



Christian
Reformed
Church

2020 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 I work on this "Living the Call" issue, I am cognizant of the fact that so much has changed in a very short amount of time. Just a few weeks ago, I was appointed to serve as acting Executive Director of the CRCNA following Steve Timmerman's resignation. Little did any of us know that within days of that decision, the CRCNA — and the world — would also be reeling with how to respond to the COVID-19 virus.

This issue of "Living the Call" is focused on Mercy & Justice. I think that's rather timely. While COVID-19 does not discriminate in who it infects, this virus is unjust in its impact on people. We may all be facing similar directives to physically distance ourselves from each other while we find other ways to connect. But, we also know that the elderly and immune-system compromised are the ones who are most vulnerable to severe complications if they are infected.

While we may all be trying to go on with our lives in remote ways, we know that small business owners, hourly employees, the homeless, and underemployed are feeling the economic and social impacts of this crisis most of all.

In the face of these and other challenges, the church has a renewed responsibility to be agents of mercy and justice to the vulnerable among us. On the following pages, you'll read updates from various CRCNA ministries that are involved in equipping and supporting you and your congregation in this call. I encourage you to prayerfully consider how you can get involved.

Most of these updates were written before the impacts of COVID-19 were fully known and felt. I encourage you to also visit crcna.org/COVID-19 to find the latest resources, tools, and support.

I leave you with this thought: what if we all took advantage of our time "socially distancing" to renew our commitment to spiritual disciplines such as prayer and Bible reading? What would the world look like if we then intentionally applied what we read and heard?

"For the word of the Lord is right and true; he is faithful in all he does. The Lord loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love." Psalm 33:4-5

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World Renew



World Renew was founded on justice and the belief that God calls us to pursue that justice for the most vulnerable communities all over the world. Over the years, the actions World Renew has taken to work towards peace and justice have grown in scope and boldness.

Responding to the injustice of hunger and extreme poverty, World Renew reached nearly one million people last year, creating opportunities for each person to grow into stories of greater strength and hope. World Renew responded to conflict and disasters in 24 countries, assisting the most vulnerable with emergency food assistance, clean water, shelter, livelihood rehabilitation, and long-term home repair and rebuilding (worldrenew.net/disasters).

World Renew's community development programs were active in 1330 communities in the key areas of food security, economic opportunity, community health, and peace and justice (worldrenew.net/communitydevelopment). Participants in World Renew programs were able to build new health, agriculture, livelihood, and leadership skills that improved their lives in the long term.

One story of justice comes from Nigeria, which tallied the highest number of people living in extreme poverty in the world. Among those counted is Nvou Gyang and her four sons. Missing from that tally is Nvou's husband, a farmer who tragically lost his life to armed attackers in 2014. This story of loss is not unusual in Nigeria where violence between competing ethnic groups often erupts. World Renew has walked with Nvou and her sons in their grief by providing trauma healing and empowering Nvou to pursue better economic opportunities through a savings and loans group. As Nvou recovers from her trauma, she is better able emotionally to care for her sons and with profits from her small banana-selling business, she can now afford to send them to school.

As we give thanks to God for these changed stories, improved futures, and transformed lives, we are also grateful for all those from our Christian Reformed Church community who have joined with us in our work of mercy and justice.

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Canadian Indigenous Ministry Committee



Fall committee meetings held at the Indigenous Family Centre Winnipeg.



Justice and Reconciliation Mobilizer Shannon Perez speaking before a KAIROS Blanket Exercise.

In a year with many ongoing conversations about reconciliation and Indigenous-Settler relationships the Canadian Indigenous Ministry Committee (CIMC) continues to offer resources and support to churches on the journey. 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 in Canada, the process of

reconciliation with Indigenous peoples is an important way in which the Canadian CRC can work toward shalom.

Deep discussions are part of the nature of the work of CIMC. Throughout the year we've discussed topics like contextualization, syncretism and self-determination. This year these discussions resulted in a video series on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. (Check it out here: <http://bit.ly/UNDRIPResourceCIMC>) Other projects included a book club pilot run by Justice and Reconciliation Mobilizer Shannon Perez in her home community!

CIMC continues to offer and encourage the KAIROS Blanket Exercise. The exercise has participants walk through various stories in Canadian history to arrive at a better understanding of Indigenous-Settler relations. This continues to be a rich experience for participants. One participant told us: "It was really powerful to see the impact that colonialism has had on Indigenous peoples in Canada. I knew a lot of the facts, but this exercise made me feel it for the first time. It helped my head knowledge become heart knowledge. I want to continue to advocate for Indigenous rights, and find new ways to partner with my Indigenous neighbors to move towards reconciliation and equality. Thank you for providing this opportunity!"

As the committee looks ahead in the coming year we're excited about the opportunities to connect with churches. Planning is already underway for the Youth Ambassador of Reconciliation program, which equips CRC youth through 1:1 mentoring and a weeklong immersive trip happening in Winnipeg. More information is available at this link. <http://bit.ly/YARP2020>

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The Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue



Centre for Public Dialogue Staff and Advocacy Fellow in the House of Commons.



Faith In Action Workshop held in Edmonton Alberta.

Throughout this year the Centre for Public Dialogue has been working hard across the country to encourage active Christian citizenship, tackling critical issues facing Canadian society from a Reformed perspective.

This has been particularly important during an election year and as new MPs take their seats in Parliament.

We've been excited to support churches from coast to coast. For example, we've met for Faith in Action Workshops in Edmonton, AB and Journey with Me workshops in Truro, NS. You connected with us in Guelph, ON through university campus groups and through livestream for events like Understanding Our Climate Crisis.

We've heard from folks that these connections are encouraging and empowering. One participant told us that an event, "encouraged me to contact government people because it isn't so difficult after all! And it helped me understand the need for contacting officials; there are so many needs out there. It is our Christian duty to speak up."

Through these relationships, hundreds of letters and emails have been sent to our government representatives as part of our Christian witness and effort to promote policies that create shalom in our nation. We continue to advocate to close the education gap for kids in First Nation communities through our Education Together campaign. We've also responded to changing legislation including on the issue of Medical Assistance in Dying. We partnered with Chaplaincy and Care, and Disability Concerns to provide resources and action steps on this issue.

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 pay a visit to your church and community! Thank you for your continuing support in God's call to seek justice and speak hope.

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Disability Concerns



Disability Concerns continues to work with churches across North America to ensure that we are living into our mission: Everybody Belongs. Everybody Serves. We connect with Regional Disability Advocates, equipping and supporting

them so that they in turn can reach out to the Church Disability Advocates to offer support specific to their community. We encourage our advocates to connect with one another, learning from one another.

This past year, Pastor Ken Vander Horst from Smithers CRC in British Columbia, reached out to Disability Concerns to explore ways to support a family with children living with significant needs. Together, Disability Concerns staff, a Regional Disability Advocate, and Pastor Ken discussed what it means to be in community as a church body. Sometimes we can have traditional ideas of what worship should look like, without always making room for the fact that God makes us all unique, and we all have different ways of expressing ourselves.

At Smithers CRC, when Pastor Ken leads the call to worship, what it means for Hans, one of 3 siblings with high needs, is that it is time to approach the pastor and give him a “high-five”. As Pastor Ken remarks, it is “a wonderful, sincere, and perfectly acceptable way of greeting someone in our community — and praise God! — in our church services as well.” It means offering Hans space to move around during the service. In addition, the church has plans to hire a “worship service care attendant” who can respond to the very specific needs of Hans and his siblings as they worship alongside their church community. Smithers CRC demonstrates a true understanding of what it means to “all belong”.

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Office of Social Justice



Members of Neland Ave CRC fill out postcards to send to their representatives.

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 as we worked to provide resources to congregations on social justice issues identified by synod we give thanks for the areas we see justice flowing in our churches.

This year we continued to emphasize our Church Between Borders workshops. This three part interactive workshop sparks thought and discussion for groups interested in engaging immigration from a Biblical perspective. Understanding policies on immigration and how they impact people on the ground is a good first step in creating better structures for flourishing. We continue to hear feedback from participants like, "Church Between Borders takes away the politics and gets at the human and Christian elements of this issue."

Throughout the year we provide weekly calls to prayer issues through Do Justice prayers. We were encouraged by feedback from folks including this note, "Thank you for your words!!!! Beautifully written prayers!!!! Finding them was such a joy." We are thankful for churches' engagement with important issues impacting our society.



Young adults meet with Rep. Gary J. Palmer about immigration reform.

At the same time we've experienced the tension and increased polarization in our society. This reinforces our need to connect with churches and communities at a grassroots level. Letters, emails, and tweets from active citizens will continue to speak into developing policies that create shalom for our local and global neighbours. Our regional mobilizers are excited to engage with congregations across the country and to help act upon the convictions of the local church.

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Office of Race Relations



The Office of 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.

One of these tools is the Blanket Exercise workshop — a 90-minute event that helps participants understand many injustices suffered by Indigenous peoples and why racial reconciliation is needed. The workshop demonstrates how to take steps toward reconciliation and building new relationships.

Advocate Viviana Cornejo shared about a recent Blanket Exercise she helped to coordinate, where the prayerful promotional efforts leading up to this particular workshop were so effective that it ended up being presented at two different churches. In addition, the local Christian middle and high schools held their own Blanket Exercise workshops. So what had started out as one planned event blossomed into four over a long weekend, and it was a joy to hear how blessed many of the participants had been through the event.

Another resource used for training is a two-day workshop called “Racism: Looking Back, Moving Forward.” During the event, participants learn about the foundation of racism and whiteness by putting

together a timeline that helps to see how racism became instituted. A recent participant had this to say about their experience: “The biblical background was great for framing the discussion, and the timeline and history were so necessary! The cultural discussion helped bring up real questions on how to decipher differences and what to do with them moving forward.”

The Office of Race Relations recognizes that participating in a workshop and learning the history of racism are very important steps, but they are only the first steps in a long journey. The next few steps involve getting organized, promoting, and encouraging more conversations on race, becoming a facilitator in these conversations, and much more as we continue on the journey toward racial reconciliation together. Our staff continues to help and resource church leaders, school principals, community leaders, and individuals to take the bold steps so that they can teach and guide others on becoming racial healers.

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Safe Church Ministry



Safe Church Ministry equips congregations in abuse awareness, prevention, and response, helping to build communities where each person is respected and protected, and where the response to abuse is compassion and justice that foster healing.

The majority of our work is done by volunteers in churches and in classes throughout North America. **An increasing number of classes have established the position of a Safe Church Coordinator as a part of their classis structure.** Many of these Coordinators are paid an annual stipend by the classis. Safe Church offers seed money in the form of a one-time grant, to help a classis establish this position. A series of articles posted to The Network, Updates from Safe Church Coordinators, provides a window to show what is happening with safe church ministry in various places, and also facilitates learning from one another.

A webinar series is underway called, **Connect, Collaborate and Coordinate to End Abuse.** These webinars are designed to help equip and support our Safe Church Coordinators and others who are actively involved in safe church ministry in their own contexts. The webinars will lead up to our fall conference, of the same name. This biennial, bi-national conference for

Coordinators will be held Oct 22-24 in Grand Rapids. We are planning on having Boz Tchividjian, founder of GRACE, (Godly Response to Abuse in Christian Environments) as a featured speaker. He will address our conference, as well speak at an event, which will be open to the public.

Safe Church has also approved nine mini-grants in 2020 (up to \$1200 each). These **mini-grants help fund locally planned and implemented events and projects**, six in Canada and three in the U.S. to be held during 2020. The funds help make a variety of initiatives possible; a few examples from 2020 include a multi-classis conference, a networking event, and training in Restorative Practices, **Circle of Grace**, and how to talk about sexuality with your children.

Online resources are a critical part of our work. You can find Safe Church on our *website*, on *The Network*, and on *Facebook*. Over 600 people receive our e-newsletter every other month. Over 30 people have committed to pray regularly for Safe Church and receive a monthly prayer guide. Pray with us for more people to find their calling serving in safe church ministry. It's up to all of us to make our churches and communities safer for everyone and to end abuse.

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People You Should Know

Justice and Reconciliation Mobilizer **Shannon Perez** has worked for the CRC since 2013. Before that she was a CIMC member! If you are on a reconciliation journey, want to get connected to resources, or have questions Shannon is a great person to get connected with! sperez@crcna.org

Justice Mobilizer **Cindy Stover** is available to help and encourage your church in pursuit of justice. Workshops, conversations, and useful resources are all ways she can support your church. cstover@crcna.org

Volunteer and Communications Specialist, **Becky Jones** works 20 hours each week for Disability Concerns and 10 hours for Safe Church, and works out of the Canadian office. She brings an artistic background to her work as a former art therapist and volunteer coordinator at the Art Gallery of Burlington. bjones@crcna.org

Jodi Koeman is the Church with Community Coordinator — a joint position with World Renew, Pastor Church Resources and Office of Social Justice. She is eager to work with churches to assess, evaluate, and encourage them in their diaconal work. jkoeman@crcna.org

Justice Mobilizer, **Kris Van Engen**, is available to support churches who stand against poverty and injustice. He can help you find small group resources, lead immigration workshops, connect with your regional Climate Witness Project organizer and raise your voice with elected officials. kvanengen@crcna.org

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 Mercy & Justice work or another part of church ministry, and wonder if your denomination can help with something, just CALL (800-272-5125), CLICK (www.crcna.org/Resources), or CHAT (from any page on www.crcna.org). We're here to serve, and would love to connect you with people and resources to support your ministry.

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/CGflxsh>

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.