



Christian  
Reformed  
Church

2021 Issue 3

# 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

In a sermon I preached recently, I reminded the congregation that we are more loved than we can imagine and more cared for than we can determine. What an amazing truth this is to grab hold of and praise God for!

I also reminded the congregation that we have been given a mission from God that is ever being revealed. For many of us this part can be challenging. We struggle to see how God might be using us within today's difficult times.

The reality of COVID-19 is still with us, and even though many of our North American communities are beginning to see relief due to the arrival of vaccines, we also see inequity of access to vaccines around the world. In India and other parts of southern Asia the pandemic is ever worsening, and we can feel powerless to help.

Similarly, for some of us, the ongoing sting of racism and other societal ills remains strong. We may feel compelled to lament as the Israelite exiles did in the Old Testament, *"How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"* (Psalm 137:4)

How can we worship in the midst of tragedy and pain? I think the answer to this can also be found in the Psalms.

Psalm 138:7 encourages us with these words, *"Though I walk in the midst of*

*trouble, you preserve my life. You stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes; with your right hand you save me."*

As we strive to walk humbly with God, we can not only endure, but thrive — knowing that he is with us.

We worship an incarnate God, who chose to become human so that he could understand our pains and challenges. We serve a risen savior, who has overcome sin and death! We praise his holy name and give him all the glory, regardless of COVID-19, social unrest, political disagreements, or denominational disputes. Through it all, God is faithful, he is Lord!

In this issue of "Living the Call" we explore the various ways that the ministries of the CRCNA can assist you with our call to Gospel proclamation and worship. We are called to worship as an act of obedience and an act of love, in good times and in bad. Whether we lament, confess, seek direction, or give God praise, the act of worship feeds and nourishes our souls. To God be the glory!

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## Calvin Theological Seminary



Sarah VerMerris, an MDiv student at Calvin Theological Seminary

For nearly sixteen years the Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary has been resourcing pastors with fresh ideas, vibrant illustrations, and textual insights, all in the service of making the task of writing sermons a bit easier. In the past year, as pastors navigated the pandemic, resources like the ones found on the Center's website became even more valuable.

Each week, five new sermon starter articles are posted: four in English for the four Bible texts chosen by the Revised Common Lectionary for the upcoming Sunday, and one sermon article in Spanish. The writing team for the Center includes experienced and active preachers who have a good sense for what busy pastors need to help pull together sermons week after week.

Thanks to the generosity of Lilly Endowment, the Center has also been running a number of Peer Learning Groups for the past seven years. These groups of ten to twelve pastors meet regularly to share preaching challenges and come up with creative solutions to meet such challenges. During the time of COVID, these Peer Learning Groups also became vital lifelines for stressed pastors in need of collegial support.

As the world slowly emerges from the pandemic, the Center's continuing education seminars will begin again as well, offering pastors one-week opportunities to meet with peers to discuss topics vital to the preaching task.

God's people are always hungry to hear God's Word proclaimed with fresh vibrancy. The Center for Excellence in Preaching is grateful to be able to help pastors achieve such sermons.

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### Tools You Can Use

Visit [cep.calvinseminary.edu](http://cep.calvinseminary.edu) to see new and current sermon starter articles to spark creative thinking and visit the archive to search for sermon ideas on hundreds of key biblical texts.

Want to fine-tune your preaching?

Visit [cep.calvinseminary.edu/video-posts/](http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/video-posts/) to view a number of 4-5 minute teaching videos giving tips and a variety of sermon topics from preachers like Meg Jenista, David Beelen, Scott Hoezee, Mary Hulst, John Rottman and Peter Jonker.

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## Worship Ministries



A January webinar was one of several opportunities for worship leaders to get together to share challenges they are facing and resources they've found helpful.

This year we were thrilled to add Katie Roelofs and Jeremy Simpson to our staff, adding greatly to the skills, knowledge, and diversity of our team. With their leadership a number of conversational webinars have occurred: one on multicultural worship, another reflecting on the PBS special *The Black Church*, and a third with Rev. Kevin Adams exploring his book *The Gospel in a Handshake: Framing Worship for Mission*.

Kevin Adams' book also was one of the books chosen for our Peer Learning Book Groups along with *Worship Together in Your Church as in Heaven* by Nikki Lerner and Josh Davis. This year we had 10 groups that met online including one for church planters. We also formed a cohort of CRC worship leaders to participate in a *Certificate in Worship Leadership* program. If you'd like information on either of these opportunities, please send us an email.

Knowing that our worship leaders are experiencing a great deal of fatigue and even burnout we have worked to support them in different ways. We held a webinar on Self Care and have been holding weekly

roundtables, opportunities for worship leaders to get together to share challenges they are facing and resources they've found helpful, ask questions, address tech issues, and celebrate the good things God is doing in the midst of the pandemic. We also continue to offer an online retreat experience that has had over 80 participants. *Moments Virtual Retreat* was created by CRC artist Regina Jupp, Lombard, IL, and is available to anyone for free at <https://reginajupp.com/retreat>.

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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#### Staff

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### Tools You Can Use

**Monthly enews:** sign up at [crcna.org/worship](http://crcna.org/worship)

**Endorsed Coaches** serving worship leaders and churches: [crcna.org/worship/endorsed-coaches](http://crcna.org/worship/endorsed-coaches)

**Webinar Library:** 30 webinars on various worship topics are available on our YouTube channel.  
[bit.ly/2ww7eSZ](http://bit.ly/2ww7eSZ)

**Reformed Worship:** a quarterly journal for worship leaders and planners available in print and digitally. Subscribe at [ReformedWorship.org](http://ReformedWorship.org)

**Peer Learning groups** form annually in the fall around various worship-related topics: a great way to network with other worship leaders.

**CRC Worship Ministries Facebook:** encouragement and connection for worship leaders, planners, and pastors in the CRC.

**The Network:** for additional resources go to [network.crcna.org/users/worship-ministries](http://network.crcna.org/users/worship-ministries)

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## Calvin Institute of Christian Worship



Some of the recipients of Worshipping Community grants

The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship (CICW) would like to highlight a new publication and 25 new Vital Worship Grants projects.

*Morning and Evening Prayers* (Eerdmans, 2021), by CICW staff member Neal Plantinga, is for anyone seeking fellowship with God—from those who have prayed their whole lives, to those who have yet to find the words. Each prayer expresses some essential Christian longing on behalf of self and others—for faith, hope, love, wisdom, gratitude, peace—yet also makes space for any state of heart or mind by rejoicing with all who rejoice and weeping with all who weep. We are very grateful for Neal’s pastoral writing. See <https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/publications/morning-and-evening-prayers/>

25 Worshipping Community grants were awarded on May 1, 2021, as part of the Vital Worship Grants Program. These projects have a variety of emphases, many of which have been shaped by a year in pandemic—an exploration of lament, grief, and resilience; intergenerational worship in the online

environment; and pilgrimage through the Christian Year as spiritual formation—but all work to deepen people’s understanding of worship and strengthen practices of public worship and faith formation.

This year’s recipients include 15 congregations, two colleges, two seminaries, and six other ministries. They also represent 14 Christian denominations, in addition to some interdenominational and ecumenical projects, 16 states, and one Canadian province. Two of this year’s 25 grants went to Christian Reformed churches: Prairie City CRC in Prairie City, Iowa, and Seattle Dream Church in Seattle, Washington. See [worship.calvin.edu/grants/past.html](http://worship.calvin.edu/grants/past.html)

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## The Bridge App

As technology continually changes the ways we communicate, it brings challenges as well as new and exciting opportunities for the ministry of the local church. To assist local churches as they explore and embrace these opportunities, the Christian Reformed Church partnered with Extreme Technology to develop *The Bridge App* for Canadian congregations with a focus on being Relational, Missional, and Local.

The Bridge App enables churches to instantly deliver Announcements, Prayers, and Events. A membership Directory with essential contact information is conveniently available at all times, as well as the Bible in numerous versions and languages, the *Today* devotional, access to CRCNA resources, and a Watch function for viewing online worship and other videos.

The Bridge App is one of the few smartphone apps that enable users in Canada to give to their local church budget or other causes through credit card as well as by ACH (Automated Clearing House) transactions that come directly from the donor's bank account.

While the pandemic has resulted in many challenges for local churches, it has also been encouraging to hear how The Bridge App has served as a timely solution.

Grant Cassidy from First Toronto (ON) CRC has regularly posted through The Bridge App's Prayer function. "During COVID, The Bridge App has been even more valuable. We hold a Sunday Zoom call and then immediately post the members' thanksgivings and requests," says Grant. "Everyone is able to pray for those who need it. It is great that we can start right away and not wait for the church bulletin. We can also see answered prayer."

Jenny Eastwood in Burnaby, BC, says the Directory function has helped members of New Westminster CRC to stay connected. "It was very easy to set up. We only needed to prepare a spreadsheet of our existing members' database to have our directory uploaded," she says. "Our seniors especially love that they can search for a friend's phone number, address, and email directly from the app: no need to carry a directory around."

Ancaster (Ont.) CRC has made extensive use of the Announcement and Prayer features, says Dick Kranendonk. "The Give feature has been a blessing for our church, especially during this time of COVID-19. The amount of time needed to administer the Bridge App is minimal after the initial setup. Communication

in our church has greatly improved and members very much appreciate this service."

Doug Kuyvenhoven from Maitland River Community Church in Wingham (ON), said that prior to the COVID restrictions on worship gatherings, "as soon as we have newcomers attending regularly, we get their information and a photo, and add them to the Directory in The Bridge App. Immediately everyone using the app has their names, contact info, and a photo of them. We are in a growth spurt, so having The Bridge App has been a real blessing for our church."

Smithers (BC) CRC has been actively using The Bridge App for three years, but has benefited greatly from the Give function since the pandemic put restrictions on worship gatherings. "We have noticed that our weekly giving has continued to come in and that is in part thanks to gifts being given generously through the app each week," says treasurer Jenna Hessels. "We are also able to keep our congregation engaged and informed through announcements, worship service links and bulletins, and our church, in turn, allows us to continue to be a blessing."

Roughly two-thirds of CRCs in Canada are now using The Bridge App, and during the past year the app has processed \$3-million in donations for the local churches. For churches that are not utilizing the app, an information package is available by contacting [bridgeapp@crcna.org](mailto:bridgeapp@crcna.org).

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](mailto:bridgeapp@crcna.org).

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## Two Unsung Heroes of Classis

Ideally, every church and church leader should be able to say that they are better off because they are part of their classis. While there are a variety of ways this could be true, today I'd like to draw your attention to two specific functions of classis that relate to pastors. Both are relatively quiet and stable, and could be considered unsung administrative heroes supporting gospel proclamation and worship.

The first is what's often called a Classis Ministry Leadership Team (CMLT). These teams, by whatever specific name they go, primarily focus on supporting those preparing for, or just entering into, ordained ministry in the CRC. A significant way they offer support is through financial aid for seminary education. Rev. Shawn Brix, newly appointed Canadian Church Liaison for Calvin Seminary, has been gathering leaders of these teams together to help get a clearer sense of how this funding is best distributed, and to address some of the challenges and opportunities related to preparing for ministry. The gatherings have also provided an

opportunity to talk about the variety of ways people enter into ministry today and how CMLTs can provide the best support possible. The relatively quiet gathering and distributing of these funds makes a big difference for those preparing for ministry; several classes cover a significant portion (or full) cost of tuition.

The growing engagement in distance education and the specific focus on church planting as part of the denominational ministry plan offer a potential way for classes to consider how that pastoral education is funded in the future. A church planter or pastor has more of an opportunity to participate in seminary education while they are engaging in active ministry. Funding models that encourage active ministry leaders to pursue a seminary education during ministry rather than mostly simply in anticipation of ministry may be fruitful (including adjustments to forgivable loan options). I'd love to chat more about this with you if it strikes a chord.

The second unsung hero is classical appointments (when a classis assigns pastors in the classis to preach at a church experiencing a pastoral vacancy) and pulpit exchanges (where pastors in the classis periodically exchange places for worship). Both of these are getting less support in classis settings for a variety of reasons, but in my classis renewal work I consistently hear the high value that churches place on these opportunities. Inviting a variety of pastors via exchanges builds a sense of community (and, admittedly, gives the church the chance to hear another voice). And a church without a pastor is blessed when, by being part of a community of churches, the burden of arranging pulpit supply is shared.

Like I said, neither of these are glamorous or flashy. Some see them as outdated. But churches and church leaders experience them as significant ways that the classis supports them in gospel proclamation and worship.

**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](http://crcna.org/Resources)), or CHAT (from any page on [crcna.org](http://crcna.org)). We're here to serve, and we would love to connect you with people and resources to support your ministry.

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*(with the support of Shawn Brix, Canadian Church Liaison with Calvin Seminary)*