

church of the servant

InFOCUS

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In Brief...

March InFOCUS This edition of our church's quarterly newsletter gives special attention to Church of the Servant's Ministry of Education. While not every issue will have this kind of a thematic approach, the purpose of *InFOCUS* will remain to exhibit the active ministries and missions which our members' time, talents, and treasures are invested in.

Lent 2006 COS continues to benefit from the work of our Pastoral Residents! Rev. MaraJoy C. Norden, along with the ministry staff and other writers from the congregation, has prepared a devotional for us to use during Lent. It is entitled "Journey to Jerusalem." Copies are in your church mailboxes and extras will be available at the back of the sanctuary throughout Lent. You are encouraged to read these for your Lenten meditations and Easter preparations.

Visitors and New Members In early March, after much revision, a new Welcome Pack brochure will be available at the Welcome table in the foyer of our renovated front entrance. Also, for anyone interested in membership or just curious about Church of the Servant's ministries and history, a series of classes will be offered on April 23, 30, and May 7—contact Janice McWhertor to sign up.

Search for the new Minister of Education

Education Elder, Glenn Remelts, and a search committee under his leadership have received applications, checked references, and are now interviewing candidates. We anticipate that a new Minister of Education will begin working among us in June of 2006. One committee member commented, "The hard part now is choosing from among some really great candidates."

The new Minister of Education will oversee Little Lambs, children's worship, church school for children through grade six, summer church school, Vacation Bible School, Girls' Club, Cadets, Camelot Kids Tutoring, and, together with the nursery

supervisor, the nursery. Adult education will now be under the oversight of the Minister of Congregational Life, with our residents doing much of the planning. The nursery, formerly under congregational life, will now be under the care of the new Minister of Education.

When asked what she would say to help the next Minister of Education with the transition, outgoing Mary Loeks replied: "I would say, 'Use your own sling. Well intentioned folk may point to that shiny armor of Saul's, and tell you about the thousands he has slain... [but] smile, say thank you, and use your own sling.'" ■

“The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

—*Children’s Worship from the eyes of Mary Foxwell Looks*—

“May the Lord be with each of you, as you worship together...And may the Lord be with you, as you worship here...Go in peace...” With these words of blessing the children leave, following their banner. Where do they go? What do they do?

There had been a rich history of children’s worship in this congregation prior to the time I came to it. The format and curricula had been developed in house. But those leaders had mostly burned out, retired to do other things, or left the congregation. I was eager to find a way of doing worship that combined a good understanding of what worship is with a good understanding of who children are. Jack and Carol Roeda invited me to go with them one evening to a presentation at La Grave church of a way of doing children’s worship. I was introduced that evening to “Young Children and Worship.” I knew this was the way of worshipping with children that I had been seeking—but I did not know how we could do it at Seymour school—(today known as Evergreen school.) With practically no storage space allowed us, and no way to leave anything set up during the week, what could we possibly do with all those little baskets of wooden figures, the fabric underlays, a “desert box” filled with sand, gold parable boxes, etc., etc.?

But we did figure out ways to make it work, albeit not without challenges. At the end of a story, the leader is supposed to say, “Watch closely where I go, so you will always know where these materials are kept...” I usually choked on those words, or omitted them—I’m not sure what the other leaders did! For I knew that some materials went back and forth to the basement at my house. They might not be there the next week, or they might not be in exactly the same place. Other materials were stored in some of the same carts-on-wheels that we use today. One year we had to keep those storage carts in the north building during the week, then roll them across Nevada street to the south building where

we conducted children’s worship on Sunday mornings. That worked all right except on snowy mornings when we were ahead of the snowplows! For several years one children’s worship center met in the small house next to Seymour that was used by the Christian Learning Center during the week for teaching purposes. When I arrived early one Sunday morning, Karen Gritter, who helped with set-up, greeted me excitedly. “There’s men’s underwear on the dining room table (in the little house) and I can hear the shower running in there! What shall we do?” I suggested we’d best give whomever it was time to get dressed, then I’d find out who he was and why he was there. (It turned out to be someone who came annually to help Christian Learning Center with fund-raising projects—they had let him stay in the house, but had neglected to tell him about us, or us about him.) He wasn’t very happy that we’d invaded his boudoir, but he left before the children arrived!

So what is this children’s worship, to which we have put a great deal of effort over the years? Central to our children’s worship is the story of the Good Shepherd. Together with their leader, the children enter the story, following the shepherd through dark and scary places, to cool water and green grass. Most of the sheep return to the fold—but wait! One is missing! The shepherd retraces the day’s journey—looking, looking, until he finds the missing sheep, and carries it home on his shoulders, rejoicing.....The children then wonder who these sheep are. They often name them, and a sheep is sometimes given the child’s own name.

The children are then given opportunity to respond to the story. Each will do so in his or her own way. Some will work with the story materials. Others will use a variety of art materials. Others might respond with music or dance. Puzzles and books related to the story are also available for use during this important time of response.

During our Trinity season, we use many of the major Old Testament stories. As the new year begins in Advent, we follow the stories and major events in the life of Christ, our Good Shepherd. These stories are told simply, using plain wooden figures and other hand-made items, felt underlays, a “desert box” filled with sand, and gold-covered parable boxes. The children are introduced to the seasons and colors of the church year. “Signing,” the

hand alphabet used by some hearing impaired people, is used for some portions of the worship. Periodically a “feast” is included in the time of worship, usually a drink and a small cookie.

Why all this effort for over 18 years? One of our early leaders has set up a center in Rehoboth, New Mexico, helped with our children’s offerings. One of our leaders took some of the parables, translated into Spanish, and used them with children in El Salvador. Another leader and trainer has conducted children’s worship in China. Others who started with us have now set up centers in Canada and other parts of the United States. Why the effort? Because Mikey declares that one of the sheep must be named Mikey.....Because Sarah prays earnestly that Jesus will heal her mother, who undergoes major surgery this week.....Because of the picture Rebecca drew of herself, kneeling with the shepherds at the manger.....Because Adam, understanding in his own way what Jesus has done for him, decides he is ready to stand at the Good Shepherd’s table, partaking of the bread and wine from the hands of his parents. ■

Visit Your Elders

—*Seeking and Finding Discipleship*—

One cornerstone of Christian Reformed Church polity is the shepherding role of elders in the congregation. But in recent years, as COS has grown larger, this has become increasingly difficult so that we have taken steps to try to enhance this feature of our spiritual community. Our first improvement was to split the city and surrounding area into ten geographic parishes, with two elders who would be responsible to act pastorally and promote community in their own areas.

While the parish system helped, elders still had trouble visiting all their charges, so now we’re attempting something new.

For Lent of this year, the elders of each parish are asking us to come in and visit them at the church, at a convenient time for us. It will be a time to receive prayer and encouragement, and an opportunity to deepen our connectedness to our local communities.

So please, take the time, and help them succeed in their ministries. Invite friends, family members, and the people you know to make appointments and receive a dose of spiritual refreshment too. ■

Stewardship at COS

A word from the Finance Committee

In Pastor Roeda's February 19 sermon on Isaiah 43:23-25, we heard the prophet declare God's people guilty of not honoring God with the gifts he expected of them. The take-home message for Finance Committee was clear: How does our giving look to God? Would a visitor glancing at the giving summary in our Sunday bulletin see us giving to God in a way that honors Him and supports His work among us? Would they see a deep devotion and gratitude to our God and our Savior?

Telling questions. Thankfully the news is good: In 2006, our church has continued to expand in our outreach, our internal ministries, and our building. These are exciting steps! Also, even though this has meant an average 15% increase in members' financial responsibility, in the case of those who have sent in pledges, this challenge is being met! We have much to thank God for.

But the picture isn't all good. Thus far, only 50% (compared to the usual 75%) of pledges are in. Some people are not giving. Offerings this year are down from the same period last year. We are substantially behind budget (if you can afford to help us catch up, please prayerfully consider it).

So the Finance Committee is left, like the prophet Isaiah, still wondering—How does God see our giving? Are we honoring him?

Each of us should respond. Consider how God blesses you, both in your everyday circumstance, in all the benefits of belonging to a healthy vibrant church (where worship and outreach co-exist so well), and

especially, in how God has provided you with every eternal blessing, of far greater value than anything we own. In this light it is right and fitting that all of us take out our pledge forms and checkbooks and act prayerfully and sacrificially. ■

Pledge forms and envelopes are still available near the mailboxes or in the church office. Pledges can also be sent by e-mail or mail to the church office.

Hospitality 101

First impressions last, and it's been shown that one of the best and longest lasting impressions a church can leave on its visitors comes from how the people at that church greet. And that makes sense, because greeting is incarnational.

Essentially, when we greet someone, we're heeding the call of Colossians 4:5-6 to use every opportunity to share the good news—to pass along God's peace, comfort, and grace to all people. In this sense, greeting in a hallway, classroom, or foyer is as important to passing God's peace as when it happens in a sanctuary.

A layer of meaning is added when we greet each other and introduce ourselves by name. This too is incarnational. It's what God did for us in Jesus. Taking on flesh, he gave himself a name and face, and he came to meet us when we were still strangers to him. Then he saved us.

Thirdly, greeting by name is heavenly: In heaven we'll get new names, be fully known, and we'll greet each other in the One Name, as children of One Father, as members of One Family. So at COS let us greet each other and all others knowing it'll make a lasting, godly impression. ■

needs of all the people we encounter in all our daily walks is not something that comes automatically. But maybe we can help each other in the process. Maybe we can awaken each other's awareness and reaction to the places in which God puts us, and to the people we encounter in those places. Maybe we can motivate, educate, and inspire each other, as we literally walk together!

You are invited to participate with others in the congregation in a series of "prayer-walks in every environ." You will enjoy this camaraderie as you walk with other believers and with God. And don't forget to intercede as you look for the declarations of God's glory. ■

Questions Often Answered

Q. What's the difference between children's worship and church school?

A. A lot of folks use these terms interchangeably, and seem confused about these two things that we offer; children's worship during both morning services, church school from 10:00-10:45 a.m. This is probably in part because there is not a clear dichotomy between them. We do learn as we are doing worship. And we can worship, even as we are learning. But the focus of each is different, and each has its place. When I worship God, my focus is on being with, and interacting with God. I offer my time and myself to God. The focus of church school is to prepare me to be a better worshipper and servant of God.

Q. Why do you offer children's worship only through second grade?

A. It is true that this is a somewhat arbitrary decision. It has seemed to me that by the time a child is reading at a third grade level there is much in our corporate worship that is meaningful, and in which he or she can participate. One of the goals of children's worship is to prepare the younger children to more fully participate in the worship of the whole body.

Q. Any chance you need more children's worship leaders? I think this might be a way in which I could serve.

A. I'm SO glad you asked! We very much need to increase our "pool" of trained leaders. If possible, we would like to add (once again,) a third children's worship center at each service before the end of this school year. We certainly need to do that by fall of this year. A training is an important and necessary preparation for each new leader. If you are interested, please see Mary Locks to attend a training scheduled at COS on Fri., March 17, 3:30-9pm and Sat., March 18, 9am-3:30pm. ■

Prayer-Walk in Every Environ

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Ps.19:1), Many of us find that the beauty of God's creation points us to the creator. But what about the other environments in which God puts us; our neighborhoods, our route to work each day, the places that we work? Do these invite our prayer responses? As we sit at a desk, stand by a sink, drive to the home of a friend, walk through our neighborhood—do we see evidence there, and is it our constant prayer, that God's glory be declared?

Could we ever be considered "a holy people," "redeemed of the Lord" "a kingdom of priests" (Is.62:12)? May it be so!

The practice of lifting up to God the

You are invited to participate in six "Prayer-Walks in Every Environ." Join us on Sunday afternoons in April and May...

April 16—*Saul Lake Bog Nature Preserve

April 23—Neighborhoods west of COS

April 30—*Lamberton Lake Fen

May 7—Neighborhoods southeast of COS

May 14—*The Wege Natural Area for the Study of Ecology

May 21—Neighborhoods southwest of COS

(1-1½hr walks (*plus driving time), led by members of our congregation including Roeda DeJonge and Rev. Najj Umran)

*Nature Preserves in Kent County: directions, maps, and more info at www.naturenearby.org

Reaching Out, Reaching In

— An update on Outreach ministries of Church of the Servant —

Houses of Prayer Report:

Many of you may recall that in 2005 we began a Saturday evening worship service, "More to Life," to reach our neighborhood for Christ. While we succeeded in many ways, developing all who were involved, we were less successful at enfoldng our local residents. So we felt a change was necessary. As a result of much prayer and discussion, we chose to shift gears in 2006, and start local Houses of Prayer instead.

In a nutshell, a House of Prayer is a small evangelistic prayer cell. Every week we get together to pray for our neighbors, with the hope of sharing Christ and being a light in our communities. Over time, the goal is that neighbors join us in our prayer groups and even start their own Houses of Prayer.

Currently these prayer groups meet on Sunday, Monday, and Thursday nights in the homes of people living in Alger Heights and at Fountains and Heartland Village Square (apartments near COS). In a word they are thriving! Thankful neighbors are commenting. People without churches attend. And in the midst of worship and prayer, God's love is tangibly felt.

If you are interested in joining or finding out more about these groups, or would like to host a House of Prayer of your own, please contact Naji Umran, Minister of Outreach, or one of those involved.

Christians for Prisoners (CFP/PFC):

This ministry, begun through the hard work of missionary-inmate, Troy Rienstra, supported by a growing community, and recently endorsed by the council of Church of the Servant (January, 2006), is a response

to Jesus' command to "go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

When inmates see the authentic, consistent witness of a fellow prisoner, many open their hearts and minds to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Troy has seen this happen time and again when he's brought the teachings of Jesus to bear at Standish Correctional Facility. With him, a team of people is working and praying to establish a church where inmates minister to one another and give living testimony as the body of Christ in the prison.

The team includes students from Trinity Western University in British Columbia, Canada, prisoners and their family members from all over the United States, and many from COS, who find rich blessing in this work. If you want to join with CFP/PFC, please contact Rich or Carol Rienstra, Jonathan Bradford, or Rev. Naji Umran.

Understanding Color

In 2001, the CRCNA Ministry of Race Relations received the following Mandate from Synod: "To design, organize and implement programs through which the denomination, individual churches and members can effectively use all available resources to eliminate racism, both causes and effects, within the body of believers and throughout the world..."

At Church of the Servant we have tried to take this goal seriously. The main thrust of our effort so far has been to educate the leadership of our congregation in the existence of racism and to encourage our members to take steps toward an Anti-Racist identity. We have partnered with both Coit and Madison Square CRCs, developed an Anti-Racism Team, and are looking forward to introducing some more transformative practices and positive changes to the life of our congregation.

While at a January meeting to consider next steps at COS, one of our Pastoral Residents, Rev. Angela Taylor-Perry, made a simple suggestion for us to consider as a personal way of growing more racially conscious and mature in Christ.

As she described an everyday sort of

scenario where she was at the local DMV office with a white friend. During their wait, Angela told us she'd noticed several differences between the ways black and white were being served by the attendants.

"Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection."

— excerpt from Martin Luther King Junior's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"

Things that whites don't often notice and things that make her aware of her blackness and the struggle of being black in today's culture. What she wished her friend would have done, and what she encourages each of us to try doing in the future, is to be more racially sensitive to our environment.

Challenging as it may seem, Angela hopes you and I will take advantage of the everyday opportunities that present themselves and ask African-American friends serious questions. Reveal that you're not ignoring, but thinking sensitively. "What was it like in there for you? What does being a person of color mean to you—when you go to the DMV, when you're buying your first home, when you stay at the hospital?" Because such questions will broaden our minds. And asked daily, they will help us begin to understand the underlying things that a person of color has to live with every day of their lives.

TOP 10: Why "Trudy" Should Attend Church School at COS

As suggested by Mary Loeks

10. Mary Loeks highly recommends it!
9. It is a lot easier to find a place to park when you are here before 10:00 a.m.
8. Trudy just might have fun—but don't necessarily expect her to tell you that.
7. You, Trudy's parents, may find that you learn things from her—our children are sometimes our best teachers.
6. It will give you time to take advantage of our adult education opportunities.
5. The tools church school teachers use—(curriculum)—are much improved from what you may remember.
4. This is an opportunity for Trudy to grow friendships with peers whose families worship with hers.
3. This is a way to keep the covenant you made at her baptism.
2. She may not know her Bible as well as you think she does, even if she attends a Christian day school. Trudy can't grow in her relationship with God without also growing in her knowledge of God.
1. This gives Trudy an opportunity to build relationships with godly adults from the congregation; adults who are neither her parents nor professionals paid to spend time with her. The church is people. Trudy will have more difficulty abandoning the church when she is an adult if she grew up having significant relationships with the people at church.