



The 4th Focus

“Learning Together”

This past weekend there were a number of us camping at Cran-Hill Ranch. From the time I was a child until now, I've always enjoyed spending Labor Day weekend with my Fourth family roughing it in tents. I won't speak for every adult, but for most of the children at Cran-Hill, leaving is sad. Sad because they've had so much fun with their friends. Sad because they are exhausted beyond belief. And sad because school begins the following day.

Cran-Hill marks the end to the summer season, and the beginning of the school year. I've heard kids describe fall as “a return to halls of suffering.” While some children are already counting the days until summer 2017, others are glad to be learning and growing.

Almost every adult I've met knows that learning never really ends. Whether the education is formal in a school, or comes through work/life experience, learning is constantly happening.

When it comes to our faith, we are also called to a lifestyle of learning. I remember being in seminary and hearing one of my professors say, “the more I learn, the more I realize I don't know.” When it comes to God and his ways, there is really never a point where we'll know everything. But, we must do the work of digging into his Word to know him better.

By now you've likely read the letter in your mailbox about the two sermon series we'll be tackling this fall. We'll be looking at our practice of Communion, and as well, human sexuality. We want to dig into Scripture and examine what God has to say to us.

This fall we have a rich opportunity for us to learn together. Not only are we teaching through sermons, we're also providing Q&A time after the service where you can engage in the conversation. We also have two mid-week teachings, on Wednesday the 14th and 21st to explore the practice of Communion from history, and through the Seder meal. I know we're asking you to set aside a night during the week, but I'm confident it will be worth your time.

The reason we're learning about communion is because it is one of two Sacraments God gave us, and it really is a means of feeding our faith.

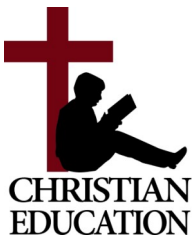
- Sometimes we think of Communion as a piece of bread and thimble of juice.
- Sometimes we think of Communion as a warm up to coffee and cookies.
- Sometimes we think it is just a ritual.
- Sometimes we just think the service would be shorter without it.

Maybe you've never thought any of those things.

Regardless, Communion is this rich opportunity for all members of the covenant family to soak in the love of Christ. The more we understand Communion, along with its purpose in Scripture and the church, the more we come to see we can't live without it. Communion is this incredible way that we grow together in our faith, and grow together in our unity with Christ.

As we explore the roots of Communion, we'll look at its connection to Passover, the role of children in the meal, and the call to be worthy found in 1 Corinthians 11. There will likely be surprises along the way. But those surprises are opportunities to learn, grow, and wonder together. So again, I invite you to dig into Scripture and explore the beauty of God's grand plan of redemption, and be amazed by his generous love for you.

- Pastor Eric



It's September, and school is back in full swing. The kids have their supplies, the buses are rolling again, and teachers gear up their lesson plans. Here at Fourth, Christian education is starting up again as well, with opportunities for kids from preschool to high school to grow in their faith.

My guess is that when we think of education, we think of students sitting and listening to a teacher. And that's certainly part of education. But I think we need a broader definition of 'education,' if we want to think about how kids and adults alike grow in our faith.

For example, when I watch a sitcom, I'm being educated, because that show is portraying a certain vision of what reality should look like. TV is not a teacher standing up front saying, "Your life and priorities should look like this!" But TV educates us. In fact, research shows that people who watch more TV tend to spend more money on things like houses, cars, and clothes, as we try to keep up with the (imaginary) Joneses.

When I go to the mall, I'm being educated as I browse through the stores, which are filled with images of what "the good life" looks like. The mall isn't passing out assignments, but it is giving us a vision of the good life - if only I had those clothes or shoes or latest Apple product, I'd really be happy.

In the Bible, the education of a disciple happens by an all-around approach, not merely by a teacher or preacher standing up front and talking. In Deuteronomy 6:4-9, parents are instructed to impress a love of God on their children by talking about God as they live out his commands. And when Jesus wants to make disciples, he doesn't just say, "Listen to me," but "follow me." In other words, education is *always happening*.

As a follower of Jesus, my first response to this reality is: well, I'm in trouble. Because if I'm *always* educating my fellow Christians (including my children), I have to admit that I'm not always educating them in how to use time, money, or energy in a wise manner.

But then I remember that a proper Christian education is not first about what I must do but about what God has already done for us. So we don't begin with God's commands, as in Deuteronomy 6, but with God's grace poured out on us through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. In other words, Christian education focuses on who I am in Christ and lets my life flow from that identity. That's what I need to be talking about, living out, and keeping in front of me on a daily basis. Although a 24/7, year-round, never-stopping process of education might seem tiring or exhausting at first, Jesus calls us to it, promising that the weary will find true rest in following him.

- Branson Parler

September

- 1 - Mary Proos
- 2 - Dale Springfield
- 4 - Abbie Schalk
- 7 - Tim Brinks
- 8 - Ruby Parler
- 9 - Travis Bolt
- 11 - Norm Schalk
- 14 - Nolan Baragar
- 15 - Ellie McDowell
- 17 - Eleanor DeFouw
- 19 - Jessica Berrios
- 19 - Patrick Marvin
- 19 - Clara Broene
- 22 - Barb Funckes
- 22 - Henry Coeling
- 23 - Marty Berthiaume
- 23 - Deb Robinson
- 26 - Steve Burggraaf
- 26 - Eric Schalk
- 27 - Elise Leasure



October

- 1 - Dave Randall
- 1 - Gina Schalk
- 1 - Siena Broene
- 1 - Becky Tubergen
- 3 - Kintaro Rossiter
- 4 - Julie Gleason
- 5 - Leah Walton
- 6 - Joshua Schalk
- 11 - Sandy Gleason
- 12 - Jenn Kuiper
- 15 - Sue Hawkins
- 15 - Jennifer Wammack
- 15 - John Bills
- 17 - Brian Tubergen
- 18 - Richanda Bolt
- 18 - Adam Villalobos
- 19 - Diane Christians
- 21 - Addison McDowell
- 22 - Bob Scherpenisse
- 25 - Bob Burggraaf
- 25 - Emmet Playter
- 26 - Nancy Aukeman
- 28 - Suzanne Bolt
- 30 - Phyllis Berrevoets
- 30 - Dianne Waterloo

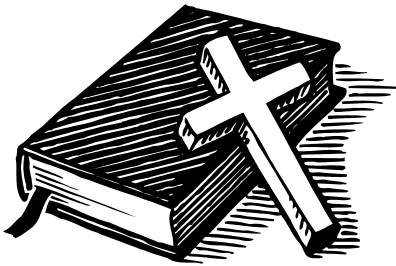


Looking back over my first year of **GEMS**, it was not what I expected. It turned out to be something so much better! So thank you for all the leaders and parents who have answered my million questions and dealt with some strange issues! We had a blast: caroling for Christmas, decorating cupcakes, singing, memorizing our theme verse, going to the zoo, swimming, learning about Jesus, and making new friends! We as leaders have been so blessed by the girls and thank all the parents so much for sharing them with us!

With that being said, I'm glad to announce that it's time to kick-off another year! We have our first event of the year on Monday, September 19 and will have an open-house style carnival with games, prizes, and ice cream. Parents, special friends, and girls are welcome to come and go as you can anytime from 6pm-7:45pm. Stay for five minutes or an hour and forty-five, it's up to you. All girls from 1st-8th grade are welcome to attend. Normal schedule will start in October on the first three Mondays of each month through April, full calendar schedules will be handed out at the kick-off carnival. Registration form will be able to be filled out for any girls looking to be a part of **GEMS** this year.

- Kristi Dennis

Reformed Church - Native American Missions, Part 1



Reformed Church missionary activity to Native Americans has a history as old as the denomination itself. The first pastor, Jonas Michaelius, who arrived in 1628, only saw hope in reaching children by removing them from their parents, a plan never carried out. Colonial pastors like Johannes Megapolensis, Bernardus Freeman and Godfriedus Dellius gained the Indian's trust. Freeman and Dellius translated much of the Bible, creeds and liturgy into the native language.

During the early nineteenth century, as many as 100,000 Indians were driven from their former homelands. The Cherokees were highly civilized and had adopted most of the white man's ways. President Andrew Jackson ignored a Supreme Court decision guaranteeing an independent Cherokee Nation. Out of 16,000 Cherokees forced to move from Georgia to Oklahoma, some 4,000 died along the way in what has come to be known as the Trail of Tears. As an Indian agent, the Reformed minister John F. Schermerhorn zealously executed Jackson's policies.

As more settlers went west, treaties meant to last *for as long as the grass grows and the water runs* were casually broken. Indians were pursued and forced onto reservations. Vast buffalo herds, their basic food source, were needlessly slaughtered by white hunters and reduced to near extinction. Not only were they robbed of their land but also their identity. Forced to adopt the white man's ways, they were also compelled to give up all traces of their former life. Children were taken from their parents and sent to faraway schools like the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania.

Rev. William Harsha sought to bring the plight of Native Americans to the Reformed Church and recommended an Indian pastor whom, he said, *would not be likely to fall into the mistakes inevitable to a white man*. The Choctaw Frank Hall Wright was born in Oklahoma, but ministered in New York City, where he was stricken by tuberculosis. Two representatives of the Women's Board encouraged him to begin mission work in Oklahoma. Despite his condition, he saw this as God's leading, gained strength and reached the area in May 1895. At first he was rejected by both the army and Indians, but soon gained the latter's trust. Wright eventually established churches among the Cheyenne at Colony (1898) the Comanches near Lawton and the Apaches imprisoned at nearby Fort Sill. (Both 1907).

Evangelistic camp meetings lasting for days ending on Sunday were patterned after the old familiar tribal gatherings and still common today. While Wright preached, a number of interpreters translated simultaneously into several Native American languages. At a gathering in 1905, there were 427 attendees, not including the children.

Probably the most famous Reformed Church convert was the Apache leader Geronimo, a name still well recognized today. In 1876, he fled the reservation at San Carlos, Arizona, and for a decade successfully outran and outwitted the army across Arizona and New Mexico until his small starving band surrendered in 1886. Geronimo's Apache people became prisoners of war, sent to Florida, Alabama and finally around Fort Sill where they were confined until 1913. At a camp meeting in 1903, Geronimo received the gospel. In his autobiography, he stated *Since my life as a prisoner has begun I have heard the teachings of the white man's religion, and in many respects believe it to be better than the religion of my fathers...I believe that the church has helped me much during the short time I have been a member*.

There is debate over whether or not Geronimo was expelled from the Reformed Church. After carefully examining him before his baptism, Wright's fellow missionary Walter Roe stated that *No consistory of our church could refuse to admit this man into membership*. Despite apparently sincere attempts to repent, he often backslid into his old ways. After a night of drinking, he died of pneumonia on February 17, 1909 after falling off his horse and lying on the ground overnight. An error-filled obituary in a local newspaper biased against Geronimo said that he was suspended from the church. However, because there is no proof in either the Apache church records or in any Reformed publications that this ever occurred, this assumption may very likely be incorrect.

- Eric O'Brock

Next - Native American Missions, Part II

Our Thailand Adventure 2016



Thailand is 9,000 miles away from Michigan; that's about a 26 hour trip! But a highly anticipated journey for us since our children are waiting at the end with welcoming hugs! This time we invited Amanda, our 16 year-old granddaughter, to accompany us and it was fascinating to see the whole experience through her eyes.

Only one percent of the 67 million people living in Thailand are Christian. Leaving the Buddhist tradition to follow Christ often means being rejected by your greater family. Thailand is also a temporary refuge for thousands of asylum seekers from other countries, who left all behind because their lives were in danger as a result of their love for Jesus. These are among the folks we worship with at the Evangelical Church of Bangkok on Sunday morning when we visit the Boehms. It is humbling to think of the freedoms we take so for granted and inspiring to hear about their faith. No doubt each one has offered prayers of desperation because they have to stay focused on God's unlimited power to sustain them during these challenges.

Once again, we visited the Pakistani refugees in their crowded studio apartments. Two years later, they are still waiting for visas to make them legal aliens. A 14 year-old boy in one family we visited had been released from immigration detention so he had a bail paper and was allowed to go into the community to buy things. Mom and the other two children were confined to their small one-room apartment. Dad had been killed before they left Pakistan. Several years ago, a group of dedicated parents organized a school in the building. It is thriving, thanks to donations of textbooks, technology, school supplies, and healthy snacks. During our stay, Lisa and the kids took the students on a field trip to the Crocodile Farm and made bracelets with them. (I read in the Grand Rapids Press that West Michigan is expecting 900 refugee families to be part of our schools this year, so students and parents – you *also* have an opportunity to embrace asylum seekers!)

We took a side trip to Cambodia where Tom and I were treated with extra care! We asked a guide about this and he informed us that most adults don't live beyond 50 since there is minimal access to health care for adults. I added health care to my gratitude list! Another reason for this missing generation is the mass genocide that occurred in Cambodia in the late 1970's. Walking through one of the memorial sites was an extremely sobering experience. We visited YWAM missionaries in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh and treated their families to a meal, offering our encouragement for their ministries.

Our trip ended with a 3-day stay on an island where we relaxed, enjoyed delicious Thai food, snorkeled, and watched the kids (including Jeff!) on a wild banana boat ride over (and in) the ocean. We treasure the once-a-year extended times we have with Jeff, Lisa, Janae, Tessa, Jordan, and Micah and plan to share a bit about the kids' lives in Thailand next time the Boehms are Missionaries of the Month.

- Norma Boehm

Cran-Hill 2016



Ken and Mike picking the pig.

Tea party with Mama Sue.



Kids Hope USA Prayer Walk

Please plan to join us for a Prayer Walk from Fourth Church to Kent Hills Elementary on October 2, 2016 immediately following the morning worship service.

We will pray for our neighborhood as well as for the staff and students at Kent Hills Elementary!

Watch the bulletin for further details.