



CHARLES HONEY
RELIGION EDITOR

Church deeds need to trump doctrine

Accepting Belhar Confession chance to embrace call to action

A mistaken belief about church is that it is primarily about church. It almost never is.

What goes on in church is primarily about what goes on outside of church — the way people live and what they believe 24 hours a day.

So it's not so surprising that illness-plagued Christian Reformed Church leaders chewed up two-and-a-half hours Wednesday night debating a doctrinal statement from South Africa 23 years ago. Nor that leaders of the Reformed Church in America, the CRC's older sister, put in long hours last week before adopting the Belhar Confession.

The Belhar is a strong statement affirming Christians' unity in Christ and decrying the sin of "separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups."

It all sounds very nice and churchy, but it's not about church. It is about the suffering of blacks crushed under apartheid's hateful heel, and their faith in a God who is "in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged." It's also about the suffering of anyone who has been marginalized or separated from others, no matter their class or color.

SEE HONEY, C2

SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Spiritual Journey is a regular feature on the faith lives of local people.

SENITA LENEAR

Age: 36

Work: Member of Grand Rapids Board of Education

Place of worship: New Hope Baptist Church, 130 Delaware St. SW



Inspirational books, aside from sacred texts: "His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage," by Willard Harley. It's so good, that's the gift I give to couples getting married. That, and "Financial Peace," the Dave Ramsey book."

Inspirational art or artists: Music. "Listening to lyrics ministers to me. It can bring me to tears, sometimes, and not always religious music."

Faith role model: "My grandmother, Bobbie Jo Mosely. My mother died when I was 9, and she stepped in. She had just lost her child, and she was leaning on and depending on God. I learned no matter what circumstances you're going through, God is who you depend on."

Favorite faith practice: "Before I say anything at a board meeting, or wherever, I pray: 'Lord, guide me. Give me the words to say. Help people to understand what I'm saying.'"

What I'm working on in my faith life: "One of the things I'm really working on is the words I speak, how I speak them, and how they impact other people's lives. What we put out there, other people are hearing."

"It's a wonderful event for me. It feels like my life comes full circle."

—The Rev. Patricia de Jong



PRESS PHOTO/HOLLYN JOHNSON

Welcome: Philip Pletcher, as Robert Morrison, a gay man who has returned to the church as a minister, shakes Dylan Harris' hand and welcomes him to the church as Eric Hanson, who is discovering his identity as a gay man. The play, "All the Little Children," will be performed at the UCC's General Synod in Grand Rapids.

GRAND RAPIDS UNITED

LIBERAL DENOMINATION BRINGING VOICE OF WORSHIP TO DEVOS PLACE

BY CHARLES HONEY
PRESS RELIGION EDITOR



COURTESY PHOTO

A happy return home: The Rev. Patricia de Jong returns to Grand Rapids next week after leaving 40 years ago. She will deliver the closing sermon for the United Church of Christ's General Synod.

The Rev. Patricia de Jong left Grand Rapids 40 years ago, feeling the pull of ministry but not knowing where it would lead her.

It led her to the United Church of Christ, a liberal denomination far removed from the conservative Christian Reformed Church in which she was raised.

Next week, de Jong returns home for a seemingly providential event — a UCC national meeting said to be among the largest conventions ever held in Grand Rapids.

She will deliver the closing sermon of the five-day General Synod beginning Friday in DeVos Place.

"It's a wonderful event for me," said de Jong, pastor of First Congregational Church of Berkeley, Calif. "It feels like my life comes full circle."

She is one of about 3,500 clergy, lay people and administrators expected to fill more than 8,500 hotel room nights over the course of the conference. That is the highest number of rooms yet for a local conven-

tion, said Janet Korn, vice president of marketing for the Grand Rapids/Kent County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

She anticipates participants will spend more than \$3 million in local businesses — a major boost to the economy and the bureau's efforts to attract religious conventions, Korn said.

"It's a great accomplishment for our destination," Korn said. "People in the religious meetings industry know this is a large conference."

SEE UNITE, C3

'Speaking of Faith' creator on tap

Former correspondent to speak, share experiences June 27 in DeVos Place

BY JUANITA WESTABY
THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

In the world of journalism, religion was one of the last taboo subjects. The career of NPR's "Speaking of Faith" creator Krista Tippett is Exhibit A.

The former foreign correspondent for the New York Times had a spiritual awakening, went to Yale Divinity School then pitched the idea for a radio show that would have thoughtful conversations about religion and philosophy.

It took five years from the initial pitch to the weekly program it is today. (It can be heard locally at 7 a.m. Sundays on WVGR-104.1.)

SEE TIPPETT, C3



Krista Tippett

IF YOU GO

United in Grand Rapids

The United Church of Christ General Synod, beginning Friday, offers related events open to the public, some free and some for a fee. They include:

■ **Growing Bold**, a conference by the UCC Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender Concerns, Monday through Thursday at Crowne Plaza

■ **Holy Water**, a conference on environment and faith, 8 a.m. Thursday, East Congregational UCC, 1000 Giddings Ave. SE

■ **Children and Families Multicultural Festival**, noon to 9 p.m. Thursday, St. John's UCC, 1934 Bridge St. NW

■ **River City Saturday**, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. June 27, a day of speakers, music and other events in DeVos Place and at Rosa Parks Circle
Details: ucc.org/synod, click on Pre-Synod Events and River City Saturday

Local couple taking food-faith connection to the road

Tour will span several states, variety of locales

BY MORGAN JAREMA
THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

Rob and Kirstin Vander Giessen-Reitsma say when it comes to faith, food is a practical way to live your deepest values.

"What we choose to eat is never just a neutral choice," Kirstin Vander Giessen-Reitsma said. "What we choose supports certain systems or certain ways of doing things, whether we're aware of them or not."

The Northeast Grand Rapids couple, both 29, loaded their Volkswagen Jetta diesel and headed out Tuesday on a six-week U.S. Eat Well Food Tour to talk with faith communities about the connection between their spiritual beliefs and the food they eat.

The tour, in partnership with the Christian Reformed Church's Office of Social Justice, will take them to a dozen or more locations including whole foods stores, organic farms, greenhouses, farm markets and churches in Indiana, Wisconsin, Iowa, Nebraska, Illinois, Michigan and Ontario.

The Vander Giessen-Reitsmas,



PRESS PHOTO/LANCE WYNN

Leaving home: Rob and Kirstin Vander Giessen-Reitsma have embarked on a six-week tour across the U.S. and Canada to talk to groups about faith and food.

co-founders of the nonprofit organization Culture Is Not Optional — or CINO (cultureisnotoptional.com) — believe food plays many roles, from basic nourishment to the central element of some of religion's most sacred rituals.

"There are food choices that represent love, justice, abundance and creativity, and we want to put those into practice at the dinner table," Kirstin said.

One choice that represents love

and justice, she said, is fair-trade products such as coffee.

"It puts people first who have kind of gotten trampled in the global market," she said. "To buy fair trade is to be intentional in trying to correct that, by thinking about farmers and their families in Latin America or Africa as opposed to just doing what is best for our pocketbook."

Given that today's global food system benefits some while leaving others hungry, the couple think peo-

CONNECT

- For more information or to schedule a free workshop, call Kate Kooyman at 648-6068 or e-mail kkooyman@ccrna.org.
- For Eat Well Food Tour info, workshop schedule and daily trip blog, go to eatwellfoodtour.com.

ple of faith can eat in a way that sustains life and fulfills humans' role as stewards of the Earth.

But they say they will not preach one right way to do things.

"We're not going to be out presenting a new list of rules for people to follow," she said.

"It's going to depend on people's household means, their knowledge level, their cooking ability and their access to resources. All those things figure into it."

And the fact that the couple will be on the road for six weeks means they will not always be able to escape the lure of schedule-friendly eating on-the-go.

"If we haven't packed ahead of time, we at least try to look for locally owned restaurants," she said. "Maybe they don't necessarily have the healthiest or locally grown food, but it at least lets us contribute to the local economy."

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