its message resonated with you and that you are starting to think about how your own church's journey connects with the journey we are on together as a denomination.

When you read the booklet, watch the videos, or visit [OurJourney](#) on the web, you'll notice that all of these pieces have something in common: stories. Why? Stories are powerful. Even simple stories have the ability to engage us on many levels, not just in our minds but also in our hearts. Stories bring people together.

The stories in *Our Journey* aren't intended to be prescriptive. They don't tell you exactly what to do or how to do it. They're really more of a travelogue than a road map.

So as you read, watch, or hear these stories of ordinary people and ordinary churches doing ordinary things, sometimes with extraordinary results, think about your own stories and those of your church. Where has God placed you, and where are you on the journey?

I encourage you to start sharing your stories, either in person or by using the [Share Your Story](#) pages on the Network. Why? We need to hear each other's stories so that we can learn from and encourage one another as we travel this journey together.

Steven Timmermans  
Executive Director, CRCNA

## global missions

### Back to God Ministries International

Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI) continues to use technology and media to spread the Word of God to people around the globe. Congregations and generous individuals like you make this mission possible by partnering with us to share the gospel, disciple believers, and strengthen the church.

- In a historic move on October 12, 2016, Japanese pastors and leaders gathered in Yokohama, Japan, for the annual General Assembly of the Reformed Church in Japan (RCJ) and unanimously approved the creation of the denomination's first missions agency—a media ministry. This marks a transition from the current operations of the CRC media ministry—a partnership between BTGMI and Christian Reformed World Missions-Japan (CRJM)—to the newly created and, more notably, locally managed RCJ Media Evangelism Office. Rev. Masao Yamashita, BTGMI Japanese ministry leader, was installed as the new director of the RCJ Media Evangelism Office.
- The Spanish daily devotional guide, *Cada Dia*, has gone digital. In an age of technology and increasing printing costs, the BTGMI Spanish team is transitioning its *Cada Dia* readers from printed booklets to email subscriptions, mobile app downloads, social media updates, and web visits for daily meditation. More than 3,100 people have made the switch, and the team hopes to gain new readers daily. Eliana from Spain testifies, "I receive a lot of

texts, tweets, and notifications from different sources, but I know when I see the *Cada Día* logo that God is sending me something special.”

- BTGMI has been praying about establishing French ministry in Niger, where the population is more than 90 percent Muslim. Issaka Moussa, serving as liaison between BTGMI, Words of Hope (WOH) and the Evangelical Church of Niger (EERN), recently visited our offices and signed an agreement stating BTGMI’s pledge to partner in French ministry with WOH and the EERN. As a result, a Nigerian Christian, Rabo Godi, was appointed as coordinator of our French outreach in Niger. Through this partnership, BTGMI will use Mr. Godi’s gift of proclaiming the gospel through radio broadcast.

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

## Home Missions

God is up to something in North America. He’s on the move in our neighborhoods, communities, workplaces. God is ahead of us, out there, working in people’s hearts and connecting congregations and communities with one another. Together with you, Home Missions is working to join him. Here are just a few examples of your support at work:

- Destination Church in St. Thomas, Ont., is becoming a place for hope, purpose, and really good food, as the community is starting to notice. What began with gardening and community dinners has grown as partners from all over the city have come together in Destination Church’s building, formerly occupied by bars and a strip club. “Our goal is to make a faith foundation for their life and use it to raise them up,” says pastor Beth Fellinger.
- Coffee Break at Yosemite Church in Merced, Calif., celebrated 15 years of ministry. Coffee Break leader Jonae Pistoressi leads 196 women in Bible study groups where they learn, fellowship, and pray. This Coffee Break ministry is one of more than 700 active groups in North America and around the world.
- Sunlight Español in Port St. Lucie, Fla., has been blessed with new members and growth. Though less than a year old, the church has already has more than 45 members.

Pastor Juan Sierra notes that “Christian Reformed” is made up of many backgrounds,” and he hopes this multicultural, multigenerational church will continue to grow in the months and years to come.

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

## New Mission Agency

As Christian Reformed Home Missions and Christian Reformed World Missions continue to move toward becoming a single mission agency, several steps have been taken to give a clearer picture of the agency’s structure.

- The Christian Reformed Church in North America has launched a search for a person to serve as the director of the new agency. The candidate will go before Synod 2017 for approval.
- Regional leaders for North America have been hired, and additional leaders for the future agency have been appointed.
- Staff from regions around the world gathered for face-to-face meetings where they discussed and discerned how their ministries might be able to benefit from the future structure.

## World Missions

Christian Reformed World Missions exists to glorify God by leading the CRC to respond obediently to our Lord’s commission to witness to the good news of God’s kingdom and make disciples of all nations.

As 2016 comes to a close, we have many things to be thankful for, and we can already see God working in new ways for the future.

- Praise God for the service of three World Missions employees! In December 2016, Joel Hogan, director of international ministries; Albert Hamstra, director of global impact; and Ken Schemper, director of advancement, will retire. These three leave with 104 combined years of experience both on the global mission field and as office staff.
- Leadership from CRWM’s Cohort of Missioners program met together in person for the first time in El Salvador to further develop the program planning. The Cohort of

Missioners program offers a year-long experience in which participants, usually college-age adults from North and Central America, are immersed in a new culture by serving with local mission organizations at the grassroots level.

- In October, Hurricane Matthew hit Haiti, among other countries, taking around 1,000 lives and destroying entire communities. In the midst of this tragedy, we were reminded again how the CRC global mission agencies work together for God’s glory in this Caribbean nation. World Missions, Back to God Ministries International, and World Renew remained safe during the storm and worked together to help bring immediate relief to victims.

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

## Timothy Leadership Training Institute

India is home to over 1.2 billion people, and about 1 billion of these are Hindus. In this challenging religious context Christians witness to the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Since 2012, four TLT training hubs have been established in India, from which eight training groups with over 200 participants have received training in several cities, including Chennai, Siliguri, Visakhapatnam, Kalimpong, and Delhi. From Kalimpong, graduates will also be able reach out to areas in Nepal and Bhutan to conduct trainings.

In Visakhapatnam alone, four training groups have developed from the many TLT trainings conducted by Gene and Linda Klaasen with the support of Providence Christian Reformed Church of Holland, Mich. Over 100 participants have been enrolled, of which 37 have graduated from TLT, several of whom have moved on to develop additional training groups in areas surrounding Visakhapatnam.

Churches have been strengthened, and members have been challenged to a deeper faith. Some TLT participants have developed a heart for their neighbors to know Jesus—inviting the children of unchurched families to Sunday school. One pastor started Sunday schools in all three of the churches he pastors. Another’s preaching led to the conversion of

village leaders from Hinduism, thus opening the entire village to Christianity.

God has been using TLTI in amazing ways to equip pastors, evangelists, and lay leaders in India, enabling them to build healthy churches and share the gospel in their communities.

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



## Pastor Church Resources

(No report this quarter.)

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

## Sustaining Pastoral and Congregational Excellence

The *Oasis of Grace* conferences are “a tremendous gift, and we give thanks to the team at Sustaining Pastoral Excellence and the monies given to offer these gatherings. The conferences are so needed and become a lifeline for many. We are truly seeing much fruit from the years we have been having these conferences,” shared one attendee.

In early November, almost 100 pastors’ spouses from all over Canada and the U.S. gathered in San Diego, Calif., for a two-day *Oasis of Grace* conference focusing on resting in God’s goodness. The event included times of worship, prayer, conversation, plenary sessions, workshops, and relaxation. Rev. Heidi De Jonge (pastor, pastor’s wife, and PK—pastor’s kid) spoke on the theme verse Hebrews 4:16. She shared that God takes us from a narrow space to a liberating space—an oasis of grace where multiple palm trees and springs are provided.

During conversation times, participants reflected on the plenary message and how it affected their lives. These were times of deep sharing, mutual understanding, and comfort. “It is so beautiful to have a place to share our struggles in a safe environment with people who ‘get it,’” said one woman.

The workshops focused on art journal-

ing, parenting, exercise, and isolation in ministry. During free-time activities, relationships were formed, renewed, and strengthened.

The best part of the conference was “meeting so many amazing people from all over. We have so much in common.”

*Oasis of Grace* was the sixth conference for pastors’ spouses. There’s a clear need for such events, and in April the planning team will begin to work toward having another in 2018.

[crcna.org/sce](http://crcna.org/sce); [crcna.org/spe](http://crcna.org/spe)

## Chaplaincy and Care Ministry

In recent months this office has been busy with additional applications for endorsement, planning for our next Chaplains Conference (June 2017), which will wrap up our 75th-anniversary celebrations, and planning for the transition to a new director. (Ron Klimp, the current director, will be retiring in April 2017).

In the past few months we have endorsed another six chaplains, bringing our total to 146 full-time and part-time military and civilian chaplains in all sorts of institutions and settings—both in Canada and the U.S. We visited two local Christian colleges (Calvin and Hope) and have scheduled spring dates to visit several others. Almost weekly, pastors and students continue to contact us by phone or email to begin exploring chaplaincy. Our list of inquiries and “in process” names now exceeds 75.

Our conference planning team has now settled on the theme of “Pioneers Past and Present” for our 75th anniversary wrap-up conference. 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.

The position of director of Chaplaincy and Care has recently been posted, applications have begun coming to the Human Resources department, and a committee to review these and begin the interview process is now being formed. It is our hope that a new

director will be chosen by early next year to allow for some overlap to facilitate a smooth transition. Please pray for this critical transition time.

[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 CRC, providing assistance to individuals, congregations, and classes in this process.

Synod 2016 approved 47 people as candidates and granted extensions of candidacy to 25 others. The process of waiting can be slow, and candidates appreciate a word of encouragement and support. If you know a candidate, consider reaching out to him or her. See our website for a list of candidates and their status.

We have been busy this fall implementing a deeper, more consistent program for prospective candidates. The program involves a two-year engagement with a vocational mentor and a yearly engagement with classis through an appointed committee. The mentors and the classis functionaries are all being asked to learn and accept a new function. Consider finding out who in your region has accepted this task, and offer them a word of encouragement.

We are also working on initiatives referred to us by Synod 2016. These include appointing a work group to encourage and support continuing education for pastors (see *Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 849-51), and articulating ways that the office of commissioned pastor can be developed for better function in the church.

Finally, work is being done to facilitate denominational orientation opportunities for pastors who seek to affiliate with the Christian Reformed Church. There is a yearly Korean-language orientation each May, and other events are conducted in Michigan and regionally for English-language speakers. Contact Rev. David Koll in the Candidacy office if you know of a person who may profit from attending such an event.

We praise God for the existence of partners in each of the 48 classes

across the denomination, and we appreciate the prayers and support you offer in this significant work.

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

## Ministry in Canada

Over the past few months, much work has been done in Canadian ministries to connect with local churches, including visits to nearly every classis across Canada to explore together the Ministry Plan *Our Journey 2020*.

As well, we look forward to the piloting of a phone app that will serve to create a prayer community, answer questions for seekers, connect new people to a local church, provide devotional material for members, and improve resourcing for leaders. Look for its implementation across Canada in 2017.

We have also been encouraged by the success of the Youth Ministry Project across Canada and in releasing it to fly on its own, expand, and spread into the United States.

Several means and methods of connecting with local churches are also now available: regional gatherings of churches with denominational support, consulting days with our ministry leaders, and directly connecting to the new ServiceLink, which will act as ongoing support for churches to all the resourcing and coaching provided for Canadian churches. All these have been well received by and found to be beneficial to local leaders.

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

## Classis Renewal

Earlier this year, Karl Westerhof retired from his position as Classis Coach. We're grateful for the support he has provided to many classes during times of renewal, reimagining, and reorganization.

In late August, Al Postma started as the Classis Renewal Coordinator. This new position brings two things together: it builds on the work of the Classis Coach, and it is responsible for ensuring the implementation of recommendations arising from the Better Together project (having to do with better supporting the work of classis functionaries).

In partnership with various denominational offices, gatherings are being planned to work with people in classis leadership positions in the CRC. This includes a gathering of Canadian classis leaders in January, a gathering of the U.S. stated clerks in February, and a pilot project that brings together five leaders from four classes to discuss and imagine together what regional ministry can look like in the future.

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

## Church Renewal Lab

The Church Renewal Lab of Calvin Theological Seminary is partnering with 24 churches in the Great Lakes region along with six churches from northern New Jersey and six from northern Alberta. We seek to help churches change the atmosphere (creating a missional culture) and journey to mission (creating a strategic plan), through a two-year renewal process that includes quarterly training events, coaching, peer learning, congregational participation, and a three-step process of "listen . . . imagine . . . do."

Recruiting is taking place for a fifth cohort launching in June 2017. If your church has the following characteristics, contact Keith Doornbos ([kdoornbos@calvinseminary.edu](mailto:kdoornbos@calvinseminary.edu)) for further information:

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

The Renewal Lab is cosponsoring a "Next"/"More and Better" conference in Port St. Lucie, Fla., Feb. 4-9; it will be a leadership catalyst event with a focus on disciple-making.

The Renewal Lab is doing a decadal study of CRC congregational membership change and hopes to complete this study in the near future. Of particular interest is information

about our "Church Vitality Index." The index includes the number of infant baptisms (is a congregation next-generation oriented?), the number of transfers from non-CRCs (is the congregation non-insular?), and the number of new members coming in through evangelism (is the congregation gospel centered?). Those combined numbers make up a congregation's Vitality Index. It is our hope that every church will aspire to a minimum CVI of 20 (about 10% of their membership). Findings will be shared in a future quarterly report.

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

## Ridder Church Renewal

Ridder Church Renewal (a 30-month process of missional transformation for pastors and teams of church leaders) is entering the second half of the current series of learning events. Our recent learning events focused on the values of integrity, authenticity, courage, and love. Pastors and teams also began to learn and practice the ministry skill we call "generating and sustaining creative tension." New to this process this year is developing the ability to practice "holding container" conversations. These conversations are designed to foster dialogue in which the tension is held between the current reality of a congregation or community and what is emerging in God's kingdom. This skill is critical for dealing with difficult issues in congregations around missional transformation. Another central skill in our recent learning events involves seeing the congregation as a system.

Nearly 700 participants (pastors and lay leaders) are currently going through RCR in six regions across the U.S. and Canada. If you are interested in joining our next series of learning events, contact Chris DeVos at [chris.devos@westernsem.edu](mailto:chris.devos@westernsem.edu) or at (616) 392-8555, ext. 169.

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

## Reformed Leadership Initiative

It's been wonderful to journey with the pastors and congregational leaders in the Congregational Leadership Learning Networks of the Reformed Leadership Initiative (RLI) over the

past 16 months. We've faced several bumps and obstacles on the road to becoming flourishing learning communities. Our coleaders, who are RCA and CRC pastors and leaders, stay encouraged by sharing stories of challenge and celebration in monthly video conferencing calls with the RLI codirectors and by participating in an "All Hands on Deck" video conferencing call with all twelve coleaders, codirectors, coaches, and implementation team members. The comments we hear in these interactions lead us to believe that we are participating in something beyond what we can imagine, and we are experiencing the work of the Spirit individually and communally.

Some comments recently made in one of these meetings with our coleaders shed light on new ways of thinking about leadership development. For instance, one coleader said, "This work has opened my eyes to the needs not just of pastors but of the elders, deacons, and other lay leaders in the churches. What this has brought out in me is more of a council-coaching approach, talking to elders and deacons, and encouraging them to not be dependent only on their local pastor but to see that as a system there are resources and partners available."

Another coleader's comment speaks to why we are excited about this journey together: "This process has reminded me of the power of a team presenting and walking with people who are ready to take next steps. Readiness is huge. Too much of my ministry has been focused upon trying to create readiness rather than seeking those whom God has prepared and are currently ready to take next steps."

Again, we thank you for your support and prayers!

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



## Worship Ministries

As a young ministry, one of Worship Ministries' goals involves getting to know our worship leaders. We have found that they are a faithful, passionate, and gifted group of people,

whether serving as volunteers, part-time staff, or full-time staff. But it also has become apparent that many are burning or burnt out. They often find themselves leading without adequate training (though obviously gifted) and with no time to find and access available resources, no finances available for continuing education, and no connection to other worship leaders.

While one would think that full-time worship staff in our churches would fare better, many churches fail to understand their worship leaders' significant pastoral and formative role and thus do not fully support them by providing ongoing opportunities for spiritual renewal, connections with colleagues, and musical, theological, and leadership training. In the churches where those things are in place (including a sabbatical policy for their worship staff), we find worship leaders thriving, worship that is vibrant, and a desire to share worship resources with others.

Worship Ministries is working to find ways to address many of the needs expressed by pointing to already existing opportunities and organizations that address them, partnering with ministries to bring resources to the local church, and serving as a catalyst for the creation of new resources and networks. Our biggest strength is in our thriving worship leaders, and we look forward to creating opportunities for them to share their experience with others.

The best way to hear more about specific projects and opportunities is to sign up for our monthly e-newsletter at [crcna.org/worship](http://crcna.org/worship). For more information, please call (1-877-272-6202) or email ([worship@crcna.org](mailto:worship@crcna.org)).

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

## Calvin Theological Seminary

### Students from Around the World:

Calvin Theological Seminary is blessed to have students from 34 countries and with citizenship in 22 countries. In December, students, faculty, and staff will gather for a "Christmas Around the World" celebration in which songs and stories about Christmas are shared through the lens of a particular country.

**Faculty Openings:** The seminary board of trustees adopted faculty recommendations to move forward with new lectureships or visiting professorships in Worship and Faith Formation, Discipleship and Faith Formation, Biblical Studies (Old Testament and/or New Testament), and with a new position: Associate Academic Dean. Nominations from churches and church leaders are requested. For information, please visit [job openings](http://calvinseminary.edu/job-openings) at the seminary website ([calvinseminary.edu](http://calvinseminary.edu)). Applications submitted by January 1, 2017, will receive preferred processing.

**Inaugural Legacy Award:** The seminary's inaugural Legacy Award, designed to recognize and cultivate stewardship and charitable giving from one generation to the next, was presented to members of the Gary and Matilda Vermeer family and the Harry and Bernice Vermeer family as well as officers and directors of the company's Charitable Foundation during a recent scholarship and donor appreciation dinner.

Bob Vermeer acknowledged that his parents, Gary and Matilda, both now deceased, had impressed on their children and grandchildren the importance of supporting Christian causes. Derek De Haan noted that his grandparents, Harry and Bernice Vermeer, helped "instill that idea of a generous heart. God calls us to be generous to others. It's not ours to begin with. It's his. We're using God's gifts to make an impact in his kingdom."

**FORUM Focus in 2017:** The most recent *FORUM* is out, and in 2017 we will dedicate our issues to focusing on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. As we prepare these issues, do you have suggestions and comments that we can incorporate? Please write us at [sempres@calvinseminary.edu](mailto:sempres@calvinseminary.edu). Thank you!

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

## Calvin Institute of Christian Worship

The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship highlights the following:

- The release of *Teach Us to Pray: Scripture-Centered Family Worship through the Year*, by CRC pastors

Lora A. Copley and Elizabeth Vander Haagen. This daily prayer book guides families in listening and speaking to God through songs, Scripture readings, guided action, and quiet contemplation, organized to follow the life of Jesus through each season of the Christian calendar.

- Continued learning on how to commemorate well the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. In October we hosted a small group of Ph.D. students and scholars from the University of Notre Dame and Calvin Theological Seminary for mutual learning and perspective sharing.
- At the 2017 Symposium on Worship, we will offer the seminar "Commemorating the Reformation Around the World: Ireland, Germany, Mexico, South Africa, Indonesia, and More" featuring musician, pastor, and scholar panelists from around the globe. It will offer a glimpse at different experiences of Protestants and Roman Catholics in different parts of the world, along with pastoral reflections about how the Reformation anniversary could be commemorated in honest, healing, and redemptive ways.
- Woody Nook CRC in Lacombe, Alta., received a 2016 Vital Worship grant. They started their year-long exploration of creativity and who we are as imagebearers of a creative God with a six-sermon series on the arts titled "Living Between the Trees: Awakening Our Creativity."

Congregation members were challenged to respond to sermons with visuals and words in journals. It was exciting to see the diverse responses, especially those of children and of people who do not consider themselves "artistic."

During one sermon, "Art as Revealing Truth or Lies," artist Karen Tamminga-Paton, who will be working with on a major installation at Woody Nook during the winter months, shared her art and faith journey and led the congregation in an exploration of creativity with found objects.

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



## Faith Formation Ministries

As our staff and regional catalyzers talk with people at CRC churches, one important need surfaces over and over. Congregations like yours are saying, "We want to learn how to tell our faith stories to each other."

We have heard you, and we are happy to help. Our new [Faith Storytelling toolkit](#) includes dozens of creative ideas for developing a storytelling culture in your church so that sharing faith stories becomes a rich pathway to growing together in Christ. Like our other toolkits, the Faith Storytelling toolkit is a free online resource in which we've collected practical, doable strategies for sharing faith stories together. The toolkit includes

- ideas you can replicate in your church.
- dozens of links to helpful resources.
- thought-provoking articles that illustrate the power of story.

The toolkit is divided into sections on becoming a storytelling church, shaping our stories, and sharing our stories in many different facets of your church's ministry.

There are resources in this toolkit for pastors, worship leaders, youth leaders, children's ministry leaders, small group leaders, ministers of outreach, and parents and other caregivers.

Faith Formation Ministries will be adding to this toolkit over time, so if telling faith stories has transformed your church, tell us how by emailing us at [faithformation@crcna.org](mailto:faithformation@crcna.org)!

This fall, we also developed a toolkit on the Building Blocks of Faith. Through that toolkit, churches can discover the four things people need in order to grow in their faith and to evaluate how well they're meeting those needs. The [Building Blocks of Faith toolkit](#) is an online resource to help churches develop vibrant and healthy faith formation cultures that fit their unique context and that serve people of all ages and life stages.

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

## Calvin College

Calvin College is proud to be "the best in the Midwest"! *U.S. News & World Report* ranked Calvin College number one on its list of Midwest regional colleges for 2017.

This fall we welcome nearly 1,000 new students to campus, with a total student population of 3,918. The students hail from 62 countries, 48 U.S. states, and five Canadian provinces. This year, 11 percent of our student body is international students, and 15 percent is AHANA students (African, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American).

Our Calvin Institute of Christian Worship has a terrific resource guide for Advent, a season of waiting that cultivates our awareness of God's past, present, and future actions. See <http://worship.calvin.edu> for the Advent guide and many other resources that will help your church plan worship.

2017 marks the 30th anniversary of the award-winning January Series. Once again the series will be available on campus, online, and at more than 50 remote sites across the country. Join us weekdays January 4-24 at 12:30 p.m. EST.

In order to prepare our leaders well, all resident assistants recently participated in a training that included sessions on fear of talking about race, immigration, and more. In addition, 210 residence hall leaders were trained on the theological and community-based reasons we need to unlearn racism. Our student leaders play an important role in creating a more inclusive campus.

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

## ServiceLink

ServiceLink has gone through some significant changes recently. From having served the denomination in the area of volunteer services for many years, our work has now morphed into a broader scope of services with local congregations as our primary focus.

One new area of service is in operating as a collaborative **resourcing bridge** between CRCNA agencies and ministries and local Canadian churches for the purpose of enabling stronger local ministries. Staff will

assist churches in finding resources, connect them to coaches or ministry leaders (including those in other congregations), answer questions, link them to websites, and provide whatever other assistance would be most helpful for their specific context.

Another new area of our service will be to provide **customer service** specifically for Canadian churches. This is being facilitated through our one-stop office, where staff will provide a consistent experience that will lean into the needs and desires of the local church or congregational members. People are encouraged to connect with staff through email or by phone and will have their questions answered as promptly as possible. Additionally we are working on a new CRCNA phone app, planned for release in 2017, that will enhance our communication efforts.

ServiceLink will continue to maintain its work in the area of **Volunteer Ministry Development** as it relates to the North American context, supporting local church efforts for engaging volunteers within their own congregations. Staff are available to consult with local congregations and to provide workshops on this topic.

ServiceLink will also continue to be a source for **mission trip opportunities**, but will now focus only on North American ministry organizations. Along with posting various opportunities, ServiceLink provides numerous resources that can assist and enhance a group's experience.

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

## Dynamic Youth Ministries

### Calvinist Cadet Corps

The stated mission of the Calvinist Cadet Corps is "Helping boys to grow more Christlike in all areas of life." During this time of year most Cadet clubs are running smoothly in their attempt to bring this mission to life. Weekly routines are established for the boys and the men. Bible lessons, crafts, activities, badges, and projects are all being worked on.

At every gathering of Cadet counselors there are stories being told of boys who are new to Cadets and who are having their lives changed through new relationships and through Christian men demonstrating a Christian lifestyle

for them. There are also stories of men who continue to learn so much from the boys they are working with.

The organization behind the scenes does not slow down at this time of year. From November to March, regional training conferences are happening across North America. Counselors are being trained on teaching better Bible lessons, working with troubled youth, cooking with Dutch ovens, learning simple games to play with the boys, and much more.

Much work is being done also in preparation for our International Camporee to be held in the Black Hills of South Dakota this coming July. Over 1,000 men and boys will be spending a week in the wilderness, learning about how God is seeking them. We have a fund available to help participants who may not be able to afford financially to attend. We ask you to pray with us for all who are involved in organizing this event, and for those deciding whether they should attend.

We give thanks for the continued support and prayers of so many, allowing us to show boys what it means to be "Living for Jesus."

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

### GEMS Girls' Clubs

(Girls Everywhere Meeting the Savior)

Over 1,400 women gathered in regions around the U.S. and Canada this fall for local workshops. Each spring, teams of volunteers are trained in Grand Rapids, Mich., to then prepare GEMS counselors in their own regions to mentor effectively and teach the annual theme in GEMS clubs. These valuable training opportunities also give women a chance to collaborate and share ideas with people serving in other churches and Christian organizations.

For GEMS, leadership training is a vital part of fulfilling our mission to help bring girls into a living, dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ. We invest in women so that they can invest in girls.

This is also a busy season at GEMS in terms of developing curriculum for girls to use in local clubs. The process of conceiving, writing, editing, and designing materials is ongoing as we seek to find innovative and culturally relevant ways to reach girls from every

background with God's love. The ministry appreciates continued prayers in this area.

We also celebrate that the GEMS mission focus in Zambia continues to expand. The Esther School opened in 2012 and equips orphaned and under-resourced children to serve God, their families, and their communities to their fullest potential. The school has been a part of GEMS since the beginning, but the goal now is for it to become an independent ministry with GEMS Clubs continuing to support its growth and development. The transition is under way, and we are excited to see where God takes the Esther School as it serves more and more children in Zambia.

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

### Youth Unlimited

It's an exciting time of year for Youth Unlimited and its SERVE mission trip program. On November 1, youth groups began reserving spots for SERVE 2017. In the first 24 hours over 500 spots were reserved! We are now approaching half our spots being reserved—but if your church hasn't registered yet, don't worry; we still have many GREAT sites available!

SERVE is looking to expand its impact in 2017; we have 31 SERVE sites in 2017 (three more than in 2016) with a total capacity for 1,800 participants.

To strengthen the support of the Canadian SERVE program, Youth Unlimited has hired Ron DeVries (Devon, Alta.) to oversee the program in Canada. His position in this role will be part-time, partnered with a new youth ministry position in the CRCNA to support their developing classis youth ministry initiative. Youth Unlimited has also hired a second full-time SERVE administrator, Elizabeth Bosscher. She will work in the Grand Rapids, Mich., office but will partner with Ron in focusing on our Canadian participants and host teams.

Youth Unlimited is honored to serve students and youth leaders from Christian Reformed congregations. We do not take this calling lightly. We are committed to 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 wish to join us in this great

adventure of investing in students and in the church, or you simply need a refresher on whom Youth Unlimited is, we would enjoy connecting! Check out our website or email [jeff@youthunlimited.org](mailto:jeff@youthunlimited.org).

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

loving mercy, doing justice

## World Renew

Being an integral part of the community in which we work has always been a hallmark of World Renew's activities worldwide. Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo, director of World Renew – Canada, explains: "As World Renew staff work with partners to respond to needs in Haiti (after the 2016 Hurricane Matthew), our values for program effectiveness and people flourishing, challenge us to help well. In staff Twitter and Facebook postings, the hashtag #FromAidtoTrade encourages donors to support organizations like ours which partner with local Haitian businesses and suppliers. They noted that after the 2010 earthquake, World Renew purchased more than 90 percent of its relief and reconstruction efforts locally, in partnership with Haitian businesses, resulting in job creation as highlighted in the book *From Aid to Trade*."

This year, our theme is *Changing the Story*. The approach that World Renew has had for so many years changes the story of global disaster response and transformational community development. Valuing the image of God in everyone; valuing local communities; valuing Christ's reconciliation of all creation to God: these are foundational as World Renew shares God's love and grace, and as World Renew brings the whole gospel around the globe.

There are many ways in which churches and CRC members can partner with World Renew to carry the saving love of Christ to hundreds of thousands of people worldwide. Synod has encouraged the churches to hold offerings on March 5 for Disaster Response Services (DRS) in the U.S. and for the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB) in Canada. Then on April 23, Canadian CRCs are requested to hold

an offering for Refugee Resettlement.

In addition, the 2017 Sea to Sea ride is planned for June 26 through Aug. 31, from Vancouver to Halifax. This event fights poverty through fundraising and awareness. Full 9-week, 2-week, and 1-week options are available. Visit [seatosea.org](http://seatosea.org).

[worldrenew.net](http://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:

- We added new [Action Centre](#) opportunities for Christian citizens to connect with their Members of Parliament on justice for [Refugees](#) and [Indigenous children](#). These action steps provide a great way to speak in favor of justice and reconciliation.
- We have been deepening our partnerships with organizations and colleagues in Ottawa with expertise on refugee resettlement and Indigenous education. We celebrate good commitments made by the government to these important causes and work with partners and citizens like you to encourage accountability to promises. Change for justice comes in many faithful and simple actions!
- Over at *Do Justice*, we're excited about our new group of [regular columnists](#). This great group of diverse and dynamic folks from across the CRC are making a great contribution to justice and reconciliation dialogues—check them out! Also on *Do Justice*, we ran a series to follow up on the Synod 2016 declaration that the Doctrine of Discovery was heresy. Titled "[In 1492, Indigenous peoples discovered Columbus](#)," the series wrestles with the legacy and contemporary effects of the sins of colonialism.

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

## Canadian Aboriginal Ministry Committee

The Canadian Aboriginal Ministry Committee (CAMC) met at the end of October for their fall face-to-face meeting at the Edmonton Native Healing Centre. The first item on the agenda was to give thanks to Harold Roscher for the use of the Native Healing Centre—by offering him tobacco. This cultural practice is being reclaimed and is occurring more and more as awareness is generated. CAMC will soon be posting an article on its toolkit website about the significance of offering tobacco, along with other frequently asked questions relating to Aboriginal culture.

The group also discussed bulletin covers and inserts for Aboriginal Ministry Sunday. The theme for the coming year will be to reflect on the members that make up Indigenous communities and the important role each member has. A letter to the churches will be sent out with more information on the theme and how to order the covers and inserts.

Shannon Perez, justice and reconciliation mobilizer, noted that CAMC is still committed to fulfilling Calls to Action 59 and 60 from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. These goals speak to the necessity of the church to educate its members and its clergy on the "church's role on colonization, the history of residential schools, and why apologies to former residential school students, their families, and communities are necessary." In addition, the church should recognize the necessity of "respecting Indigenous spirituality in its own right . . . and the responsibility that churches have to mitigate such conflicts and prevent spiritual violence." CAMC has been raising this awareness and will continue by facilitating the KAIROS Blanket Exercise, promoting further learning with the resource *Living the 8th Fire*, and praying for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

CAMC is happy to announce that goals that were set for 2015 are currently being met. For instance, CRC members participated in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and members are receiving regular communications about justice and reconciliation through CRC News

articles, DoJustice blogs, and social media. CAMC also spent time brainstorming more goals for the future and will be working on an annual plan and a three-year plan. CAMC will also plan to add new committee members in the year ahead.

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

## Office of Social Justice

Andre Taylor, a lifelong member of [Roseland Christian Reformed Church](#) in Chicago, was shot and killed in his front yard on March 13, just hours after attending worship with his church. He was 16. When the story of his death ran in *The Banner*, the [Office of Social Justice](#) staff reached out to pastor Joe Huizenga at Roseland, wondering about ways to support the church in their grief and also to better understand the issues surrounding the epidemic of gun violence in the city. This sparked a visit, and then an idea: Could urban Chicago pastors in the CRC receive training on how to relate to the media? Major news networks had approached church leaders, looking for insight into how deaths from guns were affecting the community, but those opportunities raised questions and concerns, and pastors often turned down opportunities to speak with the media. But a strong desire to make an impact in some new ways—to speak prophetically about the ethical and humanitarian issues that surrounded the tragic deaths of so many in Roseland’s community—pushed the pastors to consider a new approach.

In early November, those pastors, along with leaders from an urban pastoral association in Grand Rapids, Mich., and staff from OSJ, met at Roseland with a media consultant, becoming trained in how and why the press can be a critical means for change-making and for exercising a prophetic voice. The trainer set up a tripod and video camera, and participants watched on a big TV screen as their colleagues practiced what it might feel like to be interviewed on camera—asking themselves, “What’s my most critical message?” and “How can I give voice to my faith’s impact on this issue?”

In addition to this practical training in interacting with media, a new passion for supporting the beautiful, incarnational work of Roseland Christian

Ministries was revived among all who attended—an encouraging reminder that the church which Andre Taylor loved remains a church that does the critical work of living out the good news in its community.

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

## Safe Church Ministry

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

The [Safe Church](#) office recorded almost 400 interactions in recent months about topics like awareness, safe church teams and policies, and the Circle of Grace program. We also provide a bimonthly electronic newsletter, conversation opportunities on [The Network](#), and a monthly prayer guide for those committed to pray for Safe Church. Much of the work of safe church ministry happens through volunteer safe church team members who are active across North America.

The work of Safe Church and other ministries that make up JIMA (Justice, Inclusion, Mercy, and Advocacy) is grounded in the value that all people possess the divine image of their creator. The Lord is honored as we reflect this value in the way we treat one another in our congregations and communities.

**Awareness:** Abuse Awareness Sunday is designated as the fourth Sunday in September. Our website has been updated with [new resources on various topics](#). Churches make good use of these resources, including [videos](#), bulletin inserts, worship resources, etc. Effective prevention and response efforts depend on being aware of the prevalence, dynamics, and impacts of abuse.

**Prevention:** Every week, Safe Church Ministry responds to questions from congregations who are updating their policies and creating safer environments that nurture faith. We are pleased to offer [policy resources](#), and also the [Circle of Grace](#) program, to assist congregations in these efforts.

**Response:** Various kinds of abuse situations within a congregational setting require that someone walk alongside, listen, and offer consultation. Safe Church relies on volunteers who are willing and available for

this. Do you have a [safe church team](#) member in your congregation who is equipped to serve in this important role?

Safe church ministry works best when we all work together.

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

## Race Relations

CRC Race Relations has been mandated by the synod of the CRCNA to initiate and provide effective and collaborative training, programs, and organizing actions in ways that mobilize Christian Reformed agencies and educational institutions, as well as classes and congregations, to recognize, expose, and dismantle racism in all its forms and to experience true biblical reconciliation as a diverse and unified people of God.

This fall, Race Relations staff have been working around North America to provide training and to equip ministry leaders for the work of racial reconciliation. In September Viviana Cornejo traveled to the Dominican Republic to lead a week-long training on racial reconciliation in partnership with Christian Reformed World Missions. Additionally we have had a number of requests to offer the Blanket Exercise. We have facilitated, or are scheduled to facilitate, this workshop with CRC ministry staff (Back to God Ministries International and World Renew’s Disaster Response Services), as well as middle and high school students in Michigan.

In addition to working with CRC ministry leaders as they issued a Statement on Racism, we also provided resources for congregations to honor All Nations Heritage Sunday. We are currently working with Millbrook Christian Reformed Church (Grand Rapids, Mich.), Steve Timmermans, and Colin Watson to plan our second annual service of prayer and praise on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day in the United States (Jan. 16, 2017). We look forward to honoring this day as sisters and brothers in Christ.

This fall it was announced that Race Relations will be sharing a director with the Office of Social Justice. The hiring process has begun, and resumes are being accepted from candidates.

Please join us in praying that the search committee will have clarity as they seek this new leader for the ministries of Race Relations and Social Justice.

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

## Disability Concerns

As a person who lives with multiple sclerosis, Ivette knew personally that churches need to be welcoming communities for people who live with disabilities. She wanted to help her own congregation as well as neighboring churches to better engage with a diverse array of people, no matter their ability or disability. When she learned that Disability Concerns equips people to serve as church and classis disability advocates, she volunteered eagerly. This past October, along with about 70 other disability advocates from the CRC and the Reformed Church in America, Ivette received the training she was looking for at two events sponsored by Disability Concerns. She returned to her church and community in Port St. Lucie, Fla., eager to serve and, thanks to the training she received, equipped with specific ideas and resources to begin the work.

Most CRC classes have at least one regional disability advocate. Like Ivette, some are just getting started; others have been serving for up to two decades. All of them serve the churches of their classis in a variety of ways:

- enlisting and encouraging church advocates in the congregations of their classis who champion the full inclusion of people with disabilities in church life
- establishing and implementing annual goals to improve the region's welcome and engagement of people with disabilities
- consulting with church leaders about local resources

If you don't know who serves your classis as a regional disability advocate, check this list of [CRC Regional Advocates](#). If you don't see anyone for your classis, please [let us know](#) whom you believe would serve your classis well in this work. We'll take it from there.

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

## Partners Worldwide

Passionate cyclist? Social justice advocate? No matter who you are, you can use your voice (and a bike) to fight poverty through Sea to Sea 2017! This coast-to-coast cycling tour will take place June 26 through Aug. 31, 2017, and the funds raised will help to improve people's lives through the work of Partners Worldwide and World Renew. You can participate in the full ride, one leg of the journey, or by volunteering! To learn more, visit [seatosea.org](http://seatosea.org) or contact Jonathan at [jonathans@partnersworldwide.org](mailto:jonathans@partnersworldwide.org).

Join us Feb. 9-11 at Calvin College's 2017 Faith and International Development Conference (FIDC) and explore the intersection of faith and development and how our hope in Christ informs our work. The FIDC presents opportunities to listen, learn, and engage with others in the international development sector, including representatives from World Renew and Christian Reformed World Missions, among others. Learn more at [www.calvin.edu/academic/ids/conference/](http://www.calvin.edu/academic/ids/conference/).

We continue to present to CRC churches and small groups the mission and work of Partners Worldwide and the role business plays in ending poverty. If you are interested in hosting a presentation at your church, please contact Dave at [daveg@partnersworldwide.org](mailto:daveg@partnersworldwide.org).

This past year we celebrated over 120,000 jobs created and sustained throughout our 27 countries of operation. These numbers indicate growth, but they also indicate something else: that our reality is beginning to match our vision:

*Partners Worldwide mobilizes hands-on relationships to form a Christian network that uses business to end poverty. Our partnerships build up local capacity, creating jobs and impacting communities of high unemployment and poverty around the world.*

For stories of impact, follow Partners Worldwide on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and our [blog](#).

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