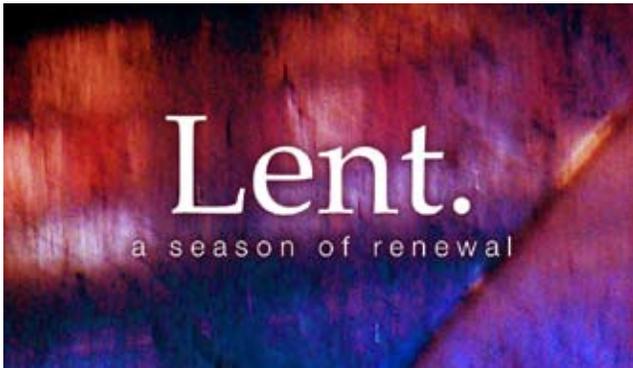


ON Broadway

Ann Arbor Christian Reformed Church Newsletter

March 2018

Lent, Vital Worship, and Sewing Machines



As the ashes are placed in a cross on my forehead and I hear again those words “From dust you have come, and to dust you shall return...”, I remember my faith story. The season of Lent spans 40 days from Ash Wednesday to Easter, not including Sundays. In Lent, we contemplate Jesus’ time in the wilderness, and are encouraged to review our own lives through his example. We are each made in the image of God, beautiful creatures, truly beloved. And yet, in this broken world there is much we can do to learn and grow, to become more like Jesus our Lord as we are led in his Spirit to follow our God.

This reminds me of my trusty Bernina sewing machine. She has completed many a creative project with me. But, to keep her running I need to do proper maintenance: oiling every so often, cleaning the dust out of the bobbin space so it keeps spinning freely. (Dust every time before you sew, the experts say. I’m working on that.) But still, every so often she needs a thorough tune-up. It’s time to take her in to the shop, where a set of fresh, experienced eyes will clean and realign. Lent is a little bit like that. We are offered a time to do a deeper tune-up, to center ourselves in our relationship with God. A time to reset our hearts and ground ourselves in our faith-life.

Our vital worship journey is a little like that too. Ann Arbor Christian Reformed Church has been a faithful worshipping congregation since 1955, over 60 years. We’ve been worshipping in our current sanctuary since 1962. In this time, we have been blessed by an outpouring of music for worship. I was playing the song *Give Thanks* the other day and noticed that it was written by Henry Smith in 1978—40 years ago! New songs find their way into songbooks and spoken liturgies are updated into contemporary language. Bible translations, including Eugene Peterson’s idiomatic translation of the Bible *The Message*, help us hear God’s word in new, fresh ways. And as we do our regular worship maintenance, the week-by-week work, our worship finds itself shifting to remain “contemporary” to our time and the culture in which we live.

The Vital Worship Team’s aim is to facilitate a time of deeper reflection, like my sewing machine’s trip to the shop and our celebration of the season of Lent. Unlike the trip to the shop though, this is a conversation that needs to involve all of us! We believe that AACRC’s communal worship of our triune God is a vital element of a thriving congregation. Our desire is to continue to create space to worship in ways that both reflect and shape the life of our congregation. Such worship can serve as the “source and summit” from which all the practices of Christian life flow. Our prayer is that through this journey we can create a shared vision for vital worship that arises out of the unique story of our congregation and leads us out into the world in lives of service.

Jen Boes for the Vital Worship Team (vitalworship@aacrc.org)

Tanya Boldenow, Sue De Zeeuw, Tim Geerlings, John Groen, George Lindquist, Mike Waldyke



March 4: Lent. 3, 9:30 am

Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; Mark 2:13-22

March 11: Lent 4, 9:30 am

Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21

March 18: Lent 5, 9:30 am

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51:1-12 or Psalm 119:9-16; John 12:20-33

March 25: Lent 6 (Palm Sunday) 9:30 am

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 5:5-11; Mark 14:1-15:47 or Mark 15:1-39

Holy Week: March 26-31, 6:30 am, followed by breakfast at 7:00 am

Monday: Genesis 1-3, God said, God saw—there was life and it was very good.

Tuesday: Genesis 3:1-7, Did God say?

Wednesday: Genesis 3:8-11a, Hiding: naked and afraid

Thursday: Genesis 3:16, The perfect dysfunction

Friday: Genesis 3:15, Crushing the heel

March 29: Maundy Thursday Worship, 7:30 pm

March 30: Good Friday Worship, 7:30 pm

April 1: Easter Sunday, 9:00 am & 11:00 am

Acts 10:34-43; or Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; John 20:1-18 or Mark 16:1-8

Habitat for Humanity

Matt Admiraal

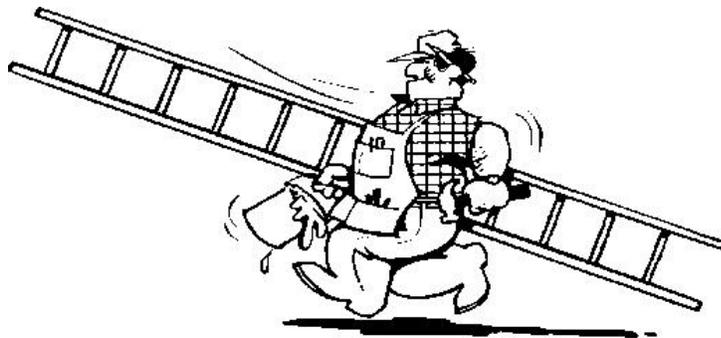
Through Habitat for Humanity, our church has the opportunity to help with the House of Faith in a few different ways again this year. The House of Faith that our church will be working on and sponsoring this year is located at 1215 Hull Ave. in Ypsilanti. Other churches that are sponsoring this house with us include First Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor, First Baptist Church of Ypsilanti, and Westminster Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor. This year our church's work dates are Saturday, March 24 (2 volunteers needed); Friday, April 6 (4 volunteers needed); Saturday, April 7 (8 volunteers needed); Saturday, April 21 (4 volunteers needed); and Saturday, May 5 (4 volunteers needed). Work days will begin at 9:00am and will last until 2:00pm, with about a 30-minute lunch break.

In order to complete the renovation of the House of Faith, your help is needed. First, you can help by signing up to help renovate the house. Renovation work involves everything from drywall to painting and trim work. No construction experience is necessary. Rather, the construction site supervisor, Paul, will provide you with a job that you are able to do and will provide any necessary training to do the job. You only need to have a willingness to help others and to learn. If you have friends that do not attend our church or one of the other churches listed, please feel free to ask them to help. Volunteers must be 18 years old or older.

In addition to volunteering to help renovate the house, our church is signed up to provide lunch for the volunteers working on the house Saturday, April 7; Saturday, April 21; and Saturday, May 5. There will be about 15 people that will be volunteering to work on each of these days. Thus, I am looking for one or two people on each of these days to provide lunch for the volunteers.

A third way in which you can help with the House of Faith is through financial and prayer support. Our church is committed to providing \$2500 toward the renovation of the home. There will be a special offering taken for this cause. Moreover, please pray for the family that will be blessed with this home and for the volunteers that will be working.

Work has already begun on the home. Please consider how you can help, whether that be by working on the home, providing lunch for the volunteers, providing financial support, and/or praying for the family that will be blessed with the home and for the volunteers. Please contact Matt Admiraal if you are willing to volunteer to work or to provide lunch for the volunteers on any of the dates listed above. This is a great opportunity for our church to be a blessing to a family in our community and also to enjoy working together alongside members of our church as well as individuals from other churches and from the community.



CRC/RCA Leaders Visit Muslim-Majority Countries to Develop Muslim Ministry at Home

*Barb Fichtenberg
AACRC Mission Team*

(taken from the Resonate Global Mission
Feb. 15, 2018 blog)

What would it look like for Christians and people of other faiths to have a respectful intelligent dialogue about religion? How could we use those experiences to improve our missional efforts to share the gospel? This past November, a group of four church leaders from the Christian Reformed Church and two from the Reformed Church in America decided to find out.

“We wanted to explore ways to make contact and build relationships of mutual understanding with religiously and culturally diverse persons,” said one Resonate staff member, summing up the trip.

The six participants—three each from Canada and the United States—visited three different Muslim-majority countries where Resonate Global Mission staff work, allowing them to see Islam in different contexts. The group met with Muslims in a mosque and with a group of Catholic and Protestant friars in their community.

They were able to do this through a type of inter-faith dialogue called Scriptural Reasoning, which the staff member explains: “Persons of different religions gather to read and explore their sacred texts in order to foster mutual understanding and friendship. This is a way of witnessing that respects others.”

Initial Reactions

One of the trip’s facilitators summed up his experience saying he was “moved beyond stereotypes, practiced conversing with others, sought ways to show Christ’s love to others, and returned impassioned to help their congregations do the same.”

One of the most important experiences for breaking stereotypes was meeting several Arabic-speaking Christians.

“This vibrant living Christianity, alongside the church’s intentional attempt to live in peaceful coexistence with Muslim authorities and neighbors, is a treasure to behold,” said one participant.

Taking Lessons Back to North America

Among the six participants was Rich Braaksma, Resonate’s regional leader for Western Canada. He was both excited for future outreach and challenged by what he experienced. “Jesus reveals the God who sees and goes to the outsider and ‘the other’ in love, which effectively ‘un-others’ them...This trip helped me see people as diverse creatures, all of us made in God’s image...”

Rich and the other leaders see this coming together of what used to be separate ministry locations (Home Missions and World Missions) as an opportunity for Resonate to expand its reach.

“Mission,” one Resonate missionary notes, “is a practice for which there is no conclusive theory or strategy. As an agency that is helping the church engage mission, we need to create spaces to keep on practicing.”

Although the trip is complete, the participants will continue to communicate with, encourage, and share how they are implementing what they learned with members of their congregations.

We thank God that Resonate missionaries are pursuing deeper relationships and respectful witness. Pray that God will continue to teach us how to share and be Jesus’ love to Muslim neighbors and those living around the world.

Yang Mingdao

Barb Fichtenberg
AACRC Mission Team

Yang Mingdao is the collective pseudonym for Chinese voices within China Partnership. This excerpt is from a talk given by a Chinese theological teacher and trainer at a recent gathering of those interested in China.

There are restrictions that have some impact on Christian groups. In China, there is a social network called WeChat, which is how most people connect. There are many church groups that communicate with each other through WeChat. But it is highly monitored, and we cannot say really sensitive things. Many people also use WhatsApp [an encrypted messaging service] a lot. Recently the Chinese government has shut down access to WhatsApp. After they shut it down, it has been very hard; communication between pastors in the country has been slow. There has been a communication breakdown and the church is trying to recover.

In some ways, recent political events, in particular the election of the top leadership group of the Chinese Communist Party, have been surprising. We believed things were getting worse because the government had made a new regulation to control religion. We expected this new regulation would take effect early in 2017. But that didn't happen. The government instead took a whole year to solicit input and revise the regulation, and announced in August that the new regulations would take effect on February 1, 2018.

Everybody, especially those in the church context, thought religious control would be tightened. All of society expected that as well: the media is controlled, the Internet is controlled, and the new regulations for churches are about to take effect. Many people in the church expected 2018 to be worse, with more persecution, because many signs pointed that way. I expected that, and as I read the first several days of reports on the convention, that feeling remained very strong.

However, when the seven leaders were named at the end of the convention, it was surprising. If a leader was in very strong control, he would be expected to bring in people who are his puppets, or who are in his camp. But two of the leaders are very open to liberalism, and one is quite neutral. Three of the seven are not in Xi's small circle. The prime minister, Li KeQiang, has also never been in his circle; Li and Xi are from different parties. Out of seven, you have three or four who are either quite liberal or who are prone to liberalism. Even though Xi, the so-called emperor, has power and has been

acknowledged as the leader within the party for another five years, it's not a one-person-controlled top leadership. There are different sects with different interests within the big party, which results in a more balanced and compromise-driven negotiation of results.

Before the leadership group was named, many people thought Xi might have three terms as president and break the two-term norm. After the group was named, people began to think: "Maybe it will only be two terms. Who knows?" This result shows there is still some internal discord. It is not just one man's voice; it is not a one-man show. There are still other, powerful parties within the Party.

Another interesting reason why recent outcomes are better than expected is because, in the past two or three years, crosses in all of Zhejiang province have been torn down, especially in Wenzhou. The government also installed surveillance cameras into the churches there, and the top political leader in Zhejiang oppressed the church. Before the convention, people thought the leader who did this in Zhejiang would gain power, be promoted, and would move on to the central government to persecute the church nationwide. But the outcome was that he was demoted and became irrelevant. The church says: "This is the result when you persecute the church!" This was another case where we thought, "Wow! Maybe it's not that bad."

The government in China is trying to control things more, but the church is also growing.

What are the implications for churches and Christian groups? Not much has changed from last year. The great transition from the current China to something we do not yet know is still ongoing. It will not be like the United States. It will not be like the old days of China. We don't know what's going to happen. It is in process.

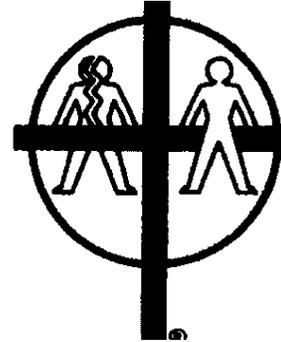
We know at this point that we have to press hard. Press forward. We do what we planned; we do it boldly and we do it carefully. The gospel is still the key people need, and people's hearts are crying out for the gospel. The church is the key. There is no real community life in China, but the churches have that. So we will continue to press forward. We will be humble to serve and to work in the culture. We have a great opportunity now. We just need to press forward.

It's Okay to Be Human

Stephen Ministry Leadership Team

An important theme of the Lenten season is the humanity of Christ. In Jesus, God became human and fully experienced the wide range of emotions we all encounter in life. Jesus experienced times of loneliness, sadness, hurt, anger, disappointment, grief, and abandonment. That is part of being human. Another part of being human is needing help from each other. God never intended us to be completely self-sufficient. Part of God's plan is for each of us to turn to others for help when we need it.

So when you are experiencing difficult times, don't struggle alone. Our Stephen Ministers will walk with you, listen to you, encourage you, pray with you, and provide confidential one-to-one care to help you through tough times. Stephen Ministers can bring the love of Jesus back into your life. To learn more about Stephen Ministry, talk to one of our Stephen Leaders: Louise Gruppen or Marian Ijzerman. Our Stephen Ministers are ready to care for you!



What Does the Term “Social Justice” Mean Within the Reformed Tradition?

Norm Fichtenberg

The term “social justice” emerges out of Scripture and is a concept deeply rooted in the historic, Biblically orthodox traditions of the Christian faith. When “social justice” is discussed within a Reformed context, it refers to God's original intention for human society: a world where basic needs are provided for in love, where people flourish, and where shalom reigns in the Kingdom of God. This vision of shalom is a vision of “the way things ought to be,” or the way God created the world to be before sin. As Cornelius Plantinga writes, “In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight... the webbing-together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight.” Social justice refers to the pursuit of shalom in human, social relationships. There are many types of justice (retributive, restorative, etc.). The significance of social justice is that it references the pursuit of shalom — righteousness, harmony, and “the way things ought to be” — specifically in our human interactions and societal structures. The Christian Reformed Church in North America rightly emphasizes the pursuit of God's shalom in all areas. For this reason, the Office of Social Justice (OSJ) was established as an arm of our denomination. The choice of the specific term “social justice” in the name of the OSJ identifies the mandate of the office: to address societal structures and injustices that hinder human flourishing. Technically, the full name is the Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action (OSJHA). However, because the activities of the office extend beyond issues related just to hunger and poverty, the shortened term is more commonly used.

Social Justice Committee—AACRC

Source: CRCNA Office of Social Justice

Mysteries, Yes

by Mary Oliver from
Devotions: The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver

Truly, we live with mysteries too marvelous
to be understood.

How grass can be nourishing in the
mouths of the lambs.

How rivers and stones are forever
in allegiance with gravity
while we ourselves dream of rising.

How two hands touch and the bonds will
never be broken.

How people come, from delight or the
scars of damage,
to the comfort of a poem.

Let me keep my distance, always, from those
who think they have the answers.

Let me keep company always with those who say
“Look!” and laugh in astonishment,
and bow their heads.

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Church Office Staff

Deadline: the 18th of every month

Sunday Morning Worship

9:30 am

10:50 am Sunday School

11:10 am Adult Ed

