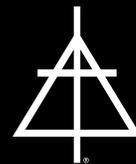


# MINISTRY REPORT

## TO CLASSES AND COUNCILS



Christian  
Reformed  
Church

SPRING 2015

### **Congregational Support**

- Chaplaincy and Care Ministry
- Disability Concerns
- Office of Social Justice
- Pastor-Church Relations
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- Home Missions
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- World Renew

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  - GEMS
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## *Chaplaincy and Care Ministry*

During December we completed the endorsement of three new chaplains, so ending the year with 12 new chaplains. This brings our total number of chaplains to 130, 90 of whom are employed full time. We have a number of others who are very close to completing the endorsement process and will likely do so in the next few months.

In the past year we awarded over \$32,000 in grants to candidates who are preparing for chaplaincy. Most of this was for obtaining the required units of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). Several of our candidates have obtained these units through some new pilot programs that begin with a weekend retreat, and continue for five or six months of remote meetings online.

Funding for this has relied increasingly on our Development Fund (over and above the \$10,000 that comes from a line item in our current budget). We have encouraged our current and retired chaplains, their supporting churches, and others to contribute to this fund for the sake of developing future chaplains. Annual donations to this fund have grown from \$6,000 to over \$10,000.

Among our civilian chaplains several have recently completed Board Certification with a national credentialing organization. Eight of our chaplains are credentialed as CPE Supervisors, and several others are training to become Supervisors. Two have also been appointed recently as members of committees of national chaplain associations – Assoc. of Professional Chaplain in U.S. and the Canadian Association of Spiritual Care in Canada. Two of our US Army

chaplains were recently appointed as trainers at the Chaplain Training School at Fort Jackson, SC.

Bottom line -- as a small denomination we have an unusually large presence in these training and credentialing activities. Thus, when I visit with other endorsers and chaplains in the broader national context I find that they are often aware of and have a high respect for CRC chaplains. This is something our denomination should be very proud of!

## *Disability Concerns*

Although most people want their church fellowship to be warm and welcoming to all people, many do not know how to make that happen, nor where to find needed information. Disability Concerns can help your church get the information you need to:

- Make worship more inclusive
- Understand how to create communications accessible to a wide array of people
- Engage children and young people who have autism and other developmental disabilities in church programs
- Walk with people who have intellectual disabilities as they prepare for and make profession of faith
- Care for parents dealing with the grief of discovering their child has a disability
- Minister with older members whose abilities diminish as they age
- Establish appropriate boundaries with people who demand the time, energy, and money of church leaders
- Help your pastor and his or her

family when one of them is dealing with a physical or mental health crisis

- Train deacons in ministering with people who have disabling conditions
- Understand siblings who have brothers or sisters with disabilities
- Come alongside persons with complex needs to help them find help, love, and community

Our website ([crcna.org/disability](http://crcna.org/disability)) and Network site ([network.crcna.org/disability](http://network.crcna.org/disability)) offer resources on all of these topics, such as a series of five training videos on including children and youth with autism and other developmental disabilities in church programming. Our newsletter, *Breaking Barriers*, available free via online subscription and in print to individuals and churches, tells stories of people affected by various disabling conditions. We sponsor several conferences each year, and offer training at classis meetings, churches, and in other settings. To build church libraries, we are distributing to churches that receive an offering for Disability Concerns a book by young siblings of kids with disabilities called *Views from Our Shoes*. Ministry is complex; please let us know how we can help.

## Office of Social Justice

Synod 2012 made a prophetic and critical proclamation: Climate change is occurring; it is very likely due to human activity; it is a moral, ethical, and religious issue; and urgent action is required to address it. With this statement, the CRCNA became the first evangelical denomination in the US to both affirm the urgency of climate change and to call its churches and members to action.

One such action occurred in the spring of 2013, when a small group from the CRC traveled to Kenya, East Africa. Their objective was to hear the stories from Christian brothers and sisters in that part of the world of how changing weather patterns are affecting their livelihoods. As they listened, a common thread began to emerge: a changing climate isn't a debate in Kenya as it is in North America; it is a daily reality.

Upon the group's return, participants set out to share the stories

that they had heard with the rest of the CRC and beyond. Out of this determination, the *Climate Conversation: Kenya* video series was born. A series of 4 short videos, together with a companion discussion guide, it combines on-the-ground footage and interviews from Kenya with study materials to help groups and individuals not only hear the stories of Kenyan Christians, but to begin to think about how they can respond:

1. **The World We Have Been Given: What's Happening in Kenya?**
2. **A Sacred Trust: Climate Change and the Poor**
3. **The Ongoing Story: Kenyan Christians Speak**
4. **Firstfruits of a New Creation: Stories of Hope**

The video resource and downloadable discussion guide can be found at [climate-conversation.org](http://climate-conversation.org).

## Pastor-Church Relations

The mandate of "Better Together" (an initiative of the Office of Pastor-Church Relations) is to create partnerships and vitality through resourcing classical functionaries. The approach is to encourage and come alongside. This mandate comes out of Synod's challenge that Pastor-Church Relations (P-CR) become involved earlier with situations where the pastor-congregation relationship is beginning to fray. P-CR proposed that revitalizing classical functionaries, particularly church visitors and regional pastors, was a strategic approach to accomplishing this goal.

On February 18, 2015 an event was hosted by the Better Together Team in Vancouver BC. In attendance were nine regional pastors from 5 classes; the Home Missions Regional Leader for Western Canada; Rev. Norm Thomas (via skype) and Rev. Cecil VanNiejhuis from the P-CR staff; and Holly Koons and Derek Atkins, members of the Better Together Team.

The day was a mixture of learning, discussion, fellowship and prayer. A main goal of the event was to share best practices and experiences as regional pastors - learning from each other - and also enjoy the camaraderie of being with other regional pastors who know the joys and challenges of this particular role. Some attendees

were quite interested in learning more about how Skype and other forms of video conference might assist them in their work. We've learned of some regional pastors who are already using this technology to connect with pastors, when geographical distance makes face-to-face meetings a challenge. It was noted that the key thing with such technology is that it works best when a relationship is already established.

## Safe Church Ministry

**Safe Church Ministry equips churches in abuse awareness, prevention and response.**

Over 200 interactions with individuals and congregations were recorded by Safe Church Ministry.

**Each month:** About 400 people receive our newsletter, 20 prayer partners receive a prayer guide, and at least three blogs are posted on *The Network*.

**Oct 1 – Webinar, *Domestic Violence and the Role of the Church*:** The webinar proved valuable and, according to *The Network*, received the highest score of those who said that they would recommend it to a friend. <http://network.crcna.org/safe-church/domestic-violence-and-role-church>

**Oct 17-18 – Safe Church New Team Training for Classis Red Mesa:** Over 40 attended from 6 different churches, including Navajo congregations. Bethany CRC in Gallup hosted the Friday evening and Saturday event. We welcome this expansion into a new area.

**Nov 1 – Safe Church Summit for Classis Hamilton:** About 40 ministry leaders attended this educational event, which included a plenary session, a choice of workshops, and lunch.

**Nov 8 – Safe Church Team Annual Training for Classis Eastern Canada:** The focus of the training was *Circle of Grace*, a primary prevention program that equips children and youth to participate in a safe environment for themselves and others. Over 10 congregations in Eastern Canada ordered *Circle of Grace* after this training event.

**November – Listening to Marginalized Voices Challenge:**

Listening is the beginning of understanding; so several ministries came together to offer this challenge. Safe Church added voices of those who have been impacted by abuse.

**Ongoing work:** Safe Church continues to develop educational resources for congregations and safe church teams; many can be found on our website [www.crcna.org/safechurch](http://www.crcna.org/safechurch).

## ServiceLink

ServiceLink has focused a lot of energy in the last few months on volunteer engagement within the local church.

In meeting with ministry leaders, we find agreement that church members are challenged in time commitments, especially when it comes to longer term roles such as elder and deacon. Other members feel ill equipped to serve as volunteers and sense that church leadership assumes they know and understand their roles without proper training and equipping.

Some churches have created a wonderful volunteer program, but not all churches have staff to do this work. ServiceLink has developed resources for churches to assist them in developing volunteer leaders within their congregations. These resources can be found on the ServiceLink website under the heading ENGAGE. Included are the following:

- \* an article on the importance of developing job descriptions for volunteers
- \* various job descriptions for ministry roles that can be adapted for any church
- \* a job description template
- \* a ministry evaluation form designed for ministry leaders
- \* brief articles on aspects of engaging volunteers, from recruitment to orientation and training, to motivation, recognition and evaluation

ServiceLink is also open to meeting with churches or providing workshops on issues pertaining to the engagement of their volunteers. Additionally, we would love to hear about best practices from congregations, so if your church has a method that has received positive results, we would love to hear about it.

## Sustaining Pastoral Excellence

Recently there have been discussions regarding assessment in the CRCNA. This is *not* referring to assessing the CRC. Rather, it is about assisting future and current leaders as they work through their calling, are in times of transition, and/or wonder about ministry fit.

The CRC Ministry Assessment and Career Guidance Committee, with members from Calvin Seminary, World Missions, Pastor-Church Relations, Sustaining Pastoral Excellence, Home Missions, and Candidacy, are in the midst of a second pilot project. The purpose is to continue to explore the impact an assessment can have on ministry leaders as they sort through where God would have them serve. The ultimate goal is leaders serving in ministries that are a good fit—resulting in healthier individuals and organizations.

The first year of the project concluded with most encouraging results. The 34 participants indicated they had improved significantly in 13 of the 14 outcomes that were tracked. These included things such as: how satisfied they were with their level of vocation clarity, the level of their career decision-making confidence, and their career adaptability. Three service providers, using fairly in-depth processes, were part of the pilot.

During the current phase of the pilot, 83 ministry leaders are working with six service providers. The process for each is less intense than last years and all assessments are conducted virtually. This significantly reduces costs and allows leaders to work with a provider regardless of geography. The participants include pastors, chaplains, missionaries, seminary graduates without a call, and students in their last year of seminary.

Looking ahead to the end of the current pilot, plans are being considered on how assessments could become part of the way in which the denomination walks alongside churches, pastors, minister leaders, missionaries, chaplains, and those considering ministry who are looking for answers regarding ministry fit.

## Centre for Public Dialogue and Canadian Aboriginal Ministries Committee

There is much to be excited about at the Centre for Public Dialogue recently. The *Journey with Me* refugee workshop is in the last stages of editing. We are looking forward to a launch event with Mary Jo Leddy, Canadian refugee advocate and founder of Romero House, at the end of March. *Journey with Me* is accompanied by an online toolkit, including Sunday school plans, film discussion questions, and worship materials that can be accessed at [www2.crcna.org/pages/publicdialogue\\_toolkit.cfm](http://www2.crcna.org/pages/publicdialogue_toolkit.cfm). We are deeply thankful for the many hours of work that people have put into this resource and look forward to years of its fruitful use.

The Living the 8<sup>th</sup> Fire small group series, which is meant to build deeper and more understanding relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians using CBC's 8<sup>th</sup> Fire documentary series as a structure, is already in use by several churches and groups, and we are busy promoting it. (It can be accessed at <https://aboriginalministry.wordpress.com/workshops/>)

After the Supreme Court's decision to strike down Canada's law against Physician-Assisted Suicide (PAS), we collaborated with Disability Concerns and Canadian Ministries on a pastoral letter to congregations and a letter to the federal government. (See <http://tinyurl.com/PASletter> )

We are also thinking forward to the wrap-up of both the reForming Relationships tour and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission at the end of May, and are gearing up to celebrate the milestones that the CRC has marked on the journey of reconciliation.

Finally, as we look ahead to a federal election, we are thinking about the call to passionate citizenship and seeking feedback from churches. **What would be helpful as you anticipate weighing the parties' responses to issues of justice and faith?** We look forward to hearing from you at [publicdialogue@crcna.ca](mailto:publicdialogue@crcna.ca).

# Calvin College

Calvin College's calling is as an academic community exploring God's world with a holy curiosity rooted in the convictions of our Reformed confessions, equipping students to think deeply, to act justly and to live wholeheartedly as Christ's agents of renewal in the world.

Biochemistry professor Brendan Looyenga received a grant from the National Cancer Institute at the National Institutes of Health for a three-year project that will include Calvin students and focuses on cancer, Parkinson's and autism research.

In late January, Herb Fynewever, professor of chemistry and biochemistry, presented a seminar at Kathmandu University, where he is teaching general chemistry and researching culture as part of his seven-month Fulbright Senior Scholar grant.

During Interim, students in history professor Kate Van Liere's research methods class worked with the Grand Rapids Public Museum to discover the history behind some of the museum's collection of over 200,000 objects. They presented their own proposals for new exhibits to the museum board and curatorial staff, and already their work is being incorporated into the museum's online database.

As a community of learners engaged in learning with others, we seek to identify, establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships locally, nationally and globally. Our 28th annual Symposium on Worship included people from around the globe, with more than 100 attendees from outside of North America. The 2015 attendees included pastors, artists, musicians, teachers, youth leaders, church educators, congregational elders and board members, justice advocates, missionaries, professors and many more.

Ours is one of just 361 campuses across the country to earn honors as a leader in community engagement from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, as campuses that are "improving teaching and learning, producing research that makes a difference in communities and revitalizing their civic and academic

missions."

Michelle Loyd-Paige, dean for multicultural affairs and interim executive associate to the president, is the recipient of the 2015 Floyd B. Skinner Justice Award, one of 13 Giants awards given out each year in Grand Rapids to African American leaders making a difference in our community.

The college covets the church's continued strong commitment to Christian education, including Christian higher education, as a means through which knowledge and culture can be understood, shaped and by grace redeemed.

## Calvin Theological Seminary

Thank you for your continued support and encouragement for Calvin Theological Seminary. The voice of the church was heard through our February Board of Trustees meeting.

Here are a few highlights:

### "Seminary Behind Bars" Prison Ministry in Michigan

For many years, Calvin Seminary students have visited Angola Prison in Louisiana to witness the power of the gospel to transform individuals and that community. In the last few years, Calvin Seminary has also brought classes to Handlon Correctional Facility in Ionia, Michigan. The State of Michigan recently asked if Calvin Seminary could bring additional programs to prison.

The Board approved the faculty recommendation that the CTS Board approve and support a Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary partnership in developing certificate and degree programs for prisoners in the State of Michigan. We hope that this program will begin in the fall of 2015 (or when faculty and funding are secured).

### Retirement Announcements

The Board received notice that Dr. Arie J. Leder intends to retire at the end of the 2015-2016 academic year.

The Board also received a retirement letter from Rev. Al Gelder as Director of Mentored Ministries. The Board expressed appreciation for his service and approved the faculty

recommendation to declare this an open position. Appreciation was expressed for Gelder's willingness to serve in a transitional role in order to do a "hand-off" in the future.

The Board approved the conferring of the title P.J. Zondervan Professor of the History of Christianity, emeritus, effective upon Dr. Richard Muller's retirement this summer. It also approved the appointment of Dr. Lyle Bierma to the position of P.J. Zondervan Professor of the History of Christianity, with primary duties in the Ph.D. program.

### Tuition Increase Approved (3%) for Fiscal 2015-2016

The Board approved a 3% increase per credit hour for the academic year 2015-2016. The Board noted that this still places Calvin Seminary in the lower third of seminaries that are considered "peers" and that CTS is the only seminary on the list that does not charge additional fees for such things as student services and technology. We appreciate the support given to students by individuals and churches via scholarships and student aid.

**Celebration Note:** We are glad for the ministry updates we receive from our alumni that are ministering throughout the world. One such update was the announcement that Rev. Tim Blackmon (1995 graduate) has been appointed as the new Wheaton College Chaplain.

**Prayer Note:** Commencement is scheduled for Saturday, May 23, 2015. Thank you for praying for students as they near that point of celebration and anticipation. We also appreciate your continued prayers for the two faculty opening searches that are proceeding in (1) Moral and Philosophical Theology and (2) Missiology and Missional Ministry.

## Back to God Ministries International

Back to God Ministries International is facing significant challenges and opportunities for reaching people around the world through media ministry.

- We are rebuilding our French ministry, a challenge—but also a huge opportunity to reestablish this vital ministry in French-speaking Africa. We are serious about collaboration to

extend our resources and the effectiveness of our broadcasts. Director Kurt Selles and Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) staff met with potential partners in West Africa to explore establishing a new discipleship radio program in this region. In addition to providing much-needed discipleship training, this program will better connect with local churches and provide an evangelistic opportunity to reach a large Muslim population.

- Our new Hindi ministry leader Dr. A.K. Lama, appointed in September 2014, asks prayers for wisdom as he works with the media team in India to further develop ministry there. One goal is to strengthen the Christian community, using media to empower Christians to reach out to unbelievers. He also asks prayers of protection for our brothers and sisters in India who face very real threats for their faith in Christ because of the rise of Hindu fundamentalists.

- BTGMI is partnering with CRWM and the Reformed Church in Japan to offer leadership training to equip church leaders for follow-up and discipleship with listeners who want to know more about the Bible. One strategic region for training is the Sendai area, where people suffer from loss experienced during the March 2011 earthquake. As a result of the leadership training BTG and CRWM, along with local churches in Sendai, are offering a new Bible study to people who attend a March concert commemorating the earthquake.

BTGMI continues to thank God for faithful prayer and financial support through ministry shares and gifts from churches and individuals. Over the last two years income has declined, but opportunities increase to share the gospel through media ministry.

## *Home Missions*

God is on the move in North America. Our culture may be changing, but in the midst of change, through prayer and partnership, we are working toward finding new ways to share the message of grace.

Home Missions along with classical leaders and ministry partners comes alongside pastors and ministry leaders that need encouragement, direction, and prayer. It has been our privilege to

see transformation take root across North America, and to serve and lead our denomination in pursuing God's mission in North America. Please join us in praising God for what he is doing throughout the US and Canada:

- Geneva Fellowship, a Christian Reformed campus ministry at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, is growing. Many students are strengthening their faith by participating in groups called "huddles", discipleship, and worship. Campus minister Steve Kooy has been joined this year by 5 new leaders and feeling God's blessings on the ministry with events filled to capacity, mentorship relationships growing, students being baptized, and support pouring in.
- Churches like F Street Neighborhood Church in Lincoln, Nebraska are thriving, thanks to partnerships with Home Missions, classis support, relationships with area churches, and support from the RCA. God has truly blessed the catalytic work of Home Missions far beyond what we ever asked or imagined and we are privileged to be a part of what he is doing.
- Church Planter Pastor F works to reach Arabic-speaking immigrants to the United States through a culture center in California. The culture center's ministry can be slow and delicate, but it has borne fruit. Not long ago, they celebrated the baptism of four new Christians whose new relationship with Christ testifies to great courage and God's irresistible grace.

## *World Missions*

God continues to work faithfully through missionaries and volunteers who serve with Christian Reformed World Missions. Thank you for being an important part of that work through prayers and financial support for CRWM and Ministry Share gifts.

Missionaries in Haiti are hosting a large number of volunteer teams, who are working along with local people to construct a ministry center for a partner ministry there. The teams are also learning how CRWM, World Renew, and Back to God Ministries

International are using their unique strengths to accomplish the common goal of transforming communities in Haiti.

In January, CRWM representatives met with several school officials and administrators in South Korea to begin forming a local leadership team that will implement Educational Care training in Christian schools. Many of the local people believe that Educational Care modules will help them address issues of juvenile delinquency, overworked students in the classroom, and other issues that schools currently face.

CRWM hosted a Prayer Safari in Kenya from February 5-16. Christians from both North America and Kenya visited schools, government buildings, and ministry centers in Kenya to pray with leaders there. Local pastors who attended the event have already seen opportunities for future ministry as a result of this Prayer Safari.

In February, the boards of Christian Reformed World Missions and Christian Reformed Home Missions instructed their directors, under the supervision of CRC executive director Steven Timmermans, to explore the feasibility of bringing together the two ministries into one agency with both a local and global vision and mandate. The agency directors have been asked to prepare a detailed plan of the steps that will be presented to CRWM and CRHM boards in April.

## *World Renew*

Providing people with opportunities to free themselves from the bonds that keep them poor is what World Renew is all about. It is ministry that starts with God working in people's hearts--with acts of mercy, justice, and service. Without God's powerful grace, and without you, this work would not be possible.

Christian Reformed Churches received copies of World Renew's annual report in February. Here are just a few highlights that we invite you to celebrate with us. In 2014, World Renew:

- responded to disasters and provided community-based programs in 37 countries.
- supported 73 church and community partners to help them

improve lives in 1,654 communities.

- reached 1,067,648 people in disaster response and development.
- facilitated 3,312 North American volunteers serving globally.
- facilitated 2,916 Disaster Response Services volunteers serving in North America.
- completed printing of new small group curriculum entitled Live Justly.
- launched #climateconversation video and study series.
- hosted 15 justice education and advocacy events.

World Renew does not receive ministry shares and depends on the offerings and gifts from CRC churches and individuals, government grants, and grants from partner organizations. Please consider volunteering, praying, or participating in one of the upcoming offerings:

- March 1 - World Renew – [Disaster Response Services](#)
- April 12 - World Renew – [Refugee Sunday](#) (Canada)
- World Renew - Foods Resource Bank (U.S.)
- May 10 - World Renew – [Maternal and Child Health \(World Renew\)](#)/ Mother's Day

For more information, visit [worldrenew.net](http://worldrenew.net)

## *Partners Worldwide*

Partners Worldwide mobilizes long-term, hands-on, global relationships to form a powerful Christian network that uses business as a way to create flourishing economic environments in all parts of the world. We create partnerships with local community institutions to provide mentoring, training, access to capital, and advocacy. This builds up local capacity to catalyze entrepreneurs and job creators and to celebrate business as a calling to do God's work.

We are seeing the impact of our partnership model around the world: Over 56,000 businesses in 25 countries are using their business as their ministry—impacting the

marketplace, creating jobs and transforming lives. These businesses created and sustained over 90,000 jobs, making a direct impact on the lives of well over 250,000 people.

The entrepreneurial and resourceful nature of the business people in our network is amazing. Often under very difficult business climates, they use their business for Christ's transformation and restoration: mentoring at risk youth, starting schools and medical clinics, providing more nutritious and affordable food for their communities, encouraging earth-friendly alternatives to land use, starting community or economic development organizations, or employing people who otherwise couldn't find a job.

Benjamin Flores from Honduras is achieving his dream of running a business—providing a home, food and education for his family. Because of the support he's received through Partners Worldwide and our local partner—training, mentors and a loan—his future is more secure. As an image-bearer of Christ, he can now live out his calling to business.

We look forward to partnering with more CRC businesspeople and churches to continue creating jobs and transforming lives.

## *Dynamic Youth Ministries*

### **Cadets**

In an effort to promote the Culture of Prayer that the Cadet Corps has been enjoying, they have adopted a prayer statement. It is: "Be joyful always. Pray continually." Hopefully, this will be more than just a statement, and will be descriptive of any event that draws Cadet people together, whether a club meeting or an international convention.

The Cadet Congress, which approved the prayer statement, also came up with two changes to merit badges. Cadeting will now offer merit badges for knowledge of spiders and for skills in snowboarding.

The last classical report from Cadets mentioned the retirement of Executive Director Dick Broene. We can now report that Steve Bootsma of Kitchener, Ontario has accepted the position. As a Canadian citizen, it is uncertain how long it will take before

he is allowed to work in the U.S. Broene will continue in the position until Bootsma can take over. Please pray for patience, as God will do this in His timing.

### **GEMS Girls' Clubs**

Girls Everywhere Meeting the Savior (GEMS) is experiencing growth across North America and around the world. We currently have over 24,000 girls and 5,300 women actively engaged in our 942 clubs. At GEMS we believe every girl needs to know Jesus Christ, and with our annual theme, "Bring the Message", we are actively sharing the good news and equipping girls to pass it on.

Our SHINE brightly and Sparkle Magazine subscriptions are perfect for the young girls in your life. Each issue focuses on how to grow her relationship with Jesus and how to live a Christ-centered life in a secular world. Visit [gemsgc.org](http://gemsgc.org) to have your holiday gift to her last all year long.

The 46th Annual Counselor Leadership Conference will be at Messiah College in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania on July 9-12, 2015. In this time we are living in, building strong leaders is essential for expanding the church and raising the next generation for Christ.

At the Leadership Conference, women are equipped to develop their leadership skills and are trained in relevant ways to bring girls to Jesus. Women will also be engaged with one another as they share successes and brainstorm through challenges in their clubs.

Lastly, many women have testified that the GEMS Leadership Conference has transformed their walk with Jesus and has helped them become missionaries in their own backyards.

### **Youth Unlimited**

43,750 – this number has a story to tell – actually many stories - but they are only the introduction to a much larger story. These stories include themes of sacrifice, selflessness, inspiration, life change, pain, understanding, discipleship, faith, friends, fun, brokenness, challenge and more. These stories will give some hope, others joy and others peace.

So what does this number represent? It represents a small sampling of stories from Christian Reformed youth leading the Church, bringing

redemption, restoration and the love of Jesus to people across Canada and the United States. 43,750 is the number of hours students gave in serving others in the name of Jesus through the Youth Unlimited Serve mission experiences in 2014. It's a small sampling because it only represents 1,600 students from approximately 25% of the Christian Reformed Churches during one week of the summer.

Imagine if I had the number of students from the remaining 75% of CRC congregations who gave a week of service – that number could be 175,000 hours or even more, yet that still wouldn't tell the whole story. Now imagine if I could add up all the weekly or monthly youth group service projects over the year (raking a widow's yard, serving in a food kitchen for those on the streets, sorting clothes, leading Vacation Bible Schools, etc., etc., etc.). Or even greater still, what if I could add up the number of times students served someone, not because of a youth group event or trip but just out of obedience and love for Jesus and others! God is working in and through our youth and we **need** to fan that flame.

I often read church and youth ministry articles and participate in conversations that focus on the challenging reality of "youth leaving the local church". Those articles and conversations are based on reality. There are few youth in many local congregations across Canada and the United States. Youth Unlimited even sees it in the number of event registrations each year. While I am a firm believer in knowing and understanding all the facts and facing reality head on, it appears to me that our focus is mostly on the shrinking number of youth rather than on those who are engaged, invested and making a great impact for the Kingdom of Christ.

May we be a community of congregations with great hope and trust in our Lord and one that fans into flames the faith and work of his people, our youth. Let's be quick to listen, offer an encouraging word, provide heart felt appreciation and allow them some freedom to speak into the future of the Church.

Youth Unlimited is honored to be

creating stories with the Christian Reformed Church.