

MINISTRY REPORT TO CLASSES AND COUNCILS

SEPTEMBER 2011



CHRISTIAN
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CHURCH

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From the Interim Executive Director and Deputy Executive Director

This issue of *Ministry Reports* (September 2011) demonstrates an important principle. The ministries of the church continue even when there is a change in part of the leadership that supports and encourages all who are involved in these activities. Together we have come through several difficult months with the uncertainty created by the resignations of Rev. Jerry Dykstra and Ms.

Sandy Johnson. Both Joel Boot (executive director) and Peter Borgdorff (deputy executive director) are committed to being an encouraging and stabilizing influence for the ministries of the CRC as described on these pages. However, this report is not about us – but rather – is provided to convey to you an account of what is the more important. Ministry – in all of its forms and expressions – is the CRC’s way of honoring our Lord as disciples of his son Jesus Christ.

The extensive scope of ministry reflected on these pages is, we trust, of significant encouragement to you. Each of the ministry programs reflect what we – the members of the CRC – have covenanted to do together. Critical to the effectiveness of these ministries is your prayerful intercession that the Lord of the Church will guide and bless these efforts. Your prayers to that end are solicited and deeply appreciate.

Chaplaincy and Care Ministries

During that past year one of the global realities impacting us is the continuing war in the Near East. Nine of our military chaplains are currently deployed, six to that area of the world. One will be returning in July and another two will be leaving this August. I will be visiting with the spouses of two others on an upcoming trip to the Seattle, Wash. area where I will also visit with 10 other state side military and civilian chaplains.

In the past three months I have had the privilege of visiting with what we call “cluster” groups of chaplains in Grand Rapids, Lansing, and Chicago area. In the coming year I have planned (in addition to the Seattle trip above) trips to Edmonton, Alberta; Denver area; Los Angeles area; and Florida. Other parts of the country will be visited concurrent with upcoming professional conferences.

Another current development for us is a large number of anticipated retirements and the growing number of inquiries about becoming chaplains. We currently have a mailing list of over 400 people who are either, active chaplains (126), retired chaplains (77), students intending to be chaplains (24), or who have

expressed some level of interest in possibly becoming chaplains (97). In 2004 these last two numbers were 6 and 60. This tells us that it is extremely important to maintain and increase our training and development funds for assisting the next generation of chaplains to complete all the necessary training.

Committee for Contact with the Government

July 2011 marks the first anniversary of the opening of the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue in Ottawa. Our work from Ottawa is a continuation of more than 40 years of Canadian CRC justice ministry carried on by the Committee for Contact with the Government. Through Biblically informed research and collaboration with partners, the Centre for Public Dialogue is *seeking justice and speaking hope* in relationships with political leaders. Here are some of the highlights of the last few months:

- It's been a joy to collaborate with a research intern from Trinity Western University's Ottawa Campus. Anna Vogt's work on First Nation education issues will be a key foundation for future work on these matters. We look forward to continuing interaction with students from TWU and other institutions.
- The May election changed Canada's Parliament a little. Some of those changes were losses of important contacts and relationships for us. But the changes also present opportunities for new relationships and new dialogue. Already in the early days of this Parliament there are positive signs that suggest to us that meaningful dialogue on justice and peace can happen with all parties in the House of Commons. We anticipate good opportunities for discussion on peace building in Afghanistan, and Indigenous Justice and Reconciliation.

For further information on the work of the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue please check our website www.crcna.ca/PublicDialogue, subscribe to our e-news Mobile Justice, or contact us at publicdialogue@crcna.ca

Disability Concerns

CRC Disability Concerns has partnered with Disability Concerns of the Reformed Church in America to produce a new booklet: *Inclusion Handbook: Everybody Belongs Everybody Serves*. Many non-disabled people have little contact with people who live with disabilities which include physical, emotional, sensory, and intellectual impairments. As a result, they may feel anxious and avoid contact with a person who has a disability, leading to isolation and loneliness. The simple ideas and tips in the *Inclusion Handbook* give people the tools they need to begin a relationship with their fellow members who have disabilities. The entire booklet can be purchased inexpensively from Faith Alive and distributed to congregation members. As well, the booklet will soon be available as a free download on Disability Concerns' website.

Also, most classes have at least one Regional Disability Advocate. Regional advocates assist the churches in their classis with inclusion of people with disabilities in their ministries. We are pleased to report that several volunteers have stepped forward recently to serve churches in their classis as Regional Advocates: Central California – Christine Hager, Greater Los Angeles – Donna Schwieger, Northern Michigan – Al and Christine DeBoer, Wisconsin – Mary Brower.

Faith Alive Christian Resources

Curriculum: During the summer, Faith Alive communicated to the church that theology matters—even for 5-year-olds. Choosing a Reformed curriculum can make a huge difference in how children come to know God and God's Word.

Many curriculums present the Bible as a collection of stories that teach moral virtues and showcase a variety of biblical heroes. They use Abraham to teach obedience, Hannah to teach trust, and Joseph to teach perseverance.

Faith Alive's curricula view the Bible not as a collection of stories but as one story—the story of how God redeems and restores the world through Jesus. The main character and focus of that story is neither a moral or a hero—but God.

God's story began in Eden and continues through the New Creation. It's important to hear that story—whether you're 3 or 103—because it shapes how you know God and how you know yourself. Dwell and WE are major new curricula released from Faith Alive (www.faithaliveresources.org).

The Banner: The Banner has successfully completed its conversion from a print magazine that was also mirrored on the web (www.thebanner.org) to a web-based magazine that also gathers its best web content into a monthly print magazine. To date that conversion has been very challenging for staff but has gone off without a hitch for our web visitors and print readers. We are receiving a lot of appreciation particularly for our expanded web offerings, including the ability for visitors to post their reactions in the "Comments" section.

Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action

The Office of Social Justice and the Office of Race Relations are asking Christian Reformed Church members to sign a [pledge](#) affirming our commitment "to love our neighbor and welcome the stranger among us."

The pledge grows out of recommendations adopted by Synod 2010 on migration that asked the OSJ and Race Relations to implement a broad and sustained educational effort within the CRC. These recommendations strongly affirm the Biblical imperatives that should lead us to:

- Welcome the "stranger," who may actually be our fellow church member and neighbor, without regard to their immigration status,

- Educate ourselves on the complexities of immigration issues,
- Promote fair and compassionate treatment of immigrants in our communities and churches - whatever their status,
- Become advocates for a more just, humane, and workable U.S. immigration system.

Nearly 200 CRC members have signed the pledge already, committing to live out their faith by aiding immigrants marginalized by our broken system.

Will you join them? [Take this opportunity](#) to publicly commit to defending the dignity of all image bearers, encouraging and joining with others from your church and community in welcoming immigrants, and advocating for reform to our broken immigration system.

Your signature will be publicly displayed as a testimony to your commitment, as well as an encouragement to those working daily toward this goal.

Pastor-Church Relations

Pastor-Church Relations has been engaged with a variety of churches over the spring months. One interesting aspect to the work is that, although there are themes and recurring patterns in the lives of congregations, the specific challenges facing particular congregations are remarkably unique involving an interplay of societal, congregational, interpersonal and personal dynamics. This keeps the work both intriguing and challenging.

Some highlights: P-C R partnered with Pastors on Point to provide nine CRC pastors with an 8 day Colorado wilderness experience. Spiritual renewal, group encouragement and a unique vocational assessment were important aspects of this retreat happening. You are invited to visit the "Pastors on Point" website to discover more about this unique experience.

And progress is being made on project fronts as well. The web-based approach to the Ministerial Information Service dubbed "Call Fit" is gaining traction. Also, the P-C R staff continues to develop a training tool for a congregation's pastor search process with the completion date slated for early 2012.

Safe Church Ministry

Highlights of my first quarter as Interim Director of Safe Church Ministry include:

A conference called "Building Safe Church Ministry", held April 29-30 at the Prince Center in Grand Rapids. This provided opportunity for me to interact with Safe Church Team Leaders and Advocates around a vision for Safe Church Ministry. Mark VanderVennen of the Shalem Mental Health Network also facilitated sessions on Restorative Justice Practice.

A new Regional Safe Church Team is being formed in the northern plain states of the USA. New Safe Church Team training will be held in Minnesota in September.

Work is progressing on several projects to provide resources to churches. Two brochures have been updated, printed and made available to reflect the 2010

Synod Approved Guidelines. Contract work has begun with two highly qualified authors to produce a Restorative Justice Manual that will speak specifically to the application of Restorative Justice Practice in cases of CRC church leader sexual misconduct. Others will work as editors and reviewers before the manual is posted online.

Two user-friendly Church Leader Handbooks are also being created for online posting. These will help church leaders understand their role in Safe Church Ministry in general, and specifically in the Advisory Panel Process.

A guide is being sought for the Safe Church Page on the Network; in the meantime guest bloggers are contributing and new resources are being posted. Also a new webpage will be added with resources that can be used for Abuse Awareness Sunday, September 25.

Race Relations

Race Relations has had a challenging yet exciting year as it continues its ministries to our congregations, agencies, and institutions. In our pursuit of greater impact for ministry through partnerships, the Office of Race Relations (ORR) continues developing effective ministry partnerships with denominational agencies, the specialized ministries of the CRCNA, and the Reformed Church of America (RCA).

We wrapped up several collaborative projects including the DORR II workshop; a DVD, "Facing Racism," with Home Missions, Faith Alive, and the CRCNA Foundation, to assist churches as they dialog about racial reconciliation; the development of DORR small group studies; and a workshop on immigration reform with the Office of Social Justice and the RCA, to be offered to the CRC and RCA churches. The Belhar study conferences continue to be conducted in the regions.

The 2011 Multiethnic Conference was one of the best yet. It was a "joyful celebration of diversity and a fervent call to further racial reconciliation in the CRC." The theme, "Already, But Not Yet: Embracing the Challenges of Biblical Diversity," proved to be extremely relevant according to Dr. George Yancey, author and keynote speaker

The ORR will award scholarships this year to students in our colleges and seminary. We are encouraged by the church's response with All Nations Heritage offerings, which provide the funding for the scholarships.

The director's activities include preaching at Grand Rapids churches; attending classis meetings; attending or speaking at conferences; visiting regional sites and the scholarship recipients; presenting the antiracism/reconciliation model to churches, agencies, and institutions; giving lectures on diversity and reconciliation; and consulting.

Issues and challenges for our office are budget-related constraints and helping our denomination engage the issues of diversity and reconciliation.

Sustaining Congregational Excellence

Fifteen pastors from across Canada and the U.S. gathered together this summer to attend the week-long Multi-Media Seminar (co-sponsored by SCE and The Center for Excellence in Preaching - located at Calvin Theological Seminary). The Grand Rapids seminar was open to all pastors of congregations who had received an SCE Technology & Equipment grant. Dr. Mary Hulst shared low-tech and high-tech preaching tools as well as her personal experience as a preacher. New skills were taught and the attendees were refreshed in their call as preachers of God's word. One participant said, "This course has made a profound impact on my confidence as a preacher and given me new areas to explore in the presentation and preparation of my sermons."

In July, the SCE Implementation Team (IT) gathered for its annual summer meeting. This was a historic meeting as the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) IT and the SCE IT were blended to form one team. From now on, the SCE IT will be the advisory body for both SPE and SCE. The meeting saw the review, and funding, of several types of SCE grants: Health & Renewal, Technology & Equipment, and Coaching for Churches. The number of applications received for that round was up significantly from previous rounds.

The interest in SCE grants and programming remains very high. Sixty-three percent of all CRC churches (those who have 150 active, professing members or less) are eligible to participate. To date, over 65% of these churches have engaged in one way or another.

Sustaining Pastoral Excellence

Recently, SPE awarded 17 pastor peer learning (PL) group grants and four pastors' spouses' (PS) peer group grants. Grants are a key piece of SPE programming.

To date, over 70% of all CRC pastors have participated in an SPE PL group. The groups are generally made up of four to eight pastors who commit to meeting together to explore an agreed upon topic. A considerable amount of group time is spent encouraging, supporting, and praying for one another. Both the caring and learning is significantly impacting the participants. "I am a healthier, stronger, and better leader because of this group." "After 12 years [of ministry], I feel this group has made it possible for me to continue serving my congregation."

PS groups are relatively new to SPE. The 27 grants awarded have involved 13% of CRC pastors' spouses. The groups are patterned after the PL model but the focus is more on caring than learning. Participants have found the experience very valuable. "We can't say enough about the sense of community and decreased isolation that comes from meeting together. It's been amazing." "In a real way, the members of this group have been able to reach out and touch a part of my heart that is being protected as a pastor's wife. "

Since 2003, funding for SPE has come from a grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. This funding will end in December 2011. The CRC will continue funding the best parts of SPE beginning in January 2012.

CRWRC

Because of generous support from churches and individuals, CRWRC is praising God for meeting an urgent fundraising goal of \$825,000 as of July, 2011. Hallelujah! The gap was caused by an unexpected grant denial from the Canadian government (CIDA). Gifts and offerings from CRWRC supporters are a "harvest of hope" to people in need around the world.

One CRWRC participant, Atimango Joyce, is a Ugandan widow with six children. "I raised goats with my husband before he died in 2002, but we didn't know how to care for them properly." Once trained in small animal husbandry by CRWRC's partners, Joyce says, "I am determined to practice every skill I know so that I can earn enough for each of my children to attend school—all I needed was knowledge. Now I can train others as well!"

CRWRC empowers more than a million people like Atimango Joyce each year. Harvest Hope funds help CRWRC reach 4,000 communities like hers with better nutrition, health, literacy, food production, agriculture training, savings and loan projects, and discipleship.

To continue to adjust the recent global financial climate, CRWRC's long-term development strategy is focusing on fewer countries and partners than in the past, but providing greater support. In this process, staff positions in Zambia and the Dominican Republic have been eliminated to better fit the amount of gifts received. CRWRC is continuing its positive relationship with CIDA, and awaits response in subsequent funding proposals. For more information about the Harvest Hope Campaign, see www.crwrc.org/harvesthope.

Calvin College

In 1995, Gaylen Byker became Calvin's eighth president. On May 20, 2011, he announced that he will be retiring from that position following the 2011-2012 academic year. He has spent the 16 years in between expanding Calvin's physical and academic infrastructure.

During his tenure, the college has re-envisioned its core curriculum, augmented its academic programs, expanded its campus across the East Beltline, renovated old facilities and constructed new ones, hosted a major art exhibition and, (in the same year), welcomed the President of the United States as Commencement speaker, conducted a capital campaign, established six endowed chairs and nine centers and institutes, and greatly enhanced its global presence.

"While his success at fundraising and building may be most noticeable, President Byker's ability to understand and protect who we are will be his legacy," said Scott Spoelhof, chair of Calvin's board of trustees.

"His passion for, and defense of, our confessions and the Reformed identity and mission of Calvin College, in my mind, outweigh the obvious physical improvements—

because if we don't hold true to those foundational beliefs, it doesn't really make a difference what we build."

One of Byker's first undertakings as president was to lead a team in drafting a new strategic plan for Calvin, outlining goals to strengthen the college's academics, research and scholarship, financial base, physical plant and international reach.

His presidency is also notable for building projects however, Vice President Shirley Hoogstra praised Byker's spiritual leadership of students, one example of which was his heading of one of the study groups last September during Calvin's campus-wide Philippians Bible study. "He asked hard questions, and he was a mentor in a way that very few people see."

Byker maintains that his job has always been to fulfill Calvin's mission: "Some people put too much emphasis on the building projects and not enough on what I call the human infrastructure, the mission, the fidelity to the mission," he said. "Think of graduation. You've got 900 people going out to do amazing things. And you've got 320 faculty doing wonderful things."

That Calvin's mission remain distinctively Reformed is crucial, Byker added. "I think a lot of colleges go in a series of steps away from their missions, and I think the first one is to be generically Christian," he said. He hopes his successor will value the importance of Calvin's Reformed identity. "Hopefully, what's coming next is a more effective and better-integrated expression of the mission," he said.

Byker is grateful for the many people who partnered with him to lead at Calvin. "It's a team effort," he emphasized. "We have a great team."

Following his retirement in June of 2012, Byker plans to take at least a year to spend time with his family, including daughters Tanya and Gayle and grandchildren Bastian; 11, Eva; 9, and Johannes, 1. He and Susan also plan to do extensive traveling.

"When I came, I told the board I'd commit to seven years, thinking it would probably be 10," he said. "Sixteen years later, I've surprised even myself."

Calvin Theological Seminary

In order to more fully serve students where they are, Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) has been discerning the role and development of Distance Learning. This past May, the Board of CTS approved and affirmed the Faculty which had adopted a Distance Learning Proposal. While there will be implications for other programs, including expansion of various certificate programs, CTS is now preparing to offer a five year, on-line Master of Divinity Program beginning in the fall of 2012.

This current year of preparation will help CTS prepare for a cohort approach whereby students will be grouped together for learning and for formation for ministry. Persons interested in finding out more about this learning opportunity can contact Matthew Cooke, Director of Admissions at CTS.

In response to this distance learning initiative, anonymous donors have recently stepped forward to

make a commitment of a 1.5 million dollar gift in order to see that first cohort through their degree program. The CTS community gives thanks for this affirmation of the direction set by the Distance Education proposal.

On August 1, Rev. Jul Medenblik will "officially" become the 7th President of Calvin Theological Seminary. Rev. Medenblik, who also has a Juris Doctorate degree, has recently left the pastorate of New Life Christian Reformed Church in New Lenox, Ill., to prepare for this new ministry position. A Presidential Inauguration Ceremony to give thanks to God for his faithfulness to CTS will occur on Saturday, October 15, 2011, at 10:30 AM at the Calvin College Covenant Fine Arts Center. All are welcome to attend.

Back to God Ministries International

Back to God Ministries International continues to maximize ministry through partnerships. We partner with more than 50 ministry partners, including CRC agencies and indigenous ministries worldwide, increasing our ability to produce and deliver evangelism and discipleship programming. We also work with more than 800 international volunteers who assist in providing discipleship for those who respond to our media outreach.

Our partnership with Words of Hope (the media ministry of the Reformed Church in America) is one example of effective collaboration:

- *Spotlight*, our simplified English audio program, discusses a variety of topics from a Christian perspective. Through international partners, we have established 49 *Spotlight* English Clubs in 21 countries, giving us an opportunity to build relationships with those who want to know more about the Christian faith.
- During recent conflicts in the Middle East, our Arabic partnership used social media to create opportunities for sharing the Gospel with young Arab Muslims seeking truth.
- With our partners in India, we produced a new radio program design to reach out to younger listeners. We've also helped establish 50 listener communities to increase the ability to disciple new believers.

We also work with the Reformed Church in Japan, and together created a new broadcast which brings hope, encouragement, and information for survivors of the devastating March 2011 earthquake and tsunami. We are grateful for your partnership which enables us to reach millions with the Gospel through media!

Home Missions

There were many highlights over the past quarter for Christian Reformed Home Missions. One particularly exciting one was the *Jump Into The River* conference

near Orlando, Florida in late April. Held immediately prior to the Exponential church planting conference, this 2nd annual gathering was a collaborative effort between the CRC and RCA and brought together church planters, parent church pastors, and others from both denominations. This event clearly showed that the two denominations, which are working together on a joint church planting initiative, are eagerly joining together in a North American gospel movement.

Another highlight was a trip that Home Missions Ministry Developer Coach Sam Huizenga took to Colombia, South America. During the visit, she provided Coffee Break training to almost 500 church leaders. We celebrate how God is using Coffee Break to impact not only North America, but also places beyond.

In June, Home Missions turned to a new page in its chapter in leadership at Synod 2011. There, on the floor of Van Noord Arena on the Calvin College campus in Grand Rapids, Home Missions presented its new director, Moses Chung, who shared his personal journey and stressed the importance of prayer in his life and in his job leading Home Missions. During this time, Home Missions also presented a summary of its mission and vision and new strategic priorities, which will have a positive impact on both regions and classes, already starting this fall. The presentations concluded with Synod delegates forming a circle around Chung, his family, and Home Missions staff members on the Synod floor and surrounding them with prayer.

For more information, please visit www.crhm.org.

World Missions

A world of people need the Good News of Jesus. They are stuck in distorted or incomplete understandings of God and His world—they need to hear, know, and experience the truth. God calls each of us to step into His ongoing redemptive movement in the world, to play a part in proclaiming His message of hope and full life among the nations. Worldwide, Christian Reformed World Missions and its partners are seeing God's Word take root in the lives of new believers.

Farid, a young Nicaraguan man, and his friends became enmeshed in gang life in their early teens. Their community avoided them – even the church. Through one man's friendship and witness, Farid and several of his friends committed their lives to Christ. Now they've begun giving back to the community they once tormented, selling hammocks to raise money to help others.

In West Africa, a Fulani woman and her two children were recently baptized as new believers. Her husband had become a Christian several years ago and had been praying for his family to know Jesus. Now the entire family knows the transforming power and grace of Jesus.

Masasui, an 88-year-old Japanese man, went to church with his mother as a child. But, as pressure to worship the emperor mounted, Masasui fell away from the church. He returned to the church several years ago

and began being mentored by the church's pastor. He was filled with renewed joy and began making lifestyle changes. In June, Masasui was baptized into God's family.

God's Church is expanding as the Gospel flows into lives and communities with the transformation and renewal found only in Christ.

Dynamic Youth Ministries

Calvinist Cadet Corps

Unseen and mostly unknown, more than four dozen men have been converging in the forests of West Michigan. They've been doing that on numerous Saturdays for the past three years, but have stepped it up during the spring and summer of 2011 to where they met and worked nearly every week. With lots of donated heavy equipment and trucks, they prepared the land for the more than 1,200 Cadets and counselors who registered for the international camporee.

By the time you read this, of course, the camporee will be finished. But you should know the incredibly uncountable number of volunteer hours that go into planning such an event. And by the time each camporee is finished, the men know it was all time well spent. May God continue to bring glory to Himself through what happens there, even years later.

Another item worthy of mention is the extensive training that took place in July. In three separate events — each lasting four days — our Kenyan training coordinator had the opportunity to meet with counselors from each of the regions in Kenya to train them in workings of the Cadet ministry. We praise God for Daniel Nandwa and his work there. He led the training without the presence of North American Cadet leaders.

Youth Unlimited Classis Report

It is the middle of July as I write this article, a favorite time of year for Youth Unlimited. We find ourselves in the middle of the SERVE mission program with more than 100 churches sending over 1,700 youth and youth workers to 30 local congregations across North America helping those local congregations reach their community with the love of Christ.

In a few days, YU will launch *Live It!* our new large youth event created to help students experience how to live out their faith through the talents and interests God gave them. We are praying each of the 600 plus students and adults will encounter God in a way that causes them to return home committed to living for Christ where ever He places them in life.

Additionally, YU was blessed again with the opportunity to partner with many West Michigan urban congregations to host the Where U At? Urban Youth Conference, April 29-May2. The 200 plus participants experienced the love of God in ways that met them right where they were in life!

Finally, YU returned the end of June from its first ever trip to Israel with youth workers, pastors and Christian school teachers. What an amazing

experience...the trip will bless participants personally and in their ministry efforts for a lifetime!

If there is any way we can serve you, your church or a church near you, please contact us, we would be humbled to serve.

Partners Worldwide

Through the ministry of Partners Worldwide and the growing network of Christian business professionals around the world, God has been and continues to work through the marketplace to bring about economic, spiritual, and social transformation. His grace and guidance has been demonstrated through the following developments over the last quarter:

In Hong-Kong and Canada, Partners Worldwide is now registered as a non-profit organization. We are thankful to God for this new opportunity as we expand our network of business professionals around the world committed to God's call.

This quarter, we've also established a close partnership with Africa Works, a local African organization that serves emerging small and medium businesses in three new countries: Swaziland, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. The goal of this 3-year strategic partnership is to strengthen value chains by training African farmers, producers, and manufacturers as they collaborate across sectors. God is already working through this partnership to enable business owners—and their employees—to step out of poverty and into stable income-generating work!

In Haiti, Partners Worldwide is walking alongside local business professionals as they meet new market demands of international NGOs. Through a close partnership with CRWRC, we are also expanding the business network in Leogane, a town severely impacted by the earthquake last year, by offering business training and connecting business owners with long-term North American mentors.

We are thankful for the support of the CRCNA, and are hopeful as we look forward and follow God's call to grow businesses, create jobs, and transform lives!