

# Sister Link

Regional Synod of Canada Women's Newsletter



## South African Reflection

By: Margaret Kapteyn  
(Source: RSC website)

How does one summarize in a few words, the sights, sounds, and especially the stories of the people in northern South Africa? Not easily.

A group of six people from the Regional Synod of Canada travelled together to South Africa to discern if there is a possibility of partnering with the United Reformed Church in Southern Africa [URCSA] in their struggle to overcome the issues of HIV/AIDS, poverty and unemployment, the disintegration of family life and crime.

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## Prayer Requests

- ✦ Mobilizing for Mission projects – Calling Lake: One Body Ministries; Woodgrove Community Church, Lantzville – outreach; Christ Community Church, Welland – outreach
- ✦ For the proposal being prepared by the church in South Africa, and for an agreement to be made and subsequent funding from the churches of the Regional Synod of Canada
- ✦ for the hearts of your sisters (and brothers) around the world who are struggling with uncertainty, guilt, loneliness, debt, disappointment, despair, grief, sickness, war, and famine
- ✦ For God to raise up and equip new leaders throughout the Regional Synod of Canada
- ✦ For all leaders throughout the Regional Synod of Canada



## Calling All Crafty Sisters

Sister Link needs your help in designing a new logo. It's really kind of simple, all you need to do is make and decorate a chain of paper dolls. These "linked sisters" will be photographed and used as the logo in upcoming editions of Sister Link (and you, your family, or women's group will be mentioned). There are 2 ways to submit your work:

1. Email a photo of your master piece to [clabbe@reformed-church.com](mailto:clabbe@reformed-church.com)
2. Mail your artwork directly to me at :

Christina Labbe  
1115 Seacliff Drive  
Kingsville, ON N9Y 2L8

## Women's Ministry in the RCA

On September 24 to 26, 2009, a group of 33 RCA women and men met in Grand Rapids to pray, think, and dream about the possibilities for a new incarnation of the RCA's Office for Women.

Our job was to answer this question:

*What are the most effective ways for the RCA to intentionally pursue a future in which women are equipped and empowered to fully exercise their gifts in the life, ministry, and mission of the church?*

After lots of discussion, here's the answer that we came up with:

*We believe that one of the most effective ways for the RCA to intentionally pursue a future in which women are equipped and empowered to fully exercise their gifts in the life, ministry, and mission of the church is to empower the Office for Women to gather women together in experiential learning communities. While some of these communities would be local, others would transcend geographical and cultural boundaries--and all would share a common goal of helping us to grow in grace. These communities would include elements of learning, service, and support, and would encourage RCA women on their journeys inward, outward, and toward community.*

*Finally, we pray that by doing a new thing in a new way for a new generation, our grace-filled communities will begin, by God's grace, to transform the whole church.*

As we look to a new year, please pray for the denominational leaders who will be looking for a staff person to figure out how to facilitate and implement these experiential learning communities. For more information, please feel free to email me at [clabbe@reformed-church.com](mailto:clabbe@reformed-church.com). I'll do my best to answer your questions. ☺

## Crab Dip

A delicious appetizer recipe submitted by Beth Germs from First Reformed Church in Chatham, Ontario



- 1 - 8 oz. pkg. light cream cheese
- 1/2 cup light sour cream
- 1/4 cup light Miracle Whip
- 2/3 cup mild seafood sauce (cocktail sauce)
- 1-1/2 cups shredded marble cheese
- 1/2 cup finely chopped green or red pepper
- 1/4 cup finely chopped red onion
- 1 lg. pkg. crab meat (surimi type)

*Cream together the cream cheese, sour cream and Miracle Whip. Chop the crab and add it to the cream cheese mixture, along with the other ingredients. Mix well. Serve with "Bacon Dippers." Enjoy!*

## CAUTION DANGER CAUTION DANGER

by: Marian Meyer, Emmanuel Reformed Church, Woodstock, ON

Did you know that attending a RCWM conference can be a dangerous activity? Well, may be not for all of us, but it certainly was for me! I attended the 2009 Spring Conference, held at Westdale Church in Hamilton. The organizers had done a superb job organizing a day of excitement for us. During the morning “session”, all of us went to different missions in Hamilton, to be involved in some hands-on work. After a wonderful lunch, representatives of the groups discussed their experiences with the rest of us. The different missions were all ministering in the name of Jesus to the bodies and souls of needy people. One of the attractive aspects of RCA missions is the fact that we do not always start our own programs but join services and programs that have already been established and are functioning well.

The workshop I attended was a “patch making party”. I still don’t know if it was the “patching” or “party” that attracted me to this group. Regardless, there I was with some 20 other ladies getting instructions from a representative of VisionLedd Ministries, a ministry that was started 10 years ago by Jim and Kathy Cantelon. This couple felt called by the Lord to awaken the Church in Africa and North America to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Their vision is to see the nation of Africa mobilized and transformed through God’s love and compassion. VisionLedd exists to build the capacity of church and community leaders to be the hands and feet of Jesus in practical and relevant ways for those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. In James 1:27(NIV), the apostle tells us “true religion is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and keep oneself from being polluted by the world”. That is why this part of their mission is called Women for Orphans and Widows or WOW, and the “slogan” is “EVERY CHURCH A MOTHER TERESA”

WOW’s focus is on Sub Saharan Africa. They minister through the local African churches to the communities they serve. VisionLedd partners with these local churches and trains pastors and leaders

how to motivate, empower and facilitate connections that bring about positive transformation through Biblical teaching and practical care.

At this point, I entered the “DANGER ZONE. Practical, building relationships, being a Mother Teresa with other members of the congregation? OK Marian, don’t just sit there! You are needed! Why else did you come to this conference?

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## Westdale Reformed Church

by Debbie vanHoeve

Westdale Reformed Church, located in Hamilton, Ontario, draws from a large geographical area. Outside the City limits, these two women hold down jobs, manage their households and capture the essence of ministry to women in their communities. Some names have been changed due to the nature and circumstances of those involved.



*"How is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees on it or not? Do your best to bring back some of the fruit of the land."*  
**Numbers 13:20**

Jane would accompany her husband on his Deacon visits to widows. When his term ended, it was the elder women who expressed a desire for Jane to continue her visits. Although not planned she opened herself up and made herself available. Looking back she was quite unaware of what God had in store for her on her monthly visits.

One of the elderly women always told Jane that her welcome mat would be out. She had married late in life and bore two children before immigrating to Canada. She had another child and kept busy providing for her family in her home and family business. At age 50 the world she knew crumbled as her marriage ended and her family became estranged. Hers was a generation where this was unheard of and people generally did not know how to respond. She remade herself as a Nanny then Homemaker working in some form until she was 70 years old. Her church became her community. Her faith remained rooted in knowing that God would never leave her or forsake her.

"It is said that when they are gone, you wish you had been closer so she was like the grandmother that I didn't appreciate in my youth. Our relationship was safe. We trusted each other and learned from one another. She led a hard life but it didn't seem to stop her from caring for and giving to others. She was always knitting for the homeless and making treasures from others discards. She never had very much yet felt she was blessed beyond belief. I appreciate what she stood for and how she overcame obstacles" recalls Jane.

Outside her apartment building, she was given a plot of ground where she would coax flowers and vegetables from hard city ground. She found joy in her garden producing amazing results from ground that had little sun exposure. Her life circumstances could very much be compared to the unforgiving soil and shady days yet from it she remained steadfast and was able to produce something remarkable.

She now lives and gardens with the Master Gardener. Her welcome mat remains out and it is to that eternal hope that Jane looks forward to visiting with her friend again.

*"Pharaoh said, 'I will let you go to offer sacrifices to the LORD your God in the desert, but you must not go very far. Now pray for me.'"* **Exodus 8:28**

Phil and Jessica want to live consciously bringing the touch of Christ to their community. Sensing God's leading, Jessica began a weekly prayer group gathering parents to pray for one hour.

The group has grown to include parents from not only the Millgrove Public School, but the local senior public school and a high school in the Town of Dundas. Prayer requests come home weekly from teachers and others who stop the pray-ers along their individual paths.



On Tuesday afternoons, the group follows the resources as provided by Breakthrough Prayer Ministries. Bible verses help them to focus as they structure their prayer using the acrostic ACTS: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.

They send encouragement cards or meals to families and staff members as they feel led. Twice yearly, they host a teacher lunch at the elementary schools. They entreat God on behalf of the school board, curriculum, staff, and families; needs can be quite specific and sensitive.

"We pray for one mom who awaits her third round of chemotherapy and another family who suffers from the loss of their mom to cancer two years ago. We pray for another family who tries to recover from the loss of their dad who died by suicide last spring. The needs these families face are huge. Now we seem to be praying for more families who have suffered job losses" comments Jessica.

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## Why and How We Worship This Christmas

by: Rev. John Kapteyn

Christmas is a time of worship, which is expressed in our songs, special services, and celebrations.

When we think of worship at the time of Christ's birth we think of the angels singing and the shepherds bowing down before the newly born child in a manger – who was God Himself in human flesh. We may think of Mary's song of praise in Luke 1:47-55 in which begins with "My soul glorifies the Lord"

Worship is the act of acknowledging God's worth. Today we often think of worship as something we give to God, and this can be misleading. Worship in the Bible was an acknowledgment of what God has done for us.

Are you able to worship Jesus this Christmas, not because it is tradition to worship, but because you know what God has done for you?

In her song, Mary mentions two things that God has done for her.

I believe our worship often fails because we take God for granted and/or we do not recognize that which He has given.

Mary says that she will be called "blessed" because *God gave her the privilege of being the mother of the "human" Jesus*. She was humbled to be used by God, who as she says "was mindful of her humble estate." She did not think that God had chosen her for anything she had done or because she was better than others, but it was an act of His grace to use her.

This meant that she served willingly. When Gabriel told Mary that she would give birth to Jesus, her response was "*May it be to me as you have said.*"

Her willingness to serve God and to be used by Him was in itself worship that spoke louder than her song.

In Romans 12:1, Paul exhorts us to "offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship." When we give of ourselves for God, we are telling God that He is worthy to be served. We are letting Him know that He is more worthy than anything else and that we trust Him more than anything else – our reputation (as in Mary's case), our comfort, our very lives.

Mary also knew that God had done great things for her. Twice she mentions that God is merciful, both in his protection for her in this life but also in being her Saviour who gives eternal life. Recognizing God's mercy is being aware that we do not get the punishment that we deserve.

Is your worship this Christmas one that comes from your heart? If we humbly receive Jesus as our merciful Saviour and if we consider serving Him to be a privilege rather than a burden, then we can genuinely worship our Lord, both in words and in service.

We worship God not only by the words we sing, but by hearing His call to bring Jesus into this world and by responding to His call to share our faith, care for the poor in His name and to bring His righteousness and justice into practice, by saying "*May it be to me as you have said.*"



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After a few weeks of reflection, I phoned Debbie Hesselink, another member of our congregation, and asked if she was willing to start a WOW ministry at Emmanuel. She was immediately enthusiastic and ready to go! Wonderful!

Our ministry started in the middle of September. An average of 14 ladies attends every other week, and during coffee time, the janitors and secretary join us because someone is always spoiling us with some delicious home baked goodies. The ladies are encouraged to bring unbelieving friends or neighbours. This becomes a non-threatening form of outreach.

During our Parties” we let our creativity reign. We create simple quilt patches that express our love and concern. We will send the patches overseas, where African women sew them into quilts and donate these handmade treasures to children who orphaned by HIV/AIDS. Even though the days are very hot, the nights are very cold and children often sleep on just the hard packed soil. This truly is a gift that keeps on giving!

- We make the patches and have wonderful fellowship together.
- The African women gain skills during the creation of the quilt.
- These skills can be used to foster a business of their own and create a modest income.
- A child feels love and is warm!
- And now, we have adopted a community in Zambia!

The group has committed to give \$35.00 a month toward the care of a community. With guidance and resources of the local church, our contribution will help provide nutritious, locally

grown food, shelter, primary health care, and an opportunity for children to attend school. Above all, it provides HOPE. We will get regular updates on “our” community; we will see for ourselves what our help is doing. We walk with our friends. Our friends are walking OUT of despair, malnutrition, and unimaginable poverty to hope, health, reasonable living conditions, joy, and thankfulness to our Heavenly Father.

What a privilege that our God allows us to be encouragers and helpers. To God be the glory!



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She believes it has grown herself the most in learning how to pray for people and seeing the answers to prayer.

“One family returned to their own church after their 18 month old nephew was released from hospital following long recovery from a serious accident. God is really at work through our prayers. One mom believes our prayers contributed to her healing from cancer”.

As she smiles, she adds “Even for some that don’t believe in God, when they undergo a trial, they seem to appreciate the power of prayer.”

Recommended Resources:

1. To start, maintain and expand a Biblical women’s ministry: Women Mentoring Women, by Vicki Kraft, Moody Press Chicago
2. For information and downloadable prayer resources see the website <http://www.breakthroughprayer.com>

## South African Reflection

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One of our tour guides said, "you will see the good, the bad and the ugly", which we did. We travelled to remote villages as well as to inner city ministries to see what the local church is doing to address these very serious problems.

We found a caring, loving, and hospitable people, who are demonstrating a sacrificial love that is rarely seen in Canada. We saw many smiling faces and received big bear hugs. Many of the women in their communities are stepping out in faith to set up drop in centres for children who have lost their parents to Aids. They provide love, a safe place for the children during after school hours, food, education, and support. Home Based Health Care Programs are being set up in communities, which are run by volunteers. These volunteers are being trained to provide care to patients who are recuperating from hospital stays, as well as providing palliative care and support for AIDS patients.

Much is being done to educate congregations about the transmission of the Aids virus, as well as trying to address the stigma that is associated with having HIV/AIDS. Workshops are being held for pastors and church leaders, so that they can educate their congregations and be an example to them. We met with local church councils and shared with each other what the challenges were in our churches and what ministries our churches were doing to help those in need. We discovered that we have much in common with our South African brothers and sisters in Christ. We saw churches of various denominations and communities working together to overcome the problems of their society.

We saw excellent work being done in the inner city of Johannesburg for the homeless by Metro Evangelical Services, [www.mes.org.za](http://www.mes.org.za)

We saw the beauty of God's creation, such as giraffes, zebras, lion, hippos, and rhinos at Kruger National Park. We saw lush green mountainsides and beautiful sunrises.

We heard the heart wrenching stories of life during the apartheid years. We met many people who had decided that instead of seeking vengeance after the collapse of apartheid, they would follow the example of Jesus Christ and practice forgiveness and reconciliation.

We visited Motsoaledi, one of the worst slums in Soweto, where families of four or five people live in a one-room shack made of corrugated steel. They have no water or electricity. This community has learned that if they share and work together they are stronger and their dream is that one day places like their slum will no longer exist.

So, what have I learned from my time in South Africa? I learned that in spite of the misery and ugliness that can be found in South Africa, as well as in every country, God is working in and through His church. He is bringing hope and a renewal in the church and we as a church in Canada can learn much from their example. I also learned from South Africans the importance of relationships and getting to know people at a deeper level.

My hope and prayer is that we as the RSC will be able to provide the needed resources to help our brothers and sisters in South Africa and to deepen our relationship with them.





## Blessing Box - update

Thank you to all of you who have contributed to the work of women's ministry in the Regional Synod of Canada. Your generosity will continue to help connect women to the work of the Reformed Church in Canada. Please continue to keep this project in mind and in prayer. To make a donation please send a cheque to the Regional Synod of Canada and mark "blessing box" in the memo line.

**Merry Christmas and  
May the peace of Christ  
be yours in abundance!**



### Christina Labbé

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Sister Link is an e-newsletter from the Coordinator of Women's Ministry for the Regional Synod of Canada.

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