



Christian
Reformed
Church

2019 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

As a denomination, the Christian Reformed Church has identified five areas to which we believe God is calling us. Some of these, such as "gospel proclamation," are universally held by Christians of all backgrounds. Others, however, have a uniquely Reformed feel to them.

Our calling towards justice and mercy is a great example. For those aware of Reformed authors and leaders, the idea of Abraham Kuyper's "every square inch" is a simple and understandable phrase reminding us of God's sovereignty over all of life. Tied closely to this concept in Reformed thinking is an emphasis on the responsibility we all have for building God's kingdom here and now.

When you combine these two ideas, it is easy to understand why Reformed Christians are seven-day-a-week Christians. Our Christian life is pursued every day, in every area, with a mission to transform it all for God's kingdom purposes.

As a result, we can't help but feel called towards kingdom-building activities of justice and mercy. Whether it a desire to help our congregations be

places where everybody belongs and everybody serves, a commitment to educating about and preventing abuse, activities that work towards racial reconciliation, ministries of disaster response and poverty alleviation, or holding our governments accountable for just laws, we believe that God has a role for us to play individually, and as churches and a denomination.

We may not always agree on the best ways to live out this calling, but as Christian Reformed people, we share a commitment that when we "hear the cries of the oppressed, forsaken and disadvantaged, we seek to act justly and love mercy as we walk humbly with our God."

On the following pages, you'll read a few examples of how we are living out this calling as we strive together to be faithful to the life that God has required of us. I hope you will feel blessed, as I do, to be part of this kingdom work.

BY STEVEN TIMMERMANS,
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World Renew



World Renew continues to see fruit in communities after what is sometimes years of hard work and prayer. Three themes have emerged of late: Church and Community, Resilience, and Proactive Justice.

Church and Community

World Renew works through local churches and Christian partners. Not only does this mean that solutions are appropriate and owned by the local community, but it also allows the church to impact its neighbors. For example, last year in Tanzania a church began serving their neighbors with acts of love and kindness. As a result, the church grew from 30 to 45 members. Additionally, at least two churches have been planted in West Africa as the result of Muslim communities being intrigued by Christians working to help them. They asked questions and requested that a Christian church be planted there.

In North America, World Renew encourages similar church-to-community connections. We partner with Diaconal Ministries Canada (DMC; diaconalministries.com) and Communities First Association (CFA; cfapartners.org) to help churches implement outreach in their own communities. For example, DMC and World Renew have facilitated approximately 10 workshops to assist churches in their quest to learn how to help people in need without harming them.

Resilience

World Renew continues to respond to areas of the world that are being affected by disasters, both natural and manmade. We have a great need for domestic volunteers (Disaster Response Services; worldrenew.net/drs). Internationally, World Renew provides relief and disaster preparedness in areas affected by droughts, floods, and earthquakes. This includes refugee camps in locations such as Syria, Bangladesh, and Uganda (worldrenew.net/idr). In Canada, World Renew also works with churches to resettle refugees. In fact, this year marks the 40th anniversary of welcoming hundreds of refugees into Canada, which we recognize and celebrate in God's faithfulness (worldrenew.net/refugees).

Proactive Justice

World Renew works through local partners to prevent trafficking, assist in post-conflict recovery, and encourage communities to be a voice against injustices that affect them. World Renew also encourages the North American church to continue to advocate for justice (worldrenew.net/advocacy) at home and abroad. In addition, there continues to be great need for trauma healing in many areas where World Renew works.

Be sure to sign up for email newsletters to find out about current disasters and volunteer opportunities (worldrenew.net/enews).

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Canadian Indigenous Ministry Committee



We're excited to finally unveil our new logo and name! Formerly known as the "Canadian Aboriginal Ministry Committee," this committee — drawn from Christian Reformed churches and Urban Indigenous Ministry centres across Canada — will now be called the "Canadian Indigenous Ministry Committee," or CIMC.

We made the decision to change our name in response to CRC members who expressed concerns with the term "aboriginal". With discernment around the most respectful terms used today, we decided to make the shift.

Alongside this new name, we've adopted a new logo for our work. This logo was designed by a community member at one of the CRC's Urban Indigenous Ministries, the Indigenous Christian Fellowship in Regina, Saskatchewan. The logo will always be used with the CRCNA logo, because the work of Indigenous ministry is the work of the whole denomination.

Despite the new name and logo, our work hasn't changed. We continue to cultivate space in the Christian Reformed Church for Indigenous Christians to live fully as both Christian and Indigenous, and to offer opportunities for CRC people to learn from and seek justice together as Indigenous and non-Indigenous members.



We've been busy preparing for the third annual Youth Ambassador of Reconciliation Program, a partnership with the Office of Race Relations and World Renew. Youth Ambassadors of Reconciliation participate in a week-long, cross-cultural, reconciliation journey in Southern Ontario and develop a Reconciliation Action Plan within their home community. Past Youth Ambassadors have gone on to be leaders in their communities for justice and reconciliation, and we can't wait to see who Creator God brings our way this year!

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The Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue



The Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue, supported by our grassroots committee — the Committee for Contact with the Government — has been paying close attention to Indigenous education for more than eight years.

Indigenous kids living on-reserve have historically received 30-50% less funding per student than those in provincially-run schools. This is part of the reason that Indigenous students have a high school graduation rate of only 24-46%. But when Indigenous communities have the funding, community participation, and culturally appropriate education that they need, as in the Mi'kmaq Education Act and other regional education agreements, the results are astounding.

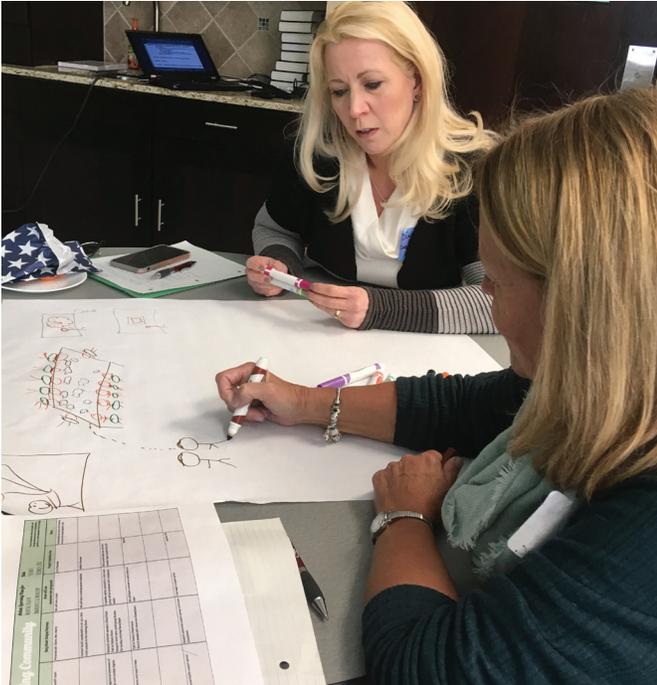
That's why the Centre for Public Dialogue has launched Education Together (crcna.org/EducationTogether), an advocacy campaign to help CRC people hold their elected representatives accountable to good promises to implement TRC Calls to Action 7-10 (reconciliation in education). As Indigenous partners tell us, we know what to do to fix Indigenous education, we just need the political will to make it happen.

From churches to film screenings, from a Christian school educators conference to deacons meetings, and even in the elementary school classroom, advocacy postcards have already been used in many settings to help people let their elected representatives know that they support equitable funding and cultural integration for Indigenous students living on-reserve.

As another part of supporting CRC people in their advocacy journeys, we've also recently released the *Faith in Action: Practicing Biblical Advocacy* workshop with our partners at World Renew, Diaconal Ministries Canada, the CRC Office of Social Justice, and Canadian Ministries. This self-directed workshop, available at crcna.org/FaithInAction, helps participants navigate the political system to make voices of faith heard by local, provincial, and national leaders. This workshop was developed for Canada, but a U.S. version will be available upon request.

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Disability Concerns



The office of Disability Concerns continues to work on your behalf to ensure that our congregations are places where everybody belongs and everybody serves. Here is a great recent example.

Diane Wiersma wanted to provide training for the shepherding elders at her church about how to do ministry with people who have mental health challenges. Someone who worked with Diane on a suicide prevention coalition suggested that she contact Disability Concerns.

As the Director of Care Ministry at Covenant Life CRC in Grand Haven, MI, Diane has a passion for her church to minister well with every member, whatever challenges they face. Through the guidance of Disability Concerns, Diane found “phenomenal” resources on mental health on the Network, and I was able to invite her and a team from Covenant Life to join a Mental Health Learning Community of CRCs and RCAs.

Learning Communities are gatherings of teams from several churches who meet four times over the course of the year to learn, create goals, and share resources about a specified topic. Team leaders meet with a coach between meetings.

Although the Learning Community was already underway, Wiersma and the team from Covenant Life felt right at home at their first meeting with the others. Wiersma said, “Getting churches together in a room around a common cause and sharing best practices really opened my eyes to possibilities.”

Interest in the recently formed Mental Health Committee at Covenant Life far exceeded Wiersma’s hopes. Besides elder training, the committee set a series of goals including starting support groups, providing mental health support to the many Coast Guard personnel in Grand Haven, providing QPR (suicide intervention training) to members, and ultimately combating stigma and changing the culture of the congregation.

They already sent a team to a benice.org training, which included both pastors and other ministry leaders.

“Disability Concerns gave us a foundation for expanding the thought process for what mental health is and what happens in the church. It’s been very powerful,” she said.

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Office of Social Justice



Most Sundays, you can find the work of the Office of Social Justice happening in a congregation somewhere in North America. Regional immigration organizers (like Peter Zigterman in Chicago, pictured here presenting at Faith CRC in Tinley Park) provide the Church Between Borders workshops to interested CRC and RCA churches through a partnership between the two denominations. He and his fellow organizers work to raise church members' understanding and awareness of immigration and refugee issues in the U.S.

Cindy Stover in Canada brings the Faith in Action workshop, an introduction to advocacy on justice issues, as well as many other learning opportunities.

And workshops on creation care happen too — for example, church members recently organized a series of workshops through our Climate Witness Project, sharing their own expertise with friends and neighbors about how to take steps to care for the earth, as well as advocate for systemic change.

Whether you're looking for an engaging time of debate over different perspectives on these issues, or to deepen your understanding with new information, please reach out to osjha@crcna.org to get connected with a workshop that fits your congregation's heart and calling.

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Office of Race Relations

There are students and leaders preparing themselves for ministry in a variety of professions. Some are in degreed programs at Calvin Theological Seminary. Others are pushing through at Calvin College. All of them are seeking to bless the kingdom of God because they want to serve the Lord. Race Relations scholarships is just one way the Office of Race Relations partners with amazing people to enhance and expand the Christian Reformed Church.

Our staff have also been growing leaders and equipping the church to seek reconciliation. Advocate Bernadette Arthur led a week-long Youth Ambassador of Reconciliation program where the teachers are Indigenous leaders in southern Ontario. Non-Indigenous leaders learn the slow work of building relationships shaped and formed by justice, respect, and reconciliation.

Advocate Viviana Cornejo has been conducting the new U.S. anti-racism workshop called "Racism: Looking Back, Moving Forward" in several church and non-church settings. The workshop takes an interactive journey through historical legislation and treaties that built the foundation of racism in U.S. The workshop helps members to equip themselves with a renewed perspective of God's healing, restitution, and renewal of the CRC church in their present locales.

Advocate Rudy Gonzalez was called in the middle of the night to pick up a Guatemalan family he met in Tijuana from detention (U.S. side). He hosted the family as other Christians fundraised to help them pay the legal fees for their cases, and accompanied them in this journey.

While the U.S. culture seems addicted to polarization and resentment, the Office of Race Relations — quietly and with both eyes open — works faithfully to raise up multiracial leaders and to engage in crucial conversations in churches to bring reconciliation and healing in the places where God's truth and grace are at work.

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Safe Church Ministry



Safe Church Ministry equips congregations in abuse awareness, prevention, and response, helping to build communities where the value of each person is honored and people are free to worship and grow free from abuse. We must each do our part to prevent the dehumanizing and devastating effects of abuse and to respond appropriately to this pressing issue that affects so many both in and outside of our churches.

Our ministry depends on volunteers, who work where safe church ministry is most effective, at the local church and classis levels. Safe Church raises funds over and above our budget to offer grants to fund this important work. Many classes have established the position of a Safe Church Coordinator; some have used Safe Church grant funds as seed money to provide an annual stipend for this position.

In addition, Safe Church has approved six mini-grants for 2019 (\$1,000 each) for projects locally designed and implemented. These include programs about internet safety in Michigan; a partnership with an organization that combats the injustice of the sex industry in British Columbia; a 'Circle of Grace' training program in Illinois; a safe church multi-classis training event in Ontario; and developing safe church resources in the Chinese language.

You can find us on our Safe Church website (crcna.org/safechurch), on The Network, and on Facebook. Over 550 people receive our e-newsletter every other month, and about 30 people subscribe to our monthly prayer guide and have committed to pray for us regularly.

We're so thankful for each person who serves in safe church ministry. Pray with us for more people to find their calling serving in safe church ministry. It's up to all of us to end abuse and make our churches and communities safer for everyone.

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Registration Now Open!

AUGUST 1-3, WINDSOR, ONTARIO, CANADA

Inspire 2019

Discover. Connect. Reimagine.



Justice & Mercy will be a key area of focus at Inspire 2019, with workshops such as:

- Addressing Pain Through Story
- Better Together
- The Blanket Exercise
- Building a Safe Church Team
- Canada and the Underground Railroad
- Church Between Borders
- Circle of Grace
- Creating an Atmosphere of Belonging
- Disability Ministry in the Third Space
- Equipping Your Church to Go Green
- Helpful Citizenship in a Time of Division
- Inspiring Churches Through Global Partnerships
- Levels of Racism: Tools for Training
- Protecting Kids in an Increasingly Hostile Online World
- Racism, in Canada?
- Standing Stones Ceremony
- Transforming Conflict with Restorative Practices
- Universal Design for Ministry
- And more!

Register today at crcna.org/Inspire

Want to Learn More?

CRC News – Subscribe at crcna.org for a weekly digest of stories in your inbox

The Network – Visit 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 to subscribe to a weekly email

Breaking Barriers – Subscribe to a quarterly publication from Disability Concerns. 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

Find Resources – Search thousands of resources available at crcna.org/resources

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