CHEAP AND LETHAL DRUGS P.38
Give your kids an unshakable faith

Summit Student Conferences challenge high school and college students to think deeper about their faith and convictions. Experience a life-changing Christian camp and conference all rolled into one this summer in Georgia or Colorado.

Only 4% of high school and college students hold a biblical worldview

Only 85% of Summit graduates, surveyed in 2021, hold a biblical worldview*

- Experience a summer of fun, exploration, and growth.
- Form lifelong friendships and a deeper relationship with God.
- Learn to winsomely and confidently engage culture.

Register today!
Save $200 before March 31st. Financial assistance available.

*Internal study in cooperation with George Barna

Live Chat | summit.org/wng
Call Us | 866.SUMMIT3
44
SURVIVAL AND HEALING
Residents of eastern Democratic Republic of Congo continue to face attacks
by Onize Ohikere

38
REBUILDING COMMUNITY
The United States saw a record-breaking number of drug overdose deaths during the pandemic, but the answers to the crisis aren’t easy
by Emily Belz

50
CHILDREN’S BOOKS OF THE YEAR
WORLD has selected outstanding examples of fiction, nonfiction, and picture books to recommend to parents, teachers, and other interested adults
by Janie B. Cheaney
Dispatches
13 NEWS ANALYSIS
A list of President Biden’s potential picks to replace Justice Stephen Breyer
18 HUMAN RACE
19 BY THE NUMBERS
20 QUOTABLES
21 CARTOONS
22 QUICK TAKES

THE GILDED AGE
Julian Fellowes recreates Downton Abbey in 19th-century NYC
by Collin Garbarino

Culture
27 MOVIES & TV
The Gilded Age, Moonfall, The Wolf and the Lion, My Best Friend Anne Frank, Reacher
32 BOOKS
Classic books on seeking justice
34 MUSIC
Two albums from British musicians should gain American attention

Notebook
65 LIFESTYLE
Red Rose Tattoo is erasing hate one tattoo at a time
67 RELIGION
68 MEDICINE

Voices
10 Joel Belz
24 Janie B. Cheaney
36 Kim Henderson
60 Q&A
70 Andrée Seu Peterson
“50 Things Every Child Needs to Know Before Leaving Home is one of the best parenting books I have ever read. If you have kids at home, you owe it to yourself and to your children to get this book. Thank you for such an awesome resource.”
Mark Cash, Executive Pastor

PUT A BIBLICAL PLAN INTO ACTION

This all-in-one guidebook, workbook, and keepsake will help you be proactive for each season of your parenting journey in the following areas of your child’s life:

- Firm foundations
- Christlike character development
- Biblical beliefs and worldview
- Spiritual growth
- Life skills
- Relational skills
- Work and money management
- Home management
- Personal care
- Educational essentials

Raise your children to maturity in Christ, gain parenting confidence, capture missed opportunities, and leave a godly legacy for generations to come.

available online at
SHOP.RENEWANATION.ORG
“Christianbook helped turn us rookie homeschoolers into veterans!”

From homeschool curriculum, books, and resources to educational games, videos, and more, Christianbook has everything you need to keep young minds engaged and growing. Always just a click away, and always at the best value. Looking for trustworthy ways to make learning fun? You’ll find them here.

Christianbook.com
1-800-CHRISTIAN
Everything Christian for less!
2021 DEATHS
JAN. 15, P. 92: I know everyone has their favorite person you missed in the yearly obituary section, but I would have loved to have seen prolific voice actor Will Ryan honored. He was best known for voicing Eugene Meltsner on Adventures in Odyssey. His acting helped shape generations.

Peter King/Monmouth, Ore.

Rush Limbaugh gave and raised millions of dollars for charity. He received the Presidential Medal of Freedom. He embraced Christ before he died. Yet you chose to note he “contributed to our polarized political climate.” To me, this shows you had no understanding of him or his listeners.

Shirley Kolb/Monticello, Ill.

Frank Barker Jr., the founder of Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Ala., and a co-founder of the Presbyterian Church in America, died in late December. I had hoped to see his significant life noted in your 2021 compendium of prominent deaths.

Ken Wienecke/Monroe, N.C.

HANDLING A HOSTILE CULTURE
JAN. 15, P. 32: Tim Keller’s interview was one of the most encouraging yet discouraging pieces I have read in a long time. His honesty, candor, and love for the gospel were encouraging, but his concerns for the church laid out a disturbing pattern. It should be mandatory reading for pastors and seminary professors.

Ron Perry/Wake Forest, N.C.

I beg to differ with Tim Keller. The church has not failed. Should we persevere and try harder and be innovative in our witness? Of course. But don’t use false guilt as a motivator. As a pastor, I’m insulted. If Pastor Keller feels guilty, that’s his problem—don’t lay it on the rest of us.

Rick Thorne/Bettles, Alaska

UNDERSTANDING CRT
JAN. 15, P. 112: I think Marvin Olasky and I can agree, no matter the label, Marxism and CRT are both evil. They seek to create hate, not love; division, not unity. I pray that we will step back from the abyss on CRT—and related gender, same-sex, and transgender theories—before it is too late.

Tom Hagedorn/Cincinnati, Ohio

Thank you for a clear, concise explanation of CRT. I plan to memorize it! I’m so tired of all the misinformation.

Mickey Giles/Austin, Texas

FOLLOWING THE LEAD OF CARL F.H. HENRY
JAN. 15, P. 10: Thank you, Joel Belz, for honoring this outstanding man of faith. We should wish that every current journalist would honor his 10 questions.

Donna Brown/Castalia, Ohio

HOPE IN THE HEADLINES
JAN. 15, P. 13: Michael Reneau referred to Liz Cheney as “brave” and “act[ing] on principle.” Her only driving force is hatred for Donald Trump. She has virtually no allies in her party. November will speak volumes for her “backbone.”

Kathy Connors/Medina, Wash.

QUOTABLES
JAN. 15, P. 17: I saw the quote from the mother announcing her ninth son. I guess we missed out on our 15 minutes of fame pre-YouTube. My wife, Janene, and I have nine sons, now ages 18 to 38. Our gender reveals were on the day of birth. The surprise would have been if we had a girl.

Theron N. Stallings/Fort Collins, Colo.

CORRECTION
Nellie Gray made her comment about marching until the court overturns Roe v. Wade during an interview at a March for Life rally (“Legacy marchers,” Feb. 12, p. 40).

Read more letters at wng.org/mailbag
". . . who will be able to teach others also. . . ."

The New Testament model of ministry was to entrust the gospel to local believers "... who will be able to teach others also." (II Timothy 2:2) In many cases, we haven't done that. A study shows western missionaries do most of the front-line ministry, and only spend 18% of their time equipping the local church to teach and lead. This is tragic because we are losing ground in world evangelization, and national missionaries are 23 times as effective as western-sent missionaries.

Is it possible that our current focus on sending westerners to teach is actually limiting the global spread of the gospel?

The Return Mandate is a call to return to a Biblical model of missions, and a recognition of the advantages national missionaries have to reach their own people.

Learn more at Return Mandate.org, or use your phone to scan the QR code and receive our Giving Guide today.
SINCE THE PANDEMIC-RELATED SHUTDOWNS began almost two years ago, I’ve used this space to warn of potential delays or cancellations of WORLD Magazine issues. I’m grateful those problems never materialized, but I’m not sorry I sounded the alarm. I’d rather any surprises be pleasant than not.

Here’s another warning about something I hope never happens: We may run out of paper to print the magazine.

Paper supplies are running low in the United States. The reasons are complex and include factors that were in play long before the pandemic showed up. Demand for paper, especially the kind used in magazines, has been trending downward for more than a decade. That prompted paper-producing factories to close or be converted to produce higher-demand paper goods.

With those conditions underlying the entire paper industry, add in the complications caused by the pandemic—labor shortages, plant shutdowns, a sudden spike in the demand for cardboard (think of the boxes needed for all those home deliveries), and trucking tensions in Canada, which is where most of America’s paper originates. These factors are harder to manage, especially in the short term.

So we’re left with a real supply problem. At times like this especially, we’re thankful for a good relationship with our great paper supplier. They advised us early to prepare for the worst. That meant instead of saving money by warehousing only enough paper for an issue or two of WORLD and our student magazines, we needed to stock four months’ worth. Within that period, we expect to be able to find enough paper to keep printing the magazines.

I hope this is just another of my unnecessary warnings. We’ve had to work with inflated prices on paper (and almost everything else), but we’ve always been able to find it. That could change.

Please pray that it won’t. I’ll let you know either way, though I recommend making sure we have your email address. Just saying.

OUR SUPPLY IS PAPER THIN
A word of warning: The global supply-chain trouble is affecting the paper you hold in your hands.
CHRIST-CENTERED EDUCATION
UNCOMPROMISED BIBLICAL TEACHING
VALUABLE PROFESSIONAL DEGREES

We offer a broad range of academic programs, including:

Applied Mathematics
Biblical Studies
Business Administration
Digital Marketing
Computer Science
Counseling Psychology

Educational Ministries
Nursing
Radiologic Technology
Intercultural Studies
Teacher Education
and many more...

EMMAUS BIBLE COLLEGE | 2570 ASBURY ROAD | DUBUQUE, IA 52001
563-588-8000 | WWW.EMMAUS.EDU | ADMISSIONS@EMMAUS.EDU
Teng Kur’s story
A remarkable young man at a special school in South Sudan

I’ve never met Teng Kur—but I’d welcome the chance. The school that produced a young man like this deserves a second look.
Teng has just finished fifth grade, and is right now launching sixth grade studies at Cush Christian School (CCS) in central west South Sudan. Teng also enjoys his role as a “junior teacher” for second graders at this most unusual school. Teng says he’s 15 years old, although exact ages aren’t typically important in South Sudan.

CCS’ founder, WORLD reader Scott Brinkerhoff, a veteran Christian school teacher and coach, was exploring a new role in some other country. His pursuit led to a rural outpost in South Sudan. The missions arm of the Reformed Presbyterian Church wanted to augment a handful of church plants by including a radio station and a school. Brinkerhoff ended up being drafted to head both efforts—and both efforts called for unusual strategizing.

Enrollment in the school was just 25 students for the first year in 2012. But when registration doubled in the second year, and then grew rapidly to 165 students, Brinkerhoff’s team knew they had a big challenge. In the days just before Christmas, Brinkerhoff chatted with three CCS students about their experience. The first was Teng Kur, the 15-year-old mentioned above.

Do you remember 10 years ago? Yes, I can remember, I was like 6 years old. Also I didn’t know what I was doing. I liked to come early, and I liked to fight with other students. I liked to run home with other boys and go to the school of my friends. My parents would beat me and take me back to school. My mother told my Dinka teachers they needed to beat me, but my teacher told them not to beat me but give some other punishment that would make me not repeat my mistake.

What were you studying? I didn’t know what I was doing, but I was changing. I was learning verses. And we had visitors from the United States—but I didn’t know where they were coming from. When I was young, what was in my mind, was that where I was in South Sudan was the only world, but I was growing and learning. There was a day I was studying maps in grade 4 and I was confused. Is there another continent—and are there other countries? I was having a hard time understanding that the earth was round.

So something happened I guess. Do you still come to school looking for times to fight? No, there was a time when we had a program, and I looked for a verse I wanted to say to the parents. So I got a verse, and I still remember the verse. It says you need to forgive. If you do not forgive, God will not forgive you. So I was just thinking about this verse. How? What is a good way that I am going to say it to the parents? How will I say it? One thing came to my mind. I need to change and I need to forgive, so that my Father will forgive me. So that is how I changed.

So He did forgive you? Yes, He did.

So have you thought about the future, when you are finished with school, what do you think God wants you to do? Maybe you have a few ideas. Do you have one? Yeah, my plan was to be a teacher, it was my plan. That is the way I am thinking.

OK, well I didn’t know that, Teng. That’s good to know. I just think about being a teacher a couple months ago, and I think that being a teacher is very good also. I like it, because I see your practice, how you work with us, that is why I like it, and I say that I want to be an example like you in some years, to have a Christian school like this and be a teacher there.

Well, I think that there will always be a need for teachers at Cush Christian School, so Teng, that’s encouraging to me, I’m glad to hear that, that’s good. I really appreciate you sharing that with us.

Indeed! If there are adventurous and healthy WORLD readers who might feel God’s call to spend a few months at Cush Christian School, an email to Scott Brinkerhoff at brinkerhoffscott@gmail.com might help in taking the next step.

“One thing came to my mind. I need to change and I need to forgive, so that my Father will forgive me.”
The Institute for Faith & Freedom at Grove City College offers a brand-new online course with scholar and historian Dr. Jay Cost on "The Mind of Madison." In the midst of dysfunctional politics, the life and insights of James Madison can remind us of long-lost truths.

- What is politics supposed to accomplish?
- How should the people influence politics?
- What is the proper relationship between the government and the economy and society?

Discover the answers to some of these questions when you take "The Mind of Madison" with Dr. Jay Cost. To register for The Mind of Madison and learn more about the Institute for Faith & Freedom, visit: academy.faithandfreedom.com
People flourish best when society is free. At HLGU you will be surrounded with a learning community that will prepare you for more than a successful career; it will prepare you for a life well lived – for you, for others, for God.

Hannibal-LaGrange University

Homeschool, academic, fine arts, and athletic scholarships available.

hlg.edu
BIDEN’S SHORT LIST
Here’s a list of potential nominees to replace Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer

by Maryrose Delahunty
LIBERAL JUDICIAL ADVOCACY GROUPS breathed a collective sigh of relief as Justice Stephen Breyer announced he would retire from the Supreme Court at the end of the current term. Breyer’s retirement clears the way for President Biden to deliver on his campaign promise to nominate the first black female to the high court.

A recent ABC News/Ipsos poll found a majority of Americans want Biden to review “all possible nominees” as opposed to promising a candidate of a specific gender and race. But Biden is not the first presidential candidate to promise to nominate a justice from a specific demographic group. In October 1980, then-candidate Ronald Reagan said he would name a woman to the court and delivered with the appointment of Justice Sandra Day O’Connor.

Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., painted Biden’s pledge to nominate a black female as “affirmative action”—a view not shared by Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., who heartily supports South Carolina U.S. District Judge Michelle Childs. Her recent nomination to the D.C. Court of Appeals has been halted while she is considered for the high court. Appointed by President Obama, Childs has served for 10 years on the federal bench. In a recent interview on CBS News’ Face the Nation, Graham lauded Childs as highly qualified, claiming “there’s no affirmative action component if you pick her.”

Another potential pick is Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, confirmed in 2021 to the D.C. Court of Appeals. Judge Jackson was a law clerk to three federal judges, including Justice Breyer, and her background as a former public defender adds to her appeal for many.

California Supreme Court Justice Leon- dra Kruger, described as a “liberal moder- ate,” rounds out the short list circulated by the media since last summer. In 2014 at the age of 37, Kruger was the youngest appointee to California’s high bench. Prior to joining the bench, Kruger worked in both the U.S. Solicitor General’s Office and the Department of Justice Office of Legal Counsel. She has argued many times before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Since Breyer’s announcement, additional candidates for consideration have surfaced. Judge Tiffany P. Cunningham, a 2021 appointee to the Federal District Court of Appeals is considered a long shot. With decades-long experience as a patent practitioner, Cunningham could bring unique expertise to the court’s deliberations in the nuances of intellectual property cases.

Judge Candace Jackson-Akiwumi of the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals and Judge Eunice Lee of the 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals, both recent Biden appointees, boast similar qualifications: Yale Law degree, previous Appeals Court clerkship experience, and extensive public defender experience.

Judge Holly A. Thomas, another Yale Law alum recently confirmed to the 9th Circuit, previously served on the Los Angeles County Superior Court. Her background includes work for the NAACP, the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, and the New York Solicitor General’s Office.

District Judge Wilhelmina “Mimi” Wright, a judge on Minnesota’s federal district court, enjoys historical notoriety as the only jurist with service at all three levels of the state’s court system.

Georgia Federal District Court Judge Leslie Abrams Gardner, previously a prosecutor for the state’s U.S. Attorney’s Office, could face an uphill battle as the sister of Democratic gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams.

North Carolina Supreme Court Justice Anita Earls completes the list of current jurists under consideration. At 61, her age may reduce her appeal as a lifetime appointee since younger nominees enjoy a longer tenure and thus greater opportunity to influence the court.

Nonjurists added to the growing list include: Nancy G. Abuda of the Southern Poverty Law Center; public defender Arianna J. Freeman; Sherrilyn Ifill, a civil rights attorney who recently served as president and director-counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund; and lastly, Melissa Murray.

Regardless of who the president picks, a Breyer clone is unlikely. Justice Breyer possessed a unique skill and desire to seek consensus among the justices, despite his propensity to vote with the more liberal members. Even though Breyer’s replacement may not shift the current balance of the court, like Justice John Marshall Harlan in Plessy v. Ferguson, perhaps she will author a minority dissent that could influence the court’s jurisprudence for decades to come.

STAFF || CANDACE JACKSON-AKIWUMI; KETANJI BROWN JACKSON; MICHELLE CHILD; TIFFANY P. CUNNINGHAM; EUNICE LEE; HOLLY A. THOMAS; CHARLES DHARAPAK/AP; TOM WILLIAMS/AP; CUNNINGHAM, JACKSON-AKIWUMI, AND LEE: TOM WILLIAMS/CQ ROLL CALL VIA AP; THOMAS: U.S. COURTS FOR THE 9TH CIRCUIT VIA AP; BREYER: ASSOCIATED PRESS

v37 4 NEWS ANALYSIS.indd 14
2/9/22 12:18 PM
HEN SWIMMING AGAINST MEN for the University of Pennsylvania, Lia (formerly Will) Thomas more than held his own against the rest of the Ivy League: As a sophomore in 2018-19, for instance, he placed second in the 500-, 1,000-, and 1,650-yard freestyle races at the league championship meet.

Now that Thomas is competing against women, the transgender athlete has been downright dominant—and plenty of people, including roughly a third of Thomas’ own teammates, are irate about it.

Thomas’ success has already spurred changes in not just his sport, but college athletics in general: In response to the outcry about Thomas having an unfair biological advantage, the NCAA revised its transgender policy in January to let individual sports’ governing bodies determine the terms under which transgender athletes may participate. USA Swimming likewise revised its policy soon thereafter, adopting a rule that could prevent Thomas from competing at the NCAA championships in March.

Should Thomas qualify for the NCAA meet, pro-LGBT lawyers will undoubtedly seek injunctive relief allowing him to participate, as this is his final season of collegiate eligibility. However, with the 50th anniversary of Title IX’s passage approaching later this year, Thomas’ case demonstrates why states are finding it necessary to enact laws aimed at furthering the federal statute’s goal of ensuring
equal opportunities for women in interscholastic athletics.

“It’s demoralizing for women to have to be on the sidelines watching males take their spots in the field,” said Christiana Holcomb, an attorney for the Alliance Defending Freedom, which is representing female athletes from Connecticut, Idaho, and West Virginia in federal cases concerning the right of women to compete in sex-segregated sports. “Every biological male who takes a spot on a women’s team is taking away a spot from a deserving female.”

Thomas first made national headlines in December when he smashed two national records at a meet in Akron, Ohio: He won the 500 freestyle with a time of 4 minutes, 34.06 seconds, beating his nearest competitor by 14 seconds. Thomas also won the 200 free with a time of 1:41.93, touching the wall seven seconds ahead of his closest competitor in that race.

It was in a race in which Thomas did not set a national record, however, that the disparity between himself and his female competitors became truly apparent: Thomas defeated Penn teammate Anna Sofia Kalandaze by a whopping 38 seconds in the 1,650 freestyle.

Since then, seemingly a week hasn’t gone by without Thomas generating buzz in a college sport that typically doesn’t garner much local, let alone national, attention: Sixteen of Thomas’ teammates at Penn have taken a public stand against Thomas, asserting that he should not be allowed to compete. Accusations that Thomas calls himself “the Jackie Robinson of trans sports” and has shown little to no concern about biological female athletes’ feelings haven’t swung public sympathy in his favor.

Olympic gold medalists Michael Phelps and Caitlyn (née Bruce) Jenner have also weighed in, asserting that the need for fairness in women’s sports should trump concerns about exclusion. Jenner, who won the decathlon in men’s track and field at the 1976 Summer Olympics and is himself transgender, even expressed sympathy for Thomas’ teammates at Penn.

“They have to be so woke and say, ‘Oh, this is great,’ while deep down inside they’re saying, ‘This is wrong,’” Jenner told Fox News.

Thomas also made headlines in January when he lost two freestyle races to another Ivy League swimmer, Iszac Henig of Yale. Like Thomas, Henig is transgender; unlike Thomas, she is biologically female but identifies as male.

While Henig has undergone a mastectomy, she has not received hormone therapy because she wants to continue competing as a female. Taking testosterone would disqualify her from doing so under NCAA rules.

At least one of Thomas’ teammates has accused him—anononymously—of conspiring with Henig to throw the 100- and 400-meter freestyle races at the Yale-Penn meet to create the illusion that being biologically male doesn’t give Thomas an unfair advantage.

Under USA Swimming’s current transgender policy, a biological male can only compete as a female if the athlete can present evidence that his “prior physical development...as a male, as mitigated by any medical intervention, does not give the athlete a competitive advantage over the athlete’s cisgender female counterparts.” If the NCAA follows this policy, Thomas will be unable to compete for a national title in any of his events.

Thomas’ teammates have asked their university and the Ivy League not to fight the new policy. As is happening with alarming frequency in women’s sports, however, the cries of actual female athletes are likely to go unheard.
As the undergraduate school of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, we are a Christ-centered, Scripture-driven, and student-focused college, with faculty committed to seeing their students grow both spiritually and academically. Here, you’ll get the foundation you need to serve the Kingdom of God, no matter what career path you choose. Wherever God calls, we’ll help you get there. Preview Day is your opportunity to see first-hand all that Texas Baptist College has to offer. Come visit the campus, speak with faculty, meet current students, and experience the great community of Texas Baptist College.

texasbaptist.com/preview
LARING TRUCK HORNS were silenced Feb. 7 after an Ontario judge granted a 10-day injunction to block protesting truckers gathered in downtown Ottawa from blowing their horns. Mayor Jim Watson has asked Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to ramp up the government’s response to the Freedom Convoy of semitrucks and other vehicles that arrived Jan. 29 in Ottawa, Ontario. Canadian truckers have been protesting the country’s stringent COVID-19 restrictions, particularly the need for truckers to quarantine for two weeks after returning from the U.S. if they are not vaccinated. Protesters waving Canadian flags and carrying slogans on their vehicles blocked the Ambassador Bridge linking Windsor, Ontario, to Detroit, backing up traffic for miles. The bridge is one of Canada’s busiest border crossings and serves as a major route for trucking. Trudeau accused the protesters of trying to derail Canada’s democracy.

PENG SIGHTING
Three-time Olympian and high-ranking Chinese tennis player Peng Shuai gave an hourlong interview to French sports newspaper L’Equipe. A Chinese Olympic Committee official monitored pre-submitted questions and sat through the interview, as well. Peng downplayed concerns about her three-week disappearance from the public eye in November just after she made a social media post accusing a former Chinese government official of sexual assault. Now she says she never made such an accusation. When asked if authorities retaliated against the post, Peng repeated a party line: Sports and politics should not mix.

THE OSCARS
Two films with big-screen vistas produced by small-screen streaming services headline the ballots for this year’s Oscars. Netflix’s The Power of the Dog, a gothic Western directed by Jane Campion, led nominations to the 94th Academy Awards with 12 nods, including best picture, best director, and recognition for all of its top actors: Benedict Cumberbatch, Kirsten Dunst, Jesse Plemons, and Kodi Smit-McPhee. HBO Max’s Dune, a sci-fi epic directed by Denis Villeneuve, followed closely with 10 nominations spread out largely in the technical categories that rewarded Villeneuve’s adaptation of Frank Herbert’s 1965 novel, yet overlooked his directorial contribution. The nominees for best picture are: Belfast, CODA, Don’t Look Up, Drive My Car, Dune, Licorice Pizza, King Richard, Nightmare Alley, The Power of the Dog, and West Side Story.

PAYROLL SLUMP
Companies in the U.S. had fewer workers on their payrolls last month for the first time since December 2020. The Automatic Data Processing National Employment Report showed that private payrolls dropped by 301,000 jobs in January following a December increase of nearly 800,000. The number includes employees who either lost their jobs or simply were unpaid during the survey due to sick leave or unpaid leave. Experts have suggested that surging Omicron infections have thrown a wrench in commerce by forcing more employees to call in sick.
6.5
The number of murders per 100,000 in 2020 in the U.S., according to FBI data, the highest since 1997, but still well below figures from the early 1990s or 1980s.

2/3
The share of major cities that have seen an increase in murders in 2021 compared to the previous year, according to a CNN analysis.

461
The number of assaults reported in New York City subways in 2021, up 28 percent from 2020 according to the New York Police Department.

47%
The share of Americans polled in September by Pew Research who wanted increased funding for police, up from 31 percent in June 2021.

94%
The increase in homicides in Los Angeles from 2019 to 2021. Los Angeles authorities reported 397 murders in the city last year, a death toll unparalleled since 2007. And yet, two years ago Los Angeles officials bragged over their lowest-ever crime rate. Cities such as Philadelphia, Portland, Ore., and Louisville, Ky., all set records for murders last year. The rapid increase in reported murders in large cities across the nation correlates with a stir-crazy nation struggling under pandemic conditions, racial unrest following the murder of George Floyd, and calls by some to defund law enforcement.
“Because of my last name, people think I’m a religious person. But I’m not. My goal was to make them realize I was not my dad.”

JERRY FALWELL JR. said of his father, founder of Thomas Road Baptist Church, Liberty University, and the Moral Majority.

“The Holocaust isn’t about race. No, it’s not about race.”

ABC’s WHOOPi GOLDBERG said repeatedly on The View and The Late Show With Stephen Colbert. She later apologized in a Tweet and wrote, “As Jonathan Greenblatt from the Anti-Defamation League shared, ‘The Holocaust was about the Nazi’s systematic annihilation of the Jewish people—who they deemed to be an inferior race.’ I stand corrected.”

“Biologically, Lia holds an unfair advantage over competition in the women’s category, as evidenced by her rankings that have bounced from #462 as a male to #1 as a female.”

Sixteen members of the University of Pennsylvania’s women’s swimming team, in a letter sent Thursday to school and Ivy League officials (see p. 15).

“You know, in Wave 1, we were heroes. By Wave 2, we were the enemy. And that’s hard.”

LUCY JENKINS, who leads the team of critical care nurses at Homerton University Hospital in East London, on the shifting tone inside beleaguered intensive care units as the pandemic drags on in Britain.

“Having a Uyghur light the Olympic torch is a middle finger to the rest of the world, as if saying, ‘Hey, I don’t care what you say about me. I do whatever I want.’”

Human Rights Watch senior China researcher YAQUIU WANG, calling the Chinese Olympic Committee’s selection of Dinigeer Yilamujiang, a cross-country skier from the oppressed Uyghur minority, to light the Olympic torch with a skier from China’s Han majority an obscene gesture.
BEIJING 2022

My, what big teeth you have.

He's OK with minor incursions.

I identify as an organic low-calorie nutritious non-binary potato.

Masks are required in school.

Parent-Teacher Conference
Daring young woman
Nine-year-old becomes youngest woman to solo around the world

by John Dawson

When Belgian-British teenage pilot Zara Rutherford touched down in Kortrijk, Belgium, on Jan. 20, she became the youngest-ever female pilot to fly around the world. The 19-year-old’s five-month journey required about 32,000 miles of flying in her single-engine Shark ultralight. Along her westerly path, Rutherford was grounded for two weeks in Alaska to avoid bad weather, got banned from Chinese airspace, and dodged fog in India, ultimately putting her two months behind schedule. Because of the size of her ultralight, Rutherford had to stay below the clouds. “It will be very strange to not have to fly every single day anymore or try to fly every single day anymore,” she told reporters who gathered for her landing. “I’m just happy to finally also be in the same spot for a few months.”

ESCAPED ROBOT

Hotel staff near Cambridge, U.K., announced Jan. 20 one of its robot vacuums had escaped the premises. Staff at the Travelodge reported the self-directed robot vacuum left the hotel via the front door, taking an unexpected cleaning path. Staff noticed the device missing within 15 minutes but couldn’t locate the machine during an initial search. Saying the robot had made a run for it, a hotel assistant manager posted a message to social media asking locals to be on the lookout for the equipment. “Today we had one of our new robot vacuums run for its life,” he said. The next day, a hotel worker found the robot stalled near a bush along the lodging’s driveway.

POP POPE

Vatican reporters knew something was up when a Fiat 500 with Vatican license plates pulled up to one of Rome’s music stores on Jan. 11. Minutes later a photographer snapped a picture of Pope Francis walking out of the Stereosound music shop holding a compact disc. According to Vatican officials, the pope made a surprise visit to the shop to see the owners, whom he promised in his pre-pontifical years that he’d visit when he traveled to Rome. After the 12-minute visit, the owners made sure Francis didn’t leave empty-handed, gifting him a classical music CD as he departed.
TESTING FAILURE
A London woman’s gambit to find an easy driving test broke down when she failed the United Kingdom’s easiest driving test. After failing several times before, Constance Kampfner took to the internet to find the nation’s easiest driving test. Writing about her experience in The Times, she said her Google query led her to a 10-hour trip in December to the Isle of Mull off the coast of Scotland. She said she knew her test would skip parallel parking and even lucked out by getting an instructor who didn’t make her prove herself on the local roundabout. She failed anyway. The London woman said she’ll practice more and try again at a later date.

CANCELED CRUISE
Patrons of a Norwegian Cruise Line ship got surprising news Jan. 13 when they learned their 10-day cruise departing from New York City had been canceled. Even more surprising: The cancellation occurred on the fourth day of the voyage with all passengers aboard. A spokesman for the cruise line blamed “COVID-related issues” for the cancellation, saying the ship would forgo all ports of call and return to New York eventually. That wasn’t welcome news to passenger Aimee Focaraccio who had boarded the Norwegian Gem to celebrate her birthday. “Without the islands and ports to break up the sea days, this is turning into a nightmare. I really can’t imagine four more sea days back to back without much to do,” Focaraccio told USA Today.

PROTECTIVE GEAR UNPROTECTED
San Mateo County, Calif., officials are struggling to explain why they left millions of dollars’ worth of masks and other protective gear out in the rain. San Francisco’s KGO-TV filmed the soaked and ruined personal protective equipment in January sitting outside the San Mateo County Event Center. According to county officials, the PPE gear was ruined when the cardboard boxes got soaked during October storms. County manager Mike Callagy took ultimate responsibility for the oversight. “It clearly is a mistake by the county and ultimately, I’m responsible for the county,” he told KGO. “We are taking precautions to make sure that doesn’t happen again.”

LASERS VS. CROWS
After decades of complaints from residents and failed initiatives, officials in Sunnyvale, Calif., are ready to deploy lasers to chase away a murder of crows tormenting townspeople. In the final days of January, city employees began spending an hour each evening shining green laser pens at the birds that roost downtown. A technical manual released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture claimed that lasers have been an effective bird dispersal technique, though officials with the local Audubon Society have complained that the lights might blind the corvids. Despite the concerns, Sunnyvale’s Mayor Larry Klein said it was time for extreme measures. “The streets are basically riddled with crow poo,” he told The New York Times.
On the road again

Automobiles may come with problems, but also unexpected joys

DON’T DO TWITTER, but someone on a podcast directed me to a thread asking this question: What’s the worst 300-mile drive in the United States?

That’s a question I could ponder with profit. While growing up, the appeal of “See the USA in your Chevrolet” was lost on me. I dreaded road trips, crammed into the back seat with two sisters and sometimes an additional cousin, fighting over space and potato chips. After my grandparents moved to Eureka Springs, Ark., that became our vacation destination: an eight-hour drive from Dallas, with the same landmarks and stops and the same final, endless hour twisting through the Ozarks.

Then I married a man with a 1962 VW Bug and an itch to wander, who once had hitchhiked from Missouri to Canada and more recently sold Bible reference books door-to-door. Our honeymoon was a road trip from west Texas through Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico, hitting every national park along the way (including a one-day hike of the Grand Canyon, where we learned the best and worst of each other). The road looks different from the front seat, with Rand McNally in your lap and a wide-windshield view of the Great American West rolling before your eyes.

That was just the beginning: California here we come, Georgia on our minds, waltzing through Tennessee, way down yonder to New Orleans. Our longest trip ran from Trenton, N.J., to northern New Mexico, in a 1963 Ferrari purchased by a friend who didn’t have time to fetch the car himself. We hit all the home ports and tourist attractions along the way and picked up one speeding ticket in Kentucky. (Surely the patrolman stopped us only because he’d never seen a Ferrari up close.)

What sights we’ve seen. What fellow travelers we’ve met. What vehicles we’ve driven the socks off of. What a spectacular country.

Automobiles may be the scourge of the planet and too often the chariot of death—I’ve mourned with those who mourn the horrible consequences of a fiery crash. And yet. Imagine the freedom that previous generations couldn’t fathom. Imagine the Lord giving men the ability to create a self-propelled means of travel and smiling to Himself at the scenes those subtle engines would open for us. Once He gave us a garden; now He gives us an open road and a scrolling landscape. “At his right hand are pleasures forevermore.” In this life, every pleasure comes with problems, such as DUIs, shrieking ambulances, and crumpled pileups. But also unexpected joys.

Back to the original question about the worst 300 miles. The Twitter thread meandered on and on, but a clear favorite with respondents was I-80 through Nebraska. That surprised me: not I-70 through Kansas? Personally, I like those wide, clean vistas that go on and on. (“Oh beautiful, for spacious skies.”)

My vote for the worst might be I-79 through West Virginia. They don’t call it the Mountain State for nothing! We only drove it once, an endless replay of ascents, descents, tight curves, passing lanes, and surprisingly few scenic overlooks. There may have been more than I remember—I’m waiting to get an earful from West Virginians—but after a point we just wanted to get out of there. It was as if the atlas kept refolding on the same stretch of highway.

My road-tripping days are over for now; my husband got over them years ago, and I can no longer be away from him for more than a few hours. But “in [our] heart are the highways to Zion” (Psalm 84:5). We’ve lived the metaphor, and our destination is in view.
Does Atheism Stand Up Under Scrutiny?

“For too long Christian belief has been subjected to uncritical scrutiny. Finally Mark Lanier, a lawyer of the first order, places disbelief before the bar. This book is a fair and balanced legal proceeding against the point of view that denies the existence of God and the redemptive results of faith on our culture.”

—MICHAEL CARD, writer, songwriter

Why American Democracy Needs the Christian Faith

“Belcher’s work on our current state of affairs in cultural discourse, marked by hyperpartisanship, incivility, and political, social, and moral instability, contributes a needed perspective borne of clear, careful, and charitable thinking. . . . I’m certain it will spur further dialogue among scholars in the academy and citizens in the public square for years to come.”

—JOHN D. WILSEY, author of American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion
JOIN PATHFINDER

TAKE 5 FREE ONLINE MINI-COURSES AND QUALIFY FOR AN IN-PERSON RETREAT. GRADUATES WILL EMERGE AS HEBRAIC LEADERS EQUIPPED TO TACKLE COMPLEX ISSUES IN THE NEAR EAST AND THE WEST.
DECADE AGO, Julian Fellowes transfixed audiences with *Downton Abbey*, his lavish soap opera about Britain’s dwindling aristocracy and the servants who catered to them. Now he’s back with a new costume drama, but this time the story takes place in late 19th-century America rather than early 20th-century England. *The Gilded Age*, on HBO and HBO Max, follows the lives of upper-crust New Yorkers living during one of America’s most extravagant periods, but while this new series offers some entertainment, it doesn’t offer much new.

*The Gilded Age* takes place in a world of old aristocratic families and newly rich...
robber barons vying for the right to decide what kind of country America will be. Fellowes invites viewers to experience this world through the eyes of Marian Brook, played by Meryl Streep's daughter Louisa Jacobson. Marian is a penniless girl from a good family who moves to New York after her father's death. She must rely on the good graces of her wealthy Aunt Agnes, played with acerbic wit by Christine Baranski. But Aunt Agnes has her own worries. She's obsessed with making sure New York's old money maintains its preeminent position, refusing to have any social contact with her supposed inferiors.

It becomes harder and harder for Agnes to keep her world from changing when the obscenely rich railroad magnate George Russell, a solid performance by Morgan Spector, builds a palace across the street. George's wife Bertha, played by Carrie Coon, has everything she wants except recognition from the most respectable ladies in town, and she's irritated at her inability to buy her way into polite society.

*The Gilded Age* is rated TV-MA, and I worried HBO had created a racier version of *Downton Abbey*. So far, that hasn't been the case. The series was originally meant for NBC, but with spiraling production costs and COVID delays, HBO took over the project to enhance its prestige-television offerings. Fellowes includes a homosexual subplot, just as he did in *Downton Abbey*, but other than that the first episodes have been pretty tame. So far, the series hasn't contained anything that couldn't air on PBS.

In fact, if *The Gilded Age* has a fault, it's that Fellowes doesn't give us much that he hasn't already shown us on PBS. Attractive young people still look for suitable spouses, but still lack the money or status necessary for happiness. The old guard still tries to maintain tradition despite the implacable advance of history. Upstairs we still find cash-strapped, well-to-do families in which idealistic youths challenge their more cynical elders. Downstairs we still find the competent butler and housekeeper, who busy themselves keeping their eyes on the conniving lady's maid and the valet with a mysterious past.

The series' new setting opens it to a couple of new angles. In addition to highlighting the familiar themes of class and gender discrimination, Fellowes attempts to tackle race in America by providing Marian a black companion named Peggy who becomes Aunt Agnes' secretary. Also, watching the ascendancy of the robber barons during the 19th century feels strangely relevant in our age of tech titans frolicking in outer space.

The show indulges in some moralizing, but true to the age, it looks toward American transcendentalism rather than the Bible for its ethical compass: One character admonishes another that the surest guide anyone can have is their own personal moral code. That kind of thinking might help you become a titan of industry, but it won't help you become righteous.

In *The Gilded Age*, Fellowes offers viewers types and tropes from his past stories, and fans of those stories might find themselves nostalgic for the early days of *Downton Abbey* when all this seemed fresh and new. But while I wished for more originality, I found myself enjoying the series anyway. There's a reason *Downton Abbey* became a phenomenon. And once again, Fellowes gives us smartly written characters, filmed in lavish sets and costumes, trying to fall in love. It's not new, but it works.

---

**TV BARON** Julian Fellowes, creator of *Downton Abbey* and *The Gilded Age*, was born in Cairo and is Baron of West Stafford.
BLOWHORN FOR A CAUSE
More animal rights spin than family film
by Jim Hill

Some movies aspire to be art, while others take a path toward propaganda. Sadly, the recently released film *The Wolf and the Lion* chose the latter road.

The movie tells the story of two orphaned animals, a lion cub named Dreamer and his compadre, a snow wolf pup called Mozart, who are being raised by recent college grad Alma on a remote island in Quebec. The film was directed by Gilles de Maistre, a French filmmaker, and written by his wife, Prune. The two are animal rights activists, and unfortunately their zeal for their cause shines too brightly as the movie seems more interested in making certain statements about animal cruelty than it does with delivering a coherent and meaningful story.

The one high spot for the film is that the footage of the animals’ relationship is adorable, and had the picture focused more on their antics with the beauty of Canada as a backdrop it could have been the family film it is being marketed as. Instead, it is a collage of poor acting, forced dialogue, and a painfully clear message—animals are good and pure (while people aren’t) and should not be taken from the native environments (and especially not put in circuses!).

I hope the film, which is receiving poor critical reviews, will not do well and will encourage filmmakers to focus more on the idea of telling good stories than on being blowhorns for their causes. Unfortunately, this film will likely find an audience as many people today seem more interested in the message of their art than its quality.

**GREAT ANIMAL (AND PET) FILMS**

- *Old Yeller* (1957)
- *Charlotte’s Web* (1973)
- *Babe* (1995)
- *Peter Rabbit* (2018)
- *Because of Winn-Dixie* (2005)
- *Lady & the Tramp* (1955)

---

**Fantasy fail**
by Collin Garbarino

In *Moonfall*, currently playing in theaters, the moon slips out of orbit and begins spiraling toward Earth, threatening to destroy the planet. The movie is equal parts science-fiction fantasy and disaster film, but ultimately it doesn’t succeed as either.

Conspiracy theorist KC Houseman (John Bradley) is one of the first to warn about the disaster. He enlists disgraced astronaut Brian Harper (Patrick Wilson) to help him get the word out, and the two of them eventually get a hearing with NASA honcho Jo Fowler (Halle Berry). When the moon starts getting closer, the world gives up hope, and our three heroes must, on their own, fly to the moon on a space shuttle they retrieved from a museum.

This plot is quite silly, and the film doesn’t pretend to worry about scientific realism. Whether a museum piece can survive space doesn’t matter in a movie in which small children—but not adults—get sucked up by the approaching moon’s gravity. And how can we still see daylight when the moon is so close it’s scraping the tops of tall buildings?

None of this would matter if the movie were entertaining. It’s not. The writing is a hodgepodge of clichés from better movies, and the actors deliver their lines with unconvincing growls. *Moonfall’s* conclusion sets up a sequel that I hope never descends on us.
During World War II, the Nazi regime hungered to eradicate the Jewish people from its society and accelerated its genocidal campaign with concentration camps, gas chambers, and other grisly means. Anne Frank is one of the Holocaust’s most famous victims thanks to the diary she left behind, and the Netflix movie My Best Friend Anne Frank (PG-13) helps us to see Anne and her story through the eyes of a contemporary friend.

Like Otto Frank’s family, Hannah Goslar moved with her parents to Amsterdam in 1934, fleeing Germany where her father had been an important civil servant. Hannah met Anne at age 6, and the two were the best of friends, going to school together at a Jewish day school and sharing the typical adventures of young girls. Anne Frank’s Diary of a Young Girl tells us much of the inner life and thoughts of a teenager hiding from persecution and of her dreams and plans.

My Best Friend Anne Frank takes some fictional liberties, but is based on Hannah’s memories as recounted in a 1997 book and portrays more of Anne’s warts and foibles. She is adventurous and mischievous, not always a loyal friend, and crazy about boys. In short, she is a teenager growing up, one of millions whose ordinary life was cut short by racial hatred.

Growing up as neighbors, Hannah and Anne plan to see the world together. Hannah is crushed when, without notice, the Frank family supposedly moves away to Switzerland, in the middle of the night. Viewers, of course, are aware that the Frank family was unable to flee the Netherlands and was in hiding in an attic for nearly two years till they were captured by the Nazis and transported to concentration camps in Auschwitz and later Bergen-Belsen.

Amazingly, Hannah Goslar and her younger sister and father also end up at Bergen-Belsen, in a slightly more privileged part of the camp reserved for more valuable Jewish prisoners. Despite physical barriers between the different sections of the camp, Hannah was able to connect briefly with the sick and hungry Anne and risked her own safety to get supplies to her ailing friend. Tragically, Anne and her sister Margot died shortly before the liberation of Bergen-Belsen. Hannah thought her friend had survived until Otto Frank confirmed her death shortly after the war’s end.

While the subject matter is riveting, the movie has flaws. It suffers from poor dubbing and subtitling (not a problem for those fluent in Dutch and German, but very distracting for the average monolingual). Christians will be disappointed that the writers pay so little attention to the spiritual life of these Jewish families in their troubles.

There is one regrettable scene where Anne forces her friend to view the illustrations of human reproduction in a science textbook. Despite its weaknesses, the movie does add to the eyewitness accounts of the Holocaust—may we never forget how sinful we are and how much mankind needs Jesus for redemption.
HEAVY HITTER

Reacher offers plenty of action but too much raunchy material

by Bob Brown

MANY FANS OF BRITISH author Lee Child balked at Tom Cruise being cast in the title role of the Jack Reacher films based on the action character from Child’s popular book series. Dark-haired and 5’7”, Cruise bore little resemblance to the hulking blond former U.S. Army military police officer in Child’s novels who crisscrosses the country with a nose for trouble and a fist for justice.

Those fans should be happy with Goliathian actor Alan Ritchson, who more than fills the role of Jack Reacher in Amazon Prime’s new TV series, Reacher (rated TV-MA). The show’s producers make no efforts to hide the 6’5” Ritchson’s impossibly muscular physique. His massive biceps (did his arms swallow Tom Cruise whole?) get so much screen time, they deserve their own mention in the credits.

But Jack Reacher is more than a muscle head. He’s a perceptive investigator who pieces together seemingly unrelated clues. For example, when he meets local police detective Oscar Finlay (Malcolm Goodwin) in the first episode, he deduces from Finlay’s accent and clothing that he attended Harvard, is divorced, and recently quit smoking. Reacher is still an old-school bruiser, though, who dispatches bad guys with a few quick jabs and even fewer words. But he’s also a Superman for millennials, who recycles and feeds an abandoned dog. Bravo.

The show itself deserves real bravos for eschewing sensuality—at least through the first three hourlong episodes I watched. In two romance-looming scenes that most shows and films today would escalate into un-Biblical amorosity, the Reacher characters intentionally keep their distance—for now.

In any case, Reacher has other elements that will make it a no-go for many would-be viewers: glimpses of bare male backsides, full frontal male nudity in a gory crime scene, the aforementioned pugilistic violence, and 15 or so strong profanities per episode. The producers’ raunchy choices spoil the show’s wry charm.

Reacher is based on Child’s debut novel, Killing Floor. The story opens in fictional Margrave, Ga. (but is filmed in Pickering, Ontario), a sleepy Southern hamlet that hasn’t seen a murder in 20 years. Initially accused of murder, Reacher begrudgingly teams with Finlay and officer Roscoe Conklin (Willa Fitzgerald) to help them investigate the rising body count. Reacher, Finlay, and Conklin sort through a bevy of shady suspects—a wealthy business owner, the power-hungry mayor, corrupt prison guards, and South American hitmen—who may be entangled in a conspiracy that extends far beyond the city limits.

Questions surround Reacher’s presence, and his past as well. Why is he in Margrave? And what about accusations that Reacher murdered civilians while on duty in Iraq? Since VidAngel offers filtering for this show, for me the answers are within reach.
AMERICA WANTS ITS SOCIAL JUSTICE like McDonald’s fries: quick, hot, and on the cheap. But the Bible says real justice is always costly. The question for Christians, then—who will pay and how much?

Some culture warriors already know who should pay, and recent comic books show two of their competing scapegoats. First, cops. Marvel’s new Luke Cage series planned for last December featured corrupt police officers as villains. In contrast, author Mike Baron’s Thin Blue Line pits heroic police against a violent, “defund the police” mob. Both recently got “canceled” in different ways.

In November, Marvel scrapped the Luke Cage series with no explanation, though some fans claimed low presale numbers and racial discrimination played a role. As for Baron, The Federalist reported in January that both Reddit and Facebook blocked ads for Thin Blue Line. Reddit also blocked all posts about the book for “misinformation and racism,” without citing any evidence. Facebook later removed its ad restrictions.

An eye for an eye, a comic for a comic; vengeance is mine, says the social justice warrior.

Thaddeus Williams points out in his December 2020 book, Confronting Injustice Without Compromising Truth, that it’s not wrong to seek justice, and he lists numerous Bible verses that command us to do just that. The problem comes when we seek justice based on our own righteousness and in our own strength. “The impossibility of keeping God’s standards is a mercy,” writes Williams. “It shatters our self-righteousness.”

Another helpful primer on race and justice—the recent reissue of C. Herbert Oliver’s book, No Flesh Shall Glory. Oliver says that as a black man in Birmingham, Ala., in the 1950s, he learned what it meant to be hungry under segregation laws: “I had money in my pocket... I was dressed and clean shaven; I had degrees from outstanding American institutions... But... I could not go into one of the many pub-
The world, the house, and the Devil

Novels that tackle morality and meaning

by Rachel Lynn Aldrich

JACK Marilynne Robinson

This latest novel in the Gilead series has more conflict and plot elements than some of the other books in the series. While *Gilead* and *Home* focus on characters’ internal development in the midst of ordinary life, *Jack* follows the growing courtship of the titular character with an upstanding black woman in St. Louis. Through it, the reader gets an inside look at Jack's doubts about God and eternity. The premise carries a lot of inherent drama, but the prodigal son that has floated at the edges of the other three books turns out to be, upon closer inspection, self-pitying and not very interesting. The fact that it chronologically precedes the other three books undercuts suspense about his choices. Caution: obscenities.

PIRANESI Susanna Clarke

Susanna Clarke's second novel is a stunning and strange story with no clear genre or comparison. The main character’s relationship to and questions about the House mirror both the reader’s confusion and modern man’s displacement in the world. It’s disorienting, disturbing, and compelling. Indeed, the House and the world, for Piranesi, are one and the same. This book is not for everyone, but readers interested in the concept of disenchantment in the modern worldview will find Clarke's exploration of the idea fascinating. She asks whether we have really drained the world of meaning or if we have simply lost the ability to see it. The imagery is distinctly pagan, but reminiscent of C.S. Lewis’ path to Christianity through his fascination with myth. Caution: obscenities.

THE DUTCH HOUSE Ann Patchett

Ann Patchett traces the effects of unforgiveness and broken relationships over several generations, all swirling around a luxurious and strange house in rural Pennsylvania. A sister and brother, Maeve and Danny, grow up trying to reconcile with their own story of loss and fractured family. It explores how one person's bitterness can overflow into those around them, spoiling even good things. And in the end, forgiveness isn’t easy or simple either. The characters are Roman Catholic, but it doesn’t seem to affect their lives beyond heightening relational tensions. It certainly doesn’t affect their sexual relationships, which are an unfortunate intrusion to the story. Caution: obscenities.

THE MADNESS OF CROWDS Louise Penny

This latest Armand Gamache mystery tackles a post-pandemic plot. Released in August 2021, the novel’s description of the end of the pandemic comes off as optimistic and sentimental. But beneath failed COVID-19 predictions and mainstream language and morality, the biggest plot twist is the premise itself. The mystery hinges on a distinctly pro-life theme: the horror of euthanasia and mandatory abortions for infants with disabilities. The Canadian characters (and through them, their author) wrestle with the tension between their humane instincts and their acceptance of voluntary abortion and assisted suicide. Where do you draw the line? They don’t reach a conclusion, but the dignity of one character’s daughter with Down syndrome provides the moral center of the plot. Caution: obscenities.
More than afterthoughts

Two albums from British musicians should gain American attention

by Arsenio Orteza

IVE ALBUMS USED TO BE AN AFTERTHOUGHT, an easy way for artists to please their often all-too-easily-pleased fans without having to go to the trouble of coming up with a dozen worthwhile new songs.

But with COVID restrictions putting a crimp in the concert business, live albums are becoming vital. Without them, some performers might lose that sense of real-time connectedness with their audiences altogether.

The British soft-pop songstress Rumer has joined the ranks of musicians refusing to let that crisis go to waste. In October 2020, she and a five-man band anchored by her keyboard-playing husband Rob Shirakbari turned in a resplendent livestreamed set at London's otherwise empty Lafayette club.

The show’s audio portion is now available as Live From Lafayette (Cooking Vinyl). Latecomers to Rumer’s anachronistically dulcet voice (two-thirds Karen Carpenter, one-third Linda Ronstadt) and the fetching uses to which she puts it couldn’t ask for a better overview.

Five selections come from her 2020 album Nashville Tears, one from her 2015 EP Love Is the Answer (the Todd Rundgren–penned title cut, still the best-ever Christian pop song by a non-Christian songwriter), four from 2014’s Into Colour, one from 2012’s Boys Don’t Cry, and four from 2010’s Seasons of My Soul—all that’s missing are representative offerings from 2016’s This Girl’s in Love: A Bacharach & David Songbook and the 2012 album that she made as half of the Brazil-meets-the-’60s duo Stereo Venus, Close to the Sun.

In short, if Live From Lafayette doesn’t earn Rumer some long-overdue traction in the U.S., it’s hard to imagine what will.

Live recordings and stateside neglect also figure in Rollin’: The Albums 1976-1978, the new five-disc Steve Gibbons Band box from Esoteric Recordings.

Gibbons, now 80, hailed from Birmingham, England, and seemed poised in the ’70s for stardom. Besides the rough-and-tumble quality of the music that he was making at the time—an approximate combination of Rockpile, the Move, Mott the Hoople, Commander Cody & His Lost Planet Airmen, and (according to some) Bob Seger—Gibbons and his band had ties to the Who, with whom they shared management and for whom they opened during that group’s 1976 tour, a gig that resulted in the live album Caught in the Act (Disc 3 in the Rollin’ box).

But, despite scoring a hit in England with a cover of Chuck Berry’s “Tulane” (from Rollin’ On [Disc 2]) and earning thumbs-up reviews, Gibbons’ band failed to click with U.S. deejays and other pop-music gatekeepers, who could be inexplicably deaf to the sounds exciting blue-collar Brits. (See also: Slade.) Consequently, few American record buyers even knew that the group existed let alone that it recorded a second live album that superseded its first (BBC Radio One in Concert—17th November 1977 [Disc 5])—or that 1978’s Down in the Bunker (Disc 4) bulged with carefully observed, musically varied, slyly humorous, and subtly infectious songs.

In the Dylanesque “Big J.C.,” Jesus Himself does a walk-on, dispersing a high-stakes card game simply by showing up.

BEGINNER’S SKILL Rumer’s 2010 debut album, Seasons of My Soul, peaked at No. 3 on the UK charts. ALAN MESSER
Still going strong
Noteworthy new or recent releases
by Arsenio Ortega

THE BOY NAMED IF
Elvis Costello & the Imposters
If 2020’s Hey Clockface established that 2018’s Look Now was no latter-day fluke, this year’s model goes both one better. And if Elvis Costello is the Tom Brady of rock ‘n roll, the Imposters (who are really just the Attractions with Davey Faragher instead of Bruce Thomas on bass) are his Rob Gronkowski, catching whatever he throws their way and running with it for all they’re worth. Pete Thomas’ explosive drumming, Steve Nieve’s careening keys—you almost don’t need to know or care whether Costello’s vaunted wordplay means anything. But parse your way through “Trick Out the Truth” and you’ll sure hope, and maybe believe, that it does.

WHAT MAKES IT THROUGH
Sara Groves
The title of the opening number, “Soul of Things,” foreshadows what’s to come: an album’s worth of meditations on the beneath-the-surface vulnerabilities that go ignored because they’re painful to confront and the toll that that ignorance, willful or otherwise, takes on otherwise healthy relationships. The songs “Nothing” and “Deal Breaker” address the topic most directly. “Reach Inside” expands the personal to the political. Soft folk-pop with a sprinkling of contemporary production values (and literary references) helps the medicine go down. The infectiousness of “Remains of the Day” and “Cheshire Cat” prove that Groves still knows the importance of a catchy hook.

WANT TO VISIT MY INNER HOUSE?
Jonathan Richman
Just when you want to write Jonathan Richman off for remaining too in touch with his inner child (at 70, no less), he comes up with a song such as “I Had to See the Harm I’d Done Before I Could Change,” as self-aware an exploration of what it means to repent as has ever been set to a simple melody (and even simpler instrumentation) and that only a grown-up could write. And, for all its silly, childlike charm, the song celebrating sweltering weather implicitly undermines climate-change hysteria. For the third album in a row, there’s a Hindu text. For the second album in a row, Jerry Harrison returns to coproduce and play keyboards. The keyboards you might notice.

J Jon Troast
The instrumental set up on Troast’s 10th consecutive alphabetically titled five-song EP (only 16 more to go!) includes mandolin, upright bass, and violin, a rootsy combination perfect for these straightforward sing-alongs extolling the blessedness of life in Christ. “Joy in You,” “My Shield, My Rock and My Defender,” and “What Greater Joy Could I Know” colloquialize psalms, “Lord Have Mercy” vernacularizes the “Kyrie eleison,” and “Just to Have Jesus,” which Rory Feek should seriously consider covering, dramatizes James 1:17. Can you imagine them sung by worship leaders from megachurch stages? Yes, but you can also, and more easily, imagine them sung around a campfire. And therein lies their charm.

THE BOY NAMED IF
Elvis Costello & the Imposters
If 2020’s Hey Clockface established that 2018’s Look Now was no latter-day fluke, this year’s model goes both one better. And if Elvis Costello is the Tom Brady of rock ‘n roll, the Imposters (who are really just the Attractions with Davey Faragher instead of Bruce Thomas on bass) are his Rob Gronkowski, catching whatever he throws their way and running with it for all they’re worth. Pete Thomas’ explosive drumming, Steve Nieve’s careening keys—you almost don’t need to know or care whether Costello’s vaunted wordplay means anything. But parse your way through “Trick Out the Truth” and you’ll sure hope, and maybe believe, that it does.

WHAT MAKES IT THROUGH
Sara Groves
The title of the opening number, “Soul of Things,” foreshadows what’s to come: an album’s worth of meditations on the beneath-the-surface vulnerabilities that go ignored because they’re painful to confront and the toll that that ignorance, willful or otherwise, takes on otherwise healthy relationships. The songs “Nothing” and “Deal Breaker” address the topic most directly. “Reach Inside” expands the personal to the political. Soft folk-pop with a sprinkling of contemporary production values (and literary references) helps the medicine go down. The infectiousness of “Remains of the Day” and “Cheshire Cat” prove that Groves still knows the importance of a catchy hook.

WANT TO VISIT MY INNER HOUSE?
Jonathan Richman
Just when you want to write Jonathan Richman off for remaining too in touch with his inner child (at 70, no less), he comes up with a song such as “I Had to See the Harm I’d Done Before I Could Change,” as self-aware an exploration of what it means to repent as has ever been set to a simple melody (and even simpler instrumentation) and that only a grown-up could write. And, for all its silly, childlike charm, the song celebrating sweltering weather implicitly undermines climate-change hysteria. For the third album in a row, there’s a Hindu text. For the second album in a row, Jerry Harrison returns to coproduce and play keyboards. The keyboards you might notice.

J Jon Troast
The instrumental set up on Troast’s 10th consecutive alphabetically titled five-song EP (only 16 more to go!) includes mandolin, upright bass, and violin, a rootsy combination perfect for these straightforward sing-alongs extolling the blessedness of life in Christ. “Joy in You,” “My Shield, My Rock and My Defender,” and “What Greater Joy Could I Know” colloquialize psalms, “Lord Have Mercy” vernacularizes the “Kyrie eleison,” and “Just to Have Jesus,” which Rory Feek should seriously consider covering, dramatizes James 1:17. Can you imagine them sung by worship leaders from megachurch stages? Yes, but you can also, and more easily, imagine them sung around a campfire. And therein lies their charm.

“He loved the way I sang,” wrote Ronnie Spector in her autobiography, “and he knew exactly what to do with my voice. He knew my range. He knew my pitch. He even knew which words sounded best coming out of my mouth.” The “he” to whom she was referring was her producer and first husband, Phil Spector. And, although their marriage proved disastrous, the recordings that they made from 1963 to 1966 would eventually earn Ronnie (as a member of the Ronettes) a place in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. Ronnie Spector passed away Jan. 12 at 78, half a decade after her escape from Phil’s notoriously manipulational possessiveness established her as a prototypical “survivor.” But, except for her show-stealing cameo on Eddie Money’s 1986 hit “Take Me Home Tonight,” her career never rebounded. No other producer, it seemed, knew exactly what to do with her voice. So it is that 2011’s 18-track Be My Baby: The Very Best of the Ronettes—produced by Phil but released by Sony Legacy—remains her consummate musical testament. —A.O.
Grave words

Contemplative epitaphs speak volumes about the deceased

Grave words

Contemplative epitaphs speak volumes about the deceased

ADMIT IT. My husband and I like to spend time in old cemeteries for no reason other than to read tombstones. That’s right. We’re fascinated by epitaphs, and it’s commonly acknowledged that in towns along the Mississippi, families of the dearly departed penned theirs with remarkable style. I guess that’s one reason we weren’t the only ones in Natchez cruising burial plots a while back, although I was the only visitor with a laptop slung over my shoulder.

Occasionally, I would lean its screen against a wrought iron gate and type because I could not help myself, the history was so thick in those etchings. Funny how it’s the smallest, barely-est there-est etch—the dash between the years—that represents a lifespan. And it’s the dash that counts, right?

In Natchez, a hundred acres of epitaphs speak directly to the tragedies of life, many times unexpected and early. Employees trapped in a fire downtown. A boatman drowned in the river. A son said “to have never caused his parents grief but when he died.”

Other inscriptions proved America was the Promised Land to people the world over, including Prussia’s Conrad and Catherine Schwartz. A 10-foot marble monument in the Schwartz section of the cemetery attests to the milk and honey part.

And then there was the tombstone with only three words and two periods: “Louise. The Unfortunate.” Boy, that one will give you pause. But even without inscribed dates, God knew all about unfortunate Louise. All the comings and goings and doings that made up her dash, had she had one.

Moving on to Vicksburg’s Cedar Hill Cemetery, one of the oldest in the United States, we spotted Latin on a couple of rows, Latin in the Bronte vein. Remember her words about Helen’s Brocklebridge churchyard grave in Jane Eyre?

“A grey marble tablet marks the spot, inscribed with her name, and the word ‘Resurgam.’”

“Resurgam,” as in I will rise again.

Nice, I thought to myself, fingerling the curve of an R way to pack a punch in just eight letters. How come 19th-century Americans were so … so … what? Succinct? Clever? Theologically sound?

Again and again, I bent low and squinted like I was reading the Rosetta Stone. Again and again, I found crumbling headstones with something to say, and they didn’t mince words when they spoke. “Thy will be done.” “All is well.” “To die is gain.” “Absent, not dead.” “I know that my Redeemer lives.” “Bless the Lord, O my soul.”

It was more of the same at Port Gibson’s Wintergreen Cemetery, where a marker notes Aseneth Maria Spencer’s earthly remains and that she died “in the full assurance of Hope.” (Evidently they had different notions about what was worth capitalizing back then, too.) And no one could accuse Anne Jane Butler, 23, of holding to a fluffy confession: “She early professed her faith in Christ. Her end was perfect peace.”

Maybe young people just had a more serious bent back then. I suppose losing all your siblings during a yellow fever epidemic could do that. Even so, I’d like to ask Miss Mary E. Ross about her path to spiritual maturity, the kind that had her dying “in Christ and confidence” at age 19. A Q&A with her mother might be helpful as well. Too bad I missed them by close to 200 years.

For curiosity’s sake, I took a stroll through some more recent graves. Those headstones were glossier, but not many had the extra layer of information that an epitaph offers. One had a vase bearing Greek sorority letters, though.

But even when epitaphs are missing, rounded mounds of earth send a message whistling through the Spanish moss and leaning cedars that rings as honest as those troubling verses about our fleeting lives being as nothing before God. The chiseled dates aren’t silent either, making you do the math and get a true north on your own place in the big scheme of things.

Maybe—just maybe—that’s why we like spending time in old cemeteries reading grave words. But only because we know resurgam is among them.
global missions is changing

Around the world, local leaders are rising up and planting churches in their communities. Here are three reasons to support local leaders:

1. They already understand their culture, language, and social networks.
2. They can contextualize the training so it is relatable and practical.
3. They are invested in their communities because they already live and work there.

Join us in our work of local leaders training local believers to plant churches around the world.

To learn more, scan these QR codes or visit us online:
REBUILDING COMMUNITY

The United States saw a record-breaking number of drug overdose deaths during the pandemic, but the answers to the crisis aren’t easy

by Emily Belz in New York
Esther Nesbitt, who has lost two of her children to drug overdoses, grieves for her daughter in Binghamton, N.Y.

ANDREW LICHTENSTEIN/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES
months ending in April 2021, according to the most recent estimate from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That's a nearly 30 percent jump from the previous year and means that more Americans are dying from drug overdoses than guns, car crashes, or the flu. It's about on par with deaths from diabetes.

"Dealers were not hindered by the shutdown," said Paul Burke, who leads Brooklyn Teen Challenge, a Christian residential recovery program in New York City that saw overdose deaths in its small community of recovering addicts this past year.

The deaths usually involve a cocktail of drugs, often with the dangerous syn-
Whether you realize it or not, you may know someone who has an issue with opioid addiction.

CHRISTIANS WORKING in recovery and doctors on the front lines are tired. Those I interviewed had a lot of theories on the causes of the recent peak, ranging from general isolation, to government unemployment checks keeping people out of recovery, to the dopamine effects of social media raising addictive tendencies, to the overall feeling of societal uncertainty.

“I have hope in Jesus Christ,” said Burke from Brooklyn Teen Challenge. “People that don’t have that, I don’t know how they manage through all of this stuff ... the division in our country ... it creates a sense of instability. As people we feel that, we feel scared.”

No one could point to one approach or program that can solve addiction. The theme instead from interviews was the need for a strong, basic network of community over a period of years of recovery. And doctors said that should have been a factor in public health decisions during the pandemic.

“People are meant to be in relationship with one another,” Nicks said. “It’s just communities that come alongside each other. ... The ones with the best networks in place.”

Governments are trying various experiments that are easier than rebuilding communities. New York City recently opened the first “supervised injection sites” in the United States, two sites where people can use drugs under medical supervision. The city reported that it had reversed 59 overdoses in the first three weeks of the sites’ operation.

The executive director of the sites, Sam Rivera, gave a mysterious blessing on his work: “We are meeting people who use drugs where they are in their life journey to support them in building their self-worth.”

February 26, 2022 WORLD 41
GREG BARNHARDT, 39, graduated from a Teen Challenge program in California and had been on staff in Brooklyn since 2019. He was also on the worship team of a local church, House on the Rock. Burke described him as “one of the most likable people you will ever meet.”

In a testimonial video Barnhardt made for the Christian nonprofit Hope for New Teen Challenge has always emphasized a year-long recovery program. And Burke said the people who do the best often remain in the local Brooklyn Teen Challenge community for three to five years, connected to local churches affiliated with the program. That’s not quick or easy.

Burke said because churches were meeting less frequently during the pandemic, the Brooklyn recovery program had fewer opportunities for outreach, and the number of intake calls dropped dramatically. He thinks the substantial government aid during the pandemic also kept people out of recovery programs and said his beds filled up in August last year when unemployment checks stopped.

“I was an addict for 18 years,” he said. “As long as you have resources, you won’t get help.” He went from filling all 40 of the beds in the men’s program in 2019 to 10 for about a year. Now the program is full again, though it temporarily downsized to an 18-bed facility.

The overdose crisis hit the Brooklyn Teen Challenge community this past year. One graduate who had remained in the area and was part of a local church overdosed and died. Then in December, a graduate who had been four years sober and was on staff as the outreach coordinator also relapsed, overdosed, and died. No staff member had ever before died from an overdose.

CHRISTIANS DISAGREE about the sites to some extent. Burke at Teen Challenge sees the sites as a “loaded gun”: “It makes things that are evil seem like they are not.” He said the people who set up injection sites “mean well,” but they clearly had no experience with addiction themselves.

“One you inject ... you’re going to battle that the rest of your life,” he said. “Why would you make it easier for the first time?”

Other Christian doctors and paramedics I interviewed were doubtful that new users would go to an injection site. They thought the sites would probably save a few lives, but that they do not solve any of the underlying problems.

“It allows them on Tuesday to not die, when they’re going to die on Thursday,” said Dr. Elliott Tenpenny, a Christian emergency physician in North Carolina who has seen many overdoses. Tenpenny suspects safe injection sites are more of a way for politicians to score points: “It’s easier to say 7,000 people were safely injected, rather than seven people are no longer on opiates.”

Nicks agrees that an injection site “just kicks the can down the road” and added that only a small percentage of people could be within proximity of that specific site. “To operationalize that on a national level—every single community, rural, urban, suburban—is incredibly difficult,” he said.

The No. 1 thing to immediately save lives, Nicks says, would be having naloxone available everywhere for free, so someone could walk up to a pharmacy and ask for naloxone and get it immediately, and to ensure that every police officer and librarian would have doses with them.

Meanwhile, Burke has watched more 30-, 60-, and 90-day recovery programs pop up as more resources and insurance coverage for addiction have become available. He’s glad that there are more recovery resources, but he also said shorter programs covered by insurance are always going to be more appealing to someone struggling with addiction.

“There is nothing that is too far gone or too broken that He can’t fix.”
Greg Barnhardt

was hooked on methadone, heroin, and pills for years. Then his sister introduced him to a pastor who told him about a faith-based recovery program called Teen Challenge. He decided to go despite some misgivings, and soon was praying to God, “I need You to be in my life.” He graduated and eventually joined the staff at Brooklyn Teen Challenge.

Burke says relapses don’t come out of nowhere. Barnhardt had grown increasingly isolated from people in Teen Challenge and at the church, he said. Burke also said the pandemic-related shutdowns in New York limited Barnhardt’s work both as outreach coordinator and as a worship leader.

“He was very closed off,” said Burke about their interactions in recent months. “You can’t take at face value what people tell you. They may tell you they are doing good, but they’re not doing good. ... His isolation—it wasn’t without us trying.”

The day Barnhardt overdosed, Burke had called him and asked if they could meet up after church the following day. It was a positive conversation. Barnhardt had cheerfully told Burke he was looking forward to it. A few hours later he overdosed.

He was in a coma at the hospital for a week or so, and his family came to New York and stayed in Burke’s guest space. Burke said that gave everyone time to grieve together before Barnhardt finally died.

“Greg’s passing is not good, but God has a way of taking bad things and making good out of it,” said Burke. It reminded the men in the recovery program, many of whom have overdosed before and survived, to stay accountable and close to each other.

Barnhardt said in the video last year: “The peace that I have found in Christ Jesus, the hope, the joy, the purpose, is lasting. There is nothing that is too far gone or too broken that He can’t fix.”

—Emily Belz is a former senior reporter for WORLD
Residents of eastern Democratic Republic of Congo continue to face attacks

BY ONIZE OHIKERE
A child sifts through the rubble of an Ituri province displacement camp that was attacked and burned in November by CODECO rebels.

ALEXIS HUGUET/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES
ON A JANUARY MORNING, THE GOSPEL AND RECONCILIATION RADIO STATION BEGAN ITS DAILY BROADCAST WITH A MESSAGE ON GOD’S LOVE.

The station sits strategically on a mountain top in the village of Nyankunde, located in the Democratic Republic of Congo’s restive eastern Ituri province. The radio’s signal reaches up to 300 miles, allowing its messages to reach a few other surrounding villages.

The Monday broadcast addressed the importance of loving one’s neighbors.

“If we have love in us, we can continue to live together,” Jean Luc Simbilyabo, who began the station six years ago, later told me.

The message of peace and reconciliation is timely for Nyankunde, which has a history of tribal conflicts and armed violence, the latest over the past year. A local rebel group fought government troops for control of the town shortly before the government imposed martial law across the wider eastern region in May, hoping to stem the violence.

The violence has eased in Nyankunde since the April fighting, but locals still live in survival mode. Many are trying to rebuild, even as violence persists across neighboring communities and the wider eastern region. DRC has the largest internally displaced population on the continent, numbering more than 5 million.

The conflict has added to existing tensions with DRC’s neighbors, with a resurgence of attacks targeting neighboring Uganda and the involvement of an Islamic State–affiliated rebel group. Despite the fragile conditions, missionaries and Christian leaders in Nyankunde are working to help the community move on from survival to healing and reconciliation.
Nyankunde’s historic 2002 violence inspired Simbilyabo to start the radio station. At the time, thousands of rebels from the neighboring Ntigi tribe descended on the village for seven days, killing more than a thousand people.

They destroyed several properties, including the Nyankunde Evangelical Medical Center, a mission-run hospital that once served the wider eastern region. It wasn’t until 2005 that many residents who fled the conflict returned home. That was after United Nations peacekeepers had swept the town for land mines.

“We had an idea to start a radio station to help people,” Simbilyabo said.

**LAST APRIL,** American missionary doctor Patrick LaRochelle was sitting outside the rebuilt mission hospital with his colleagues discussing schooling plans for their children when someone from the village rushed up to them.

He shared that fighting between the military and the local rebel group Patriotic Force and Integrationist of Congo (FPIC) had intensified. FPIC members are mostly from the region’s majority Bira youths, who are angered over their exclusion from the provincial government and want to reclaim lands now occupied by the pastoralist Hema tribe.

That night, LaRochelle housed as many as 35 people in his family home as the sounds of gunshots echoed across the community.

At the same time, missionaries with Mission Aviation Fellowship also huddled together in safety, said John Cadd, an MAF missionary who has served in the region for 13 years.

“Our people were down on the floor with mortars going off before they could actually get out,” he said.

Several of the missionaries left Nyankunde mainly for the provincial capital of Bunia before the government imposed martial law across the eastern Ituri and North Kivu provinces. The April 30 declaration, which went into effect on May 6, empowered the military to control civil positions of authority until “the re-establishment of the peace.”

Civilians fled to the surrounding bush to escape the violence as others tried to get to neighboring communities. The Nyankunde lockdown lasted several weeks as the military battled to regain control of the town from the FPIC.

Unlike during the 2002 fighting, the Nyankunde Evangelical Medical Center became a refuge for the community.

As many as 120 civilians sought shelter there, said Dr. Lindsey Cooper, a pediatrician with Christian Health Service Corps who works at the medical center.

From outside the village’s borders, Lindsey and other missionaries worked to get food and medicine to people still stranded in the region. They implored the United Nations to provide a humanitarian corridor into the community, she said, but were told the agency couldn’t act out of the military’s jurisdiction.

Four staff members remained on duty, caring for the remaining patients and military troops who came in for treatment. Hospital staff buried those who died next to the hospital. They include a little girl who battled with terminal leukemia—one case Lindsey can’t forget.

“I didn’t want her last moments on earth to be filled with gunfire,” she said. “I think of her and I pray that God consoled her in her final moments on earth.”

More than 120 rebel groups operate across the eastern region. These armed groups have killed more than 6,000 people and kidnapped more than 7,000 others since 2017.
The eastern region increasingly became a conflict hub after the Rwandan genocide in 1994. Some armed members of the Hutu rebel group fled to the neighboring eastern DRC region. Despite two wars and peace deals, DRC and its allies failed to regain control over the growing armed groups. The persistent tribal tensions, lack of government presence, and natural resources in the region have created a complex setting for armed groups to start and thrive.

During the martial law, at least 55 people died and many others were injured after rebels staged two overnight attacks on May 30 in Ituri’s Irumu territory and North Kivu, also targeting displacement camps. Authorities blamed the Islamic State–affiliated Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a rebel group that began in neighboring Uganda but now focuses its insurgency mostly on DRC. In November, local authorities accused the Cooperative for the Development of Congo (CODECO) rebel group of attacking a camp in Ituri province that left at least 22 people dead.

After a string of ADF attacks in Uganda’s capital city of Kampala, the Ugandan military launched a joint mission with Congolese troops early in December in the eastern region. The joint operation stoked concerns about civilian safety, given the two nations’ uneasy history. (In 2005, the International Court of Justice ruled the Ugandan army broke international humanitarian and civil rights laws during its incursions into DRC in the 1990s and again in 2003.)

The unrest is also stoking international concern. The U.S. State Department last March declared the ADF a foreign terrorist organization after it pledged allegiance to the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP).

The Islamic State claimed its first attack in DRC in 2019. Signs of further cooperation have grown since then. In September, the Congolese army detained a Jordanian for working with the Islamic State affiliate on its drone program.

In a 2021 report, the London-based International Center for the Study of Radicalization said the extent of the group’s connection to the Islamic State remains contested. But it noted reports of training links between the ADF and the Islamic State affiliate in Mozambique.

“Relying on intelligence information from member states, the reports describe ISCAP as IS’s regional province covering Somalia, DRC, and Mozambique,” it said. “The group in Somalia has been designated as the command centre for ISCAP, meaning that it is acting as the link between the affiliates in East and Central Africa and IS’s central organization in the Levant.”

IN DECEMBER, a health zone vehicle from the Nyankunde Evangelical Medical Center drove past the road leading to the center and stopped at the major roadway. The bus picked up two patients from the Hema minority tribe, drove them to the clinic, and dropped them back at the same spot on the highway when they were done.

The medical center began the pick-up and drop-off process after last year’s violence. Dr. Warren Cooper, a surgeon and Lindsey’s husband, said they found that patients from minority tribes were afraid to come for treatment. “Tribal animosities still remain between the tribe of Nyankunde and some of the surrounding areas,” Warren said.

It’s one sign of the uneasy calm that still blankets the village, making Warren believe many people are still in survival mode and not yet at a point of healing.

Violence has stalled in Nyankunde, but attacks continue in surrounding communities. Residents say displaced people continue to come into the town, seeking refuge.

Dr. Bungishabaku Katho, a theologian who has worked for nearly two decades on reconciliation, said the conflict and subsequent peace-building efforts must involve the larger community.

“They’re not just out in the forest somewhere,” Katho said of the rebels. “You don’t deal only with the rebels. You deal with the community because they’re coming from the community.”

The fragile peace has also hindered many missionaries from receiving clearance to return to Nyankunde.

The Coopers are serving at a much smaller hospital in a village closer to the Ugandan border. Yet their hearts remain in Nyankunde.

The couple has made short trips back and continues to consult with their col-
leagues at the medical center through phone calls and photos.

They hope to return full time. Over the years, Warren has operated on several battle injuries, giving him a unique opportunity to interact with some rebels.

“We do feel called to work in this area,” he said. “Our prayer is that we can speak to the underlying tribal hatred.”

ALTHOUGH MAF moved its base to Bunia, the capital city of Ituri province, after the latest fighting, John Cadd said they have continued to support the local Christian community. The mission has continued to fly Congolese pastors who want to serve in remote areas.

The population in Bunia has also supported the displaced people who have continued to pour in.

“Sometimes the harder things get, the more you feel like it’s important that you’re there,” Cadd said.

Simbilyabo’s radio station has steadily worked to speak peace into the community. He said the station received calls from listeners asking if they can broadcast to more villages.

Once, when the station couldn’t function because it had no power, community members brought kerosene to fuel its generator.

In another sign of its impact, one villager who lost his home and other properties in the recent fighting called the station to share how he worked through forgiving those who hurt him. He now preaches on the station.

“He’s going to study at the Bible school here in Nyankunde,” Simbilyabo said.

Katho has also embraced a direct approach. He returned to Ituri after completing his studies in South Africa, with plans to aid the rebuilding efforts in Nyankunde. His efforts earned him widespread respect, even among the rebels.

His team now speaks with community and rebel leaders, hoping to negotiate living arrangements and reconciliation across the region.

After attending a provincial security council meeting in May, Katho said, he learned the military planned to send in as many as 2,000 troops to clear out the FPIC rebels from the town.

“We didn’t want a confrontation,” he said, because the community was still reeling from the earlier violence. “We managed to convince the local militia to leave.”

The work comes with its risks. Katho was placed under house arrest for four days in January at his home in Bunia after someone accused him of starting a militia group. During his detention, dozens of people steadily streamed into his home, praying and singing.

He sees the risks as part of the uphill battle to end the complicated crisis and bring peace.

But, he said, “there are those who are benefiting from the conflict and don’t want peace.”
THE BRITISH PUBLISHER John Newbery was enterprising enough to recognize, all the way back in 1744, that books for children offered a potential gold mine. Until then, children's publishing was largely limited to somber religious tracts, but Newbery broadened his backlist to include alphabet books, poetry, and uplifting stories like *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes*.

Despite his foresight, he'd be forgotten today if a New England bookseller hadn't proposed to the American Library Association that they award a prize to outstanding children's literature.

“Newbery” would be a good name for it. If the bookseller, Frederic Melcher, had an eye for future profits, he wasn't wrong: In the 100 years since the ALA instituted the award, only one of the winners has ever gone out of print. The average American with a public school education has probably read at least one gold-medal title.

The Newbery matters as a cultural marker, an indicator of hopes and values for America's children. Though selection committees have been slow to adopt changing standards, it seems they have arrived.

In 2020 the committee chose its first graphic novel for top honors. Last year's winner prominently featured a lesbian character for the first time. And one of the books on this year’s Newbery honor list made transgenderism its theme, as the protagonist (influenced by her gay, drag-queen, recently deceased uncle) recognizes she is actually a boy.

LGBTQ-themed books are taking a larger share of the children's market. Last spring's *Publishers Weekly* roundup of LGBTQ titles, compared with the spring of 2020, showed picture books increasing from 12 to 17, middle grade from 10 to 13, and young adult from 44 to 60.

Society seems to have made its peace with sexual diversity per se, but pornography in the school library had parents up in arms last year, as they stormed school board meetings in protest (see p. 58).

Still, excellent books for children roll off the presses of mainstream publishers every year. Since 2014, WORLD has selected outstanding examples of fiction, nonfiction, and picture books from the previous year to recommend to parents, teachers, and other interested adults. And “interested adults” take note: A good read for kids is probably a good read for grown-ups, too.
WORLD'S CHOICE FOR Children's Book of the Year is *The Swallows’ Flight* by Hilary McKay.

Soon after Hans and his family moved into their Berlin apartment, he heard his upstairs neighbor was paying for dead flies. The flies were to feed the three orphaned swallows whose nest Erik had rescued from the ground. Baby birds are insatiable, but they also grow fast, and by the time they left the nest Hans and Erik were best friends.

They share a dry sense of humor, a talent for schemes, and Hans’ Uncle Karl, a man of connections who introduces them to the Berlin Airfield. That leads to a mutual ambition to fly their own planes. And as the years pass, Erik and Hans share something else: a distaste for Hitler and his mad schemes.

Meanwhile, across the water in England, two girls are not yet friends. Ruby lives on the coast of Cornwall and Kate in Oxford. Ruby is a strong personality made prickly by the brownish birthmarks that (she thinks) disfigure her face irredeemably. Kate, quiet and sickly, is the youngest of the Penrose clan. The one thing they share is Kate’s Aunt Clarissa, or Clarry, who served as godmother to both and tries to make them friends over a series of sporadic visits.

The girls don’t click at first, but as war looms and families are reshuffled, they are thrown together at Kate’s home.

Meanwhile, on London’s East End, a scrapyard dog is friendless. He has known almost nothing but chains and broomsticks until the day strangers set him loose on the street, with rumors of war in the air. Soon the rumors will be replaced by Luftwaffe planes.

Two young men, two girls, and one dog are destined to meet dramatically in the tranquil English countryside. Their separate stories are stitched together by random events with big consequences, simple kindnesses with hidden dangers. But be warned: The details demand attention. Shy, quiet Kate, the diary-keeper, knows this instinctively. As her brother turns the pages of her most recent journal, he knows it too: “It’s a good job you wrote it all down, Kate. Or else it would all have been wasted.”

The narrative spans 15 years and a multitude of characters, and nothing is wasted. The emotional power of the story is built on countless small gestures. A clandestine wink at Christmas connects a shy girl and her irascible grandfather. A fern in a window represents a family’s commitment to do what they can. A despairing dog in the street discovers he has a heart: “A proper, thudding heart, his own, to keep him warm and alive” and to give to the first human who loves him.

McKay, a prolific British author, does have a heart for dogs: “I have a beautiful border collie named Meg.” She delved into historical fiction previously with *The Skylarks’ War*, a novel of WW I that features Clarry, Grandfather Penrose, and other characters from *Swallows*.

“I am old enough to remember my grandfather’s story re. WW1, and that was an influence [on *The Skylarks’ War*]. WW2 was suggested by my publishers as a natural succession, and my lovely editor’s Granny had actually rescued an airman who came down in a shot-down plane when she was only a young girl.”

McKay prefers to write during “mornings and evenings usually, in the rather chilly study I have made out of the old garage. It still looks very much like a garage and contains a lot of other people’s junk.”

“Other people’s junk” tells countless stories, but the beauty of *The Swallows’ Flight* lies as much in what isn’t told as what is; the gaps left for readers to fill in. Big events overshadow little lives, but the texture, color, and essential goodness of those lives reinforce what C.S. Lewis said about nations: In the end, they will matter much less than the individuals who built and lived in them.
RUNNERS-UP

Across the Desert
DUSTI BOWLING
Jolene, 12, won’t miss livestreams of The Desert Aviator at the library. The aviator is “Addie Earhardt,” gliding over the landscape in an ultralight while narrating the sights. But one afternoon, Jolene watches in horror as Addie’s aircraft tips and crashes, cutting off the narration along with any clues of where she might be. With a map and a few provisions Jolene sets out to find her, a journey that becomes a gripping survival tale. The author, a Christian, also tackles the tough issue of parental drug addiction as part of Jolene’s backstory. But hope, grit, and helpful strangers save the day. (Ages 12-15)

Amari and the Night Brothers
B.B. ALSTON
Amari is certain her missing brother Quinton is alive, especially after a package arrives with an invitation to try out for apprenticeship at the Bureau of Supernatural Affairs. It seems her brother, a top agent of the BSA, disappeared during an undercover mission. Amari herself discovers unsuspected talents that could help her find him, as long as she can hold her own and keep her cool. Debut author Alston reinvigorates the “gifted child” fantasy trope with humor, nonstop action, and a diverse character list, including the spunky protagonist. (As this is the first of a series, though, we can’t vouch for further installments.) (Ages 10-14)

A Place to Hang the Moon
KATE ALBUS
William, Edmund, and Anna Pearce, ages 12 to 9, were orphaned long ago and never bonded with their aloof grandmother. But her death leaves them in limbo with the threat of separation hanging overhead. A threat of war hangs over Britain as the siblings join the evacuees leaving London. Can a family be found who will take all of them, even temporarily? Narnia fans will be reminded of the Pevensie children, but there are no enchanted wardrobes, only sturdy English country people who lend texture and authenticity to this classic story of displaced children finding love and home. (Ages 8-14)

Linked
GORDON KORMAN
Chokecherry, Colo., is a quiet town where people get along—which is why the swastika painted on the school stairwell shocks everyone. School administrators organize Tolerance Week, but kids have a better idea. They’re learning about the Holocaust, so why not create a commemoration of Jewish lives lost, like a paper chain with 6 million links? Alternating voices carry the narrative, primarily that of Lincoln Rowley, the prankster who’s drawn to study Judaism: “My life should be about something, even if I haven’t figured out what that is yet.” Themes of repentance and forgiveness, though not specifically Christian, add depth to an engaging story. (Ages 10-14)

Honorable mentions
If your home were on fire, what would you save? Linda Sue Park gives treasured objects center stage in The One Thing You’d Save, a surefire discussion starter with a unique format. The Beatryce Prophecy, by Kate DiCamillo, pits a child of destiny against a treacherous king in a quasi-medieval setting. Clues to the Universe (by Christina Li) and The Most Perfect Thing in the Universe (Tricia Springstubb) explore relationships with problem parents in contrasting but enlightening ways. Fran Wilde’s whimsical fantasy The Ship of Stolen Words layers smiles with a sound message about meaning what you say. —J.C.
Swirling stories

PICTURE BOOKS OF THE YEAR: AUTHORS AND ILLUSTRATORS
SHOWCASE HISTORY, SCIENCE, FAITH, AND FUN

by Sandy Barwick, Kristin Chapman, Katie Gaultney, and Mary Jackson

OUR COMMITTEE SPENT the past year combing library and bookstore shelves as part of our annual search to find picture books that are beautiful, engaging, and wise. The following five selections comprise WORLD's 2022 Picture Books of the Year list. They feature diverse topics that we hope will help families continually cultivate a culture of reading at home.

The Story of Bodri
HÉDI FRIED
Fried—now 97 years old—offers readers a glimpse into her experience during the Holocaust. Stina Wirsén’s pen-and-ink illustrations with splashy watercolors introduce Fried, a Jew, her Christian friend Marika, and Fried’s beloved dog Bodri. When Hitler’s forces take Fried and her family away (endnotes explain that she “experienced the horrors of Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, and several work camps”), the simple line drawings turn stark and grim. Although Fried suffers great loss, ultimately, she and her younger sister reunite with the family dog. The ending of this worthy read provides a counterbalance to help elementary-aged children process a tragic period in history. —K.G.

Go and Do Likewise! The Parables and Wisdom of Jesus
JOHN HENDRIX
This follow-up to 2016’s Miracle Man boasts pages saturated in color and Biblical truth. Striking illustrations turn up the volume on a collection of Jesus’ parables and the beatitudes. Across 40 pages, author and illustrator John Hendrix presents readers with 12 teachings from Jesus’ ministry. Younger readers may struggle with the stylized text, but the book works well as a family read-aloud or for older children who will appreciate the almost graphic-novel style of many pages. While Hendrix offers a paraphrase of the gospel texts, an author’s note at the end provides references to the Scriptures for further study. —K.G.

What’s Inside a Flower? And Other Questions About Science & Nature
RACHEL IGNOTOFSKY
This book stands out as an engaging alternative to the plethora of dry science reference books geared for children. Its vibrant illustrations provide a visual feast as readers explore the life cycle of flowers. The main illustrations are surrounded by smaller labels and doodles, identifying different plants and critters and giving children plenty to point to, discuss, and relate to everyday sightings in nature. It introduces some complex botanical terms, but not in a way that loses a child’s interest. This refreshing science book will inspire readers to wonder at the beauty and intentionality of God’s handiwork in nature. —M.J.
**Road Trip! A Whiskers Hollow Adventure**  
**STEVE LIGHT**

Bear needs a new headlight for his old truck. He enlists his friends Rabbit, Mouse, and Donkey to take a road trip to Elephant’s Old Junk Tree. They traverse the town of Whiskers Hollow, driving over a rickety bridge and through a thorny tunnel. At the junkyard they discover lots of interesting things and have fun exploring together until they find just the right part for Bear’s truck. Soon the gang is back on the road to their next adventure. *Road Trip!* features delightfully detailed illustrations and endearing characters who, despite distinct personalities, enjoy spending time together. —S.B.

**Mel Fell**  
**COREY R. TABOR**

A young kingfisher named Mel decides it’s time to fly. Swallowing her fear, she dives off a branch—and falls. As she descends, her neighbors try in vain to help: a family of squirrels, a hive of bees, a spider, a snail, and an army of ants. Finally, Mel dives underwater and surfaces with a fish in her beak. She flies back up past her cheering friends. At the top of the tree, she releases the startled fish and hugs her mother. “I flew, I flew!” said Mel. “I knew you could!” said Mama. Readers turn the book sideways to follow Mel’s fun path down and back up again. —S.B.

---

**Honorable mentions**

In *For Every Little Thing*, June Cotner and Nancy Tupper Ling compiled beautiful Poems and Prayers to Celebrate the Day. Roberta Gibson’s *How to Build an Insect* explores insect anatomy and leaves readers marveling at God’s entomological world. *Watercress*, by Andrea Wang, offers gorgeous illustrations and a heartfelt story about hardship and family.

---

**A read-aloud treasure**

This year one exceptional book delighted our committee members: *Little Pilgrim’s Progress* by Helen Taylor with illustrations by Joe Sutphin (Moody Publishers). At just over 300 pages, *Little Pilgrim’s Progress* was too long to qualify officially for our picture book of the year list. Yet Sutphin’s charming ink sketches combine with Taylor’s text to create a beautiful volume that will appeal to older preschoolers and elementary-aged children alike.

Parents who are familiar with Taylor’s version will notice a few updates. This 2021 edition has an anthropomorphic twist reimagining John Bunyan’s characters as woodland animals: Christian and Christiana are rabbits, Evangelist is an owl, Faithful is a groundhog, and so forth. Just as Taylor’s 1947 work adapted John Bunyan’s words for a younger audience, Moody Publishers refreshed Taylor’s text so that it “will read more familiar, accurate, and helpful to today’s audience.” The plot still closely follows the original story of Christian overcoming trials and temptations as he journeys to the Celestial City, and the allegory’s message of faith and perseverance prevails.

With short chapters and regularly spaced illustrations, *Little Pilgrim’s Progress* would work well for family read-aloud time. Committee members shared that their children—who range in age from 4 to 10—stayed engrossed in the story, eager to read each new chapter. The book makes a worthy addition to family libraries. —K.C.
The Woman All Spies Fear: Codebreaker Elizbeth Smith Friedman and Her Hidden Life
AMY BUTLER GREENFIELD
Young Elizbeth Smith hated her common-as-dirt surname. Her first name, with the unusual spelling chosen by her mother, better suited a woman who longed for prominence. Ironically, the gifts that would make her vital to U.S. intelligence meant her greatest achievements would remain unknown while she lived. Only recently were her exploits as a codebreaker and code-maker declassified. This biography reveals little-known chapters of World War II and introduces some fascinating personalities. Besides a true-life espionage tale, it’s the story of a lifelong partnership between Elizbeth and her cryptologist husband, William Friedman.

Their marriage stood the test of hardship, sickness, long separations, and the stress of hugely consequential assignments. The Friedmans sacrificed peace and tranquility for their country, often with little reward. Their story, meticulously researched, is an engaging read for a wide audience, not just history buffs. And analytical readers will relish the many intra-chapter inserts about codes and cyphers. (Ages 12 and up)

Fallout: Spies, Superbombs, and the Ultimate Cold War Showdown
STEVE SHEINKIN
Steve Sheinkin shines again with this thrilling, month-by-month narrative of the events leading up to the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. From the hollow nickel inadvertently used to tip a paperboy to the eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation between Kennedy and Khruoshchev, the story of intrigue, intelligence, intuition, and near misses keeps pages turning. While the story never references Providence, Christian readers will finish the book with overwhelming gratitude for divine action averting disaster. Parents should be aware that there are a few instances of quoted profanity. (Ages 12 and up)

Race to the Bottom of the Earth: Surviving Antarctica
REBECCA E. F. BARONE
In 1910, Capt. Robert Scott launched his second attempt to reach the South Pole, unaware that the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen had assembled an expedition with the same goal. The challenge of reaching the Pole became a race. In 2018, Capt. Louis Rudd was preparing to set a record as the first man to cross Antarctica alone and unaided—equally unaware that American athlete Colin O’Brady had set himself the same task. In alternate chapters, the narrative covers both races in all their grueling, heart-breaking, death-defying intensity, while probing the ambitions of men determined to conquer the world’s most forbidding landscape. (Ages 12-15)
Audiences have always enjoyed a fresh take on a beloved story. Today, too many fresh takes involve 21st-century takes on gender and sexuality. Still, parents and teachers can find positive reboots if they look carefully.

To start with, beware publishers who equate sexual and ethnic diversity. Yet in the new Remixed Classics series for teens, authors retell stories like *Treasure Island* with, as *Publisher's Weekly* puts it, “a diverse cast of characters, both in terms of sexuality and ethnic background.” If that’s not clear enough, the same outlet describes one title in the series as “carefully crafted queer interpretation.”

Many books signal this kind of content, making them easier to avoid. Parents and teachers may or may not notice gender-bending cover art for *Jo: An Adaptation of Little Women (Sort of)*. But the Amazon.com description states plainly, “things get complicated when [Laurie] tells Jo he has feelings for her. Feelings that Jo doesn’t have for him… or for any boy.”

Parents and teachers may struggle to spot other problematic books. Cover art and book descriptions can downplay or ignore important changes to an original text. For instance, readers may find it hard to know whether a particular copy of Anne Frank’s diary contains sexual content edited out of earlier versions. Or take the 2019 Classic Graphic Remix version of *Little Women* titled *Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy*. The book’s Amazon.com description vaguely hints that Jo “feels like no one will accept her for who she truly is.” In the book, author Rey Terciero centers Jo’s coming out as gay. He also depicts her religious Aunt Cath as suffering from “horrible” anti-gay attitudes inherited from racist parents. (Note the linking of sexual and ethnic “diversity.”)

Thankfully, some content creators still attract new audiences without adding offensive content. Last September, actor Andy Serkis—who played Gollum in Peter Jackson’s Lord of the Rings films—released a riveting audiobook version of J.R.R. Tolkien’s fantasy novels. In *Fellowship of the Ring*, Serkis brings to life the many “races” of Middle Earth (elves, men, dwarves, hobbits) as Frodo and his eight companions seek to destroy an evil ring of power.

Christian author Mitali Perkins points out in *Steeped in Stories* that Tolkien wrote derogatively about Jews in private correspondence, comparing them to “tricky” and “treacherous” dwarves in his novels. But that connection isn’t made in The Lord of the Rings, and Serkis will draw in reluctant readers of many ages and backgrounds with his vocal acrobatics.

Another positive reboot—Mariner Books’ *Animal Farm: The Graphic Novel* from 2019. It does include violence and drunkenness, but Odyr’s bright, colorful illustrations soften the horrors of communism for teens and up. Another plus: Orwell’s animals invite readers from any race or ethnicity to see themselves easily in the text. Similarly, Joe Sutphin’s *Little Pilgrim’s Progress* depicts Bunyan’s moral and spiritual lessons through kid-friendly animals. It’s a great option for multi-racial churches, families, and schools.

So long as classics endure, new generations will seek to remake them. That means Christian readers will continue to face new challenges and opportunities to take every thought captive for Christ.
Porn on the shelves

EXPLICIT BOOKS AT SCHOOL LIBRARIES PROMPT PARENTAL ACTION, BUT ONLY SOME SCHOOL DISTRICTS PROVE RESPONSIVE

by Janie B. Cheaney

LAST YEAR, PARENTAL COMPLAINTS about school closures, mask regulations, and critical race theory in the classroom grabbed headlines and figured in raucous school board meetings glimpsed on the evening news. But another complaint received less attention: the presence of books in the school library that parents considered pornographic.

A YouTube search for “parents protest pornography” turns up video from Loudon County, Va., to Waukesha, Wis.; from Keller, Texas, to Salt Lake County, Utah. Parents hold up offending books and sometimes read offensive paragraphs. Some videos warn about “explicit” content. In others, parents who attempt to read lurid passages are shouted down by members of the school board. The explicit content, in almost every case, relates to homosexual, transgender, or gender-queer relationships (“genderqueer” being a catch-all term for nonconforming sexual identities).

What, exactly, is “explicit content”? Three titles show up again and again at contentious board meetings:

All Boys Aren’t Blue is the “Memoir/Manifesto” of George M. Johnson, a black gay activist. Johnson describes positive experiences as well as traumatic ones in his childhood, but includes detailed descriptions of early sexual encounters, beginning when he was seduced at age 13 by his 18-year-old cousin.

Gender Queer, by Maia Kobabe, is a graphic memoir about the author’s journey to nonbinary, asexual status. “Graphic” describes the book’s genre, not primarily its content, though the pages that depict Kobabe’s sexual experiments, including fellatio, fit that description.

Lawn Boy, by Jonathan Evison, is a novel about an aimless young Latino who finds fulfillment as a gay topiary artist and successful businessman. The narrative is spattered with F-bombs and includes a description of oral sex between fourth grade boys.

Gender Queer and Lawn Boy were published for the adult market but selected by the American Library Association for its annual “Alex” list. These are 10 adult titles recognized for their “special appeal to young adults ages 12 through 18.” Without that distinction, they might never have found their way to school libraries.

Stacy Langton, a Fairfax County, Va., mother of six, was working at home when a television news report sparked her curiosity. It was about protests in Hudson, Ohio, over a writing manual used in the local high school that included suggestive prompts (e.g., “Write a sex scene you wouldn’t show your parents”). A search for other problematic books led to Langton’s discovery that both Lawn Boy and Gender Queer were available at her son’s high school. He checked them out, and she read them cover to cover. “I was wrecked for a day,” she told The Epoch Times.

Langton signed up for two minutes of citizen participation at the next school board meeting. While reading a lurid passage from Lawn Boy, she was interrupted by the chairwoman: “There are children present, Ma’am!”

The video went viral, making Langton an activist and a target, along with other parents nationwide. The National Coalition Against Censorship published a statement in December condemning the “organized political attack” that “threatens the education of America’s children.” The ALA released a similar statement, framing the issue as sheer bigotry: “A few organizations have advanced the proposition that the voices of the marginalized have no place on library shelves.”

Stacy Langton waves away such accusations. “It’s about pornography, not gender or sexual preferences,” she said.
in a telephone interview. What about those who point out that children see far worse on their phones? “That’s a personal issue.” School policy is supposed to reflect community standards. On school laptops given to students, she explained, pornographic content is carefully blocked, so allowing pornographic material in the library “makes no sense.”

Langton’s solution is for publishers to provide parental advisory labels for books with explicit content, as the music industry agreed to over 30 years ago. Getting inappropriate books out of the schools altogether is an involved process and varies from one district to another. School officials in Loudon County, Va., voted unanimously to remove *Gender Queer*, but next-door Fairfax County has taken no action.

Katy, Texas, Independent School District has tried to be more responsive to parents. In an email interview, Maria Dipetta, media communications manager for the district, explained how teachers and librarians have traditionally relied on the recommendations of the ALA and review journals. But recent concerns about content have led the district to enhance their community review process. “Parents with concerns regarding potentially ‘pervasively vulgar’ content … are encouraged to complete a form via the Partner with Parents Online Book Review app. Each submission is evaluated by Katy ISD instructional personnel,” who respond within 30 days.

Partners with Parents launched in December, and the response has been “very positive. Parents have been pleased to have a process to share their concerns.” A few titles have even been removed from district libraries.

Though the line between free access and prudent protection isn’t always clear, few would dispute that parents should have a say in what their children read. Mutual respect will go further than noisy protest, but in some school districts, they may have to fight for it.
Last year I interviewed Hong Kong pastor Wong Siu-yung after he had immigrated to Taiwan. He left his homeland stealthily in July 2020 after Chinese state-owned media accused him of breaking the newly imposed national security law for his role in creating the 2020 Hong Kong Gospel Declaration. He has since co-founded Tamsui Hong Kong Church in New Taipei City, the first independent Hong Kong church in Taiwan. Here is our interview edited and shortened.
What were your thoughts when you first heard in 2020 that Beijing would impose a national security law in Hong Kong? In Cantonese we have a phrase dai wok, which means a big mess. Why is it a mess? Because the entire society’s atmosphere was already different by then. Police used harsher methods to clamp down. Before, all we needed was enough people peacefully protesting on the streets, but by 2019 that no longer worked. So by 2020, we felt there was nothing we could do.

But you didn’t feel this way in 2003 when half a million people protested an earlier version of the national security law, which led to the law being shelved. Why is that? I was younger then. Also it wasn’t long after the handover [from the United Kingdom in 1997]. We felt that when Chinese President Deng Xiaoping promised a "high degree of autonomy" for 50 years and the "one country, two systems" policy, even if they didn’t keep their promise 100 percent, they’d still fulfill it 80 percent. I never thought that by now it’d be meaningless.

What was the purpose of writing the 2020 Hong Kong Gospel Declaration? We wanted to create a declaration like the Barmen Declaration, which was written during the time of the Nazis. We didn’t want to touch on the political, so we kept it more general. But if you know the context, you know it’s directed at current events. We hoped that the Hong Kong Church—not just one denomination—could make a declaration at this time. We want people to know the Church was not absent from the public sphere: We had our voices and our thoughts. Also history can look back and see there was a struggle within the Church.

What about the declaration, which is religious in content, caught the eye of the government? We had one group focused on circulating the declaration, so they created a video. It included a lot of images from the 2019 anti-extradition law protests, including young people holding up a flag that read “Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of our times.” There were also some historical clips from old Nazi newsreels. They had an issue with this video, so they claimed the entire declaration was problematic.

You were one of the public signatories of the declaration. State-run Ta Kung Pao ran a piece in early July 2020, claiming you and the other initiators had violated the national security law. Is that when you decided to leave Hong Kong? Actually before that, I was already thinking about leaving Hong Kong for two reasons. First, ever since I was little, I knew the history of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and I never trusted the CCP. I knew they wouldn’t just arrest me, but they would also go after my family. They would monitor my wife and mother and brother. They might hire an officer to stand in front of their apartment. And they could freeze our bank accounts. If I am taken, what will happen to my wife?

What was the second reason? My church. Some congregants said, “Pastor Wong is making our church more dangerous.” And I felt that if I kept pastoring, I would bring problems to the church. Some other congregants said, “No matter what happens, we will stand by you. You just preach what God wants you to preach, what you think is right. If police come, no worries, we will just go to another church.” So there were people on both sides. But my view was the church has already been around for 50 years.

What were you feeling when you left Hong Kong on July 12, 2020? I’ll describe two scenes from that day. It was a Sunday. I told my mom not to see me off at the airport, so I called her in the morning. When she picked up the phone, she cried. Even when my father died, she didn’t cry. She had no clue why I was leaving. She thought it was something for missions. In order to ease my mind, she said, “If you go over there and things go well, you don’t need to come back.” I was already crying hard as well. My father died four years ago. I felt like there was so much I still wanted to do for her, so my...
heart felt reluctant to go. My brother wouldn’t send me to the airport because he was afraid he’d cry too hard. I said I understand.

And the second scene? Right before I left there was a news story about a young Hong Kong protestor who knifed a police officer and wanted to escape to the United Kingdom. But police arrested him as he was boarding his flight. He made some unwise decisions. First he took Cathay Pacific [an airline with close ties to the government]. Secondly, he didn’t bring any luggage. Third, he bought a one-way ticket. These three things made it easy for the police to find him.

So I brought enough luggage to look like I was traveling, I bought a round-trip ticket, and I took [Taiwan-owned] China Airlines. Going through security, sitting at the gate, waiting for the departure, my heart was pounding. When I got on the plane and sat at my seat, it was like “Wooah” I could finally release a breath of air.

Of course, looking back now, I know it wasn’t so urgent, but at that time, I didn’t know. So those two scenes from that day made a deep impression. It’s something I will remember for the rest of my life.

With the Hong Kong government tightening control, what opportunities do you see for online churches? People stayed for many different reasons. Some can’t leave, others don’t want to leave. We still need to care for them. If Hong Kong loses its religious freedoms, say churches become state-sanctioned like in China or completely closed, then online church is vital. Even if the government censors the internet, people will find ways to get over the firewall. So we need to be doing online church.

I think that when laypeople need to hold their own worship gatherings at home, the hardest part to do is the sermon. They can fellowship, pray, read books, study the Bible, it’s not hard. But there’s no way to have a traveling evangelist visiting different homes each week. Online churches can fix this problem.

What about now, with religious freedoms still intact? Christians can’t hear true facts from the pulpit because the preacher is afraid to say it. I completely understand that: If they speak out, they’ll be arrested. The congregants understand that, but they want to hear it. And the pastors want to be pastored themselves. Where do they hear God’s Word? Online church. People can go to one church in person but also hear the Word online.

How about for the Hong Kong diaspora? Online church is also important for Hong Kongers spread out in cities and countries all over the world, some of which don’t have Cantonese churches, or don’t have Cantonese churches that are yellow [pro-democracy]. They can also have fellowship in person but watch church online.

Do you have any hope left for Hong Kong? From a political viewpoint, I have no hope. You can see President Xi Jinping already has shown in front of the whole world that he doesn’t respect “one country, two systems.” And now he is completely controlling Hong Kong. He thinks he’s succeeded. If you ask me, Taiwan is next. I think it will happen while Xi is still in power because he’s tasted success. He’s oppressed Hong Kong, and no country in the world is doing anything because they all care about the China market.

But I’m not hopeless. The fact that I still have the motivation to act comes completely from my faith. My inspiration comes from Revelation. Every generation has its Babylon: For a time it was the Roman Empire, during the WWII era it was Japan, Italy, and Germany. But now it’s China.

In Revelation it says in the end, Christians will witness with only their blood. So trusting in man is hopeless. In the end, God has victory, this is based on the Lamb who was slain. So all power, all principalities can’t exceed Jesus. President Xi says he’ll be president for life, maybe he lives for 100 years, but eventually he will also meet God. I believe the CCP will collapse. Maybe not in my lifetime, but I believe it will happen. I believe it purely by faith.

—June Cheng is a former WORLD correspondent
Grounded in grace • Growing in truth

Planted

COME GROW WITH US

Sink your roots deeper into Christ during this 9-month discipleship program in the mountains of Pennsylvania.

Live, learn, and work within a small, tight-knit community of young adults.

Dedicate your next year to experiencing God's revelation together in his Word and in his world.

Biblical Training
Hands-on Farming

Outdoor Adventure
Life Skill Development

APPLY NOW | plantedgapyear.org
Help teens help themselves.
Develop news literacy, critical thinking, and Biblical discernment with ten-minute episodes every weekday, year-round. Go to worldwatch.news to view a sample episode and choose how you stream.
WHEN 19-YEAR-OLD Billy Joe White took a job at a skateboard and tattoo shop, he had no idea that 13 years later he would embark on a personal mission transforming body art to counteract a hate crime committed 400 miles from his home in Zanesville, Ohio.

Charlottesville, Va., made national headlines in August 2017 when 20-year-old James Alex Fields Jr. plowed his car into a crowd protesting the removal of a statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee. Fields, an avowed white supremacist, killed one woman and injured dozens more.

METAMORPHOSIS IN INK

Red Rose Tattoo is erasing hate one tattoo at a time

by Maryrose Delahunty
When White learned Fields was from Ohio, he felt compelled to take action to offset the negative image of his home state. He posted an offer on Facebook Live offering to cover up tattoos promoting hate, giving away the first 10 “cover-ups” for free. Customers responded almost immediately.

In two months, the first 10 were done. But the requests kept coming, and White decided to extend his offer indefinitely. White and his staff at Red Rose Tattoo have completed over 100 cover-ups and counting. Profits from their regular work fund the free work.

Clients redeeming his free offer often come from prison or gang life and a lower socioeconomic bracket. They cannot afford to pay what can amount to hundreds or thousands of dollars for the work. White doesn’t judge them and doesn’t make them pay. He and his staff want people to feel valued: “We want to put our energy, our money, and our resources into kind of rehabilitating everybody if we can.”

A 2018 documentary short film—Beneath the Ink—about White’s work received a 2019 Emmy nomination. In January 2020, White received a Cultural Awareness Award from Ohio’s MLK Holiday Commission in recognition for helping people “erase the hate.”

Not all view White’s work favorably. He has gotten death threats from “dudes rocking swastikas” to those with KKK affiliations. However, he was most surprised by the pushback from far-left liberals who oppose his work and don’t believe his cover-up patrons deserve any grace or forgiveness. White reacts by recounting a meeting with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s nephew who told him “that’s how you know you’re making a difference.”

People often ask White if he is a former white supremacist and whether he partied with hate groups. While the answer is “no,” such discussions give him insight into people and their trauma, which has helped him deal with his own.

White hails from a blue-collar family. In high school, he was student council president, class president, and salutatorian—an unlikely background for someone sporting arms covered in ink. His father was a coal miner who died from emphysema, and his mother a factory worker who overcame breast cancer but succumbed to lung cancer. In his mid-20s, White lost both his parents within a span of 49 hours.

Eventually, he learned to cope with his loss by pouring himself into serving others: participating in various charity drives during the anniversary of their deaths. One year, on the anniversary of losing his mom, he tattooed over the breast cancer scars of a woman who had a mastectomy. That hit him close to home. He describes it as the most powerful cover-up he has ever done.

When asked about his own body art, the most meaningful tattoos relate to his kids: two girls and one boy—ages 16, 15, and 11. They each tattooed their names on his left forearm.

Does he ever refuse to do a tattoo? He claims he spends more time telling people “no” than “yes.” His reasons vary. The requested design may not be his style so he refers them to another shop. He also declines on ethical grounds, refusing work that goes against his moral compass. He considers it his duty to teach people how to get tattooed “the right way” for the right reasons. He opposes people who “weaponize tattoos” and use them to hurt others.

He pays little attention to social media—dismissing the negative and even the positive comments. The opinions that matter most come from daily interactions with customers. He and his staff strive to create a safe space where a person with muddy boots and ripped jeans can sit next to a suited professional and trade stories.

White has seen lives visibly changed by his transformative work. John, who appeared in the documentary, struggled with anger, hate, and self-turmoil. Today, he is confident and in a healthy relationship. Another man cried in the shop after receiving his cover-up. He was previously ashamed to take his shirt off in front of his wife because what was previously inked on him messed with his head.

White doesn’t profess to be a Christian, but his life, work, and words exemplify relational bridge-building: “I try to just bring grace to everybody and every situation whether or not it seems like they want it or need it.”
URING A NEARLY nine-hour trial in late January, a Finnish prosecutor laid out the case against politician Päivi Räsänen and Lutheran Bishop Juhana Pohjola, who are on trial for expressing their Biblical beliefs about homosexuality.

In April 2021, Finland’s Prosecutor General Raija Toiviainen charged Räsänen—a 62-year-old medical doctor, longtime Finnish member of parliament, and former interior minister—with “ethnic agitation.” Räsänen’s past statements on homosexuality were “likely to fuel intolerance, contempt, and even hatred toward homosexuals … and thus oversteps the boundaries of freedom of speech and religion,” the prosecutor’s office said in a statement.

In a 2019 Twitter post, she attached a picture of the Biblical text in Romans 1:24-27 and denounced the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF), one of the country’s two national churches, for partnering with a local LGBT Pride event. The charges also target remarks she made on a nationally syndicated Finnish public radio program and a 23-page booklet she released in 2004 titled “Male and Female He Created Them.”

Pohjola, 49, faces charges for publishing Räsänen’s booklet through the Luther Foundation Finland, a ministry arm of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland. The small group of conservative congregations formed after a 2013 split from the ELCF, in part over the denomination’s acceptance of homosexuality and transgenderism.

The case against Räsänen and Pohjola has attracted widespread international attention. The International Lutheran Council, a worldwide association of confessional Lutherans, protested the “unjust treatment” of Räsänen and Pohjola and called the actions of the Finnish prosecutors egregious. A citizens petition supporting Räsänen has garnered more than 335,000 signatures.

Alliance Defending Freedom International, the legal group representing Räsänen and Pohjola, said a ruling against them would not establish an immediate legal precedent for other European countries. It would, however, “set a new low bar for European free speech standards,” said Lois McLatchie, a representative from ADF International.

Five U.S. lawmakers urged Rashad Husain, the U.S. ambassador for international religious freedom, to monitor the case.

The case against Räsänen and Pohjola has attracted widespread international attention. The International Lutheran Council, a worldwide association of confessional Lutherans, protested the “unjust treatment” of Räsänen and Pohjola and called the actions of the Finnish prosecutors egregious. A citizens petition supporting Räsänen has garnered more than 335,000 signatures.

Alliance Defending Freedom International, the legal group representing Räsänen and Pohjola, said a ruling against them would not establish an immediate legal precedent for other European countries. It would, however, “set a new low bar for European free speech standards,” said Lois McLatchie, a representative from ADF International.

Five U.S. lawmakers urged Rashad Husain, the U.S. ambassador for international religious freedom, to monitor the case.

The case against Räsänen and Pohjola has attracted widespread international attention. The International Lutheran Council, a worldwide association of confessional Lutherans, protested the “unjust treatment” of Räsänen and Pohjola and called the actions of the Finnish prosecutors egregious. A citizens petition supporting Räsänen has garnered more than 335,000 signatures.

Alliance Defending Freedom International, the legal group representing Räsänen and Pohjola, said a ruling against them would not establish an immediate legal precedent for other European countries. It would, however, “set a new low bar for European free speech standards,” said Lois McLatchie, a representative from ADF International.

Five U.S. lawmakers urged Rashad Husain, the U.S. ambassador for international religious freedom, to monitor the case.

The case against Räsänen and Pohjola has attracted widespread international attention. The International Lutheran Council, a worldwide association of confessional Lutherans, protested the “unjust treatment” of Räsänen and Pohjola and called the actions of the Finnish prosecutors egregious. A citizens petition supporting Räsänen has garnered more than 335,000 signatures.

Alliance Defending Freedom International, the legal group representing Räsänen and Pohjola, said a ruling against them would not establish an immediate legal precedent for other European countries. It would, however, “set a new low bar for European free speech standards,” said Lois McLatchie, a representative from ADF International.

Five U.S. lawmakers urged Rashad Husain, the U.S. ambassador for international religious freedom, to monitor the case.

The case against Räsänen and Pohjola has attracted widespread international attention. The International Lutheran Council, a worldwide association of confessional Lutherans, protested the “unjust treatment” of Räsänen and Pohjola and called the actions of the Finnish prosecutors egregious. A citizens petition supporting Räsänen has garnered more than 335,000 signatures.

Alliance Defending Freedom International, the legal group representing Räsänen and Pohjola, said a ruling against them would not establish an immediate legal precedent for other European countries. It would, however, “set a new low bar for European free speech standards,” said Lois McLatchie, a representative from ADF International.

Five U.S. lawmakers urged Rashad Husain, the U.S. ambassador for international religious freedom, to monitor the case.

The case against Räsänen and Pohjola has attracted widespread international attention. The International Lutheran Council, a worldwide association of confessional Lutherans, protested the “unjust treatment” of Räsänen and Pohjola and called the actions of the Finnish prosecutors egregious. A citizens petition supporting Räsänen has garnered more than 335,000 signatures.

Alliance Defending Freedom International, the legal group representing Räsänen and Pohjola, said a ruling against them would not establish an immediate legal precedent for other European countries. It would, however, “set a new low bar for European free speech standards,” said Lois McLatchie, a representative from ADF International.

Five U.S. lawmakers urged Rashad Husain, the U.S. ambassador for international religious freedom, to monitor the case.

The case against Räsänen and Pohjola has attracted widespread international attention. The International Lutheran Council, a worldwide association of confessional Lutherans, protested the “unjust treatment” of Räsänen and Pohjola and called the actions of the Finnish prosecutors egregious. A citizens petition supporting Räsänen has garnered more than 335,000 signatures.

Alliance Defending Freedom International, the legal group representing Räsänen and Pohjola, said a ruling against them would not establish an immediate legal precedent for other European countries. It would, however, “set a new low bar for European free speech standards,” said Lois McLatchie, a representative from ADF International.

Five U.S. lawmakers urged Rashad Husain, the U.S. ambassador for international religious freedom, to monitor the case.
IGHTY-YEAR-OLD COLIN STRATTON could still drive, but he told the doctor at the medical clinic that his body had given up. He suffered pain from aggressive bowel cancer and other medical issues and was in danger of losing his independence. Stratton insisted that she give him a “suicide pill” because he wanted something that would kill him that day. Voluntary assisted suicide (VAD) laws in Victoria, Australia, require up to a two-week process, but Stratton told the doctor that if she wouldn’t help, he would go home and shoot himself in the head. He left the clinic and drove home with his son, Glenn.

They argue it could “open the door for prosecution of other devout Christians, Muslims, Jews, and adherents of other faiths for publicly stating their religious beliefs that may conflict with secular trends.”

Räsänen and Pohjola face a maximum sentence of two years’ imprisonment.

The trial was scheduled to resume on Feb. 14, and a verdict is expected to follow within a month. The prosecutor is also seeking fines for Räsänen, Pohjola, and the Luther Foundation. She also asked for Räsänen’s writings and statements to be removed from the internet, including the distribution of her booklet on the Luther Foundation’s website.

The booklet, intended for Lutheran laity, emphasizes that the Christian concept of humanity recognizes everyone’s inherent value, regardless of their sexual orientation. It characterizes same-sex partnerships as conflicting with God’s design for marriage and sex and sinful according to Scripture. Räsänen suggested homosexual tendencies are a result of a “disorder of psycho-sexual development.”

On this point, Räsänen said during the trial that some information in the pamphlet is outdated since research and legislation have changed. Still, she argued it usefully reflects discussions taking place at the time. Censorship “would open the floodgates to a ban on similar publications,” Räsänen told WORLD.

Pohjola expressed similar concern. “What worries me is if [the prosecutor’s] arguments are considered valid, that’s a radical shift in the understanding of freedom of religion,” he said. “As a Lutheran bishop, I have no other way of teaching. … We have to make a basic distinction between the value of human beings and judging our acts in light of the Word of God.”

Räsänen, a pastor’s wife, mother of five, and grandmother of seven, clutched a Bible as she entered the court on Jan. 24. She called it an honor to defend freedom of speech and religion and vowed to continue fighting if the case reaches higher courts, including the European Court of Human Rights.

Following the proceedings, Räsänen sent an email to supporters saying she was relieved the long-awaited and heavy day was over. She said she waits for the verdict “with a calm and hopeful mind.”

A chaplain visits with a patient at North Colorado Medical Center.
In the end, his .22 caliber rifle was too long for him to operate, and he insisted his son pull the trigger. On May 24, 2021, Glenn shot and killed his terminally ill father. The prosecution dropped the initial murder charge, and he was convicted of aiding and abetting a suicide on Dec. 9, 2021. His two-year adjourned undertaking (probation) requires he undergo mental health counseling related to the trauma of being involved in his father’s death and substance abuse treatment for his subsequent increased alcohol and cannabis use.

Glenn Stratton’s involvement in his father’s death underlines some of the complex issues involved with dying, such as understanding suffering, death’s process, and dependence at the end of life.

The church can be involved by raising the topic of death and helping people answer big questions such as: Why is this happening to me? Where is God in my illness? What will happen when I die? How will my family manage without me?

“If there are no good answers to those existential questions,” says Dr. Megan Best, “spirtual suffering ensues, often masquerading as physical pain. But it’s not a physical problem, so there won’t be a medical solution. No amount of pain management will solve a spiritual problem.”

Best is associate professor of bioethics at the University of Notre Dame Australia and a palliative care doctor. She says this type of suffering fuels Australian legislators’ fascination with euthanasia. If New South Wales approves VAD in late February, every state in Australia will then have some legal form of assisted suicide.

“There is a very poor level of death literacy in Western society,” says Best. “We live in a death-denying, youth-obsessed culture and have lost touch with the normal process of dying and spiritual issues. The church should be at the forefront, leading conversations about the end of life.”

A Melbourne-area palliative care doctor, whom WORLD agreed not to name because she feared it could harm her practice, finds it harder to bridge patients’ expectations for a suffering-free death and the reality of the life cycle when VAD is a player in the room.

“We don’t have to be scared to talk about the end of life. God loves us very much.”

“When a specific symptom arises, like the death rattle, it might be met by the family with, ‘But it doesn’t have to be like this.’ We can lose a sense of the normal.”

Best says dying people regularly express a desire for hastened death, but those desires fluctuate with good and bad days. Their cry for euthanasia, she says, is really a cry for help. With VAD as an option, a suicidal patient may not get the psychiatric help he or she needs because too many in the medical community don’t want to talk about death. Beginning the euthanasia process is easier than asking the vulnerable person, “What’s wrong?”

Christ calls the church to care for vulnerable people, including the dying and their families. “We need to normalize dependency and bearing one another’s burdens in the church,” Best says. “It gives others an opportunity to serve us.”

The Melbourne-area doctor says, “The community has a role to care for each other at the end of life, just like they do at birth.”

Best recommends the church care for the dying by visiting the sick room to read and sing, offering meals, and leaving encouraging messages by phone or text. If you don’t know what to say, Best remembers how Job’s friends did well for the first week when they sat in silence, acknowledging his suffering. Pretending nothing is happening can be more damaging than saying the wrong thing.

“In the end, it’s not something you can fix for someone else,” says Best. “All you can do is provide companionship and know it’s important to answer the big questions. Jesus is going to come and take us to live with Him, so we don’t have to be scared to talk about the end of life. God loves us very much.”
The last leaf
Grace abounds during a parent’s hospital stay

The Pestilence Angel, no respecter of persons vaxxed or unvaxxed, winged her way to the right address, didn’t knock first, and unpacked her assorted wares: fever, congestion, fatigue, joint aches, and head pains. My father, 97, got a double portion.

As God is wont to do, He allowed the deep magic its mischief and did not hinder it, instead sending at once an emissary of the deeper magic to counteract it. You are familiar with “Quick, paint this blood on your lintel and sit tight till the plague blows over.”

Dr. Rita is a fellow church member in our largish congregation, a mere face in the hall to me. She appeared on the doorstep unsummoned and carrying a duffel bag with oxygen canister inside. She entered a blizzard of germ warfare (my husband and I were also positive), sat down, and took my Dad’s hand for over an hour.

We phoned his physician, and when a five-day treatment in the hospital was prescribed, I saw it coming: What COVID would not accomplish, loneliness would. Sure enough, it wasn’t 24 hours before the floor nurse called bright and early in the morning, sounding like the sorry kidnappers in O. Henry’s “The Ransom of Red Chief” begging their hostage’s father to take the boy back—they would pay!

He was inconsolable, feeling “deserted,” he said. Where was he? Where was I? No visitors allowed, I explained, especially daughters with full-blown COVID. You’ll have to stick it out. Christians know that “for God a day is as a thousand years,” and this is also true of my father.

Later, Rita phones and says she’s chatting with my father in his hospital room and would I like to do FaceTime with him. It worked like a charm and reminded me of the story Anne Lamott tells in Bird by Bird of her friend whose 2-year-old locked himself in his room in a rented condo on Lake Tahoe where the rooms are especially dark because it’s a casino town and people want to sleep in all day after gambling all night. And after trying everything else—like keys that she knows don’t work—Mom gets the idea to slide her fingers under the door and somehow gets her son to do the same. It calms him down till he’s freed, and Lamott ends the story by saying about the strategy, “It isn’t enough, and it is.”

The next day Dr. Rita texts: “I can go over around 6 today if that is helpful.” And she does.

But that still leaves three days.

So next day, when Dr. Rita isn’t on the schedule to work at the hospital, there she is again sitting bedside with my father. And now she’s doing FaceTime with all my children and my brother in Florida. And she gets this idea to move him to a different room where he has a window, and she texts me: “If anyone wanted to wave from outside they can come over, I will get him to the window.” And she sends me the scene of the street from outside his sixth-story window and I find the exact spot, and we wave and I pantomime hugs and dancing on the sidewalk.

Which reminds me of another O. Henry story called “The Last Leaf” that is about a pneumonia epidemic, oddly enough. In this tale an older artist saves the life of a younger artist who has contracted the disease, by giving him the will to live. He knows his bedridden friend is convinced that when the last leaf falls outside his window, he will die. So the elder painter, who has never made it big in the art world, paints the masterpiece of his life before his own death, of pneumonia—a realistic autumn leaf on the window of his friend’s room.

It is the thinnest of threads connecting to reality, but it is enough. The sick man recovers. As does my father. And once again the deep magic proves no match for the deeper magic.
MASTER OF ARTS IN

Biblical Counseling

Expositional Training for Soul Care

Two year accredited hybrid program offering evening, synchronous and online classes

WE TRAIN MEN AND WOMEN TO COUNSEL THE MOST SERIOUS ISSUES IN LIFE WITH GOD’S SUFFICIENT WORD UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH.

THE MASTER’S UNIVERSITY
FOR CHRIST & SCRIPTURE SINCE 1927

For more info, visit masters.edu/mabc.
OLYMPIC ACHIEVEMENTS
But fewer Americans were watching this year

MEDAL-WINNING ATHLETES such as the USA’s Jaelin Kauf celebrated their achievements at the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, China. Kauf (reacting to her score above after competing on Feb. 6) won the silver medal in the freestyle skiing women’s moguls. The network airing the Beijing Olympics, NBCUniversal, probably isn’t celebrating. The first four nights of the games saw viewership reach only about half the levels of the 2018 Winter Olympics in South Korea across all platforms. (Even with the reduced audiences, the Olympic coverage still produced the most-watched programs on network television on each of the first four nights.) The lower ratings were not a surprise to NBC. In late January the network told ad agencies to expect about half the audience of the 2018 games. NBCUniversal Television chairman Mark Lazarus told Sports Illustrated that the company is “delivering what we promised to the marketing community.” NBCUniversal reportedly paid $7.75 billion for rights to the Olympics through 2032.
Faith without a strong foundation crumbles in the face of today’s relentless cultural rejections. Christians, young and old, will find the strong foundation they need in the biblical bedrock of Genesis.

New Release: Available Now!

Full Color Interior
7x9, 288 PAGE PAPERBACK
When you visit Union University, you’ll discover what sets us apart and why Union is one of the premier institutions and best values in Christian higher education. Join one of our preview day experiences, come for a personal on-campus visit, or visit virtually without leaving your home.

REGISTER AT uu.edu/campusvisit