



Christian  
Reformed  
Church

2021 Issue 2

# Living the Call

A REPORT FROM THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA

## MERCY AND JUSTICE

The Christian Reformed Church seeks to express God's love by living out five callings:

### Faith Formation

As a community of believers, we seek to introduce people to Jesus Christ and to nurture their faith through all ages and stages of life. (Report in August)

### Servant Leadership

Understanding that the lifelong equipping of leaders is essential for churches and ministries to flourish, we identify, recruit and train leaders to be servants in the Kingdom of God. (Report in October)

### Global Mission

Called to be witnesses of Christ's Kingdom to the ends of the earth, we start and strengthen local churches in North America and around the world. (Report in February)

### Mercy and Justice

Hearing the cries of the oppressed, forsaken and disadvantaged, we seek to act justly and love mercy as we walk humbly with our God. (Report in April)

### Gospel Proclamation and Worship

Believing that faith comes through the hearing of God's Word, we proclaim the saving message of Jesus Christ and seek to worship him in all that we do. (Report in June)

## From the Executive Director's Desk

While I was writing this reflection, I heard the news of a fatal shooting in Atlanta, Ga. Eight individuals were killed — many of them Asian. Though the motivation is not yet clear, the nature of the attack, and the fact that the perpetrator singled out Asian establishments for his crime, strongly suggest that race, class, and gender were contributing factors. What makes a person, raised as a Christian, who hears the words of Jesus and commits to following him — resort to violence against others?

Violent acts always have their beginnings in uncharitable thinking, violent ideation, and violent words. This should not surprise us. The Bible is replete with admonitions about the power of words. Proverbs 18:21, for example, says, "*The tongue has the power of life and death.*"

Recently, we have seen uncharitable words escalate into demeaning words, and then escalate further into postcards and other threats towards denominational staff members engaged in Race Relations and Social Justice. It behooves all of us to stop the cycle of negative rhetoric before it escalates and metastasizes.

This is why synod, the leadership, and the staff of the CRCNA are so committed to the work of God in the areas of mercy and justice. This is a Gospel imperative. I thank God that so many of you as leaders fully embrace this imperative. And we are thankful for the many messages of support

received by the staff of our justice ministries as they endured these verbal indignities.

Ministries contributing to the area of mercy and justice include World Renew, Disability Concerns, Race Relations, Office of Social Justice, Safe Church, Centre for Public Dialogue, and the Canadian Indigenous Ministries Committee.

These ministries point us to the importance of God's command to love one another, and to serve one another with the love that emanates from the Father. The staff and volunteers of these ministries, and the many ministries like them within the CRCNA family, remind us of God's better way.

And as we do this work we are also reminded that our enemy is not our brother or our sister — our enemy is the *sin that so easily entangles* (Hebrews 12:1) — sin that creates a distorted view of humanity and that is *crouching at our door* — *but we must master it!* — Genesis 4:7.

As you read through the following pages, I encourage you to pray continually — that we will uplift and uphold each other — that we will seek to individually and collectively do good to and for our neighbor.

To God be the glory!

BY COLIN P. WATSON SR.  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
EXECUTIVE-DIRECTOR@CRCNA.ORG

## World Renew

World Renew has always been compelled by God's deep passion for justice and mercy in our world. When COVID-19 swept the globe, infecting people and claiming lives, it left in its wake social and economic setbacks that are having devastating effects on the most vulnerable. Moving quickly to adapt to COVID-19 restrictions, World Renew trusted God to guide us to deliver His hope to those who need it the most.

The global economy contracted during the COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions, and by the end of 2020 the number of people living in extreme poverty rose by an estimated 115 million. Understanding that protecting health was difficult, even unlikely, for families burdened by poverty, World Renew reached more than 688,000 people with programs that were specifically designed to prevent the spread of the virus. These included distributing emergency food supplies, providing families with electronic vouchers, and radio campaigns with vital health information. In addition, with our local partners in 17 countries, we distributed hygiene kits that included masks, soap, and disinfectant. ([worldrenew.net/covidresponse](https://worldrenew.net/covidresponse))

With COVID-19, there has also been an increase in gender-based violence, domestic violence, and child marriages across the world. World Renew understands gender injustice as a profound violation of the will of God and has been increasing efforts to help girls and women complete their education, remain unmarried throughout their childhood, remain free from sexual or domestic violence, and become leaders in their communities. ([worldrenew.net/peaceandjustice](https://worldrenew.net/peaceandjustice))

Ekadashi Das, 16, benefited from World Renew's work in eradicating child marriages. After her father became bedridden and her mother lost her job as a housemaid when COVID-19 hit Bangladesh in March 2020, they considered marrying Ekadashi off to help ease the family's financial burden. World Renew, through our local partner, found work for Ekadashi's mother, connected the family with the government's COVID-19



Adolescents in Bangladesh join hands to say no to child marriage.

food support program, and worked to ensure that Ekadashi could continue school for free, so Ekadashi did not have to get married. She says, "I feel like I've been freed from a curse."

Through God's grace, in 2020, World Renew was able to partner with 76 grassroots organizations in 35 countries, to provide economic opportunities, community health programs, peace and justice, food security, and disaster response to more than 1.4 million people. This work couldn't have been done without the generosity of donors, and we say a heartfelt thank you for helping us deliver hope to so many.

**IDA KAASTRA-MUTOIGO &  
CAROL BREMER-BENNETT,  
DIRECTORS, WORLD RENEW  
INFO@WORLDRENEW.NET**

## Canadian Indigenous Ministries Committee (CIMC)



Youth Ambassador of Reconciliation Program participants met via Zoom to discuss reconciliation.

Throughout the past year, as our country has grappled with the effects of colonialism that surfaced in the news, the Canadian Indigenous Ministry Committee (CIMC) continued to offer resources and support to churches on journeys of reconciliation.

CIMC's key hope is for all churches to access the many tools and resources available as reconciliation becomes a stronger theme in our churches—not only reconciliation with God through Christ, but also reconciliation within our nation. Given the history of the church, the process of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples is an important way in which the CRCNA can work toward shalom.

This year marked the start of the first *Hearts Exchanged* cohorts. *Hearts Exchanged* is a process designed to equip Reformed Christians to engage with Indigenous people as neighbours in a fulsome and humble way that builds trust and transformation. Two pilots are taking place in Eastern Canada and Edmonton. These deep and engaging conversations will continue in new regions across the country in the coming year. If you are interested in participating, check out more information on our website: [crcna.org/hearts-exchanged](http://crcna.org/hearts-exchanged)

As we continue to share the stories of Indigenous Christians, we are encouraged by the feedback we receive, including this response in reference to a blog written by Richard Silversmith. “It is like fresh water to a thirsty soul. I was drawn to Christianity because of Christ’s radical love, for the commitment to the most vulnerable, for its upside-down values.” Listening carefully to voices we don’t often hear can help to make our churches spaces of increased welcome.

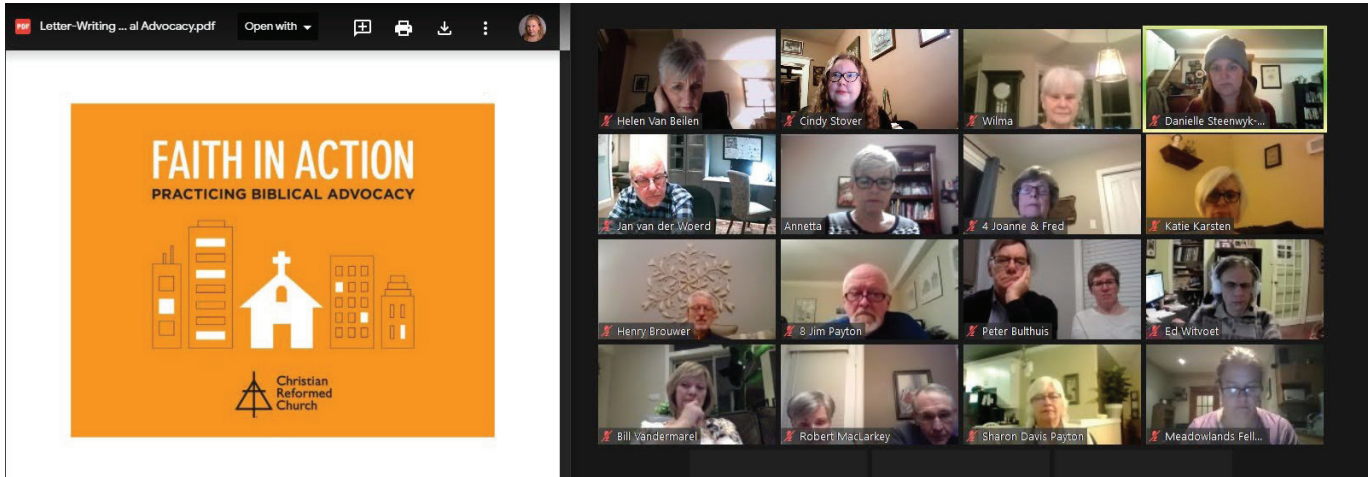
Participants in this year’s Youth Ambassador of Reconciliation Program were able to experience this truth. In our first virtual running of this program, participants were able to connect with guest speakers from across the country and dialogue about ways that they could further reconciliation in their own communities.

As the committee looks ahead in the coming year we’re excited to connect with you and your church. Stay tuned for our new virtual book club that will feature videos and discussion on Thomas King’s book *The Inconvenient Indian*.

**SHANNON PEREZ,**  
CIMC, JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION MOBILIZER  
[SPEREZ@CRCNA.ORG](mailto:SPEREZ@CRCNA.ORG)



## The Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue



The Faith In Action interactive workshop will help you learn how to navigate the political system to have your voice heard by local, provincial, and national leaders. Find out more on our [website](#)

Throughout this year the Centre for Public Dialogue has been able to meet with churches and individuals from across the country in a virtual format. We are thankful for people who've looked to advocacy throughout this unique year to address the various impacts that marginalized people have experienced.

As we made advocacy opportunities available, church members stepped up to take advantage of tools, such as action alerts, to raise important policy points with their representatives. One advocate told us, "I truly appreciate the experience and tools you supply . . . I will trust that the desire [for justice] of this child of the Father is a delight, and blessed powerfully by the Spirit for Jesus' sake!" We say 'amen' to that!

We've been excited to support churches from coast to coast in virtual formats. Our *Faith in Action* workshops continue to be a popular way for people to better understand how to speak into the public sphere in a helpful and detailed way. We've met with everyone from students in campus ministries in Guelph and Toronto, to a collection of church members from British Columbia.

Through these actions, hundreds of letters and emails have been sent to our government representatives as part of a Christian witness to policies that create shalom in our nation. We've worked on problems with Canada's refugee policy through the *Continuing Welcome* campaign, pursued our commitments to Indigenous people through advocacy on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and responded to specific issues raised by COVID-19 through our *Hear Us Out* campaign.

We're looking forward to providing new resources in the coming year on climate change, advocating for a full welcome for refugees, and responding to issues you care about. We'd love to hear from you or visit your church and community in whatever ways are possible! *Thank you for your continuing support in God's call to seek justice and speak hope.*

**MIKE HOGETERP,**  
DIRECTOR, CENTRE FOR PUBLIC DIALOGUE  
MHOGETERP@CRCNA.CA

## Disability Concerns



Participants of an online book club about Prof. John Swinton's book, *Finding Jesus in the Storm: The Spiritual Lives of Christians with Mental Health Challenges*.

Our world crossed the one year mark of living through a pandemic. In *living the call for justice* through the course of this year, Disability Concerns shifted our ministry work completely online.

While isolation is something we, as a collective community, deal with daily, the online platform has also offered some new opportunities for ministry. For example, Disability Concerns hosted two book clubs this year, most recently a discussion of the book *Finding Jesus in the Storm: The Spiritual Lives of Christians with Mental Health Challenges*.

For six weeks, a group from across North America gathered via Zoom and worked our way through Prof. John Swinton's in-depth discussion on a variety of mental health diagnoses, which he wrote based on his knowledge of theology and mental health, and on interviews with individuals who are living at the intersection of mental health and faith. Guided by the book, our group explored how, as a church, we can cause undue harm to our fellow Christians who live with mental health challenges.

Swinton not only highlights ways in which we have failed to embrace all of God's beloved, but also offers key insights into how we, as the representation of Christ on earth, can embrace all members of the body of Christ, appreciating the unique ways in which God has made each one of us.

As a true gift to our book club members, Swinton made a guest appearance for our last meeting, sharing an hour of his time with us. We are so grateful for his book, his presence in our book club, and the friendships that have been made over Zoom over the course of this book club.

Disability Concerns created a [book club resource](#) for Swinton's book that we would encourage church councils and disability advocates to use to lead their own book discussions in their communities. Truly, this book is a wonderful resource for everyone!

**MARK STEPHENSON,**  
DIRECTOR, DISABILITY CONCERNS  
[DISABILITYCONCERNS@CRCNA.ORG](mailto:DISABILITYCONCERNS@CRCNA.ORG)

## Office of Social Justice

The Office of Social Justice works to support churches in responding to God's call to "let justice flow like a river" in our personal and communal lives and in the structures of our societies.

This year we expanded our work in the Climate Witness Project, in partnership with World Renew. In a particularly impactful event, participants from across Canada and the U.S. joined our virtual screening of 'The Story of Plastic' and then discussed the movie in Zoom meet-ups. One participant shared this about the screening: "I really valued the session and hearing the input of others, especially since we had a very diverse group. Because of participating, I found out about an event I intend to take part in: Plastic Free July."

In addition to continued advocacy for just immigration policies, we relaunched our *Blessing not Burden* campaign, mobilizing church members to wear and share the message that "Immigrants are a Blessing Not a Burden" with t-shirts and yard signs. We also offered virtual sessions of our *Church Between Borders* workshop to churches, clubs, and schools.

Throughout the year we provide weekly calls to pray through *Do Justice* prayers. We were encouraged by feedback from folks who include them in their services or weekly bulletins. "I have long relied on the weekly prayers, and passed them along within my network. I've found the combination of care for all people, especially the poor and most vulnerable (including the unborn), to be unique in today's political landscape."

At the same time, the pandemic continues to reveal pre-existing disparities in our society and disproportionately impacts our most vulnerable. As we press on in our work, letters, emails, and tweets from active citizens will continue to speak into developing policies that create shalom for our local and global neighbours.

**MARK STEPHENSON,**  
ACTING DIRECTOR, OSJ  
[OSJHA@CRCNA.ORG](mailto:OSJHA@CRCNA.ORG)



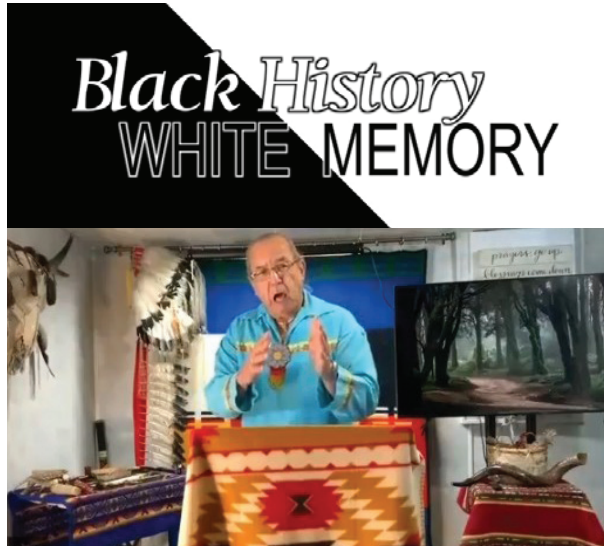
Office of Social Justice staff and supporters model t-shirts created as part of the relaunch of the "Blessing Not Burden" campaign.

### Tools You Can Use

The Centre for Public Dialogue and Office of Social Justice make it easy for you to contact your representative with a click of a button on important policy issues! May sure you check out our action centre: <https://p2a.co/CGfkxsh>



## Office of Race Relations



Race Relations launched an online series of “Roundtable” webinars to help people delve into issues related to race and Christianity.

Race Relations has been using a variety of tools to resource and train members and congregations as they work together to dismantle the causes and effects of racism within the body of believers and throughout the world.

The pandemic shifted the priorities of training and resources to the virtual world of Zoom and other online applications.

In October, Race Relations launched a new online webinar series. These “Roundtable” webinars provide opportunities for participants to delve into issues related to race and Christianity and are open to the public.

The first Roundtable (which had 49 participants) featured Mike Peters, a Native American pastor who discussed the topic: “*Addressing Native American Issues as a Non-Native*.” The second Roundtable in November had a three-person panel share their thoughts on the *implications of the 2020 US election* and its effect on antiracism work.

Race Relations partnered with the Office of Social Justice for the third webinar presented in January with the topic of “*Talk is Cheap; Antiracism is WORK*.” This panel discussion, attended by 175 people, invited participants to listen, learn, and interact with three activists who spoke about the difficult move of putting talk into action in the fight against racism.



For Black History month in February, the title of the webinar was “*Black History / White Memory*.” The three-person panel discussion focused on the question: Why do white people and Black people remember the history of racial injustice so differently? Over 150 people attended, and many more viewed the event on social media and the recording. A *future webinar in April* is planned to observe the national Stand Against Racism campaign.

ORR continues leading *community workshops in the virtual world*, most recently completing a *Cultural Intelligence* workshop with a church in Michigan. And they have created a unique asynchronous learning session for individuals (online, DIY) entitled “The Ideology of Whiteness.”

MARK STEPHENSON,  
ACTING DIRECTOR, ORR  
RACE@CRCNA.ORG

### People You Should Know

We welcome **Chelsea Schiavi** ([cschiavi@crcna.org](mailto:cschiavi@crcna.org)) as the Administrative & Volunteer Assistant with the Justice ministries. In this role Chelsea will contact Christian Reformed Churches and provide assistance with volunteer coordination for Race Relations, Social Justice, and Disability Concerns.

## Safe Church Ministry

### Circle of Grace: The What and the Why

Date of Presentation: February 18th, 2021

Presentation By:

- British Columbia Safe Church Ministry – [Faye Martin](#),  
Abuse Prevention & Response Coordinator

- Faith Formation Ministries – [Liz Tolkamp](#)  
Regional Catalyzer for British Columbia



On February 18th, The British Columbia Safe Church team hosted a training on Circle of Grace. The recording is now available on the Safe Church Youtube Channel.

For Safe Church, one of our mandates is to help build communities where the value of each person is honored — where people are free to worship and grow free from abuse. What does this actually mean in the day to day life of the church? While there are a number of ways to work towards this goal, one specific way we encourage churches to live out this concept is by integrating the Circle of Grace curriculum into the church. This program is designed to be shared with little ones as young as 3 years old and then built upon annually as they grow and mature into young adults.

Recently, [Safe Church coordinator for British Columbia](#), Faye Martin, and [Faith Formation](#) Catalyzer for British Columbia, Liz Tolkamp, collaborated to train over 50 people from a number of churches across the province on the [Circle of Grace Curriculum](#). In their [training](#) they shared the value of a curriculum that imparts the message that each child is sacred to God and should therefore be respected by others. They offered tangible ways to incorporate the program into the yearly calendar of the church and shared personal experiences of success of the program in the lives of the children. Circle of Grace provides our children with tools for self-advocacy as they learn to love and respect themselves in the eyes of God. Introducing agency to our children is a critical step in developing communities where abuse cannot flourish.

*“The Circle of Grace curriculum is a game-changer for how we think about abuse prevention and awareness. By incorporating it into children’s discipleship programs, the church is raising up a generation of children who understand that abuse is a reality in our world today, who know how to recognize it, and who feel empowered to respond in ways that promote their safety and the safety of their community. Planting these seeds early on will radically change the way church communities talk about and engage issues of abuse in the future.”*

AMANDA BENCKHUYSEN,  
DIRECTOR, SAFE CHURCH MINISTRY  
[ABENCKHUYSEN@CRCNA.ORG](mailto:ABENCKHUYSEN@CRCNA.ORG)

### Want to Learn More?

**CRC News** – Subscribe at [crcna.org](http://crcna.org) for a weekly digest of stories in your inbox

**The Network** – Visit [crcna.org/Network](http://crcna.org/Network) to post your questions, participate in discussions around the topic of “Biblical Justice”, or review available resources

**World Renew E-newsletter** – Visit [worldrenew.net](http://worldrenew.net) to subscribe to a weekly email

**Breaking Barriers** – Subscribe to a quarterly publication from Disability Concerns. [crcna.org/Disability](http://crcna.org/Disability)

**Do Justice** – This blog is a conversation starter for justice in the CRC. Together we’re finding new ideas and perspectives, sharing better ways to engage in justice work, remembering our motivation, and growing our faith. Visit [crcna.org/DoJustice](http://crcna.org/DoJustice)

**Find Resources** – Search thousands of resources available at [crcna.org/resources](http://crcna.org/resources)

**Or call 1-877-272-5125 with any of your ministry questions.**