

ON Broadway

Ann Arbor Christian Reformed Church Newsletter

June 2017

The Dramatic Story of a Persecuted Believer

Submitted by Pastor John Groen on behalf of the AACRC author

At AACRC, we meet, befriend and share the gospel with people from many different nations. It is always a joy when our witness bears the fruit of spiritual birth. However, the spiritual journey that begins in Ann Arbor can take dramatic twists and turns when a new follower of Jesus returns home to a country in which Christians are at risk for persecution. God's power and faithfulness to those marked as belonging to God through baptism can be encouraging testimonies to the new life created and sustained by the God-breathed indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

Here is one such story. It is the testimony of an international who became a follower of Jesus through the ministry of AACRC and was baptized before returning to a homeland where Christians are vulnerable to persecution. The first challenge arose as the believer spoke to family members about a newfound faith in God. When it became clear that the conversion was not a temporary phase, spousal rejection ensued and resulted in divorce.

The next challenge occurred at work. Over time, supervisors noticed changes in the person and began to conduct interviews to determine the reason. The believer shared a testimony of spiritual conversion. This was not well-received. A concerted effort was undertaken to bring the individual back to pre-conversion status. The adverse consequences of refusal to abandon Jesus were explained over the course of multiple "counseling" sessions. The new believer remained loyal to Jesus with a strong witness to the authorities regarding the value of following Jesus. Eventually, there was a transfer to a less desirable department. Finally, when faith persisted, employment was terminated. Then came the arrest by police and a month of torture designed to undo the conversion. During this time, the believer expected imprisonment or becoming one of the growing number of "disappeared" persons or suspicious cases of "suicide."

In the face of traumatic persecution, the believer remained faithful to God. And God was faithful, supplying strength to endure everything and the mercy of release from the torture without immediate imprisonment. During this

moment of freedom without any hope of future employment and high risk for life-threatening persecution, God opened a door for the believer to flee the country and receive safe haven in the West. Today, the believer is being disciplined at a church, works at a job appropriate to previous training and is preparing to share the gospel with others.

One of the remarkable aspects of this story is how God sustained the faith of this new believer despite the absence of a substantial spiritual support network. The available resources for spiritual growth were limited to voracious Bible reading, Christian literature and regular email discipleship from Ann Arbor. The personal presence of other believers to encourage and mentor this individual was absent from the situation. The brief discipleship in Ann Arbor was the only face-to-face spiritual mentoring that occurred before entering the trials of faith that were experienced on the homeland.

This story is a reminder that the internationals with whom we share the gospel need our faithful and earnest prayers when they leave Ann Arbor. Usually, the challenges to spiritual growth faced in their homelands are more subtle than the traumatic loss of family, job and personal security as well as torture that the believer in this story experienced. However, there are many ways that spiritual beginnings in Ann Arbor dissipate when internationals return home: pressure from family and friends; employer pressure that includes loss of opportunities for career advancement if not outright termination; and pressures to succeed at work that deplete energy and consume one's personal life. The "rat race" in our culture can be magnified greatly in certain other cultures, robbing people of the discretionary time and energy to pursue their spiritual journey.

Above all, this is a story of God breathing a powerful, overcoming new life into the heart of a fledgling follower of Jesus. The evidence of God's power in this person's life is dramatically undeniable.

Connect Night • Soar High with God's Word

Mary Admiraal

We ate good food and enjoyed the company of the community of faith. More importantly, we gathered together to be encouraged in our role as teachers and students of God's Word; to meditate on the very food that gives us life. *"People do not live by bread alone; rather, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."* (Deuteronomy 8:3 NLT)

THE INTERVIEWS

Below are answers to two questions that were posed to Titia VanderMolen and Ron Reimink about being involved in the God's Word regularly.

Currently, how does God's Word speak to you?

Titia: God's Word, written thousands of years ago, still continues to be relevant for me today. I have read the Scriptures, heard them read to me, listened to preachers explain a text, and every time I'm convinced that it is God's Word for this time in my life and this date in history. Take time to read it for yourself.

Ron: Several routines Sharon and I established in our faith journey 35 years ago is daily Scripture reading or use of a devotional guide, a time of prayer, regular engagement in worship and church programming with people in our community of faith. These opportunities open the door to hear God speaking to me and experience personal spiritual growth.

When your family sat together for devotions, what did you do?

Titia: I asked my four children to help me recall our routine. All of them replied to my e-mail and mentioned the Bible was read at each meal time. Specifically, the children remember that the time we set aside for spiritual growth was consistent and regular. Otherwise, it was difficult to try and figure out the exception or when not to take the time to read it. As adults, they recognize the value of taking time each day to learn more about God and His design for our lives.

Similarly, the children remember reading the Bible cover to cover. They were reminded that God's Word, in addition to being "...sweeter than honey, like honey from the honeycomb," (Psalm 19:10b) all of it, "... was useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness..." (2 Timothy 3:16 17). As adults, they are thankful that their Bible knowledge extends beyond head knowledge to something they believe in their hearts and can recall in times of joy and sorrow.

Ron: Truth be told, from time to time Sharon and I struggled to make our family's time together in God's Word relevant and meaningful. However, Sharon and I

agreed that family devotions were non-negotiable and this mutual accountability helped us maintain consistency when the rhythms of life seemed to invade opportunities for spiritual growth.

Both of our children recall eating dinner together, reading age appropriate devotions and discussing questions and answers that often triggered a discussion. In addition, at bedtime Sharon would take one child and I would take the other child and spend time having *Little Visits with God* (written by Allan Hart Jahsmann). These moments were open doors for hearing God speak or hearing the heart of our kids when we least expected it.



The Dutch Children's Bible Titia read to her children when they were growing up.



Ron confesses that, at times, these routines were difficult to maintain.

The following hymn was sung during Connect Night

How Sure the Scriptures Are

Christopher Idle

How sure the Scriptures are!
God's vital, urgent Word,
as true as steel, and far more sharp than any sword:
So deep and fine,
at His control they pierce where soul and spirit join.

They test each human thought,
refining like a fire;
they measure what we ought to do and to desire:
For God knows all
exposed it lies before his eyes to whom we call.

Let those who hear His voice
confronting them today,
reject the tempting choice of doubting or delay:
For God speaks still
His Word is clear, so let us hear and do His will!

(Sung to the tune of *Rejoice the Lord Is King*)

Hope Clinic Service Update

A balanced, well-prepared meal is a real blessing to folks who rarely enjoy that. We have the regular opportunity to help provide such an experience. On the fourth Saturday of each month volunteers from our church go to Hope Clinic in Ypsilanti to serve dinner. While other volunteers prepare the meal with ingredients gathered by the Hope staff, we have the privilege to prepare a tray of food and hand it to each of the 50 to 80 guests who come each week. That moment of personal interaction and the potential for additional connection while eating are blessings that flow in both directions.

Our congregation has a team of volunteers who have consistently been faithful to meet this monthly commitment over the past two years. If participating in this ministry interests you, we can always use additional people who are willing to be called on to serve. How could you be involved? Some volunteers participate several times throughout the year while others less frequently. Perhaps your fellowship group would like to take on a service project together. A few hours at Hope on a Saturday afternoon would be a great way. Or a family with kids who are at least middle school age could volunteer and serve together. Feel free to contact us to ask questions, volunteer for a trial experience, or to join with our regular volunteer group to participate. The work requires no skill or

training, and is well supervised at Hope. We would love to see more and more of our community join in this ongoing ministry. If you would like to be involved please contact Ron or Sharon Reimink (734-995-1710, rreimink@comcast.net).

New Life Church

During this past academic year, New Life Church, located on Washtenaw Avenue near the main campus, has used our Youth Room for students living near North Campus for a Thursday night Bible study and time of communion. We received three very full cards from the U-M students and wanted to pass on a few of their comments as they thanked AACRC for the use of our space.

- Thank you so much for generously sharing your building with us this school year. It made a world of difference to be able to meet there. It felt like "home." I've been thanking God all year for His generous blessing and provision of that space! May God bless you all for your generosity.
- Thank you so much for letting us use your Youth Room! It has become a home away from home for us to be a spiritual family this year. And I'm so grateful we've had the space to engage with God and each other.
- The room was a blessing to our whole team and provided a great space to become a family. Thank you so much!
- Thank you for providing a space for us to laugh, learn, and pray! It's been a blessing and joy.
- Thank you so much for letting us use the space for our Thursday night activities. It was something I looked forward to every week.
- To our friends at AACRC: thank you so much for your hospitality this year. Be providing a place for our team to meet regularly, you have blessed our team in more ways than you can possibly know. This year, we have seen each of our members take steps of faith in deepening their relationship with God and serving His body. Our communion has grown closer together as we have learned what it means to have fellowship with and disciple each other. We cannot express how deeply grateful we are to your church.

Serve Update

As the calendar turns over to June, the reality and excitement of Ann Arbor Serve is beginning to set in. The Serve Leadership Team wants to keep you updated as things develop and even change. We LOVE to talk about Serve, so stop any of us in the Fellowship Hall for a chat or to get a question answered.

Prayers Answered

We've asked for specific prayer as it related to finding a worship leader for the week. Through a series of God-led steps we were connected to Andrea Featherstone, from Oxbridge, Ontario, Canada. She has led worship at multiple Serve sites and has a passion for youth. You will have an opportunity to meet her on Serve Sunday, July 23rd, as she will be leading worship that day. As Sue shared at the congregation meeting in May we learned about waiting and trusting God.

Work, Work, Work

While the point of Serve is not measured in the amount of work accomplished, we do need to come up with an immense amount of work for our students to tackle during the week. We estimate we will need over 1,200 hours of work to meet this need. (That is about half a year of work for an individual!). Bill has and is working hard to secure worksites and worksite hosts to accompany the teens each day. We'll spend time at Friends in Deed, Hope Clinic, Detroit Afro-American Mission, Food Gatherers, St. Louis Center, Family Life Services, Heartland Healthcare Center, Emmanuel House, and Hope Clinic International's Global Health Services.

Smaller Serve Site

Serve has an open registration which means that our numbers ebb and flow a bit until we get to this time of year. Our numbers are currently 58 students and 12 leaders, for a nice round number of 70. So a bit smaller than what we had perhaps anticipated, but no one of the leadership team in complaining as we get our feet solidly underneath us. The students are coming from Zeeland, Kentwood, and Ann Arbor MI & Brampton and Oakville Ontario, Canada.

Volunteers Needed

The leadership team will be reaching out to you in the middle of June to let you know what volunteer and material needs we have. In addition, there will be an update given on June 18th during the worship service. We are so thankful for the ways that the congregation has already stepped up to get us to this point.

Serving together,

Ryan Boes

Hank Byma, Worksites

Victor Chen, Community Life Coordinator

Darlene De Vries, Food Coordinator

Sue De Zeeuw, Spiritual Life Coordinator

Bill Vander Roest, Worksites Coordinator

Ross Weener, Host Team Coordinator

