

Living the Call

A REPORT FROM THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA

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)

FAITH FORMATION

From the Executive Director's Desk

"As we preach, teach, and live out the gospel within and beyond our walls, we nurture people of all generations as they grow in the likeness of Christ Jesus."

This is the desire the Holy Spirit planted in our hearts and is expressed in the CRCNA Ministry Plan, *Our Journey 2020*. We've labelled this desired future, "Discipleship" and it is our prayer that the Spirit would empower us to live out this desire for faith formation in all of our congregations.

To assist us in this endeavor, the ministries and people of the CRCNA have put together a variety of resources. If you go to the homepage of The Network (crcna.org/Network), you can find suggestions to assist you with Parenting, Youth Ministry, Faith Nurture, Intergenerational Ministry, Young Adults and many more life and faith topics.

In other words, the goal of nurturing every generation, helping to form them more and more into Christ's likeness is an exceedingly broad task and shared by many.

In our congregations, it's not just the pastor or elders' responsibility. We all share in preaching, teaching, and living out—as the Spirit has gifted us. On the following pages, you'll find several tools and contacts to assist you in whatever role you play in the faith formation of others.

Yet, we aren't thinking broadly enough if we think faith formation is only influenced from within our congregations. Allow me to highlight two, out of several, additional important partners.

In many places where CRC congregations are located, we also find retirement homes, nursing facilities, and other services that assist seniors in their homes. These ministries reflect the calling our Lord has expressed for the diaconate in Acts 6 when widows were being overlooked. Just because a church member has reached an advanced aged doesn't mean his or her faith is complete. Residential ministries for seniors have the responsibility of providing new faith formation opportunities as these members face challenges unique to this chapter of life.

Secondly, Christian higher education continues to be a critical partner in faith development as teens move into adulthood. Christian colleges and universities teach these sons and daughters about God's sovereignty over all, implicating all areas of study and calling as this next generation is formed and prepared for leadership.

Yes, within our congregations and among our many partners in ministry the task of faith formation is before all of us. Thankfully, we are not alone, nor do we pursue this task by means of our own power. Our denomination has a rich history and significant resources that the Spirit uses to aid us in this calling through all ages and stages of life. Thanks be to God!

BY STEVEN TIMMERMANS,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Calvin College

In May 2018, Calvin College announced it would become Calvin University by 2020. That change is part of a greater vision that sees the college expanding its global influence and solidifying itself as a trusted partner for learning across religious and cultural differences and throughout the academy, the church, and the world.

While the name will change, the mission endures: to equip students to think deeply, to act justly, and to live wholeheartedly as Christ's agents of renewal in the world. This has been Calvin's sustaining mission since its founding; looking ahead, the university organization enables Calvin to build off of this mission as it thinks expansively about the populations it seeks to reach and innovatively about the ways it organizes itself to serve those populations.

As always, commitment to students is Calvin's central focus, preparing them for service to a broken world. No matter their major, each graduate of Calvin will be equipped to use their gifts for the renewing of the world in the name of Christ.

Here are a few examples of how that renewal is happening through the Calvin community in 2018-2019:

Seeking the Welfare of Every City

In May 2018, 15 Calvin Prison Initiative students received their associate's degrees from Calvin College. The program, funded entirely by private donations and grants, seeks to improve prison culture and curb recidivism rates by equipping prisoners with an education. Inmates in the program—many of whom are serving life sentences—have now found purpose through a Christ-centered education; they've found hope as the antidote to despair. Seventy-five inmates are now enrolled in the program. The inaugural class will earn their bachelor's degrees in May 2020.

Pursuing Renewal through Research

From creating a community and developing resources for those affected by rare disease to assessing and addressing microbial contamination in a large



watershed; from designing a disaster relief shelter that could withstand torrential winds to creating a theatre production that challenged the audience to consider what true forgiveness looks like; in 2018 students were equipped and empowered by their professors to discover creative and innovative solutions to complex problems.

Empowering Global Citizens

The Institute of International Education's Open Doors Report consistently ranks Calvin College as a top-five baccalaureate institution for the number of students who study abroad. This year marked Calvin's 50-year anniversary of offering off-campus programs. "Our office seeks to promote interdisciplinary learning, intercultural competence, social and emotional growth, and faith formation and spiritual development," said Don De Graaf, director of off-campus programs. "Seeing a new perspective and beginning to understand our place in the world encourages students to think about living justly and their role in bringing about God's kingdom."

DR. MICHAEL LE ROY
PRESIDENT, CALVIN COLLEGE
CALVIN.EDU

Faith Formation Ministries

Have you ever thought of our families as cross-cultural mission fields?

Children and teens live in a cultural setting significantly different from that of their parents and grandparents, and parents and grandparents are navigating faith formation challenges through unmapped territory.

Our church ministry needs to acknowledge this new reality.

Thankfully, supporting family faith formation is embedded in our DNA as Reformed followers of Christ. We see this in:

- A powerful vow that the entire congregation makes at every baptism committing the entire community to participate in discipling every child.
- Covenantal theology that gratefully receives the Lord's mercies to all generations in such a way that each generation both shares and receives blessings from all the other generations.
- Receiving the Scriptures as one unified story of God's faithfulness from creation to new creation, a story which shapes the entirety of our lives.

Faith Formation Ministries (FFM) has made three significant commitments to address this reality.

1. Reformed children's ministry matters. Synod 2018 affirmed that our children need fresh and pedagogically sound education materials to help them grow in faith. FFM has appointed Dr. Mimi Larson from Wheaton, Ill. to serve the denomination as a children's ministry catalyzer, and she has already interacted with many congregational leaders. FFM's new Children's Ministry Toolkit contains dozens of ideas, and every CRC congregation will find 1 or 2 ideas (perhaps with Mimi's help) to adapt for their own unique context.

2. Reformed youth ministry matters. Through various surveys, CRC churches have declared that strong ministry to teens and young adults is a top priority. Last year FFM appointed Ron deVries



from Edmonton, Alta. to serve as a youth ministry catalyzer. During this year, Ron has facilitated the placement of a classis-based youth ministry champion in 30 of the 48 classes, a project we hope to complete in the next two years. These champions are in touch with strong, visionary resources and serve as networkers and encouragers throughout their classes. They also provide a communication link between the local church and FFM. We're excited about the impact of this approach!

3. Reformed family ministry matters. The home is the primary location of faith nurture. Families need the church to support them! During the past year FFM has been invited by churches to facilitate workshops on family faith formation, and later this year we'll be launching an online Family Faith Formation toolkit filled with curated resources to support faith nurture both at home and in the community. This fall FFM will gather interested CRC congregations for a 14-month cohort journey to develop stronger practices and activities through which the church supports faith nurture in the home.

REV. SYD HIELEMA
DIRECTOR, FAITH FORMATION MINISTRIES
CRCNA.ORG/FAITHFORMATION

People You Should Know

American SERVE Director

Jen Rozema, jen@youthunlimited.org

Calvin College Chaplain

Mary Hulst has served as College Chaplain since 2009. She can be a resource on preaching and on millennials. calvin.edu/directory/series/mary-hulst

Calvin Institute of Christian Worship

John Witvliet is director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship and professor of worship, theology, and congregational and ministry studies at Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary. calvin.edu/directory/people/john-d-witvliet

Calvin Prison Initiative

Todd Cioffi is the co-director of the Calvin Prison Initiative, a partnership between Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary that offers up to 20 inmates in the Michigan Department of Corrections each year an opportunity to earn a bachelor's degree in ministry leadership. calvin.edu/directory/people/todd-v-cioffi

Children's Ministry Catalyzer

Mimi Larson, childrensministry@crcna.org

Faith Formation Ministries Regional Catalyzers

Regional Catalyzers (RCs) are experienced ministry leaders who are here to encourage and equip your church's faith formation leaders, lead workshops, and connect you with helpful ministry resources. Visit crcna.org/FaithFormation/coaching to find a Regional Catalyzer near you!

Youth Ministry Catalyzer and Canadian SERVE Director

Ron DeVries, youthministry@crcna.org or ron@youthunlimited.org

Youth Ministry Champions

Each Youth Ministry Champion works to empower and encourage those working on the frontlines of congregational youth ministry. Champions listen, pray, help connect, and serve as a voice on behalf of youth leaders at classis. Their desire is to strengthen youth ministry in the CRC through networking, sharing resources, and consulting. Visit crcna.org/youth to find the Youth Ministry Champion for your classis.

Classis Story:

Who's on your hope team?



"Like many CRC churches in Canada and the US, our congregations long to have their hope refreshed," said Rev. Lora Copley, who helps lead the Classis Red Mesa Leadership Development Network (pictured here) with Darleen Litson.

The LDN is comprised of Indigenous lay leaders spread out over a large area of New Mexico, Arizona and Oklahoma who meet twice a month. Recently, Dr. Syd Hielema, team leader of Faith Formation Ministries, was invited to spend a Saturday with the class to help them "refresh their hope".

Copley explained, "Our students deal with so many discouraging factors in their communities and churches that their hope gets beat up, and it's difficult to lead without hope."

Together the group explored the Emmaus journey in Luke 24. In it, hope-starved Jesus-followers have their hope restored when they unknowingly walk with their risen Savior.

Hielema pointed out that many Psalmists struggled with hope, and most of them responded with two practices: they remembered times when their hope was stronger, and they — like the Emmaus walkers — found fellow travelers for mutual hope nourishment.

Together the group did a remembering exercise, calling to mind Scripture verses that blessed them. After one woman tearfully recited from Ps. 139, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made," a gentle quiet settled over the room. It seemed to say, "Yes, we understand. So much around us seems to shout, 'you are worthless,' but the Lord silences those lies."

As the day ended, the group was invited to ponder, "Who is on your hope team? We cannot walk to Emmaus alone."

Tools You Can Use

Calvin Institute of Christian Worship — The CICW is an interdisciplinary study and ministry center located at Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary. CICW offers a wide range of practical resources and scholarly works for congregational leaders, pastors, teachers of worship, students, artists, and all interested in worship. These resources serve as tools for preparing, planning for, and leading worship as well as for studying the history, theology, and practice of worship worldwide. The website provides free resources primarily in the form of articles, audio files, slideshow and video presentations, plus links to purchase Worship Institute books, cds, and hymnals.

Calvin Shorts — Calvin Shorts is a series for global Christians who want to understand God's world better. Each book examines a single topic and suggests ways to think and act faithfully. These books are great for discussion in small groups, book clubs, and in classroom settings. Titles include: Emerging Adulthood and Faith, The Church and Religious Persecution, and Sport. Faith. Life., among other topics. calvin.edu/press/calvin-shorts/

Calvin Centers & Institutes — Calvin's centers and institutes provide the time and space for scholars to pursue robust study and research in their fields. These centers for learning further the mission of the college, contribute to local, national, and global conversations on a variety of issues from preaching to politics, and can be useful for congregations and individuals as well. calvin.edu/academics/centers-institutes/

Children and Communion — While each child's developmental path is unique, there are common patterns in how children's understanding of the Lord's Supper typically unfolds. This two-page resource summarizes those patterns from preschool through the teenage years. Visit crcna.org/FaithFormation to find this resource.

Cross Examination — In this apologetics column in *The Banner*, contributors answer basic questions that

people, often especially our youth, have about their beliefs. See thebanner.org/department/cross-examination

Digital Library — The Digital Library gives free, online access for CRC churches and members to hundreds of Faith Alive Christian Resources titles—including curriculum, Bible studies, and more. With the Digital Library, made possible by your church's support of Ministry Shares, you and everyone in your church can access hundreds of resources in a more convenient way—any time of the day or night, from anywhere, on any device connected to the web. Visit crcna.org/Library

Dwell Sunday School Curriculum — To see how DWELL can help God's big story come alive for the kids in your church, call Faith Alive at 1-800-333-8300 or visit DwellCurriculum.org for more information including downloadable samples, scope and sequence, and a video tour.

Faith Alive 2018-2020 Catalog — Visit FaithAliveResources.org/Catalog to download your own copy of the new Faith Alive catalog or to order a print copy. This new catalog features products that support faith formation for people of all ages, from preschoolers to adults, including children's ministry and Sunday school curriculum, youth group resources, small group studies, resources for worship planning, products to support church leaders, and much more!

Faith Formation Ministries "Ten Ways" Tools — This popular and growing series of one-page resources shares ten easy, practical ideas that provide a springboard for conversation, training, and planning around various faith formation challenges. Visit crcna.org/FaithFormation to access all of our "Ten Way" tools.

Faith Formation Ministries Toolkits — Our toolkits are online resource collections that provide dozens of easy, practical ministry ideas. We compile them with an eye for what might work well in a CRC church, then organize them so you can easily find

Tools You Can Use Continued

resources and ideas that fit your needs. Our available toolkits include: The Building Blocks of Faith toolkit, Children's Ministry toolkit, Faith Storytelling toolkit, The Intergenerational Church toolkit, Professing Our Faith toolkit, Welcoming Children to the Lord's Supper toolkit, and Pastor's Spiritual Vitality toolkit. Visit crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits to access all of our toolkits.

Hymnary — *Hymnary.org* is an online hymn and worship music database for worship leaders, hymnologists, and amateur hymn lovers alike. At *Hymnary.org* you can search or browse hymns by title, tune, meter, key, scripture reference, and more.

Reformed Basics — What does "Reformed" mean anyway? Explore this through a compilation of previous *Banner* articles by award-winning writer and former *Banner* editor Rev. Len Vander Zee on topics including election, the Trinity, original sin, and more. Includes discussion questions for personal study, small groups and church adult education. Visit thebanner.org/study-series

Reformation Themes: Commemorating the 500th Anniversary — October 2017 marked the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, an event that changed the course of Western history. This award-winning collection from *The Banner* includes a

series of articles focusing on each of the Reformation's "five solas"—Scripture alone, faith alone, Christ alone, grace alone, and glory to God alone—along with a retrospective by Dr. Karin Maag, "The Reformation: What Did We Gain? What Did We Lose?". Includes discussion questions for personal study, small groups and church adult education. Visit thebanner.org/study-series

Spiritual Characteristics of Children and Teens — While each person's spiritual journey is unique, there are common patterns. This helpful brochure explores how children and teens of different ages experience God and grow in faith. It's great for youth workers, pastors, teachers, and parents. Visit crcna.org/FaithFormation to find this resource.

Youth Unlimited SERVE Trips — SERVE is church-based, all-inclusive, mission trips for middle or high school aged youth groups. Students go into communities in the USA and Canada to contribute to and care for those they come in contact with while having the opportunity to experience the concepts of justice and missional living. More than just a week-long mission trip, SERVE is a faith-forming experience in which communities, congregations, and students experience lasting transformation. Learn more at youthunlimited.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 a 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.