



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

It is the start of Spring—a time when we look forward to new growth, new beginnings and new life. And yet, each time we turn on the news, we are faced with images of devastation and death. Ukraine has been invaded by its neighbor Russia. While this may seem like an innocuous headline, when it is combined with the raw images of devastation, suffering and death that we see on a daily basis, the reality of this current Holocaust comes into full view. We wonder, “Why would some people inflict this horror on their neighbor?”

We also know the answer. Left to our own devices, and our own desires for personal and institutional power, humanity turns to sin. We then suffer the consequences that result from our lack of dependency on the one who is the giver of life.

The words of the apostle John are true—if we would but pay attention and heed them—

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.”
1 John 2:15-17

It is the season of Lent—a time when we remember our sinful and fallen state;

reflect on the goodness of God, and all that he has done for us because of his incarnate love; and look forward to the celebration of the culmination of that love in Jesus going to the cross for us. He suffered the punishment that we could not bear, and in his resurrection we gained an eternal life that we could not earn.

In a similar way, as we see the world around us and reflect on how distant mercy and justice seem to be, we also remember that God has come and has given us hope. When we see foundations being shaken and lives being destroyed, we remember that the Word of the Lord is steadfast and true. We are called to praise God in the midst of our chaos and mess, and to call on him in spite of our circumstances.

“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 . . . For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice; the upright will see his face.” Psalms 11:3-7

This is his command—that we worship him, remember that he is just, do good for others as we have the opportunity, and pray for his justice. And this is just what we, as the Christian Reformed Church, have been striving to do.

Canadian Indigenous Ministries Committee (CIMC)

This year many of us gained a new understanding of our country's history for the first time as the news of Indigenous children's graves in Kamloops, B.C., ripped across the Canadian media landscape. And many of us were left wondering, "What's the next right thing?"

This has been a significant area for the Canadian Indigenous Ministry Committee (CIMC) to speak into, encouraging church members to listen to Indigenous voices in a new way. One way the CRC is living into this hearts-broken experience is by unpacking the history of White-Settler colonialism as a dominating worldview in a learning/action journey called Hearts Exchanged.

Hearts Exchanged goes beyond the headlines into unsettling work that wrestles with our church's complicity in colonization and the genocide of Indigenous communities. It also invites a holy imagination of how churches can become places of belonging. Participants are in an eight-month cohort-based journey coming face to face with their settler responsibilities supported by a community of learners. One participant has said, "The program has built capacity for significant faith recalibration. We have recognized how [a] perversion of the gospel lives on in our own hearts and communities, and together we have experienced significant distress concerning this."

CIMC continues to provide resources for all stages of this journey including video prayers and litanies. A special podcast reflection was released for personal contemplation as Canadians marked their first National Truth and Reconciliation Day. 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.

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Are you leaning into Indigenous justice and reconciliation with your existing small group? Our self-guided book club is perfect for existing small groups or gatherings. cna.org/indigenous/resources

Centre for Public Dialogue



Faith in Action is an interactive workshop that will help you learn how to navigate the political system so that your voice is heard by local, provincial, and national leaders. Find out more: crcna.org/FaithInAction

The COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing challenges experienced by refugees, the realities of climate change and the challenges of racial reconciliation make it clear that people all over the world are interconnected and interdependent. Throughout the past year we've reflected on how our good is linked to our neighbour's, and how that well-being is shaped by the systems that can support thriving or cause harm.

Because of this, we have worked together to be salt and light in the public sphere. During the 2021 federal election you prepared with us to respond to candidates who knock on our front doors. We shared ways to ask questions that honour vulnerable people as we acknowledged our interconnectedness.

People from across the CRC community participated in various workshops equipping us to move closer to justice. One participant had this to say: "It was an encouraging exercise for me to take some of the intimidation out of the act of writing to our political leaders ... Thank you for creating an open and comfortable space for us to explore together how we can take steps towards making a difference in this world."

This type of advocacy has made a difference nationally and locally. Bill C-15, an act to implement in Canada the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was passed. The implementation was a Call to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and was one step forward in the journey of reconciliation. Additionally, faithful advocacy by two Christian Reformed congregations helped to reunite a refugee family from Yemen after more than three years of separation. In the coming year let's continue to answer God's call to seek justice and speak hope as interconnected and loving neighbours.

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Disability Concerns



Studying Kate Bowler’s book *No Cure for Being Human* created space for grief. In collaboration with the Reformed Church in America, a cohort of young adults learned about Disability Advocacy. We are launching a virtual volunteer training platform.

Virtual and hybrid worship, church meetings, and activities have been wonderful for many people with disabilities. We hear from some that they worry that this new-found connection will be lost; they hope churches will continue to provide hybrid opportunities to engage.

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The backbone of Disability Concerns is a network of volunteers who are passionate about the experiences of people with disabilities at church. Our goal is that each CRC Classis and each church would have a Disability Advocate. Many of our volunteers have a disability, or a family member that does, or they work with people with disabilities professionally. Disability Concerns is focusing much of our efforts on recruiting new volunteers. If you or someone you know would make a great [disability advocate](#), please get in touch with us at disabilityconcerns@crcna.org.

The recent increased familiarity with technology has helped us as we support our existing volunteers. Regional meetings give us the opportunity to share our ideas and experiences. Disability Concerns staff are meeting one on one with Regional Advocates. Our virtual Leadership Conference allows us to include Church Advocates along with Regional Advocates.

What is Ableism?

Definitions of ableism are complex and layered:

- Attitudes, actions, and/or circumstances that devalue people because they have a disability or are perceived as having a disability.
- Intentional or unintentional discrimination or oppression of disabled individuals.
- Anything that positions a person without a disability over a person with a disability, solely based on disability or differences in ability.
- Attitudes, actions, or systems that consider a person with a disability as inferior.

Our theme for 2022 is [Ableism](#). Help your church raise awareness about ableism by participating in [Disability Awareness Sunday](#) on October 16, 2022.

Office of Social Justice



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/CGfkxsh>

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.

As part of the Climate Witness Project, regional organizers engaged with churches in their region, offering educational opportunities. Allen Drew, regional organizer in the Eastern U.S. offered a three-session series, "Engaging Climate as Christians." One participant shared this feedback about the series: "I've just finished watching the first session. Allen has done an amazing job presenting the climate crisis and the responsibility of Christians using a biblical framework. I highly recommend this series."

This year through the *Do Justice* podcast, we interviewed guests about what it looks like in their contexts to both meet immediate needs and work toward long term solutions through advocacy. In response to an episode about advocating alongside refugees with Dena Nicolai, a listener shared, "This was very helpful for me...as our congregation is feeling the wait-time because of that backlog [Dena] spoke about. I am feeling inspired to meet with my [member of parliament]."

Throughout the year we provide weekly calls to pray through *Do Justice* prayers. We were encouraged by feedback from folks who include them in their services, weekly bulletins, or social media: "I so appreciate these prayers and have shared a number of them," said one follower.

At the same time, the pandemic continues to reveal pre-existing disparities in our society and disproportionately impacts our most vulnerable. As we press on in our work, letters, emails, and tweets from active citizens will continue to speak into developing policies that create shalom for our local and global neighbors.

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Office of Race Relations

The Office of Race Relations (ORR) has created resources, led workshops, trained facilitators, and consulted with church leaders in fulfilling the CRCNA's mandate and working with the body of believers to dismantle the causes and effects of racism.

The All Nations Heritage (ANH) multiracial [Student Scholarship Fund](#) is one of the strategies ORR uses to develop multiracial congregational leadership in the CRCNA. Recipients of these scholarships attend one of the higher learning institutions affiliated with the denomination and have expressed a strong desire to train for and to engage in the ministry of racial reconciliation in church and/or in community.

Through gracious donations received last year, the ORR was able to award ten scholarships to students for the 2021/22 school year including [Neulsaem "Sam" Ha](#). He is originally from South Korea and England, and is currently studying at Calvin Theological Seminary. He summed up his own missional vision:

"My hope in my future ministry is to teach that we ought to fight against racial injustice if we claim to be in Christ and also that we must trust Christ and him alone if we seek to achieve true racial justice."

Race Relations Workshops offered:

- Cultural Intelligence Building
- Leadership & Race
- The Blanket Exercise
- Ideology of Whiteness
- Church Between Borders
- Racism: Looking Back Moving Forward
- Full listing: crcna.org/race/workshops

Web link to more Race Relations Resources:
crcna.org/race/resources



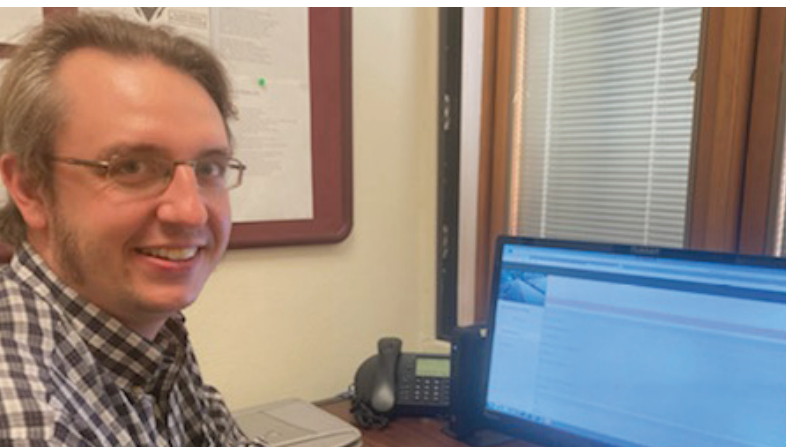
[Neulsaem Ha and his family](#)

On other fronts, webinars continue to be valuable tools used by ORR for raising awareness of the effects and trauma racial strife still causes in the world today. Most recently ORR hosted a discussion to amplify and celebrate the voices of African American pastors and leaders in the CRC for [Black History Month](#).

In addition, ORR continues leading [educational workshops in the virtual world](#) and has begun to lead in-person workshops again as pandemic restrictions have eased. Plus, they have created an asynchronous learning series for individuals (online, DIY) entitled [The Ideology of Whiteness](#).

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Safe Church Ministry



Pictured here are Rev. Joshua Stammis and Rev. Nathaniel Schmidt who both took the training as part of their preparation for ordination and ministry in the Christian Reformed Church.

When we think of the roles of ministry leaders, whether they be ministry staff, council members, or volunteers, we tend to think in terms of service — people who give their lives to serve God and God’s people in the context of the church. Without their generous offering of time, energy, and gifts, it’s hard to imagine how the ministry and mission of the church would be advanced.

But it’s also important, when we think about the roles of ministry leaders, to talk about institutional authority and positional power. Members of congregations look

to and entrust ministry leaders with power to make decisions for the life of the church but also with power to shape their own spiritual formation and discipleship. Consider, for instance, that ministry leaders are invited into the lives of congregational members in the most holy of moments - birth, baptisms, professions of faith, weddings, times of sickness, funerals, and death. They are empowered to teach the congregation, nurture it, and challenge it. As Dr. Marie Fortune, founder of the FaithTrust Institute, has noted, “Ministry leaders are given the rare privilege of being invited to care for the soul of another. This is a sacred trust, a rare chance to make a difference.”

Within this context of sacred trust, power and authority are a gift to be used in ways that lead to the well-being and spiritual flourishing of others. But in a sinful and broken world, that power is sometimes used in ways that violate that sacred trust and bring harm. This happens when ministry leaders use their power and influence, advertently or inadvertently, for personal gain at the expense of another person.

Psychologists have noted that when power goes unacknowledged, those who hold it are more prone to misusing it. For that reason, Synod 2019 determined that all candidates for ministry should take Abuse of Power training. Safe Church now offers this abuse of power training in a 4-6 hour online course. The training consists of discussions of power and sacred trust, healthy boundaries, pastoral ethics, and how ministry leaders can steward their power for the flourishing of others. So far, 57 candidates and ministry leaders have taken the training. Soon, we hope to open up the training to all ordained ministers, office bearers, and ministry staff.

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World Renew



World Renew, in collaboration with the larger CRCNA, joined the UN and nonprofits around the world in “16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence.”

For sixty years World Renew has answered God’s call to pursue justice and mercy in a broken world. In most communities where World Renew works, the fundamental rights to dignity and equality for women, girls, and other marginalized groups are significantly limited. As part of our gender justice work, World Renew shares God’s word, emphasizing that we are all God’s image bearers—hence, all have the right to live free from abuse, discrimination, and limitation of our unique gifts.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, the world has witnessed an increase in gender inequalities and a spiraling in gender-based violence, most notably domestic violence, child marriages, and femicides. This spurred World Renew’s Gender Working Group (GWG) to raise staff and public awareness and encourage action, through webinars, social media posts, and participation in the 16 Days of Activism campaign.

The GWG urged staff to consistently wear “intersectional lenses” in our gender justice work: to look at everything and anything that can marginalize people, including but not limited to, gender, race, class, caste, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, and marital status. Wearing intersectional lenses when designing programs to support women’s rights ensures no one, despite their identities, falls through the cracks.

Without intersectional lenses we would fail to see, for example, that the learning opportunity we offer women in a community may exclude the woman who cannot read or places an unwed mother in a situation where she could face ridicule, or, because of location, is inaccessible to the woman who uses a wheelchair. In short, intersectional lenses help remove the blinders that prevent us from seeing when we are perpetuating inequalities and injustices.

As we continue to answer God’s call for justice and mercy, we do so wearing intersectional lenses, so we can truly see his most vulnerable and marginalized image bearers.

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Tools You Can Use

World Renew Gender Working Group Newsletters:

- [The Shadow Pandemic: Gender Based Violence](#)
- [Intersectionality](#)
- [World Renew International Women’s Day Video](#)
- [Documentary showcasing World Renew Uganda’s gender justice work](#)
- [16 Days of Activism Resources](#)

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In this report, you will hear from various justice ministries including the Canadian Indigenous Ministries Committee, Centre for Public Dialogue, Disability Concerns, Race Relations, Safe Church, Social Justice, and World Renew.

I thank God for the work that these ministries shepherd and the way they are helping the people and congregations of the CRCNA engage in holistic ministry as God's stewards.

May we continue to live into the truth that our work is not in vain and that our God reigns.

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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 Mercy and 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.

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.