

DEACONS STORY DECK

Deacons, get ready to inspire and thank your congregation for their generous offerings with these uplifting ministry shares stories!





STORIES TO INSPIRE & THANK

1. Finding Jesus at Dinner Church Resonate
2. Unwavering Support Calvin Seminary
3. Protecting God's Flock Together Thrive
4. My Life Wasn't Good Indigenous Ministry
5. Fully Forgiven Resonate
6. Staying Busy After School Reframe
7. From Healing to Hope Calvin Seminary
8. Good News On The Radio Reframe
9. Hearts Exchanged Indigenous Ministry
10. Sharing Hope With The "Down & Out" Reframe
11. Collaboration for Church Renewal Thrive
12. Meet Annika Kolean Calvin Seminary
13. Meet Aaron Solomon-Mills Calvin Seminary



FINDING JESUS AT DINNER CHURCH

A Resonate Story

Once hesitant, Anjalie* stood before the door. Laughter and clinking plates echoed from inside. Should she leave? But a strange feeling urged her to step in. With a deep breath, she knocked.

In her home, Leah De Vos, a Mission Network Developer with Resonate Global Mission, welcomed up to sixteen international students every Friday for Dinner Church. And weeks ago, she had extended the invitation to Anjalie.

Dinner Church, inspired by Jesus' ministry of sharing meals in Acts, has been spreading worldwide as a way to connect with those seeking community and spiritual growth beyond traditional church settings. Through support of ministry shares, Dinner Church has successfully become a stepping ground for non-Christians like Anjalie, who long for companionship and hope.

Leah invited Anjalie to Dinner Church. She was hesitant but felt drawn to the idea. After weeks of uncertainty, she finally mustered the courage to attend. The initial awkwardness quickly faded as Leah and the other students warmly embraced her.

During devotions that evening, Leah shared her testimony, which touched Anjalie deeply. Encouraged by the safe environment, Anjalie opened up about her own struggles, finding solace in the supportive community.

Anjalie became a regular at Dinner Church, growing increasingly interested in the gospel. While Dinner Church didn't replace a traditional church, it served as her first step. The gatherings evolved into Bible study, which then led her to attend church regularly. Eventually, Anjalie decided to devote her life to Jesus and was baptized not too long ago.

Thanks to your generous giving to ministry shares, Leah, a Resonate ministry partner, not only hosted her Dinner Church but collaborated with Classis Niagara to establish more dinner churches in Ontario through an internship program. This is all made possible by CRC churches giving to ministry shares.

"It's been amazing to see how God is working," said Leah. "When you take people out of that traditional church setting, all they really see is Christ. They see servanthood and they see community."

**Name changed to protect identity*





UNWAVERING SUPPORT

A Calvin Theological Seminary Story

Thanks to your generous giving to ministry shares, the incredible journey of Carmen and Uri has unfolded. Born and raised in Mexico City, Carmen's path led her to Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where she discovered her calling to ministry.

As Carmen began her studies, she found unwavering support from Cascade Fellowship CRC in Grand Rapids, who provided her with accommodations, a vehicle, and financial assistance. Graduating with her MA in Youth and Family Ministry, Carmen's life was transformed, and she refers to her life as "pre" and "post-Calvin."

During her studies, Carmen met Uri Alcivar, and their long-distance courtship blossomed into marriage after her return to Mexico City. Uri, a middle-school teacher, became increasingly involved in Carmen's ministry, finding joy in discipleship and supporting young adults.

Uri felt called to pursue additional training and looked to Calvin Theological Seminary, facing obstacles such as English language proficiency and financial concerns. Yet, with the support of the seminary and Cascade Fellowship CRC, Uri's path to study at Calvin Seminary was clear.

Despite challenges like Carmen's father's illness and delays in obtaining a visa, God's gracious provision prevailed. Uri's student visa was approved, and the family moved to Grand Rapids.

Uri's experience at CTS was transformative, interacting with diverse families from around the world, enriching his faith and understanding.

Graduating with his MA in Christian Leadership, Uri now serves as the Resident Director at the Seminary, honing his pastoral skills.

In 2024 they will be taking their next steps, leaving to serve with Resonate Global Mission in Belgium, ministering to a congregation with Latino immigrants and refugees. They also feel called to provide pastoral care for missionaries serving far from home.

From Mexico City to Grand Rapids and beyond, your church's giving to ministry shares has been the backbone of this remarkable journey. As Carmen and Uri serve in Belgium and beyond, they are the fruit of the investments and seeds planted by others, trusting in God's harvest.

Thank you for making this incredible story possible through your faithful support of ministry shares. Together, we continue to invest in and plant seeds, confident that God will bring a bountiful harvest!





PROTECTING GOD'S FLOCK TOGETHER

A Thrive Story

In the Christian Reformed Church, preventing abuse and promoting safe church practices is a crucial goal. This mission is made possible through dedicated Safe Church coordinators working at the classis level, sharing information and offering support.

Meet Carolyn Hoekstra and Natasha VanderVies, two passionate Safe Church Coordinators. Carolyn, a retiree with a 35-year career at Christian Horizons, now serves Classis Quinte.

Meanwhile, Natasha, a nursing and healthcare expert, fulfills her role in Classis Ontario Southwest while attending Sarnia First CRC with her family.

Both Carolyn and Natasha have been involved in safe church practices for years, actively supporting their local congregations and communities. Carolyn's previous church roles include council membership, worship leading, and shaping Safe Church policies. For over five years, Natasha has been working on prevention policies, education, and providing abuse prevention training.

As they embrace their new formal roles, these coordinators receive support through ministry shares, benefiting from extra training and consultation provided by Thrive ministry staff. Small grants help them set up their work, enabling them to make a significant impact.

Carolyn's expertise from Christian Horizons allows her to focus on reducing abuse risks, especially among vulnerable members like children and the elderly. Her goal is to ensure that all congregations in her classis participate in training, with easy access to safe church resources.

For Natasha, this role is deeply personal. Her empathy for vulnerable people and her commitment to abuse prevention motivate her. She believes that every effort to protect God's flock is worth it, even if it helps just one person.

Both coordinators see their involvement in Thrive's Safe Church ministry as a way to actively engage in abuse prevention, not only within their churches but also in the broader community.

Your generous Ministry Share gifts make all of this possible. By supporting these dedicated coordinators, you help protect God's flock and make our churches safe and caring places for all. Thank you for helping to create a safer and more loving community for everyone.





MY LIFE WASN'T GOOD

An Indigenous Ministry Story

Meet Tiffany Keewatin, a strong woman from the Peepeekisis Cree First Nation, known as Spiritbird in her culture. Her early life was marred by dysfunction and the painful effects of intergenerational trauma. With both parents struggling with alcoholism, she found herself following a similar path and seeking solace in alcohol at a young age.

Tiffany's mother, a survivor of the residential school system, bore the scars of that experience throughout her life. But even in the midst of hardships, Tiffany observed her mother's unwavering dedication to Indigenous Christian Fellowship (ICF). Indigenous Christian Fellowship is located in Regina and one of the three urban indigenous ministries supported by ministry shares.

Her mother's repeated visits to Indigenous Christian Fellowship piqued her curiosity.

Curiosity turned to conviction as Tiffany witnessed her mother's faith journey at ICF. She saw her mother's commitment to prayer ceremonies and her determination to be true to herself. Inspired by her mother's resilience, Tiffany embraced her Indigenous spirituality and found solace in prayer to her Creator.

This turning point led Tiffany to a transformative path. Today, she is a proud mother of eight children and a grandmother of 13. Through Indigenous Christian Fellowship's support, Tiffany has worked

hard and found stability in her life. She credits Bert Adema the Director, for never giving up on her and her family.

Indigenous Christian Fellowship not only provided a safe space for her spiritual growth but also allowed Tiffany to become a role model for her siblings. Despite their ongoing struggles, they see her as a beacon of hope and change.

Through Indigenous Christian Fellowship's guidance and her unwavering determination, Tiffany has triumphed over her past and become a source of inspiration for her family and community. Her story showcases the power of faith, resilience, and the transformative impact of supportive communities like Indigenous Christian Fellowship.

Through your generous support of ministry shares, you have blessed Tiffany Keewatin, whose life bears witness to the healing power of faith and the strength of community support.





FULLY FORGIVEN

A Resonate Story

Carlos* worked as a security guard at Tesoros de Dios, a Resonate Global Mission ministry partner in Nicaragua. At the same time, Resonate missionary Vinnie Adams moved to Nicaragua to serve with Tesoros.

Carlos has a gentle and happy spirit, always wearing a smile and showing kindness. He cares about others and is quick to ask about their well-being, as Vinnie experienced firsthand.

But life took a devastating turn for Carlos when his wife left him, leaving him to raise their one-year-old son alone. As if that wasn't enough, a large tree branch fell on his small, tin-sided house, collapsing the roof.

Overwhelmed and heartbroken, Carlos couldn't bear the weight of it all alone. Thankfully, generous churches who give to ministry shares made a difference.

Vinne rallied a team from the community to help repair Carlos's roof, restoring safety and security to his home. But God had even greater plans for Carlos.

The loss and challenges left Carlos with many questions, and he began meeting with Vinne and a colleague. Though he knew Jesus was good, his past involvement in some terrible things left him unsure if Jesus could fully forgive him.

Thanks to your giving through ministry shares, Resonate sends missionaries like Vinne to places like Nicaragua. Vinne could meet with Carlos, providing him with a Bible. Astonishingly, Carlos read the entire book of John and half of Matthew within a week!

Week after week, Vinne studied the Bible with Carlos, listening to his concerns and sharing God's truth. The Spirit was at work in Carlos, as Vinne reassured him of Christ's complete forgiveness and the glory of being part of God's family.

One beautiful day, Carlos prayed to receive Jesus' mercy and grace.

This incredible transformation was possible because of your support through ministry shares. Your generosity enables Resonate to send missionaries like Vinne, supporting people like Carlos who long for the hope that only Jesus can provide.

**Name changed to protect identity*





STAYING BUSY AFTER SCHOOL

A Reframe Story

Every school morning in Central Java, Indonesia, Teresia rides behind her mother on the back of the family's motorcycle. If she's lucky, she'll be able to catch a similar ride from a classmate's parent on the way home, but she usually walks.

After school, Teresia's parents are still at work, so she usually walks home alone. During this period of idle time, with no supervision or structured activities, Teresia admits that she used to be vulnerable to the influence of her classmates.

But everything changed when she discovered a new after-school activity! Thanks to your church's support through ministry shares, ReFrame Ministries' partners in Indonesia launched discipleship groups, including one right at Teresia's school. About 25 students gather to watch powerful YouTube videos produced by ReFrame.

"These videos have been so valuable for my personal journey with Jesus," said Teresia.

In her small group, Teresia and her peers discuss the lessons, guided by a dedicated leader. They also explore daily devotions for teenagers, also provided by ReFrame.

“Before joining the group, I only heard about the gospel at church or in school lessons,” Teresia shared. “But now, I have learned to have daily devotions and live according to God’s will.”

The impact on Teresia is evident. Instead of being negatively influenced, she now hopes to invite her friends to join the group, too.

Let us pray for Teresia, that she continues to grow in God and becomes a shining example, positively influencing her peers. We thank God for the transformative work made possible through your church’s support of ministry shares.

Together, we help young people like Teresia deepen their faith and find a supportive community to walk with Jesus. Thank you for making this ministry possible!





FROM HEALING TO HOPE

A Calvin Theological Seminary Story

Cathy Zou's journey to Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) is one of determination, faith, and a calling to make a difference in the lives of others. Originally from China, Cathy and her husband, Andrew, moved to the United States six years ago to pursue theological studies at Calvin Seminary. While Andrew pursued his Master of Theological Studies (MTS) and later his Master of Theology (ThM), Cathy focused on caring for their two young children.

However, life in a new country was challenging. With Andrew engrossed in his studies, Cathy took on the responsibilities of raising their children while also coping with the emotional toll of being far from home. The loneliness and cultural adjustment, combined with Michigan's harsh winters and the added stress of the global COVID-19 pandemic, presented a difficult season for Cathy.

In China, counseling was sometimes looked down upon in conservative church circles, but Cathy knew she needed help. She sought the guidance of a professional counselor and experienced profound healing. Through counseling, Cathy realized that faith and psychology could go hand in hand, empowering her to help others in their struggles.

When Calvin Theological Seminary launched the new Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling (MCMHC) in September 2023, Cathy felt a deep calling to apply. The program offered

a chance to integrate her faith and passion for helping others in the mental health field. She knows firsthand the impact that mental health professionals can have on people's lives, especially during challenging times.

Cathy's journey demonstrates the significant need for mental health professionals globally. The World Health Organization highlights that approximately 450 million people worldwide struggle with mental health issues, and North America is not immune, with one in two Canadians experiencing a mental illness by the age of 40.

Your giving to ministry shares plays a vital role in supporting programs like the MCMHC at Calvin Theological Seminary. It enables the seminary to develop new degrees that address pressing needs and equip individuals like Cathy to make a meaningful impact. By investing in mental health counseling, you contribute to promoting healing and shalom in individuals and communities, advancing the Kingdom of God and the redemptive witness of the gospel message.

Thank you for your faithful support through giving to ministry shares. Your generosity empowers people like Cathy to fulfill their calling and bring hope and healing to those in need.





GOOD NEWS ON THE RADIO

A Reframe Story

Amidst the hustle and bustle of her work at a local restaurant in Riga, Latvia, Natalia finds a rare moment of calm when her toddler finally falls asleep. Eager to hear news from her homeland, Ukraine, she turns on the radio, hoping for updates.

But to her surprise, it's not the usual news and chatter she hears—it's the voice of Lika Roman, a fellow Ukrainian and a member of ReFrame Ministries' Russian language ministry team (formerly known as Back to God Ministries International).

As Lika shares her biblical reflections and personal testimony, Natalia feels as if Lika is speaking directly to her. Through these radio broadcasts, Natalia discovers the Christian faith, which becomes a powerful source of comfort in the midst of her own refugee experience.

In a miraculous turn of events, Christ begins to heal Natalia's deep emotional wounds.

The ability to reach people like Natalia is made possible because of the generous support of churches giving to ministry shares. Through these gifts, Lika has been able to host Zoom meetings, providing a virtual space for those in areas affected by the war in Ukraine.



Lika emphasizes, “There’s a lot of bad news, but we know that in Jesus, we have good news. It’s a tremendous blessing that we can reach out to people through media anywhere.”

Thanks to CRC church’s giving to ministry shares, lives like Natalia’s are being transformed through the powerful message of Christ’s love. Your support enables ReFrame Ministries to bring hope, comfort, and healing to those in need, even in the midst of challenging circumstances.

As we continue to give to ministry shares, we partner together in spreading the good news of Jesus Christ and making a difference in the lives of people around the world. Thank you for your generosity and commitment to sharing the love of Christ with those in need.





HEARTS EXCHANGED

An Indigenous Ministry Story

The Canadian Indigenous Ministry has made a profound impact on Meadowlands Fellowship CRC, empowering them to embark on a transformative journey of racial reconciliation and justice in their community.

In February 2021, the church initiated their journey of learning how to love their Indigenous neighbors, sparked by the tragic murder of George Floyd in May 2020 and further fueled by the heartbreaking discovery of unmarked graves at the Kamloops Residential School in May 2021.

This journey, however, was only the beginning. Leveraging resources provided by CRCNA, Meadowlands delved into a video book study, setting the foundation for their transformation.

Over the next six months, they engaged in four enlightening Zoom sessions with guests discussing Indigenous issues, and participated in a reflective book group exploring Thomas King's profound work, "The Inconvenient Indian."

But the church's quest for understanding and reconciliation did not stop there. In the fall of 2021, 17 dedicated members embraced the powerful Hearts Exchanged process, which further deepened their understanding and compassion.

Witnessing the transformative impact, a second Hearts Exchanged group was formed in the fall of 2022, with 13 more participants eager to join the journey. Hearts Exchanged, is an initiative designed to equip Christians in engaging with Indigenous neighbors as fellow image-bearers.

As their first cohort completed the program, the church remained committed to continuous learning. They hosted an Indigenous musician for an inspiring concert and attended an enlightening Indigenous art exhibit.

The work of our Canadian Indigenous Ministry team is only possible through your support of ministry shares. Many CRC churches, just like yours, are embracing these transformative opportunities for healing and reconciliation. This journey exemplifies the remarkable power of education, empathy, and dedicated community support.

As we continue this journey together, let us extend our heartfelt gratitude to all who generously contribute to ministry shares, fostering justice, reconciliation, and unity within our local churches. Your support is empowering real and lasting change in the lives of our neighbors, and together, we can build a more compassionate and just world. Thank you for standing with us on this transformative path.





SHARING HOPE WITH THE "DOWN AND OUT"

A Reframe Story

Every spring and summer, John Lee and the church members in Auburn, Maine take to the streets, walking in pairs, and handing out Today devotionals and Christian literature. Your support through giving to ministry shares makes this street evangelism ministry possible.

Printed copies of Today are a common sight in Lewiston, with John receiving one of the largest orders in the area. These devotionals serve as a great conversation starter, as they share their faith with people they meet on the street.

John shares, "When we walk on the streets, we say we're Christians and that we're handing out devotionals. As they look it over, we begin to talk about where they stand in their faith."

Thanks to your giving, John has a growing list of people who eagerly want to receive the Today devotional from him regularly. It's like he's running a paper route, but the impact goes far beyond just delivering papers.

2023 marks John's 7th year leading the street evangelism team with Court Street, where they walk through neighborhoods every other Saturday from March through September. These city streets are often well-populated, with many people facing challenges due to drugs and prostitution. Yet, amid

the struggles, those who engage with John and his team are often ready to make a change in their lives.

Through these conversations, about 100 people have accepted Christ, all by God's grace. Some have even joined John in attending church, while for others, the impact may not be immediately visible.

John explains, "We always ask God to bring the people he wants us to talk to, and most of the time, we can see that he has done just that."

Your giving to ministry shares has made a profound difference in the lives of countless individuals in Auburn and beyond. Through these devotionals and personal conversations, lives are being transformed and hearts are opening up to the love of Christ.

Thank you for your faithful support, which enables John and the church to reach out to those who are "down and out" and share the hope of the Gospel. Together, we are making a lasting impact in our community and beyond.





COLLABORATION FOR CHURCH RENEWAL

A Thrive Story

Meet Rev. Jake Porter, a pastor at Immanuel CRC in Hudsonville, Michigan. Seeking guidance, he reached out to Thrive's Dave Den Haan a few weeks ago.

Immanuel had a mission and vision statement that had been collecting dust for years, with little impact on their decisions or ministry. Reverend Jake wanted to breathe life into it and make it a driving force in their church.

Den Haan knew just the right person to help. He connected Reverend Jake with Reverend Elaine May, the program manager for Thrive's church renewal and a key contributor to the Thriving Essentials curriculum.

Instead of providing advice alone, Den Haan harnessed the power of collaboration with Thrive to ensure Immanuel got the best support possible. May's expertise and experience made her the perfect guide for Immanuel on their journey to revitalize their church.

Through teamwork and cooperation, Immanuel CRC is stepping into a new chapter, embracing their mission and vision with renewed passion and purpose. Thanks to ministry shares, the collaborative efforts of Thrive are able to help churches like Immanuel find the support they need to flourish.

Your generosity towards ministry shares is helping to build stronger churches, thank you for being part of this inspiring journey of renewal and growth.





MEET ANNIKA KOLEAN

A Calvin Theological Seminary Story

Annika has been a seminary student since 2021, joining Calvin Theological Seminary through distance learning from Zeeland, MI.

Annika believes that the Lord has gifted her with a great passion to study Scripture, which is what led her to Calvin Seminary. She says that studying at Calvin “has been nothing short of a joy.” Post seminary, Annika believes the Lord is calling her to become a teacher.

When considering seminary, Annika was drawn to Calvin because of the academically oriented Master of Theological Studies program. Though she was unsure of where the Lord was calling her at the beginning of her studies, she continued to trust that the Lord would guide and lead her. Annika believes that one of the major areas of growth this journey has provided is how to trust God and his timing.

Thank you for your faithful support through giving to ministry shares. Your generosity helps to make theological education possible for students like Annika.





MEET AARON SOLOMON-MILLS

A Calvin Theological Seminary Story

Aaron, a loving husband and father to six, is a current MDiv student at Calvin Theological Seminary, partaking in the seminary's distance program from Southern California. Aaron is a gifted pianist and cherishes connection with others.

He says he feels the Lord is calling him “toward faithful preaching and teaching, helping our new members to understand Reformed liturgy, and the concept of covenant in church membership, and helping our church in community engagement.”

Aaron was installed as lead pastor at BellOne Christian Reformed Church in March of 2023. When considering attending Calvin Seminary, Aaron was encouraged by his family and church to pursue the MDiv program to bridge his ordination from commissioned pastor to Minister of the Word.

Aaron feels blessed to be part of a diverse educational community and appreciates the interesting and formational coursework that CTS offers, as he believes it is equipping him further for pastoral ministry.

Thank you for partnering with ministry shares to help to make theological education possible for students like Aaron. Your support means that the CRC will have a healthy next generation of pastors for your congregation.

