

# ON Broadway

Ann Arbor Christian Reformed Church Newsletter

January 2017

## What a Friend We Have In ...

*Roy Glover*

What name did you use to complete the title of this article? I'm sure many of you chose the name, Jesus. But if you were a member of our Friendship Ministry staff you might have chosen another name, a name like Dana, Peter, Angie, Jerome, Albert or Suzie. That's because each of these special needs Friends attend our Friendship Ministry meetings regularly every month.

For those unfamiliar with Friendship Ministry, it was started 20 years ago by a church family that was looking for a place where their autistic son could experience God's love and care, the kind of support that all of His children need no matter what their mental and physical abilities might be. To say that our Friendship Ministry program has been successful would be an understatement. Currently we have 49 Friends who attend our monthly meetings and 28 staff who provide them with the hugs, smiles, encouragement and the acceptance that every human being needs to grow and flourish. I can honestly say that what we as a staff give to our Friends is returned to us in even greater measure. In fact, after a 90 minute meeting, many will admit that they feel more refreshed, in mind and in spirit, than they did when the meeting began.

Many of our Friends live at The St. Louis Center, a Catholic long-term residence facility in Chelsea. Others come either from our church, local care homes or their own family homes in the greater Ann Arbor area. One major exception is the family that drives to Ann Arbor from Milford, a more than 60 mile round trip, to insure that their special needs son doesn't miss a single Friendship meeting. Each Friendship meeting includes a time of singing, Bible study, puppet entertainment, birthday celebration, special music, prayer and refreshments. During the year we also take time to remember and celebrate Christmas and Easter together, lead a Friendship Worship Service in May and end our time together with a picnic-in-the-park event in early June.

Friendship is always on the lookout for people who have a heart for God's special needs children. Everyone needs love, support and a way to share their unique gifts and talents with those around them. So if that person happens to be you, or if you have questions about the ministry, please make it a point to drop in and observe one of our monthly meetings. We meet at the church from 7-8:30 on the first and third Thursday's of each month. Or you can either email or call Wayne Van Zomeren or Roy Glover for more information. The following photos were taken at the Christmas potluck.



## How to Grow Old

Pastor John

Since I've known Cornelius Plantinga I've respected him and take in what he says and writes with joy knowing that wisdom is again on the horizon. (He was a professor of mine at Calvin Seminary). So when I read this article in *Comment* magazine—which comes from my Canadian motherland—and given its content and my place in life and the places we are all at in life—I thought it wise enough to maybe benefit most of us who read this newsletter. I thank God for the wisdom of teachers who never fade but grow deeper and deeper into the riches of what life has to offer us as we follow Jesus. Enjoy! Pastor John

### How to Grow Old

Aging doesn't have to mean decline; make it a pilgrimage of hope by Cornelius Plantinga. December 22nd, 2016

Some years ago I read an article in the *New York Times* about a group of elderly men in Manhattan who meet fortnightly for a restaurant meal and a topic to discuss. They meet for what Cicero called *convivium*. The topic can be almost anything of general interest, not excluding politics or religion. In an accompanying photo of the group, one man's face intrigued me. It seemed genial, interested, humane. He looked like the sort of man it would be good to sit with for a meal and a topic. The article quoted him. He said, "Not all the guys have all their marbles, but the marbles they still have, they definitely bring to the table."

Cicero would have approved. Among his pieces of advice for us who would age calmly and wisely is that the mind is a muscle. Exercise it. Friends are a boon. See them. Old age brings limitations. Accept and work around them.

Cultivate a calm and judicious life from the time you are young, Cicero says, and then let your life ripen.

*How to Grow Old* is a famous piece of wisdom literature. In his introduction, Philip Freeman tells us that, among others, Montaigne, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin loved this little book. Staged as a dialogue between the elderly Cato, a Roman leader from the previous century, and two younger friends, the book reads as avuncular counsel from a man who has understood that growing old may seem a burden and so wants to lighten it for the young.

Following standard Stoic conviction, Cicero counsels us to fit ourselves into the natural scheme of things, in which we are successively infants, juveniles, young

adults, middle-aged, elderly, super old, and dead. With awesome inevitability that's the way life goes, and it's folly to resist. You can't fight nature and hope to prevail. The way of wisdom is to surrender and look for opportunities along the way.

Nature has but a single path and you travel it only once. Each stage of life has its own appropriate qualities—weakness in childhood, boldness in youth, seriousness in middle age, and maturity in old age. These are fruits that must be harvested in due season.

Cicero notes that everyone hopes to live through to old age, but then complains about it when it arrives. Folly! Instead, cultivate a calm and judicious life from the time you are young, he says, and then let your life ripen. If you have been mean or petty, old age will exaggerate these vices. But if you have been generous and gracious, old age will expand these virtues. You reap what you sow. The recipe is to live in such a way that when you are old you will enjoy satisfying memories of your decency.

Along the way, Cicero offers a multitude of examples of men—all of them men—who knew the recipe. Plato lived quietly and blamelessly in his last years, and died at eighty-one, when he was still writing. "Sophocles composed tragedies long into his old age." Isocrates was "ninety-four when he composed his *Panathenaicus*—and he lived five years after that!"

So old age needn't restrict us to inactivity. No need to be sluggish or unnerved. You can't any longer vault yourself over parking meters or impress girls by diving from ten-metre platforms, but so what! Absent disease, you can think, converse, enjoy a topic and a meal, take a walk, listen to music, read, take a course, attend a game, visit with friends, give to worthy charities, volunteer at a hospital, worship God intergenerationally, accept a senior discount on your haircut, speak peacefully, travel somewhere new, and advise high school grandkids to befriend the friendless and to walk away from the prestige trap when applying to college. You now have "wisdom, character, and sober judgment." Offer the benefit of these attainments to the young, says Cicero, and do so in ways they will accept. If you are a writer, keep writing. Plant trees that will shade the next generation. Think of yourself as belonging to the "Senate [Senatus], the assembly of the leading *sense* [old men, elders]."

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Don't bewail the loss of libido, says Cicero. It used to bind you. It led you straight into mischief. Let it go with thanks. Remember that "in the kingdom of self-indulgence there is no room for decency." Sensual pleasure is a fleeting and unworthy god: "Old age has no extravagant banquets, no tables piled high, no wine cups filled again and again, but it also has no drunkenness, no indigestion, and no sleepless nights!"

Plant trees that will shade the next generation.

At the end, says Cicero, do not fear death. It's in the order of things for us to die. The leaf must at last fall from the tree. Either my soul will be destroyed or else it will journey "to a place where it can live forever." So "why should I be afraid, then, since after death I will be either not unhappy or else happy?"

As a Christian, I read Cicero with both gratitude and regret. The gratitude comes for his genial common sense, patient reasoning, and peaceful tone. It's all so calm. The Holy Spirit sows truth promiscuously, as Calvin taught, and there was a certain amount of sowing going on in Cicero.

What I regret is that in the avoidance of all aggravation, so little of the drama of sin and grace appears in Cicero. But the drama plays out every day. Aging Christians rue missed opportunities to confess their misdeeds to loved ones and, perhaps, to receive a word of forgiveness. They wish they had been kinder to a parent, and now lament that it's too late. Robert Frost wrote "The Road Not Taken" whimsically, but so many of us read it poignantly because we so often think of that road and of the chance that reconciliation lay at its end. In the biggest frame of their thinking, Christians see aging as progress toward the new heaven and earth. To Christians, aging is pilgrimage toward the City of God with, along the path, opportunity for sanctification.

Like everybody else, Christians note the poignancy of aging. Joints ache. (My eighty-year-old father used to remark that when he would swing his legs out of bed in the morning and put weight on old joints, his choice over the twinges was to be annoyed or amused, and he chose amused.) Meanwhile, parents and friends die. Upper-register music sounds screechy. We know a time is coming when almost nobody on earth will understand who we were or what we wanted. Meanwhile, springtime is depressing, writes William Willimon in *Sighing for Eden*, especially when you "see young lovers walking through apple blossoms." You feel your age. "You have more yesterdays on your account than tomorrows. . . .

There are more doors closing behind you than opening in front of you." He adds that it was in just this frame of mind that, one day, King David stepped out onto his balcony and spotted Bathsheba.

One response to the poignancy of aging is in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.

Rejecting such despair, the people of God acknowledge plainly that "for mortals, their days are like grass" but then add, just as poignantly, that "the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him." Life is not "a tale told by an idiot" but the story of a people, a drama of a living body of people—a body with many parts, in a drama with many parts to play. This is a tale told by God and signifying everything of final importance in this life and in the life to come. It's the drama of the tragic fall of human children and of how a resourceful God has come among them to lift and to place on their feet people who had fallen, and to do it for no reason other than his own chesed, his own lovingkindness.

Aging is pilgrimage into this hope. Tweet

The only meaning our lives have is a meaning conferred by this everlasting love of God. This is the love that has planted the generations, cultivated and delighted in us, worried over us and worked among us when we were laid low, and that one day comes for us not as a grim reaper to cut us down but as a faithful gardener who wants to transplant his trees to a place where their leaves shall never wither, a place where their leaves can be for "the healing of the nations." These are lives that gain whatever meaning they have in being treasured by God and then in being spent to increase the divine pleasure.

Meanwhile, day by day we Christians ask God to carry us along. Isaiah was amused by the gods of neighbouring nations who had to be toted out of town ahead of enemies. Take divine Nebo off the wall carefully, he said (in effect), so he doesn't fall on his divine nose. Pack him up, and haul him away on a buckboard. Israel's enemies had to carry their gods.

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But as John Timmer once said in one of his gleaming sermons, Israel's God carries Israel:

Listen to me, O house of Jacob,  
all the remnant of the house of Israel,  
who have been borne by me from your birth,  
carried from the womb;  
even to your old age I am he,  
and to gray hairs I will carry you.  
I have made, and I will bear;  
I will carry and I will save. (Isaiah 46:3–4)

So the big question in ancient Near Eastern religion, said Timmer, is, "Who is carrying whom?"

Christians should be unintimidated about their belief in the life to come, when the new Jerusalem descends to earth and God's dwelling is with us. This is not "pie in the sky by and by" but a solid hope of a solid new heaven and earth. Aging is pilgrimage into this hope. With a destination wedding in their future (the city of God is "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband") Christians may age with poise. They are headed for a future more glorious than they can imagine.

Meanwhile, the call for aging Christians is to put to death whatever needs to die—impurity, evil desire, greed, idolatry—and to clothe themselves with the virtues of Christ—compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and love. The call to die and rise in this way is the call to preparation for entry into a new heaven and earth where vices are unwelcome and, finally, irrelevant within a setting full of light and full of wonder.

Cicero's account of aging is all calm rationality. He never raises his voice. Christians may accept his common sense, but will miss in it the pain and joy of dying and rising with Jesus Christ and the forward movement of pilgrimage toward the City of God.

**Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.** (aka Neal Plantinga) is a Christian writer, speaker, and preacher. Formerly President of Calvin Theological Seminary in Michigan, he is now Senior Research Fellow in the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. Three of his six books have been named Book of the Year by *Christianity Today*. He is ordained in the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

**How to Grow Old** Princeton University Press, 2016.  
196 pp.

God With Us • PreK– 5th Grade Combined Sunday School Dec. 18, 2016



## Coffee Break Update

*Katrina Brehob*

God has abundantly blessed Coffee Break so far this program year! There are six Bible study groups for women (four in the morning and two in the afternoon) and three children's classes that have been meeting this year.

Four of the classes (three morning and one afternoon) studied "Experiencing God" by Blackaby, Blackaby and King. This was an in-depth study that challenged the women to develop an ever-deepening personal relationship with God, recognize God's work around us and to join Him in His work. This study sparked many wonderful conversations within and between the various groups. The morning classes will finish in the new year by gathering together as a large group to share with each other some of the insights gained throughout the study.

For the rest of the 2017 program year, the three morning classes will be studying "Entrusted – A Study of 2 Timothy" by Beth Moore. The afternoon class will be studying "Prayer: An Adventure with God" by David Healey. If you would like to join us in one of these studies—please do! There is room for more!

The morning and afternoon classes that provide an introduction to the Bible have been studying and will continue to study the Gospel of Mark. Both classes have been well attended, but the morning class is especially full of faithful attendees who have been inviting their friends to join as well! In response, we have been happy to welcome two new leaders to join with our current teachers so that all the women will feel supported and encouraged.

Meanwhile, the morning children's classes are also going strong! Babies through toddlers are loved in the nursery (no matter how much they cry—leaving mom is hard!). Two- and three-year olds play and learn more about God during Little Lambs, and four- and five-year olds sing and craft and hear Bible stories during Story Hour.

## Experiencing God at Christmas

Coffee Break wrapped up 2016 with two beautiful Christmas celebrations. The morning classes all came together in the fellowship hall to enjoy a yummy potluck brunch followed by a program filled with music and God's word in a Lessons and Carols style. One of the groups dressed in costume and acted out the story of Jesus' birth as it was told. Other women lent their musical talents to either accompany the songs or perform solos. A surprise visit and song from the Little Lambs class, who reminded everyone to follow the star to Jesus, was a perfect cap to the morning.



## 2016 School Supply Rescue and Recycling Project

Godwin & Barb Okonkwo

A few years ago when we discovered that Faith school in Ghana was without books and school supplies God led us to Ginny Rezmierski and the school supply rescue and recycling project. Since then we have sent a total of 56 boxes of books and supplies to the school. The children and teachers have been thrilled to receive these much needed supplies. Below is a letter from Ginny giving a brief history and update of this project. We too thank those of you who have helped to collect, sort, package and store the many discarded but usable books and supplies.

### **From: Virginia Rezmierski**

Well, here we are. School is underway and Thanksgiving is approaching. Seventeen years have passed since a group of people from First Presbyterian Church formed a partnership with area elementary principals and teachers and began collecting discarded school supplies and storybooks and sending them to the poorest schools in Dumaguete, Philippines. It is surely a time of thanksgiving to all of you.

When this project started the schools in this city in the southern Visayas of the Philippines, were without books, pencils, paper, crayons, or other school supplies. All instruction by the teachers was done by writing lessons on blackboards and by the students reciting their lessons. Now, among other wonderful improvements, thanks to all of you, every elementary school in that city has a library of books that the children actively borrow and use.

Supplies that were no longer needed by our students in Washtenaw County, many of which would have been discarded as landfill, can now be found in the hands of thankful teachers and students—not only in Dumaguete, but also in approximately 15 other cities and villages in the Philippines, in Ghana, Romania, Peru, Burundi, Nicaragua, and Zimbabwe. Children in the United States have also benefited by this recycling of supplies and books. Several schools on the south side of Chicago, schools in Hamtramak, Inkster and in Detroit have gratefully benefitted from our sharing. Each year personnel from our local community centers, the Sheriff's summer program, the literacy center, and other agencies have also shared in these distributed and discarded books and supplies.

What started as an effort by the wonderful custodians at Huron High School to share what they cleaned out of lockers at the end of the school year and didn't want to waste, turned into a full annual project. Seventy-five to one hundred of you as volunteers from all over Ann Arbor convened in late June each year to help collect, sort, count, pack and ship or deliver these supplies to grateful teachers and students. Little else but the cardboard boxes in which the supplies were collected, ended up at the recycling center or in the trash.

Taken at a very conservative 20% of retail value, (we actually counted all of this), we estimate that over the 17 years of this partnership between Washtenaw county educators and volunteers, we have shared approximately \$750,000 worth of educational materials and books. Ten's of thousands of books have been sent. Hundreds of gallons of pencils, pens, markers, and crayons have been sent. (Many of you spent hours sorting those crayons and pencils ... remember?) Microscopes, rulers, calculators, video tapes, dvds, older edition textbooks, math tools, scales, earphones, globes, encyclopedias, and on and on. Tons of waste have been saved from the landfill. But most importantly, teachers and children who are without these supplies have benefitted enormously and have felt the love that you have packed in these shipping boxes.

The Rezmierski garage, the collection and staging site for all of this June activity, is now closed for business. Last year, I retired as coordinator of this project. However, the project continues on!!!! South Lyon schools and volunteers from the Ann Arbor Christian Reformed Church will continue to collect and ship discarded supplies and books to Ghana. Volunteers from Knox Presbyterian Church will continue to work with some county schools for shipments to Burundi. Volunteers from First Presbyterian Church will continue to work with Dexter, Saline and Whitmore Lake schools for shipment to extremely poor schools in new villages in the Philippines. Manchester schools will continue to share supplies with an elementary school on the south side of Chicago.

An opportunity also exists for the Ann Arbor elementary schools to share discarded supplies and books with specifically identified elementary schools here in Michigan—in Detroit. Volunteers from the Delta Kappa Gamma International Honor Society for retired educators are working with the Detroit Federation of Teachers to provide these donated supplies directly to Detroit teachers and children. Teacher-to-teacher, student-to-student, principal-to-principal-- they will have the opportunity to directly touch the lives of needy students and very grateful Michigan educators. The coordinator of this effort is Pat Stejskal.

On behalf of all of us who have worked on this project for the past 17 years, on behalf of all of the children and teachers who have benefited from U.S. generosity and thoughtfulness, thank you for your energy, time, and enthusiasm. Happy Thanksgiving.

Virginia (Ginny) Rezmierski, Ph.D.  
School Supply Rescue and Recycling Project, Coordinator