

January 2021

Emo Christian Reformed Church

Care & Share

BELOVED OF GOD

By Dr Marno Retief

As we enter this new year, I want to ask you a question that many believers wrestle with at times. Quite possibly you will ask yourself this question a number of times throughout the course of 2021: “How does God the Father really feel about me?” This is such an important question. It brings us to the heart of the gospel message and to the core of our journey of faith. How does God the Father view you as a follower of Jesus Christ? What does He think of you? The Gospel of Mark, when taken in its totality, teaches us that God the Father views every baptised follower of Jesus Christ in the same way he views Jesus – as his beloved child. Just like the voice of God the Father said to Jesus, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11, ESV), He looks at you and says, “You are my beloved son, you are my beloved daughter – and I’m pleased with you, I think the world of you, I fully approve of you!” But I know that – for some of you, at least – those words might sound too good to be true. You really struggle to believe God the Father feels this way about you. There might be a number of reasons for this. Maybe your own childhood experiences with your father were so negative – maybe even destructive – that you’ve always struggled to have a positive image of God the Father. Maybe your father was completely absent from your life, so you’ve always experienced God the Father as distant and uninterested. Maybe you’ve desperately sought to find your identity in something or someone else. Money, power, sex, addiction, or whatever else the case may be. But all of it has left you feeling empty and lost. You feel isolated and completely separated from the presence of God. However, despite all those negative experiences, I have a word of hope for you today. Let me point you to the good news of the gospel: If you trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, God the Father views you as his beloved child. Throughout the course of our lives, throughout the different seasons we face, we need to frequently remind ourselves of this fundamental truth – we are beloved children of God.

In his book, *You are the Beloved*, the great spiritual writer, Henri Nouwen, offers us some excellent advice:

In times when you feel bad about yourself, try to choose to remain true to the truth of who you really are. Look in the mirror each day and claim your true identity. Act ahead of your feelings and trust that one day your feelings will match your convictions. Choose now and continue to choose this incredible truth. As a spiritual practice claim and reclaim your primal identity as beloved daughter or son of a personal Creator”.

This is such great advice from Nouwen. Although you might not feel it, you must keep on believing the truth of who you are, you need to keep on reminding yourself of your true identity in Christ: You are a beloved child of God. When God looks at you, He sees you as you are in Christ. Your fundamental identity is in Christ. Allow this truth to keep on shaping your identity.

But how’s this possible? Why does God see Jesus when He looks at us? The answer is found in something that happened right after Jesus’ baptism. Mark 1:10 records, “And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove”. This image of the Spirit descending on Jesus signals something incredibly important: Jesus is the Messiah, which means “the anointed one”. The baptism of Jesus serves as the occasion where the Holy Spirit anoints Jesus as the Messiah of Israel. And it’s in Jesus’ role as Messiah that we discover why his identity as God’s beloved Son also becomes our identity. As Messiah, Jesus is the

representative of his people, and that includes everyone – whether Jew or Gentile – who believes in him. When you trust in Jesus as your Messiah, you're united to him. This unity with Jesus is so personal that everything true about him becomes true about you. Martin Luther explains the dynamics of this mutual relationship by referring to the example of a marriage:

Faith . . . unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. By this mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul become one flesh. And if they are one flesh and there is between them a true marriage – indeed the most perfect of all marriages, since human marriages are but poor examples of this one true marriage – it follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil. Accordingly, the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as though it were its own, and whatever the soul has Christ claims as his own. (Martin Luther, *The Freedom of the Christian*)

Because Jesus is our Messiah, we have the incredible privilege of sharing in everything that belongs to him, including his identity as the beloved of God. By faith, every follower of Jesus is united to Jesus the Messiah. And he is the representative of his people.

As people of Jesus the Messiah, united to him by faith, we need to practice looking at our lives through the eyes of faith. We need to acknowledge the fact that God is at work in our lives. We need to understand that, ultimately, we're living our lives *coram Deo* – in the sight of God, in the presence of God. But let's be honest – we live in a world where many people don't even acknowledge the existence of God. They openly identify as atheists and proclaim there's no God. And then there are also many people – even some followers of Jesus – who live as practical atheists. They acknowledge the existence of God, but they live as if God doesn't exist, as if the physical world is all there is. Yet, the baptism of Jesus confronts us with the reality of God's presence and action in our world. We read how, right after his baptism, Jesus "saw the heavens being torn open". In the context of Scripture, the word "heaven" is often used to refer to the realm of God – the divine dimension operating behind our reality. A dimension where God is at work in ways we can't even imagine. It was in this moment, at his baptism, that Jesus recognised, more than ever, the fact that the drama of his life was unfolding before the face of God the Father. And because we're united to Jesus by faith, we should remember the same is true of us. We need to recognise that the story of our lives is taking place in the presence of God.

In his book, *Reaching for the Invisible God*, Philip Yancey mentions how every animal on earth has a set of correspondences with the environment around it, and some of these correspondences far surpass our abilities. For example, humans can perceive only 30 percent of the range of the sun's light and 1/70th of the spectrum of electromagnetic energy. However, in some cases, animals far exceed our abilities. Bats detect insects by sonar; pigeons navigate by magnetic fields; and bloodhounds perceive a world of smell unavailable to us. Yet, through the gift of faith, the Spirit of God gives those who are in Christ an ability no animal will ever have – the ability to perceive the reality of the spiritual world. Faith gives us the unique ability to perceive God's action in our lives. As the apostle Paul puts it, "[F]or we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7, ESV). We need to look beyond the physical realm and – with the eyes of faith – see there's a dimension beyond our reality where God's constantly at work. If you're struggling to make sense of your life at the moment and it seems like God's nowhere to be found, change your point of view – try to look at your life with the eyes of faith. No matter how things may look, God's at work in your life.

But why's this spiritual perspective so important? Well, it's important because, without this perspective, we won't be able to face the various trials and tribulations that form part of the journey of faith. When we're faced with desert situations in our lives – as we inevitably will be – we seriously need to hold onto the truth that God is living and active in our lives. Isn't it interesting that right after Jesus' baptism – right after the moment he recognises God's action in his life and his identity as the beloved of God – right after these empowering spiritual events, he enters the desert! In fact, the text says, "The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness" (Mark 1:12, ESV). The text further mentions he was in the wilderness for forty days and was tempted by Satan during that time. In a sense, Jesus was re-enacting Israel's exodus from Egypt, having to pass through the desert before entering the promised land. Jesus' life teaches us one of the most important truths of the spiritual

life: The fact that God loves us, the fact that we're his beloved sons and daughters, doesn't exempt us from times of pain and struggle in this life. Once again, remember: What's true about Jesus is true about us. If Jesus, the beloved Son of God, had to pass through desert situations in his life, surely we'll also have to do so. And it doesn't mean God is angry at us, or upset with us, or anything like that. It's simply part of the journey for any beloved of God.

In the summer of 1967, Joni Eareckson Tada and her sister rode their horses to the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland to go for a swim. What happened next was a terrible tragedy that would change the course of Joni's life. Joni dived into shallow water, struck her head on a rock and became a quadriplegic. She was paralysed from the neck down. During two years of often painful rehabilitation, Joni learned how to paint with her mouth, and reflected on the implications of her disability for her faith. There were times when Joni was really angry with God, demanding to know why he allowed this terrible thing to happen to her. There were even times she wished she'd rather died. But in the years since then, Joni has learned that it's in her weakness that God's strength can shine through. By sharing her story, Joni has been a source of great blessing to people all over the world, encouraging them through her example of faith. Moreover, in 1979, she founded an organisation called Joni & Friends that seeks to address the needs of families affected by disability.

Nevertheless, at first Joni found it all but impossible to reconcile her condition with her belief in a loving God. How could he be a loving Father when he's the one who allowed this suffering to enter her life in the first place? It didn't make sense. But one evening Joni became absolutely convinced that God truly does understand. The catalyst was a good friend who told her, "Joni, Jesus knows how you feel. He was paralysed. He couldn't move or change position on the cross. He was paralysed by the nails". And Joni found this realisation profoundly comforting. "God became incredibly close to me and eventually I understood that He loves me. I had no other identity but God, and gradually He became enough," stated Joni. "I prayed for healing and truly believed it would come. The Bible speaks of our bodies' being glorified'. Now I realize I will be healed; I'm just going through a forty or fifty year delay, and God stays with me even through that". Joni's insight is so important for our faith. When we find ourselves in a desert situation, we need to remember that God is with us even in the most difficult moments of our life. He doesn't stop loving us or caring for us.

When Jesus found himself in the desert, the Gospel of Mark mentions there were angels ministering to him. But here's the strange thing: They didn't stop Satan from tempting Jesus. Why not? Why didn't they stop Satan? Well, that wasn't their purpose. The angels were present to remind Jesus of his Father's love and care for him. They were there to assure Jesus of the fact that, despite his suffering, he was still God's beloved. God was with him in the desert. There's an important spiritual truth in this for us. No matter how difficult or painful our situation may be, we need to remember God is with us. We continue to be his beloved. While He might not send visible angels to minister to us, he often does send people who support us, who pray with us, who are there with us in the darkest moments of our life.

So, how do you view yourself? What's your primary identity? The baptism of Jesus reveals how his identity was rooted in the knowledge of him being the beloved Son of God. And the good news of the gospel is that those of us who trust in Jesus as our Messiah may share in this identity. We too are beloved sons and daughters of God.

OUR CHURCH FAMILY

December is usually a busy month with lots of activities to attend. That is not so now. Who would have ever thought that it would take a year or more to get over COVID19. Patience is a virtue so let us practice it. I think we live in the best part of Canada.

We hope and pray that Dr. Marno and family will be able to arrive soon. We hope that January won't be as cold as it can be, for that will surely be a change from the weather they are used to at this time of the year.

With the end of the year in sight some are now thinking about "olie bollen" and New Year's cookies (rolletjes). What will 2021 bring? This past year was nice with the warm/hot summer which made for good haying and lots of beach weather.

Gardens produced lots of food. We had a beautiful fall and December started with mild temperatures.

The sermon which Dr. Marno preached on about Mary being favoured by God struck me. And then look at all the pain she had to go through. We too, as His children, are favoured by God.

Lucas Koomans let us know that his surgery went well.

Dan Agombar had a surgery on his shoulder and is doing well.

Cathie Sinninghe has returned home. Her surgery was not easy and there were some complications afterwards. Pray that the pain and discomfort will ease. It will take some time.

Ed and Reta Dykstra are very thankful that Laura's head injury after a snow boarding accident earlier this week was not more serious. A CT scan showed a crack in her skull and some bruising. The concussion specialist was amazed at how good Laura was doing and after a night in the hospital, she was able to come home again. Praise God for his providential care.

Congratulations to Janine Webb & Colin Angus who became engaged in July and will be getting married on Saturday, February 27th, 2021 in a small Covid-friendly ceremony and reception.

Hannah Veldhuisen had to remain in the Honduras (where she is teaching) for Christmas and New Year's. She had hoped to come home for the break but because of COVID19 restrictions could not do so. If you would like to send her Christmas/New Year's greetings, her email address is hannahveldhuisen13@gmail.com. We wish Hannah a Happy New Year.

Glenda Veltman's birthday is on January 26th. Many will remember when her and Peter and family lived here when Peter was our pastor. Glenda is not doing well and is in long care. It would be very nice for her to receive some birthday cards. Her address is 2280 Byron View Drive, Room 210, Grand Rapids, MI USA 49315.

Happy Birthday to all who are having a birthday in January. Our seniors celebrating this month are Jan vanZwol on the 6th, Anne Wielinga on the 6th, Wilma Esselink on the 7th and Henry Kaemingh on the 8th.

Happy Anniversary to all who began their married life in January.

We wish everyone a blessed 2021. And yes, when it is not easy at times, "trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey".

HEART GIFTS by Helen Steiner Rice

It's not the things that can be bought
That are life's riches treasures,
It's just the little gifts from the heart
That money cannot measure.
A cheerful smile, a friendly word,
A sympathetic nod,
Are priceless little treasures
From the storehouse of our God.
They are the things that can't be bought
With silver or with gold.
For thoughtfulness and kindness
And love are never sold.
They are the priceless things in life
For which no one can pay.
And the giver finds rich recompense
In giving them away.

Dec 12, 2020



Dear Friends,

Each of us will have our own stories of 2020. Some will be pretty much life-as-usual, others irritation or disruption by COVID-19, others occasions of celebration, still others painful loss.

Just yesterday we received a letter from a friend who had gone through thirty-nine radiation treatments in 2020. He wrote,

“Over two thousand years ago there was a faith community living in Israel, wondering when, or even if, God would fulfill his promise to send a Messiah and make things right again, they longed for “The Day of the Lord.” **In all our life we would say the year 2020 is the closest we’ve come to those feelings.** And yet, we know we are blessed, recipients of God’s grace and mercy, knowing the Messiah whose birthday we celebrate and knowing the Messiah who will one day “make everything new.”

I could end here and say, “And so it is with us.”

But ours is a unique story too.

- My work with TLT has been battered by COVID, as in-person training for church leaders was slammed shut around the world in March, and only began to creak open again late this year.
- Leadership training took new approaches through Zoom and WhatsApp and YouTube and radio – but was often hobbled by the limits of bandwidth and internet access in many countries.
- Our family has shared the joys of backyard barbeques, the exhilaration of Andrea and Henry’s engagement, the trepidation of new jobs and homes and continents, the disappointment of closed borders, and shared grief with family and friends.

This year has drawn us into greater lament – over things “not being the way they’re supposed to be”, as my erstwhile professor Neil Plantinga once wrote. But that’s what makes Christmas something we embrace with even greater fervor this year. God has “remembered us in our low estate, His love endures forever” (Ps. 136:23).



Thank you for your care and support throughout this year. We pray that your story of 2020 will be touched by God’s grace, and that you will know the peace of Christ this Christmas and in the year ahead.

With Our Love, *Albert and Carolyn Strydhorst*
astrydhorst@crcna.org

www.raiseupglobal.org/donate



“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” - which means, ‘God with us.’”
Matthew 1:22-23 NIV

One lesson, related to our faith, that I have learned over the years is that it is in times of difficulty or suffering or trials that we come to know Immanuel in deeper ways. So, as we are all in a challenging time with COVID-19 and all of its strangeness, let me share with you two good-news stories from our ministry this past month. I pray they will deepen your experience and appreciation for Immanuel, as they have for us.

At the beginning of this crisis, we in [SIL](#)* (Wycliffe’s main field partner) asked, “How can we respond and serve the world with what God has entrusted to us?” Our staff all around the world responded by serving local communities and health authorities by creating or translating COVID-19 resources in other languages. We used our language expertise in translation, publishing, technologies and education, to pull together all sorts of resources (from SIL and others). At the time I wrote this, our site links to 4619 resources, in 1005 languages from 155 countries. We have them all linked [here](#) on a very simple index. As we look back on this year, we see how God has led and opened up opportunities for service.

The other exciting news is related to our last email to you. In it, I shared with you that as Americas Area Director for SIL, I needed to find a new person to fill the role of Human Resources (HR) Director for SIL in the Americas. I asked you to pray for wisdom and discernment for me. Well, God has answered that prayer. I have strongly sensed His leading in

this challenging search. I cannot say much more at this point since we still have some steps to finalize everything. But thank you for your prayers. I am so thankful that this decision has been made before Christmas. I can now relax much better over the holidays! This process has frequently led me to reflect on Immanuel, God with us.

Despite COVID-19 restrictions and social distancing, we are thankful that we can still celebrate the real meaning of Christmas: Immanuel, God with us. Jesus, born in the most humble of settings over 2000 years ago, was, and still is, God and He is still with us today. As you celebrate Jesus' birth this Christmas, no matter your circumstances, we pray you truly experience His presence and the PEACE, LOVE, JOY, and HOPE that He offers and freely gives.

Thank you for your interest and support of us and this ministry of serving some of the most marginalized peoples in the world.

Merry Christmas!

Justin & Tammy Hettinga

**SIL, Wycliffe's closest partner, is a faith-based nonprofit organization that serves language communities worldwide, building their capacity for sustainable language development by means of research, translation, training and materials development.*

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wycliffe.ca

Finance Update:

As missionaries working with Wycliffe Bible Translators (giving leadership to the work of Bible translation and language development in the Americas), we trust God to supply our financial needs through churches and individuals who wish to partner with us. Part of our reliance on God is to make our needs known as we have them. **We are currently lacking about \$280/month to reach 100% of the ministry budget that Wycliffe Canada has set for us.** Please consider becoming a financial partner or increasing your regular monthly donation.

To Partner Financially:

If you would like to make a one-time donation or set up a recurring donation (pre-authorized payments), visit Hettinga.ca, and click "Give Now." For pre-authorized giving from your bank account, simply fill out and submit this "[Pre-authorized Monthly Debit Agreement](#)" form. To donate by credit card over the phone, please call 1-800-463-1143 (9am-4pm Mountain time) and ask for the Receipts Department. To donate by mail, please make cheque(s) payable to Wycliffe Canada and mail to the Wycliffe address above. (Please include a separate note that states "for the work of Justin & Tammy Hettinga.") If you have any issues with any of these giving options, please do



THE RIGHT TO LIFE

Association of Thunder Bay & Area

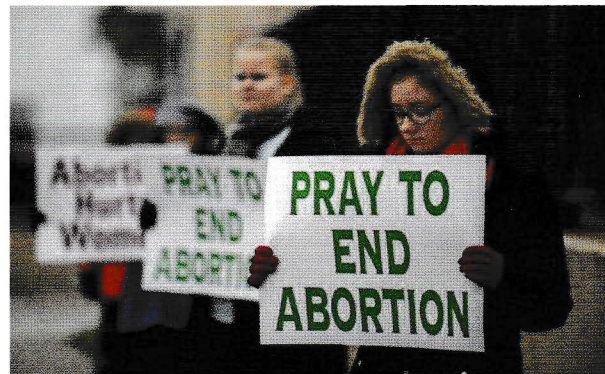
Life – Precious at all Stages

Protecting Life - From Conception to Natural Death

Fall-Winter 2020

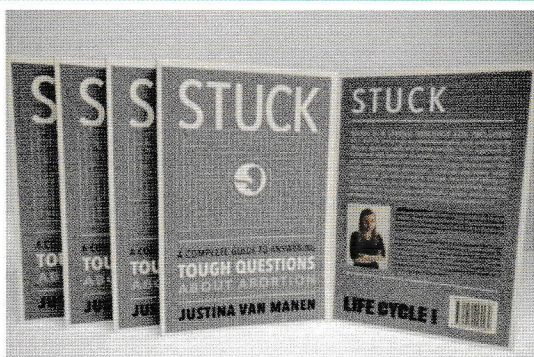
LIFE CHAIN IMPACT PREVAILS

With guidance from our local health unit, we proceeded with our annual local Life Chain event in October. Close to 100 participated, their pro-life messages well received by the majority of those passing by. There were many positive outcomes from this year's event! Our thanks to all those who took part and who committed to a time of prayer at home.



Plans for **LIFE CHAIN 2021** have already begun! If your church or group outside of Thunder Bay is considering a Life Chain event of your own next year, please contact us and we can work with you to make it happen!

APOLOGETICS!



Board Member Danae Turgeon, who has taken part in activism and apologetics training with the Canadian Centre for Bioethical Reform, is putting her knowledge and experience to good use serving our growing Thunder Bay pro-life community. Under her leadership, 10 individuals were trained (over seven 2-hour sessions) using the highly acclaimed book **STUCK** by Justina Van Manen. Training included interactive dialogue and role playing. Five of the participants subsequently participated in local activism where hearts and minds were changed. **Individuals and groups interested in future apologetics training initiatives please email us at info@thunderbay.life for details!**

CALLING ALL UNIVERSITY & COLLEGE STUDENTS!

We are excited to share news of the successful growth of the student pro-life club at Lakehead University - **Lakeheadu Students for Life!** Their mandate is 'to affirm the value of pre-born children and their mothers and to support our members in this through providing educational resources and opportunities.' Thunder Bay Right to Life is eager to support this and other local pro-life youth engagement initiatives! Please spread the word and help the LU club continue to grow! You can email them at lakeheadustudentsforlife@gmail.com

The Right to Life Association of Thunder Bay & Area
PO Box 32018 Thunder Bay, ON P7E 0A1 Email: info@thunderbay.life
Memberships and Donations can be processed at our website using STRIPE.
Find us at www.thunderbay.life and on Facebook @thunderbay.life

*Member of the
Canadian Council of
Christian Charities*

Pro-life radio ads run daily on UCB Radio Thunder Bay, reaching up to 9,000 listeners. Our current ad focuses on Abortion Pill Reversal - for women who have begun the chemical abortion process and changed their mind. Contact information directs them to practitioners familiar with the reversal process and attempts to save their pre-born child. Additional radio ads are currently being developed on the subjects of assisted suicide, and crisis pregnancy support. **YOUR MEMBERSHIP & FINANCIAL SUPPORT MAKES PROJECTS LIKE THIS POSSIBLE!**

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS *Membership Drive*

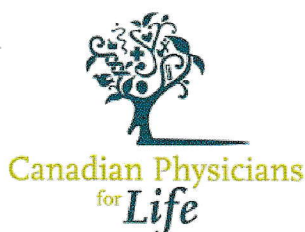
HELP US GROW! Renew your annual membership and **encourage others to become supporting members as well.** Your membership fees and generous donations allow us to continue our work - but there's more to it than that! A growing membership means encouragement and increased opportunities for connecting and supporting one another in our pro-life position, and for reaching those who might be on the fence. Membership growth provides our organization with a solid pool of volunteers, networking opportunities, sharing of ideas for future projects and initiatives, and more. National polling indicates that the pro-life position is no longer a fringe position. Locally and across the nation, despite Covid-19, the pro-life movement continues with boldness and determination. Help us continue to have a strong local presence, informing and educating our community about abortion and assisted suicide, and providing training and resources for pro-life work in and around Thunder Bay.



A Rachel's Vineyard retreat provides a supportive, confidential, non-judgmental place where women and men can express, release and reconcile painful post-abortive emotions and begin the process of restoration, renewal and healing. It is an opportunity to experience God's love and compassion on a profound level in a place where men and women can share, often for the first time, their deepest feelings about abortion. For those who have experienced an abortion, or loss of a child through miscarriage or still birth, we encourage you to consider taking part in a weekend retreat. **Confidentiality is assured.** For information visit www.rachelsvineyard.org or contact Mary-Jo by phone at 807-252-7420 or by email at cocoa@tbaytel.net or Terry at 807-476-4715 or email thoward@tbaytel.net. Find them on Facebook - @RachelsVineyardThunderBay or visit www.thunderbay.life for more details.

Sanctity of Human Life Sunday – January 17th 2021


We encourage parents, educators, pastors and church leaders to include this special day in their plans! Please visit our website for more info and suggested resources. If you are interested in obtaining items for a display for your church or group please email us at info@thunderbay.life.



Board Members had the opportunity recently to participate in the **Canadian Physician's for Life (CPL) Virtual Conference**. Expert speakers presented on a variety of subjects including Abortion Pill Reversal Protocol, Conscience in the Canadian Healthcare Context, Bill C-7 and the Legal Changes to the Laws Governing MAiD, The Pro-Life Movement Around the World, Scientific Literature on Abortion and Women's Mental Health **and more**. Videos from the conference will be available on CPL's website and will be highlighted on our RTL website and Facebook pages as well. **Networking and follow-up conversations continue to take place, valuable for the development of upcoming local educational initiatives.**



January 2021

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1 Nicole Boven Weston Veldhuisen 	2 Derek Kaemingh *Gary & Cheryl Foster (15th)
3	4	5	6 Jan Van Zwol Ann Wielinga	7 Wilma Esselink	8 Henry Kaemingh	9
10	11	12	13	14 Hudson Agombar	15 Grace Hettinga Max White	16 Sarah McInerney
17 Aiden Wielinga	18	19 Gavin Veldhuisen	20 Jared Bethune	21 Laura Hickey	22	23
24	25	26 Julia Dykstra	27 Sullivan Shortreed	28 LoriAnn Shortreed Jenelle Veldhuisen	29 Christine Bethune Dax Laplante	30 Olivia Ronmark- Paishk
31 André McInerney						