

ON Broadway

Ann Arbor Christian Reformed Church Newsletter

April 2017

Presence in the Wilderness

*Michael McGowan
Calvin Seminary AACRC Intern*

Kristi and I recently traveled to a church in Sheboygan, WI to preach a morning and evening service. Traveling around the region to fill vacant pulpits will be the new norm for us as we continue walking through the ordination process in the CRC. I am learning that it is not easy preaching to a congregation with whom I have no prior relations. I am trusting that God's Word and the Spirit's work in my preparation is sufficient for the needs of his people no matter where they are in life. This proved to be true for God's people in Sheboygan.

I prepared a sermon based on the Old Testament lectionary passage for the 3rd Sunday in Lent, Exodus 17:1-7. In the passage the Israelites—wandering in the barren wilderness after coming out of slavery in Egypt—"grumble" or "murmur" against Moses due to their lack of water. Scripture tells us that the people were essentially questioning the presence of the Lord: "Is the Lord among us, or not?" How many of us continue to ask this question of God in our wilderness journey known as life? The pain of failing bodies and strained relationships; the hurt we feel over children starving in South Sudan and knowing that millions of people are forced from their homes ... all of this begs the question, "Is the Lord among us, or not?" It's not only the Israelites who ask this question, it's us!

The people of God in Sheboygan were asking the same question. A teenage student from the local Christian school was in an accident that found him in critical condition in the hospital only days before. This tight-knit community was thirsting for assurance of God's presence in the chaos of their wilderness. I found out about this

situation ten minutes before the start of service in a meeting with the elders. My mind quickly raced ahead to that point in my sermon where I had already been planning on sharing a story of my seminary friend who lost a teenage son in an automobile accident. Was it still appropriate for me to share this story?

The boy in the accident was mentioned during the corporate prayer. Without knowing what I was wrestling with in my head, and knowing the content of my sermon, Kristi grabbed my hand and whispered to me that I needed to share the story as planned. I did share the story. I shared how the presence of God was experienced in God's people. My seminary friend knew God's presence in the chaos and confusion of her wilderness because people from her church and community group gathered around her. She tells how they knew their way around her house and her kitchen because they had been there so many times before. They took over and held her up, providing her with the space and support she needed to grieve.

God chooses to make his home in the community of his people. He desires to make himself known to us not only through his Word, but also through his people. The people of Sheboygan readily received God's Word for them that morning. They were assured of his presence in the wilderness and heeded the call to be God's presence to this boy and his family. May we, as God's people, make his presence known to a world desperate to know that the Lord is indeed among us.

Loving God, Serving People

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

Savior Servant Singers Visit the Gilbert Residence

Barbara Trevethan

On Sunday afternoon, March 5, fifteen of us from Savior Servant Singers went to the Gilbert Residence in Ypsilanti to offer a program of song and instrumental music for the residents. The room was full with residents and their families, staff, and our parents and grandparents. It was a joyous and appreciative audience!

We began with *Fruit of the Vine* (about the Fruits of the Spirit). Zannah Baker played a beautiful arrangement of Pachelbel's *Canon* and a praise song (viola). Dane Hubers and Elaina Baker (oboe and viola) played *Were you There?*, very timely and lovely. We sang *Blest Are They* from the Beatitudes.

Next Abigail VanderMolen played Handel's *Boureé* on her flute, followed by Kate Van Ee playing *There Is a Redeemer* on her trumpet. We sang *Night of Silence* (about the longing for Christ). One lady clapped for joy that we would sing a Christmas song in March!

Faith Baker played *Adagio Nobile* by Don Jon (flute). *You Are My All in All* followed about who Jesus is to us. Elaina played the 2nd Mvt. of a Bach Sonata written especially for viola.

Each person played so beautifully. We ended with a benediction round *Now Go in Peace.* God blessed us all with a sense of His Presence!



Soup Group

Roger & Norma Verhey, Chris & Kelly Van Ee

There is a “newish” group flourishing at AACRC—Soup Group. Every other Sunday during the school year, this group meets for soup, bread (and a few extras!) after the 11:15 worship service. Along with the meal there is conversation, laughter, as well as a brief devotional, followed by prayers lifted up to our Heavenly Father. Life is shared and friendships are created. The group is for any young adult, student or employee, married or single.

The group started small, January 2014, in the church basement. Roger and Norma Verhey had noticed the need for something that might appeal to church-goers in their 20’s—something that would help them connect with other 20-somethings at AACRC, as well as encourage them in their faith journey. During the spring of 2014, they met with two young women, both students. While the Verheys sometimes wondered if it made sense to continue with such a small group, the gratitude and commitment of the students inspired them to continue cooking for and fellowshiping with these women.

Before Soup Group began, the two students thought they were the only young adults at AACRC. The group brought them together, and it continued to grow. Later in 2014, Chris and Kelly Van Ee asked to join and were welcomed as co-leaders. When the church renovation was complete, the group moved upstairs, for more space and easier access to the kitchen. Currently, there are 22 students on the email list with an average attendance of about 18.

The younger generation Soup Groupers have been starting to lead devotions, often sharing their faith story or scripture that they have been studying. They send out the prayer request reminders and even take over the cooking and baking on occasion. It has been wonderful to see more and different members of the group take ownership in the group.

Relationships are so critical in every person’s life. And to be part of a church, for whatever length of time, and not have friends, seems like an oxymoron. All of us are grateful that God brought us together at Soup Group, and has given us a love to share with one another. We will close this article with quotes from a few of the participants.

After moving to Ann Arbor, soup group provided an opportunity for us to quickly connect with other community members our age. We really appreciate this time of faith-based fellowship in our week, in addition to the amazing soup the Verheys provide. (Dan and Rachel Oram)

It has been a blessing for me to see Soup Group grow and thrive over the past three years. When I started attending, we met in a classroom that was being used as a storage space during the construction project and often struggled to reach a count of 8 at our biweekly meetings. Last week, we had 18 people attending Soup Group! It is amazing to see how God is growing the community of young people at Ann Arbor CRC and using Soup Group to foster a spirit of love and belonging for both visitors and regular members. Thanks again for making me feel at home at Ann Arbor CRC--this church has become like a family to me! (Nicole Michmerhuizen)

It’s wonderful having even just a little amount of time in the hectic week to have a meal and spend casual time with friends and peers who discuss life’s adventures with, pray for, and affirm one another. I am thankful for the community, food, and fellowship so graciously offered. (Dean Robinson)

Praise be to God from Whom all blessings flow!



Mission Update: The Community of Believers at Work

Audrey Stob for the Mission Team

Jesus' last words before he left this earth: *"When they were together for the last time they asked, 'Master, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now? Is this the time?' He told them, 'You don't get to know the time. Timing is the Father's business. What you'll get is the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will be able to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all over Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the world.'" Acts 1: 6-8 (The Message)*

Our denomination, the Christian Reformed Church (CRCNA), has a long tradition of living out Jesus' call to be witnesses and it has a big pot of alphabet soup to prove it.

CRC World Missions (CRWM) sends out foreign missionaries and CRC Home Missions (CRHM) is involved in planting new churches here. In addition, there are diaconal ministries: the CRC world relief committee (CRWRC), now known as World Renew, assists in disaster relief and in developing countries. The Office of Social Justice (OSJ) and the Office of Race Relations recently announced that they will remain distinct organizations but will share a new director, Rev. Reggie Smith. The denomination recognizes that mission happens in all spheres of life and begins with the local community.

Now, a "New Mission Agency" is being formed by combining World Missions and Home Missions, starting in July, 2017. The new name has not been announced but a new director has been recommended to Synod for approval in June. Dr. Zachary King has his Ph.D. in New Testament missiology from the Free University of Amsterdam. He has served as a Pastor in Michigan and most recently for 12 years as a field leader and church and leadership developer for CRC World Missions in Haiti.

Dr. King states: "... in the Reformed tradition we have a missional vision that is ... vast." He points out that "Reformed mission includes word and deed witnessing for Christ in all we do as we try to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. This provides a really well-rounded foundation for mission."

In the meantime, the "New Mission Agency" has identified opportunities to expand ministry as a result of joining together: Arab/Muslim outreach, partnering with local ministries, and diaspora ministries."

Initiative 1: Arab/Muslim/Middle East Outreach

Missionaries in the Middle East and staff in North America who work among Muslim groups have been meeting regularly to share best practices, experiences, and struggles. EmadGirgis, is a coordinator of Children of Abraham, an outreach ministry to Muslims. 'We have been praying for more churches to open themselves to a love for Muslims. The need to do this is not optional in Canada because we are seeing so many Muslims coming into this country. The harvest is huge.'

Initiative 2: Partnering with Local Ministries

We recognize that grassroots ministries led by national leaders have a better understanding of the needs of their community. We see opportunities for partnership with these local organizations by complementing their strengths and working toward a common goal where possible. Mission Montreal is one such example of how this partnership can work. One of the many ministries that this partnership enables is English conversation groups.

Initiative 3: Diaspora Ministries Outreach

Many opportunities to start new churches and ministries with people groups from different countries exist right in North America. We hope to use the gifts and knowledge that missionaries gain while living in the international mission field to more effectively reach out to immigrants from these countries who want to partner in ministry in North America."

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Recently the Ann Arbor CRC (AACRC) Mission Team has been engaged in exploring the definition of a missional church. We recognize ourselves in many of the activities of the initiatives listed above. Last fall, at our Town Hall meeting, we celebrated the rich history of AACRC's involvement in supporting foreign missions, engaging in local ministries (especially with Internationals), participation in interdenominational social justice activity and our dedication to diaconal work. One of our Mission Team members, Barbara Fichtenberg, is a member of the council's Mission Task Force that will strive to articulate a vision of mission for the AACRC.

We invite everyone at AACRC to join with us in this dialogue to give voice to our compassion to the whole world. We want to create a strong, visible, identity that includes our entire membership in a unified vision to bring our love of Jesus to the whole world by welcoming the stranger and giving a cup of cold water to those in need.

More information may be found at the following websites:

<https://crwm.org/stories/new-mission-agency-update-and-3-initiatives>

<http://dojustice.crcna.org/article/big-news-office-social-justice-and-office-race-relations>

<https://www.crcna.org/news-and-views/bot-recommends-king-director-new-mission-agency>



P R A Y
for
S E R V E

Give thanks for our speaker for the week, ***Cara Maat***, from Zeeland, MI. Please pray for her as she prepares six talks for the students on the them of ***Authentic Community***.

Serve, a week of service and spiritual retreat, will be held at our church July 22-28. Expected to attend are 60-70 Middle School students from the US and Canada and 12-15 leaders.

John Wisckol • March 1, 1934–March 6, 2017

Don & Teresa Streng

John returned to his native Michigan in January of 2011 when his Parkinson's had progressed so that he needed to be closer to family. Although he ended up in Monroe, he had visited AACRC several times over the years and was eager to attend on a regular basis. Don and Teresa committed to driving him to worship every week.

John was a life-long music aficionado. He studied piano when he was young, but his real loves were the banjo and drums. Praise team practice brought him great joy. Those weeks that Don operated the sound board and Teresa sang, John listened and sometimes assisted enthusiastically with percussion. He quickly got to know the pastors, musicians, and others in the congregation who made a point to visit with him.

John liked talking to individuals and small groups, but he was uncomfortable in large crowds. After worship, he typically had a cookie and was ready to leave. Even so, he was happy to talk to anyone who caught him on the way out the door.

After a while, the long trips to Monroe became too much for Don and Teresa, so several AACRC members volunteered to help drive. This was a blessing to John and the drivers alike.

Even as John's physical strength waned and his mind deteriorated, God continued to work in him. Wanting to make his faith public, he was baptized in December of 2012– the oldest person ever to be baptized at AACRC and the only one to use the wheel chair lift. What a celebration that was!

When John was no longer able to live by himself, he moved to a nursing home in Westland. For his 80th birthday, family and friends threw him a surprise party. The highlight of the night was the singing led by praise team members with keyboard, guitar, drums, and John on the tambourine.

John eventually moved to Superior Woods in Ypsilanti. He missed being able to attend worship regularly, but kept up on church news by reading the newsletters each month– even the birthdays and anniversaries.



The Block Party

Mary Admiraal

*“For we are God’s masterpiece.
He has created us anew in Christ Jesus,
so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.”* Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

Recently, the PreK through first grade children of the church celebrated their friendships. They participated in themed activities like the LEGO Drop, Pin the Spot on the LEGO, LEGO Volleyball, LEGO Tower Game, I Spy the LEGO Guy. At any time, you could find children making LEGO creations with a variety of LEGO blocks. As a whole group, the children participated in a team relay race to build the tallest LEGO building and enjoyed dancing the LEGO Jig. We settled in for a time to reflect on God’s masterpiece and that He builds us as a people with a purpose for Him. The children heard the story *I Am A Promise* by Gloria Gaither that reminded them of God’s promise, the possibilities, and their potential as image bearers of Jesus Christ. In 2018, we look forward to celebrating with the same age group at The Unbirthday Party.

