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LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR

MINISTRY AMONG MIGRANTS, IMMIGRANTS, & REFUGEES
Table of Contents

3 GOD’S PLAN
   BY JUL MEDENBLIK

4 MAKING IMMIGRATION OUR PROBLEM
   BY AMANDA W. BENCKHUYSEN

8 TRAUMA, FORCED MIGRATION, AND THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH
   BY MATTHEW COOKE

12 LATINO/A EVANGELICAL IMMIGRANTS IN WEST MICHIGAN
   BY MARIANO AVILA

16 INFORMING, EQUIPPING, AND CONNECTING AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS IN GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN
   BY MARGARET MWENDA

19 LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR

22 FACULTY NEWS

22 NEW FACES

23 OTHER NEWS

24 YEAR IN REVIEW
We didn’t plan it, but God did.

A little over two years ago, Calvin Seminary held its first “Loving Your Neighbor” summer conference. It was a great conference with diverse presentations along the theme of following God’s command of “loving our neighbors as ourselves.” Here is a link to video resources from the conference: www.calvinseminary.edu/lyn2016.

Soon after the 2016 conference, we began thinking about the summer of 2018. We decided that a follow up to that first “Loving Your Neighbor” conference was to continue with that overarching vision and focus on “Ministry Among Migrants, Immigrants, and Refugees.”

At the time of our planning, the news of children separated at the border from immigrants coming into the United States or caravans from Central America coming up to the United States was not present. As people gathered, they said this conference was timely. It was in God’s timing.

Here is what I hope you will take away from this issue and the invitation to engage the articles and videos that we are making available from our summer conference:

• Seek to follow biblical principles knowing that it is more complicated than any slogan, bumper sticker, or one-liner.
• Listen first to learn and understand.
• There are good people caught up in stereotypes and caricatures rather than engaging in conversation. It will not only take biblical understanding, but also wisdom to move forward.
• Ministry along the margins helps us see the challenge and the opportunities of ministering to the “least” of these.
• Watch out for false dichotomies. For example, someone can favor better border security as well as a more compassionate immigration process for those seeking refuge.

We pray that the resources presented will help us follow Jesus a little further and deeper as we again recognize that we are to follow God’s plans, not our own.

In His Service With You,

Jul Medenblik
President
Even as I write this, a caravan of thousands of Hondurans is making the dangerous and harrowing journey north, heading toward the US border in search of a better life. Though some have suggested that the caravan is made up of drug mules, thugs, and terrorists who are planning to “invade” our country, those on the frontlines give a different picture: tired mothers with young children, young men fleeing gangs, families traumatized by violence, people crushed under the weight of corruption and poverty. Some, no doubt, head north in search of economic opportunity or the desire to join family members already in the US. Many others, however, cannot return home for fear for their lives and will make legitimate claims for asylum at our border.
Through no merit of my own, my life is markedly different. I was born in a safe and stable country. Because of this, every day, I wake up in a comfortable bed. I get my children off to a school where I know they receive a quality education. I go to work at a job that is demanding but fulfilling. I have access to sufficient food and clean water. I do not fear daily that my daughters will be gang-raped or trafficked or that my nephews will be pressured into gangs. I do not have to pay off thugs to keep my family safe. My family and I are not denied opportunities for education or work and our lives are not threatened because of my ethnicity or religious beliefs or political convictions. I live a relatively safe existence in a stable and predictable environment that allows me and my family to flourish.

For many of us in North America, immigration and refugee resettlement is something we have the luxury of not thinking or worrying much about. When it does come up, it is in the context of discussions about government policy and national security and protecting our borders and safeguarding American values. It is a political issue, not a personal one, and one from which we enjoy a measure of detachment. After all, it is not our lives at risk, and as such, it is easy to relegate issues of immigration to the pile of things that are not our problem.

But while the plight of the immigrant and the refugee may not be our problem per se, the Bible seems insistent that it should be our concern. In fact, caring for the immigrant goes right to the heart of what it means to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Deuteronomy 10:17-18 tells us, “For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the immigrant residing among you, giving them food and clothing.”

Simply put, the testimony of Scripture is that God loves, cares for, and watches over the immigrant (Ps. 146:9). And while Scripture doesn’t explicitly state why this is the case, the association of the immigrant with the orphan, the widow, and the poor provides a helpful clue. God cares for the immigrant because, like these others, immigrants are especially vulnerable to the brokenness and sin of this world. They are people without a home, often without resources, without status, and without a support system, all of which makes them susceptible to discrimination, abuse, loneliness, and hardship. Their very survival and ability to flourish is dependent upon the hospitality of others. For good reason, then, God is concerned for their well-being. God sees their vulnerability, their loneliness, their fear, and His heart breaks for them.

One way that we show love for God is by loving and caring about the things that are of concern to God. Deuteronomy 10:19 makes this explicit when it indicates that not only does God love the immigrant, but we are to love the immigrant as well. What this means, exactly, is spelled out in the law codes of the Old Testament.

There, we find laws that safeguard the just and fair treatment of immigrants. For instance:

Deuteronomy 24:14-15: “Don’t take advantage of poor or needy workers, whether they are fellow Israelites or immigrants who live in your land or your cities. Pay them their salary the same day, before the sun sets, because they are poor, and...”
One way that we show love for God is by loving and caring about the things that are of concern to God.

their very life depends on that pay, and so they don't cry out against you to the Lord. That would make you guilty.”

Leviticus 19:33-36: “When immigrants live in your land with you, you must not cheat them. Any immigrant who lives with you must be treated as if they were one of your citizens. You must love them as yourself, because you were immigrants in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God. You must not act unjustly in a legal case involving measures of length, weight, or volume. You must have accurate scales and accurate weights, an accurate ephah and an accurate hin. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.”

In addition to laws that demand justice for the immigrant, we find laws that legislate compassion and mercy. Good examples of this are found in:

Exodus 23:12: “Do your work in six days. But on the seventh day you should rest so that your ox and donkey may rest, and even the child of your female slave and the immigrant may be refreshed.”

Leviticus 19:9-10: “When you harvest your land’s produce, you must not harvest all the way to the edge of your field; and don’t gather up every remaining bit of your harvest. Also do not pick your vineyard clean or gather up all the grapes that have fallen there. Leave these items for the poor and the immigrant; I am the Lord your God.”

Through these and other laws, the Israelites were encouraged to treat immigrants as they would treat their own, making no distinction between themselves and “the foreigner.” In fact, the Old Testament laws emphasize again and again that being a foreigner, a stranger, the other is a significant part of Israel’s own story. They too “were immigrants in Egypt.” They knew the vulnerability of being a minority population. And their laws reflect this, exhibiting a profound empathy for those who would uproot themselves from their homeland and family and everything familiar to join themselves to God’s people. Thus, what we get in Old Testament immigration law is not so much laws that focus on protecting Israel, but rather, laws that seek to protect immigrants and that direct Israel to show care and hospitality toward them.

In addition to cultivating a sense of shared identity and empathy for immigrants, this core memory of being immigrants in the land of Egypt served as an important reminder that what distinguished the Israelites from the immigrants who came to dwell among them was God. They were once immigrants in Egypt. But God changed all that when He responded to their cries for help and acted toward them with compassion and grace, forming them as a people and giving them a sense of identity, a land, security, economic prosperity, and well-being. All of it was pure gift, given not because they deserved it but because of God’s great love for them (Deut. 7:7-8).

God’s intention with this lavish gift-giving, however, was never that Israel protect and safeguard this blessing for themselves. Rather, Israel was blessed to be a blessing. And so God commanded them to share their land, their resources, their culture, even their God, and in this way, to pass on God’s
love and compassion through acts of hospitality, extending God’s redemptive work to the nations. As God loved and blessed Israel, so God called them to love and bless others, particularly the most vulnerable, like immigrants.

Now, we are not Israel. And this is not the ancient Near East. But God’s concern for the vulnerable has not changed. He still loves the immigrant. And for those of us who are followers of Jesus, our calling is not so very different from that of ancient Israel. We are blessed to be a blessing, called to participate in extending God’s redemptive work to the nations. To love because God loves. To have compassion because God has compassion.

In this time of fear and anxiety, when the conversation about immigration revolves around protecting what’s ours, Christians have an opportunity to make a powerful, countercultural witness to God’s love and concern for the immigrant and the refugee. So let’s show that we are lovers of God by making immigration our problem.
TRAUMA, FORCED MIGRATION, AND THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

MATTHEW COOKE
The focus of this summer’s Loving Your Neighbor conference centered on how church leaders can best minister to those marginalized because of their status as immigrants. Professor Danjuma Gibson, on his lecture centered on trauma, began by focusing on those individuals displaced by forced immigration – specifically those who had little to no say about when they left and with no option to return home. The experience of the migrant forced from their home can be traumatizing in a way that is unique compared to others who have a choice.

When exploring the root of trauma experienced by a migrant, Gibson points to the degree of choice they had in their displacement experience. Questions like “Was the decision to leave a decision I chose?”, “Am I able to return?”, or “Was I welcomed in my new ‘home?’” are important as we consider the experience of the migrant. Often times, those forced to leave have this decision imposed upon them without notice, leaving deep wounds. Migrants enter communities and churches carrying the deep pain of being taken from their home, often separated from people they love and a place they know, to a new location where they are met with suspicion.

The migrant’s lack of choice leaves them especially vulnerable. Being aware of the trauma is important for church leaders. But how does trauma manifest itself? Gibson uses his knowledge of psychotherapy to help his audience understand how trauma occurs and why those who are marginalized and displaced are particularly vulnerable.

“I think psychotherapy is inherently Reformed,” quips Gibson, drawing a chuckle from the audience conference-goers. He pauses for a second, smiles, and continued with a quote from John Calvin from his Commentary on the Psalms. It begins:

“I have been accustomed to call this book, I think not inappropriately, ‘An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul,’ for there
is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life of all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated."

Calvin goes on to say this is not unique to the Psalms, but that the prophets, with their various commandments, also encourage us to explore our inmost thoughts for the purpose of bringing the hidden to the surface.

As such, in the case of our migrant brothers and sisters (and for the benefit of our ministry with them) it is important to have a working knowledge of trauma and the underlying spiritual, emotional, and psychological effects it has on individuals and groups. Gibson offers a framework which provides a basic understanding of what leads to trauma: dis-attachment, which can lead to loss-pain, and thereby can lead to grief. This formula is not true of all those who are forced from their home, but it is prevalent. Each step toward trauma provides insight for the ministry practitioner on how to mindfully work with the migrant in your community. Gibson spent time on each stage, engaging with the conference audience on their experience and exposure to each step.

Attachment: Growing up, we are taught to attach. We attach to other people – family members, people in our community – but we also create attachments with non-people: objects, places, symbols, etc. This need to create attachment does not go away as we get older.

Loss-Pain: When studying the effects of trauma, it is important to note what dis-attachment occurred, which leads

How should ministry leaders respond?

What pitfalls do they need to avoid?
to a feeling of loss. In forced migration, many attachments are disturbed; Gibson gave examples of material and relationship loss. Those who are forced to leave their home may feel a loss of function or of their role within a community. They may experience a shift in the very way they think of themselves. The pain that can result from such a disturbance is felt deeply.

Trauma: The pain of such dis-attachment can lead to feeling a loss of control. This, in turn, can result in a feeling of stuckness, not knowing how to proceed. While such pain can affect people of all ages, the pain of dis-attachment has a more pronounced effect on children.

THE RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH

As migrants who are experiencing trauma enter communities and churches, these communities must think through how to respond to the trauma many migrants are experiencing. How should ministry leaders respond? What pitfalls do they need to avoid? Gibson provided some helpful do’s and don’ts when it comes to creating a supportive and healthy community for our migrant brothers and sisters.

First, it is important to avoid a gospel of happiness. When church leaders avoid the pain of others, it sends an inaccurate message about the message of Jesus. In fact, Jesus entered into the pain of humanity. Further, Christ invites us to enter this pain as well—an image made clear through the practice of communion. By serving those who are grieving, we are invited to serve just as Christ served us.

Gibson challenges church leaders to take this message to heart. “Faith and Christianity does not take away pain,” he reminds the audience. “There is no way to address pain except to go through it.” Gibson encourages church leaders to suffer with those who are suffering.

However, the Church’s response should go beyond standing beside our refugee sisters and brothers; Gibson recommended making space to tell the full story of those who are experiencing trauma because of forced migration. Because trauma so often begins with a sudden change in people’s narratives, giving those who are suffering trauma space to tell these stories can serve as a moment of healing. Instead of offering the message of “when are you going to get over this?”, it allows the refugee to own their story, to provide control where it was lost.

More broadly, Gibson encouraged the leaders at this conference to fight against xenophobia and bigotry prevalent in today’s culture. This is more than a political issue; it is, in fact, a biblical and theological issue. In doing so, it is important to look closely at the practices in our own churches that may be excluding others.

Gibson reminded the Loving Your Neighbor attendees that as Christians, the biblical story uniquely equips us to engage with this ministry, to commune with those who are hurting, and to help them begin the process of healing. The effects of trauma are real and create significant pain. As communities looking to work with those who are the midst of this pain, we can lean on both our faith as well as our knowledge and resources in the area of psychotherapy. By doing so, we will create places of healing that respond to our call to mirror the example we find in Christ.

MATTHEW COOKE
Director of Communications
In our panel with Latino/a leaders and pastors (women and men), we heard about their experiences in West Michigan. It is important to clarify that the experience during the last two years has nothing to do with having or not having documents to be in this country. It is, rather, a more simple fact: Being Latino/a in West Michigan means experiencing frequently violent attitudes and actions from people who now believe are entitled to be violent against racial minorities regardless of their legal status.

We asked the participants in the panel the following questions:

What words describe your feelings about the immigration situation in this country? Why?

The following words were most used:

Rejection
Inferiority
Abuse
Sadness
Profound Pain
Oppression
Indignation
Frustration

“Rejection because we do not speak the same language and our color is different. Inferiority – in this country I have felt like a second-class human being. Abuse in the wages we receive and the types of jobs we can get.”

“There are families that have gone through the pain of being separated. There are children without parents that are taking care of their brothers and sisters, taking care of their homes. Basically, children are being forced to be adults when they are physically and emotionally not prepared to do so and they are being denied the ability to enjoy the stage of life that every human has the right to live. There are children who feel abandoned, many betrayed by the country where they were born and that should ensure their rights, seeing and feeling that there is a community that is not demonstrating the goodness of God. They do not feel the human quality of love for people who look different. A society that is broken starts breaking families and that affects us all.”
“Our children live through it at school where their classmates tell them (without even realizing what they’re saying) to go back to their country. What country, if many of them were born here?”

What have you done?

What does all of this mean in your daily life? How does this reflect in the activities you do every day? How is it for your family and church?

“Everyone is afraid, whether they be a citizen, a resident, or a visitor. Hatred has been planted, a hate against certain groups or minorities and it’s not a question of being legal or not, it’s about the color of your skin, that you look different than a predetermined appearance. That’s discrimination. Now we have to carry all of our documents, an ID isn’t good enough anymore for someone with our skin color. That is what we live every day.”

“For me, and I believe for many others that are in this situation, this human behavior (racism) seems to be normal in this country that many say is one of the most developed countries. In my life, this is reflected in my fear of leaving the house and never being able to come home to my wife and my children and feeling the contempt that others have toward me.”

“ICE deported a father who went to drop his children off at school and went to work and never came back home and the children were left without a father, abandoned and separated. There are families, people with great needs, that are afraid to apply for or look for help. People who need emergency help are afraid to ask for it. For example, with the situation with the polluted water in Flint there was an organization or group of people that were asking for ID to Latinos/nas in order to give them water. That is an extreme abuse in an emergency situation.”

“Politically they are trying to say that we do not have value as human beings and I wonder, do we not have the image of God in us? We were also made in God’s image and are the likeness of God and creator and we have the same worth that all humans have.”

“It has affected my family because they feel that even though they were born in the USA they are isolated from activities at school. For the brothers and sisters of the Church they are hurt by the raids because for those who don’t have a driver’s license it’s dangerous for them to go to their jobs and to church.”

What have you done?

What actions should our churches take to help ease these situations?

“Make every church a center of refuge for immigrants and provide information on what to do if detained. When a church is no longer a safe place, there is something really wrong with the church.”

“First, practice and show compassion as right now immigrants are looked at with hate and racism in general and it is being justified by ‘Christians’ for political reasons. You need to...”
love your neighbor as the Bible calls us to love. We need to acquire strength to continue to cry out. We need to acquire tools to help people who have gone through a crisis. We need to see in what ways we can help the Church with emergency situations, providing a place to live and food to eat, teaching them what their rights are or what institutions they can turn to. Create funds to help support institutions that serve and help immigrants.”

“Each church that believes in the true Christ needs to demonstrate tender compassion and feed the hungry, bring the homeless into our homes and without complaint ask God for strength and grace to give us the ability to fight and reach the needy and help those who cannot help themselves. This way we’ll have to opportunity to bring them to and present them to Christ. Goethe said, ‘Treat people as they are and they will stay how they are, but treat them like what they could become and they will become what they were called to be.’”

“What is going to happen in our churches and communities when compassion no longer exists and we forget about it and we exchange it for practices that go against what God established? What is going to happen when we forget to put into practice one of the greatest of the Ten Commandments, to love one another, to love your neighbor, and we replace it with a human policy that leads to hatred?”

What have you done?

Biblical reflections in light of these testimonies:

An underlying question during the panel was: If we are one family in Jesus Christ, why is a political and cultural ideology (white supremacy) more important and determines our everyday relationships more than our common faith in Jesus our Lord?
The question in Genesis 4:10 keeps speaking loudly today and we hope it will be taken seriously by our white brothers and sisters. What are we doing to our brothers and sisters from Latin America and the Caribbean?

In his eschatological discourse, Jesus issued a strong warning that is becoming a sad reality today.

“Because of the increase of wickedness (Gr. Anomia), the love of most will grow cold” (Mt. 24:12).

Jesus described a time when love was going to grow cold and wickedness would have the high hand. The translation of the word anomia as wickedness or lawlessness does not capture all the significance of this term in the Gospel of Matthew.

Anomia is used in Matthew to describe the false prophets who may do all kind of signs and wonders but fail to live according to the standards of the Law as defined by Jesus in terms of love of God and neighbor (7:23); it has a demonic inspiration (13:41); and it is expressed in the hypocrisy of religious leaders who are like whitewashed tombs but full of hypocrisy and wickedness (anomia - 23:28).

Anomia is “not doing the will of God (cf. 7:15, 21ff)...Jesus conceives of lawlessness as effecting lovelessness, a state of affairs he sees growing more intense with the approach of the end (24:12). Consequently...‘lawlessness’ is an ethical and eschatological term: from one standpoint, it denotes a failure to do the works of love that are at the heart of the Law of God as delivered by Jesus; from another standpoint, it denotes prodigious offences against the Law of God which suggest a prevalence of moral chaos (e.g. apostasy, betrayal, hatred, leading others astray, etc.).” (Kingsbury 1969, p. 105)

In more contemporary terms, anomia describes the reign of terror and inhumanity that, under certain circumstances, is set loose and becomes normal and even necessary by those who embody it. It is a progressive loss of our humanity and of the basic values that make human community possible. Think about times of moral anarchy during biblical history, like the days of the judges, the pre-exilic days of prosperous Israel (and the strong prophetic denunciations), or the graphic descriptions of inhumanity found in the Lamentations of Jeremiah during the destruction of Jerusalem. Or remember days during recent wars when a basic respect for human life seemed to disappear and terror and cruelty have been the normality even in Christian nations. Given the right circumstances, anomia flourishes and spreads wildly.

Today, we are witnessing in concrete ways an increase of anomia, even in the name of legality, morality, and Christian faith.

What have you done?

MARIANO AVILA
Professor of New Testament & Director of the Certificate in Latino/a Ministry
INFORMING, EQUIPPING, 
& CONNECTING AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS 
in Grand Rapids, Michigan

Margaret Mwenda

Early Years in Nigeria: Reverend Dr. Bernard Ayoola is a gifted engineer, pastor, and founder and executive director of the African Resource Center (ARC) in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Ayoola was born and raised in Nigeria – the most populous country in Africa – and hails from the Yoruba people, the third largest ethnic group in Nigeria (See Nigeria country profile below). Raised in a family of nine children, Ayoola attended a university in Lagos where he attained a bachelor's degree in civil engineering, taking after his father who was also an engineer. While in college, he met and later married his wife Adejoke Ayoola. Working for 12 years as a design engineer in Lagos, Ayoola never in his wildest dreams imagined he would leave his engineering profession to become a pastor.

Nigeria

Area: 356,669 sq. miles
Population: 191 million
Languages: English (official), Yoruba, Ibo, Hausa, & 250 others
Religions: Christianity, Islam, and indigenous beliefs
Ethnic Groups: More than 250 ethnic groups, the largest being Hausa & Fulani, Yoruba, & Igbo
Other Facts: Largest economy in Africa; oil is the main source of foreign exchange; six appearances in the finals of the World Cup.

(Source: The World Factbook, BBC News Country Profiles.)
Ayoola’s early influence toward being a pastor came from his grandfather, who was a pastor at the first Baptist church in Ife, where he grew up. He started singing in the choir at his grandfather’s church at the age of six and, as a teenager, played the piano and saxophone and led the choir. While living and serving as the music director in his church in Lagos, his pastor encouraged him to attend seminary to study music. Ayoola says, “I went to the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary to do an MDiv in church music and worship. I went there because I felt it would equip me to be a better church musician.”

Transition to the US: In 2004, Ayoola moved to the US with his three children to join Adejoke who had gone ahead to start a PhD program in nursing at Michigan State University. In Lansing, he started preaching at the University Baptist Church while pursuing an MDiv in pastoral training at Cornerstone University, graduating in 2007. Discerning a closer theological alignment with the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA), the Ayoolas joined the CRCNA and the Calvin community, with Dr. Adejoke Ayoola teaching at Calvin College and Bernard Ayoola enrolling at Calvin Theological Seminary in the ThM program. Guided by Dr. John Bolt to study African Christianity, Ayoola enrolled in the PhD program and obtained a PhD in systematic theology in 2017.

Ordained in the Christian Reformed Church in North America: While in the PhD program at CTS, Ayoola was ordained by Classis Grand Rapids as a Ministry Associate in 2009 to serve at the African Community Fellowship CRC as a co-pastor. After three years, he was on loan to Kentwood Christian Church (Kentwood, MI) for two years. Thereafter, he was invited to be a minister in the CRC after completing the Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (EPMC) in 2013. He was then ordained as the Minister of the Word at Brookside CRC (Grand Rapids, MI) and also became the director and pastor for the ministry of African Resource Center.
The Founding of the African Resource Center: As Ayoola pastored at each of these churches, he realized many of the new African immigrants and refugees that he served not only needed spiritual care and formation, but also help with healthcare access, accommodations, finding employment, and learning the English language, among other social needs. “We needed to have a place that is not a church to serve a wide range of African immigrants from different cultural and religious backgrounds; a place that would be all inviting, all encompassing.” Thus the African Resource Center (ARC) was incorporated as a non-profit by Bernard Ayoola, Kudakwashe Kaseke, and Alison Parham to serve African immigrants and refugees.

The ARC has devoted much attention and effort to serving those most at risk, especially the youth who tend to age out of high school without acquiring a diploma. Ayoola notes that high school-aged teenagers have very limited opportunities for college access due to language and cultural barriers. To this end, the ARC provides after-school tutoring and gives laptops to students who are economically disadvantaged to help them practice English and math at home. Additionally, ARC works closely with parents to invest in their children’s education. The outcomes have been encouraging, with evidence of improved attitudes, social skills, and better school attendance for some. “My vision is that the high school students would start getting admission into various colleges where they can grow and fit into and contribute positively to society. We are on that path,” Ayoola shares.

Through its youth ministry, African ladies fellowship, pastors’ fellowship, couples fellowship, and music ministry, the ARC continues to inform, equip, and connect African immigrants and refugees. For more information, visit the ARC website at www.africanresourcecenter.org/
Watch the entire conference now!

Like what you’ve read so far? For videos, podcasts, articles & more, visit calvinseminary.edu/neighbor

SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

DR. MARIANO AVILA  
Professor of New Testament & Director, Latino/a Ministry Certificates, Calvin Seminary

DR. DANJUMA GIBSON  
Associate Professor of Pastoral Care, Calvin Seminary

DR. BERNARD AYOOLA  
Executive Director, African Resource Center

DR. AMANDA BENCKHUYSSEN  
Professor of Old Testament, Calvin Seminary

DR. MATTHEW KAEMINGK  
Assistant professor of Christian Ethics, Fuller Seminary

KRISTINE VAN NOORD  
Program Director for Refugee Resettlement, Bethany Christian Services

DR. CORY WILLSON  
Associate Professor of Missiology & Missional Ministry, Calvin Seminar

DR. PAUL C. H. LIM  
Associate Professor of the History of Christianity, Vanderbilt University

M O R E  I N F O:  
calvinseminary.edu/neighbor
Mariano Avila
Professor of New Testament

Professor Avila’s newly published commentaries on Ephesians, written in Spanish, were published in October. This commentary is intended for pastors, seminary professors, church leaders and seminary students. It follows the same format of the Application Series by Zondervan. The commentary provides exegesis of the text, theology of the text, homiletical outlines and suggestions for the application of the Ephesians text in the Latin American contexts, including the Latino world in the United States.

Scott Hoezee
Director of the Center for Excellence in Preaching

Hoezee has been involved with two recently published books. In Faith and Science in the 21st Century: A Postmodern Primer for Youth and Adults, he authors one chapter that explores the intersection of faith and science. In addition, he served as the general editor for The Abingdon Preaching Annual 2019: Planning Sermons and Services for Fifty-Two Sundays, his third year serving in this role.

Robert Keeley
Visiting Professor of Discipleship and Faith Formation, Director of Distance Education

Keeley was invited to be the keynote speaker for the Children’s Spirituality Summit at Lipscomb University (Nashville, TN) in June 2018. His talk was titled “Walking and Singing” and dealt with the need to tell difficult Bible stories to children while walking alongside them as they make sense of the stories.
Karin Maag
Director of the Meeter Center, Adjunct Professor of the History of Christianity

Maag was ratified as President of International Congress on Calvin Research. She will serve a 12-year term. Maag is the third president in the history of the congress and first woman to serve in this role.

Young Ahn Kang
Visiting Professor of Philosophical Theology

Professor Young Ahn Kang’s new book is titled Philosophy of Everyday Life. Published in Korean and released in October, Kang describes his book: “My most recent book, Philosophy of Everyday Life, is on eating and drinking, dwelling and sleeping, working and resting, and our living with other persons. This book is based on my lectures I gave in May and June 2017, just before coming to Calvin Seminary, to the audience of more than 500 persons in Seoul, South Korea. Those lectures [were] organized as part of a series of the Distinguished Scholars Humanities Lectures organized by Korean Ministry of Education and National Research Foundation of Korea.

“In this book I tried to look at our everyday life carefully; look at it from every side, and try to disclose what happens, for instance, when we eat and drink. My way of looking at such mundane and pedestrian things in our life is always accompanied with one question after another. By looking, asking questions, and trying to understand what all these things mean I look to point out everything is given to us as a gift and we are obliged to make use of it for God and for our neighbors’ sake in gratitude and responsibility.”
A life-long resident of West Michigan, my pre-adult years were shaped through family and faith. After high school, I trekked north to Michigan’s Upper Peninsula where I earned an electrical engineering degree from Michigan Technological University. Shortly thereafter, I wandered back to the relatively warmer climes of Grand Rapids to get married and begin my engineering career.

While happy and successful, I sensed engineering may not be a life-long pursuit. Deeply engaged with our church as members and volunteers, I started a distance program with Liberty Theological Seminary. Just prior to earning an M.A. in religion, my sense about my engineering future proved true as I was asked to join our church staff. I served there for 10 years in a blended role of administration and ministry.

Then, similar to my previous premonition, I felt God preparing me for another vocational move. This time He placed me at Calvin Seminary in March 2018 where I currently serve out of the Information Technology department.

In the midst of this journey, I’ve been joyfully refined through marriage to Katrina, parenting five children (biological and adopted), the life and death of pets, and the recent start of a doctoral program. Such things have enhanced my love of strong coffee and early mornings. I’m glad for the opportunity to serve the Calvin Seminary community.

I was born and raised in Ohio along with my two brothers. I moved to Indiana to attend Grace College and Theological Seminary. After 3 years, I graduated with a bachelor’s degree in sociology/counseling and a minor in art. I met my husband the summer after graduation. I worked at Grace College and Seminary for a couple years in their Advancement office before moving into the local government and working for the Kosciusko County Assessor’s Office in Indiana. In early summer my husband decided to go back to school for occupational therapy which spurred the move to Michigan—his home state. Never would I have thought that I, being a Buckeye fan, would end up in Michigan, but I can’t wait to explore Grand Rapids, the Upper Peninsula, and the lakes. I am so pleased and grateful to serve at Calvin Seminary, which has made me feel like I am back at my old college again.
At their fall meeting, the Calvin Seminary Board of Trustees approved the development of an exclusively online Master of Arts in Ministry Leadership program. Tentatively, plans are being developed to launch this program in the fall of 2019. While Calvin Seminary has offered this master’s program in residential and distance-hybrid formats in the past, this new program is unique in that courses are completed entirely online (the distance-hybrid model requires a week on campus once a semester).

This announcement is consistent with Calvin Seminary’s trend of offering more options to students, providing added ways they can complete course work. While the residential programs at Calvin Seminary remain steady, the hybrid-distance options have continued to grow. More options have allowed students and their families to remain in their communities while also benefiting from a Calvin Seminary education. The offering of an exclusively online program should only expand the pool of potential students.

The conference also featured a lecture by Emmanuel Katongole of Notre Dame, who focused on the challenges and opportunities facing African Christianity today. Nicholas Wolterstorff discussed his awakening to the problem of apartheid in South Africa with James Bratt – an exposure which helped sharpen his sense of calling to address issues of public justice. The conference concluded with a plenary lecture by Calvin Seminary alumna Anne Zaki, who works at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo, Egypt. Professor Zaki focused on the particular difficulties facing Christian witness throughout the Middle East and North Africa. The 2019 Kuyper Conference will again convene at the Prince Conference Center on the campus of Calvin College from April 23-25, 2019. More information about last year’s conference, including video footage of the plenary sessions and select panel discussions, as well as next year’s conference, is available at: calvin.edu/events/kuyper-conference/
CPI STUDENTS ATTAIN ASSOCIATE DEGREES

Calvin Prison Initiative (CPI) program students receive an Associates Degree in ministry leadership in Spring 2018. The CPI program (a joint partnership between Calvin College and Calvin Seminary) achieved a major milestone, with 16 students graduating and working towards attaining a BA in Spring 2020.

CTS GOLF OUTING - JUNE 2018

Friends of Calvin Seminary, Jeff and Mary Beth Serdahely, enjoy a ride during Calvin Seminary’s 4th Annual Golf Classic event in June 2018. Calvin Seminary hosted a game of golf followed by dinner with 200 hundred guests at Thousand Oaks Golf Club. This wonderful event is organized by the Development Office each year.

ALUMNI GATHERING HAMILTON ON, CANADA

Calvin Seminary alumni and family members gather at a park in Hamilton, Ontario. Organized and hosted by Calvin Seminary Alumni Engagement office, the event provided an opportunity for alumni living in the greater Ontario area to network and for CTS to strengthen relationships with alumni.
LATINO/A MINISTRY GRADUATES 2018

President Medenblick presents a diploma to a Latino/a Ministry Certificate program graduate during the May 2018 commencement ceremony, while Dr. Mariano Avila (right) the program’s director looks on. Six students received their Certificate in Family Care during the ceremony.

CTS PICNIC

The 2018-19 academic year kicks off with food, fellowship, and games for the young and young at heart. Each fall semester, the Seminary welcomes new and returning students and their families with a great time of fellowship with the CTS community.
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CONVOCATION ADDRESS

Scott Hoezee, Director of the Calvin Seminary Center for Excellence in Preaching, gives the 2018 convocation address. The convocation brought together faculty, students, and staff to mark the beginning of the 2018-19 academic year.

JUSTO GONZALEZ

Dr. Justo Gonzalez offers a meditation based on the book of Acts 12 during chapel at Calvin Theological Seminary in September 2018. Gonzalez, a gifted scholar and prolific author in the area of historical theology and biblical studies in the Latino/a Church and ministry context, was visiting Calvin Seminary to teach in the Latino/a Ministry Certificate program.
Whether you choose Master of Divinity, Master of Arts in Ministry Leadership, or another program, Calvin Seminary will prepare you for a rich career in ministry, cultivating communities of disciples of Jesus Christ.

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- Students graduating with a Master of Divinity will take the full offerings of theological, biblical, and pastoral courses.
- The Master of Divinity can be completed in three or four years studying in residence, or in five years through our distance-learning program.

Master of Arts in Ministry Leadership
- Discover a powerful degree program for church ministry. Perfect for the current or future ministry leader, this master’s program offers theologically rich coursework and practical, applied learning in your area of interest.
- Your learning will focus on one of five ministry spheres: Education, Youth, and Family; Missional Leadership; Pastoral Care; Pastoral Leadership; or Worship.
- This program has been recently redesigned for student success and streamlined for student efficiency. The Master of Arts in Ministry Leadership can be completed in two years studying in residence, or in two to three years through our distance-learning program.