

ON Broadway

Ann Arbor Christian Reformed Church Newsletter

February 2015

Friends,

I found this blog posting by Tim Gombis to be a timely and real challenge for all of us. We hear so much in the news about terrorism and from different perspectives. I reflect on what Jesus is teaching me. How do I live out his command to love my neighbor, including my enemy. I have acquaintances and neighbors who are Muslim. With some we greet each other with blessings and thank God together for the blessings of safe family and good marriages. Tim Gombis' challenge is one I want to share with you. So here it is. (Tim Gombis teaches New Testament at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary, Cornerstone University.)

Pastor John

January 8, 2015

Loving our Neighbor in an Age of Terror,

by Tim Gombis

<http://timgombis.com/>

I had an interesting conversation with my son last night about the terrible violence in Paris. Among other things we talked about the increase of anti-Muslim sentiment in Europe and here in the United States. Life will be increasingly difficult for average Muslims who are law-abiding and peace-loving citizens of France, other European countries, and the U. S.

We wondered aloud about how to be faithfully Christian in a climate of violence, anger, confusion, denunciation, suspicion, and fear. Those are inevitable responses on the part of many citizens to what has happened. But what about Christians who

belong to the Kingdom of God? How do we obey Jesus' command to love our neighbor as ourselves?

I know how much I am grieved when I hear about Christians doing violence in the name of Jesus. I am ashamed of being identified with that sort of betrayal of the way of Jesus. I want to tell people that Christians aren't like that; that our Scripture does not justify violence and murder.

I saw a Muslim family from our neighborhood in the grocery store a few days ago—two parents and two middle school-aged girls. I thought of them last night and wondered how they're doing. I was thinking that being a good neighbor to them would entail doing to them what I would want done to me.

Are they fearful of now going to the store? Do they worry about being identified with murderous violence? Are they worried about how their daughters will be treated at school? Do they feel that others in our town now view them with suspicion? Do they feel that they want to tell everyone that they're not terrorists? Do they want others to know that Muslims aren't like that?

There is much that should be said and done in response to this act of evil. Certainly those nearer to the horror are able to help those affected.

But where I live, embodying loyalty to Jesus may involve being watchful of how such events can stir up emotions that confuse and perhaps diminish our fundamental loyalty to King Jesus and thus to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Loving God, Serving People

Building a community loved and changed by Jesus,
loving and changing the world for him.

Clothe Yourself with Compassion

by Harvey Stob

**Scripture Reading: Exodus 34:4-7;
Matthew 9:35-38**

As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion ...

Colossians 3:12

In Colossians 3 the apostle Paul gives us a list of sweet and nutritious fruit that Christians will produce in their lives—because the Spirit of God is working in them. The first item listed there is compassion. (Another well-known passage about spiritual fruit is Galatians 5:22-23.)

When Moses met with God on Mount Sinai, God described himself as “the compassionate and gracious God.” For us, to know that God is powerful is good; to know that God is compassionate is a great relief.

When Jesus saw crowds of people around him, he also “had compassion on them.” For us, to know that Jesus is God’s eternal Son is good; to know that Jesus is compassionate is liberating.

To “live a life worthy of the Lord” is to be compassionate. Would people who live and work and play with me use that word to describe me? Would my neighbors use that word to describe the church I attend?

A compassionate person sees others not as competitors or as someone to defeat, not as consumers to sell something to, not as someone belonging to this or that ethnic group or social class. A compassionate person first of all sees others as persons who are loved by God and for whom Jesus has compassion.

What might the Holy Spirit need to do to make me more compassionate today?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as you have looked at me with compassion, grace, and love, help me to see my loved ones—and even my enemies—with those same eyes. Amen.



February Special Offerings

February 8

GEMS

GEMS is an acronym for Girls Everywhere Meeting the Savior. At GEMS club, girls in 2nd-5th grades have the opportunity to make new friends, develop life skills through badge work, learn to apply the Bible to their lives and develop a lasting relationship with Jesus Christ. This year’s theme is *Bring the Message*, based on Isaiah 6:8; “*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I, send me!’*”

We know that Jesus is the Message, the good news. When our lives are changed by this Message, we need to share the good news with others. This year in GEMS we are growing and challenging each other to say to God, “Here am I, send me!”

Our GEMS club meets from 6:30-8:30 pm on the first and third Wednesdays of the month. We would love to have you join us! For more information, contact Laura Boonstra (boonstra.laura@yahoo.com).

February 22

Humanity for Prisoners (see next page)

Humanity for Prisoners

by *David Learned*

Whether it's to stand with a prisoner at his or her parole review, or to advocate for hospice care for a dying prisoner, or to bring attention to a neglected health care need for a prisoner, H for P, or Humanity for Prisoners, will often be involved. Certainly an attempt is made to act effectively on every request a prisoner or family member may make for compassionate care for the prisoner.

Something I never thought much about until a friend of ours was put in prison here in Michigan a few years ago was the possibility of my visiting anyone in prison, as we are reminded to do in Matthew 25:36. I knew other people felt called to do that, but I also knew it was not going to be one of the things I would be doing to serve my Lord. I did think, though that I'd satisfy my curiosity by visiting our friend once. That one visit, through the Holy Spirit's work, convinced me that every prisoner, guilty or innocent, needs to have a visit from a friend or a caring person, or better, several of them at different times. These visits testify that they are valued highly as human beings, as mothers or dads, or as friends.

The environment in prisons in our country constantly conveys just the opposite message to its inmates. The prisoners quickly learn to trust no fellow prisoner nor any of the corrections officers. And the lack of trust is of course reciprocated. Threats and violence are easily triggered in some inmates and are often ignored by corrections officers who don't want to be involved. It's a constantly frightening and dangerous environment.

I will not get into all of the political considerations that are involved that very much frustrate judicial and corrections reform. These considerations are very forceful. Humanity for Prisoners works in close cooperation with the several other reform-interested organizations in the State which together make every effort to promote meaningful reform. This is done by talking with legislators and promoting voter involvement in influencing legislation, among other activities.

To get a fair idea of what H for P is up to, please have a look at Doug Tjapkes' blogs starting January 4th this year: <http://www.humanityforprisoners.blogspot.com>. The organisation's home URL is <http://www.humanityforprisoners.org/donate.html>, from which you may arrange to donate to H for P throughout the year. As you can see from their

home page and the January blog, they put a pledge to good use with their work. You will also have an opportunity to contribute to the work of Humanity for Prisoners through a special offering to be taken on the 22nd of February.

Full disclosure: I'm a member of the H for P Board of Directors, and I'm a registered (by the Department of Corrections) outreach volunteer. Button-hole me in church if you'd like to talk more about what you might do, from writing a prisoner safely, using the A2CRC's return address, to becoming an outreach volunteer yourself. I'd also be happy to supply you with information through e-mail: learnedd@umich.edu. There are already several outreach women and men in the Ann Arbor Christian Reformed Church, as well as people who serve by writing to prisoners sought out by Doug and Matt Tjapkes. The letter writing is active in both men's and women's prisons, and is necessarily done by volunteers of the same sex.

From the Parish Nurse

Barb Okonkwo, RN

For a number of years I have been concerned with the problem and prevalence of violence against women. I think this was sparked by the experience of someone very close to me enduring years of verbal abuse before she recognized it and was able to end the relationship just as it began escalating to physical violence.

Studies report that one out of four women will experience some form of domestic abuse in their lifetime. This could mean that the person sitting in the pew next to you, in front or behind you is or has experienced some type of domestic abuse during her life.

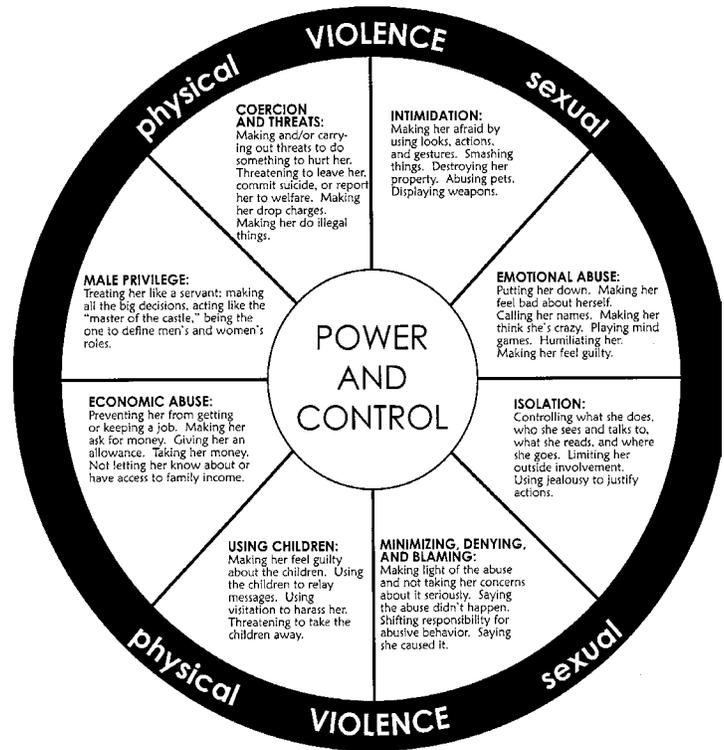
Abuse is no respecter of age, class, ethnicity, educational or economic status or among people of faith. It is a leading cause of injury and death to women worldwide, and gender violence causes more death and disability among women ages 15-44 than malaria, traffic accidents, cancer or war. Regrettably, and statistically, the church is not immune to this problem. Numerous studies suggest that incident rates among active churchgoers are nearly the same as those among the general populace. Although women are most commonly victimized men too are abused—especially verbally or emotionally.

Recognizing abuse is the first step to getting help. The U.S. Department of Justice defines domestic violence as “a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure or wound someone.”

A telling sign of abuse is fear of one’s partner. If you feel like you have to walk on eggshells around your partner—always watching what you say and do in order to avoid a blow-up—it is very likely that your relationship is unhealthy and even abusive.

Following is a “power and control wheel.” It is a conceptual way of looking at the primary tactics and behaviors that abusers use to obtain and maintain control in their relationships. The wheel shows the different kinds of abuse and how they may relate to each other. You don’t have to experience all of these tactics to be a victim of abuse. But if the purpose of

the behavior is to get or to keep control over you then it is abusive. Remember, abuse is never the fault of the victim!



For too long the church (worldwide) has been silent about abuse. Maybe we haven’t been aware; maybe we haven’t known what or how to address it, maybe we are afraid. It takes an extraordinary amount of courage for a victim of abuse to share her story. Can we be a place of safety for her? Can we listen to her? Can we believe her, walk beside her, support her decisions without judgment or blame, without giving advice or placing conditions on our support?

If you think you are in an abusive relationship or if you suspect someone you know is GET HELP. Talk to a trusted friend, one of our pastors, the parish nurse or call one of the many help lines available 24 hours.

SafeHouse Center in Ann Arbor–734-995-5444

National Domestic Violence Hotline–1-800-799-7233