

Living the Call

A REPORT FROM THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA

GOSPEL PROCLAMATION AND WORSHIP

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

These are difficult times! Our world continues to suffer from the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Millions of people have been infected, hundreds of thousands have been hospitalized, and tens of thousands have died. In North America, at the time of this writing, nearly 130,000 individuals have died. The world economy has suffered greatly, and, as a result, many around the world are now unemployed and unable to care for their families. In the midst of all of this, we in the Christian Reformed Church in North America, especially those of us in the United States, are living through arguably the worst social and racial crisis of our lifetime.

As Christians, what are we to do?

Our situation is not a surprise to God. In our sermons and Bible studies, it is often pointed out that the Bible is replete with stories of difficulty, suffering, and death because our world is utterly broken by the ravages of sin. And God is not surprised that our world is sick. God is not surprised that we are in need of salvation. And because God dearly loves us—and indeed the whole world—he sent his incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, to be our Savior, Lord, and mediator.

“When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous

do?” The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne. —Psalm 11:3-4

In the midst of our circumstances, we are called to praise God. The response to the psalmist's question is not only that we lament, though it is good that we do; the response must also include recognition of who God is and ultimately praise his name. This is the essence of worship.

This issue of *Living the Call* focuses on Gospel Proclamation and Worship. It is for this that we have been created. Wise leaders in the church have even said that the main purpose of humanity is “to glorify God and enjoy him forever” (Westminster Catechism, Q&A 1; see Isa. 43:7; 1 Cor. 10:31).

I will praise you, Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever. For great is your love toward me; you have delivered me from the depths, from the realm of the dead. —Psalm 86:12-13

Even the Teacher in the book of Ecclesiastes, after trying every aspect of sensuality and earthly delights, at the end of his experimentation had to confess that at the conclusion of the matter people must fear (honor, awe,



Calvin Theological Seminary

Calvin Theological Seminary continues to serve the church by equipping individuals for biblically faithful and contextually effective ministry of the Word. As the 2019-20 academic year comes to an end, we reflect on how God has faithfully shepherded, provided, and carried us through the good as well as the challenging times, especially amid the COVID-19 outbreak. With gratitude to God, we share some highlights of our year below.

Commencement 2020

The commencement ceremony this year was unusual and unique! Instead of gathering with graduates for breakfast and proceeding to the Covenant Fine Arts Center, we had a wonderful drive-through graduation ceremony in which students were flanked by and cheered on by our community of faculty and staff. While maintaining social distance, the students had an opportunity for a picture with the seminary president at the end of the drive through. Altogether, 61 students graduated, representing the countries of Brazil, Canada, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Kenya, South Korea, and the United States. Congratulations, class of 2020!

New Degree and Certificate Programs

This academic year, Calvin Seminary developed and launched a number of new programs to respond to the current needs of people who are seeking to be or who are already in ministry. Beginning in fall 2020, we will



Drive-Through Commencement

welcome a cohort of 12 students from across the U.S. to our new *Doctor of Ministry (DMin)* program. The DMin program is designed to fit the life and ministry of students and is tailored to serve both the needs and the schedules of pastors and ministry leaders. In collaboration with Christian Schools International (CSI) we are also offering a 15-credit-hour certificate in Bible Instruction with required courses in Integrating Faith and Teaching and in Teaching the Bible. The completion of this certificate can lead to a master of arts degree in Ministry Leadership with additional credit hours. Finally, under the umbrella of Ministry in a COVID-Shaped World, we are offering a selection of fully online, one-credit graduate courses designed to support churches and leaders in the challenging COVID-19 context. Follow this link to explore the course offerings: calvinseminary.edu/academics/covid-19-courses.

Loving Your Neighbor 2020 (LYN2020) Conference, July 6-7, 2020

The LYN2020 conference this year focuses on “forming citizens of God’s kingdom in prison and upon reentry.” Offered fully online, the conference will discuss the contexts of incarceration in the U.S. and Canada, education in prison (focusing on the Handlon Correctional Facility in Ionia, Mich.), and its impact on students in prisons and as they reenter society, offering insights on how churches can respond. Session presenters include *Rev. Dominique Dubois Gilliard*, Dr. Todd Cioffi, a panel of Calvin University and Calvin Seminary faculty, and a panel of students from the Handlon Correctional Facility. We will also host a discussion of the movie *Just Mercy* based on the book by Bryan Stevenson. *Come and join us!*

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Tools You Can Use

Resound Podcasts

calvinseminary.edu/the-table/resound-podcast

Center for Excellence in Preaching

cep.calvinseminary.edu/

The Table provides a variety of ministry resources:

calvinseminary.edu/the-table

Church Resources

calvinseminary.edu/church-resources

Calvin Prison Initiative

calvin.edu/prison-initiative/

CTS Academic Programs

calvinseminary.edu/academics

Worship Ministries



Meeting of Worship Ministries' Advisory Team and Endorsed Coaches, March 2020

The experience of the past few months has been like no other. As churches and individuals have grappled with the effects of COVID-19, our worship leaders have had to step up without preparation to lead in new ways, learning new technology and skills and implementing them at the same time. Our worship leaders have also been called on to lead congregants in lament for lost opportunities, jobs, and all too many deaths.

As I've had the opportunity to talk with worship folk, I have been struck by how many have said worship planning and leading take longer now than they did prior to COVID-19 closings. Every system, routine, and policy that had been in place needed to be rethought. Decision fatigue is real. We've asked a lot from our worship leaders, and they have risen to the challenge—and continue to do so as the context for our worship as individuals, households, families, and small groups remains very fluid. Be sure to express your gratitude to them!

I am so very grateful for the relationships, networks, and systems that have been developed over the past six years since Worship Ministries began, because they have become a support structure for us in this difficult time. This is evidence of God working behind the scenes—always ahead of us, always guiding us. For example, on

the day in March when church services were beginning to be canceled, our Endorsed Coaches were meeting; we scrapped the afternoon agenda and began to work on creating resources especially for Holy Week and Easter. These resources, along with many others garnered from local congregations, were then posted on the Network. Questions were asked and answered on our Facebook page. Church Juice staff offered tech support. Prayer groups formed. Additional webinars were created.

Endorsed Coaches

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Worship Ministries functioned exactly as it should. We gathered and disseminated resources and wisdom. We utilized the gifts of worship leaders in the local church. We listened to and prayed for and with them. Our office may be small, but the CRCNA is full of gifted individuals ready to serve and support each other. God is great, and this is a beautiful thing to behold.

As we continue to deal with COVID-19 and all its challenges along with the growing call to address issues of racism and justice, we will continue supporting your worship leaders, creating opportunities for mutual growth and encouragement. If you have a question or a need,

email our staff or a regional representative, and consider utilizing one of our endorsed coaches. And to find out about the newest resources and opportunities, be sure to sign up for our monthly e-newsletter. Thank you!

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Tools You Can Use

Monthly e-news: sign up at crcna.org/worship

Endorsed Coaches serving worship leaders and churches: crcna.org/worship/endorsed-coaches

Webinar Library: YouTube channel with 27 videos on various worship topics (bit.ly/2ww7eSZ)

Reformed Worship: a quarterly journal for worship leaders and planners, available in print and digital formats, with a searchable archive at ReformedWorship.org

The Network: for additional resources, visit network.crcna.org/users/worship-ministries

People You Should Know Representatives Serving on Advisory Team

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Continued from p. 1

worship) God and keep his commandments (see Eccles. 12:13).

What is worship? It is not only what we do on Sunday mornings in a building! If it were, we would have missed worship for the entire time that we have not been together since the advent of COVID-19. Worship is our way of life—it should be our lifestyle—we need it like the very air we breathe—it is the way we express who we are as Christians as we live in the reality of the continual presence of God.

In the stories presented here, you will see examples of and experience the presence of God as you are reminded to worship him continually in every situation, in every way we engage in ministry, as we pray continually, and in every way we are engaged in the world—to God be the glory!

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Calvin Institute of Christian Worship

The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship is an interdisciplinary study and ministry center located at Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary dedicated to the study and renewal of worship around the world. We offer a wide range of practical resources and scholarly works for congregational leaders, pastors, teachers of worship, students, artists, and all interested in worship.

We highlight **several resources from our website** (worship.calvin.edu) to encourage and sustain you in your ministry work during these difficult days of coronavirus pandemic and racial strife:

- **COVID-19 and Worship Resources** worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/covid-19-and-worship-resources-for-churches-adapting-to-social-isolation
- **Anti-Racism in the Renewing of Christian Worship** worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/anti-racism-in-the-renewing-of-christian-worship-2020
- *Stilling the Storm: Worship and Congregational Leadership in Difficult Times* worship.calvin.edu/resources/publications/stilling-the-storm
- *Caring Worship: Helping Worship Leaders Provide Pastoral Care through the Liturgy* worship.calvin.edu/resources/publications/caring-worship-helping-worship-leaders-provide-pastoral-care-through-the-liturgy/
- *Shaping Worship During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Offering Hope at Grace and Peace Christian Reformed Church, Chicago* worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/shaping-worship-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-offering-hope-at-grace-and-peace-christian-reformed-church-chicago-illinois/

[resource-library/shaping-worship-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-offering-hope-at-grace-and-peace-christian-reformed-church-chicago-illinois/](http://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/shaping-worship-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-offering-hope-at-grace-and-peace-christian-reformed-church-chicago-illinois/)

- Lora Copley and Elizabeth Vander Haagen on Family Prayer and Worship worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/lora-copley-and-elizabeth-vander-haagen-on-family-prayer-and-worship/
- Lora Copley on Preparing Families for Sunday Worship worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/lora-copley-on-preparing-families-for-sunday-worship/

In 2020 we awarded **40 Vital Worship Grants to worshipping communities** from many denominations and traditions across North America, including four Christian Reformed churches:

- Celebration Fellowship at the Handlon prison worship.calvin.edu/grants/celebration-fellowship/
- First CRC of Toronto worship.calvin.edu/grants/first-crc-of-toronto/
- First Hamilton (Ont.) CRC worship.calvin.edu/grants/first-hamilton-christian-reformed-church/
- The Road Church, Calgary, Alberta worship.calvin.edu/grants/the-road-church/

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The Network

This year The Network (crcna.org/Network) is celebrating a big milestone—its 10-year anniversary! Over the past decade, The Network has become one of the Christian Reformed Church in North America’s most visited websites. And traffic jumped 50 percent this spring, as people shared resources and questions about how to continue church ministry during the pandemic.

Organized into local church ministry topics, The Network connects deacons, pastors, worship leaders, children’s ministry volunteers, and many others.

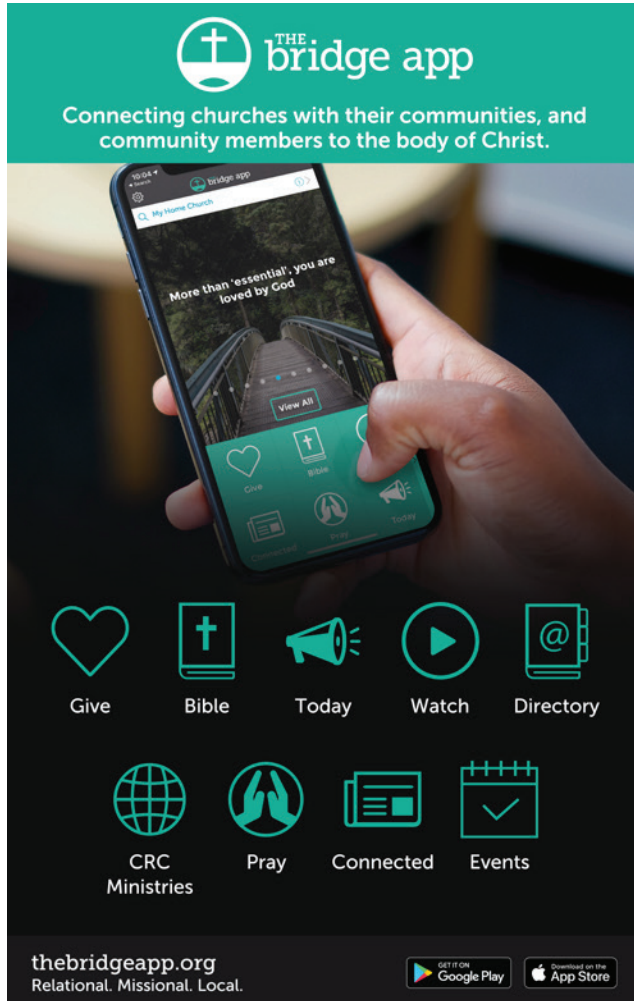
Dozens of ministry Q&As, blogs, resources, and church positions posted each week offer both practical help and peer encouragement.

The value of the site comes from the participation of the community—that is, from *your* participation. Thank you!

Questions? Email network@crcna.org for a quick response.

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The Bridge App



As local churches responded to public worship being suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic, many Canadian CRC congregations quickly turned to the Bridge App as a way to receive offerings for the church budget and local ministry causes.

A comparison of the two months prior to the COVID-19 lockdown to the first two months afterward shows that the number of churches actively using the Bridge App doubled during the lockdown. The dollar value of donations processed through the app increased nearly tenfold.

In early June, the Bridge App also became one of few smartphone apps that enable users in Canada to give to their local church through ACH (Automated Clearing House) transactions that come directly from the donor's bank account, with no fee to the user or church.

The Bridge App also provided other practical and effective ways to stay connected during the time of physical isolation by enabling churches to instantly reach their members with announcements, prayers, devotions, and blog posts from pastors, along with a platform for streaming worship services.

The Bridge App aims to be relational, missional, and local in a distinctively CRC way and with emphasis on the local congregation.

- The home screen appearance can be customized for the local church, and key functions can be enabled, disabled, and arranged based on the preference of your congregation.
- The Watch function allows for worship services to be streamed from Zoom, Facebook, Livestream, or YouTube.
- Prayer requests, events, and announcements can be easily posted and instantly shared to either “verified members” or made “public.”
- The Give function allows giving to the church budget, customizable local causes, and CRC ministries via credit card or directly from the donor's bank account, with recurring gifts optional for causes such as the church budget.
- *Today* devotions from BTGMI are available daily, and the Bible can be accessed in various languages and versions.
- An always-up-to-date version of your local church directory (including photos) can be turned on or off, depending on the preference of the local congregation.

The Bridge App is made available and supported for CRCs in Canada through Ministry in Canada and is available to U.S. congregations directly through the app developer, Extreme Technology.

IN CANADA—for additional information, please contact bridgeapp@crcna.org.

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Gospel Proclamation and Worship: A Classis Story

Classis is a community of churches that support one another, discern together, and live into a collective ministry calling. Worship and gospel proclamation are not peripheral to this but rather are foundational. More and more, classes are exploring ways for their meetings and their life together to be shaped by worship and the gospel.

In some cases, classes are looking at their meeting agendas as a form of liturgy. They wonder how the meeting itself can be an act of worship, how such things as roll call could be seen as a call to worship, reports from churches as a time of communal prayer (or, at times, a time of repentance and assurance), budget discussions as a time of offering, discerning discussions as times of listening for God’s voice, closing as a time of sending and benediction. Connecting different parts of the meeting to parts of the liturgy of worship can remind us that we are not gathered together simply as an act of administration or business but as a community of worship.

Classes are also looking for ways to infuse their meetings and other gatherings with worship and prayer. Classis Eastern Canada recently held its Day of Encouragement, which was not just worship-shaped but also taught new music and covered the themes for the day in worship. Classis Lake Superior, like some other classes, meets over two days and spends the evening time in worship and hearing a preached message shared with the delegates by a local pastor or a classis presenter. Classis Quinte has invited prayer leaders from their churches to be at the classis meeting as an intercessory team to pray for each delegate and church throughout the day.

New opportunities are budding and growing as well. In the Central U.S. region, four classes (Lake Superior, Wisconsin, Central Plains, Northcentral Iowa) joined together for a prayer meeting that included shared devotionals and praying together. Classis Zeeland has been

having Sunday-evening meetings among their churches. In Classis Greater Los Angeles, one of the leaders has hosted several worship events and learning opportunities based on his doctoral studies regarding the Psalms and worship gatherings with an Indian and Pakistani congregation—all with a passionate conviction that music will bring people together. In the context of COVID-19 closings, we’re also seeing churches support one another with shared preaching, technology support, and learning what worship can look like in a time of physical distancing (and beyond).

Churches are better off when they are part of a community. Worship and gospel proclamation are core to being the type of gospel-centered community we’re called to be.

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Help is Only a Call, Click, or Chat Away



Click Call Chat

We’re making it easier for you and your church to access CRC resources. If you’re involved in Gospel Proclamation and Worship work or another part of church ministry, and you are wondering if your denomination can help with something, just CALL (800-272-5125), CLICK (crcna.org/Resources), or CHAT (from any page on crcna.org). We’re here to serve, and we would love to connect you with people and resources to support your ministry.

Want to Learn More?

Stay up to date on what the CRCNA is doing in Gospel Proclamation & Worship through:

- **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 “Worship”, or review available resources
- **Find Resources** — Search thousands of resources available at crcna.org/resources

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