



# The 4th Focus

## “Who Are We?”

The installation service this past Sunday was one of the most humbling things I’ve ever been a part of. God was present in that service through the music, the message, the reflections, the charge to me, and you as we learn to serve together. I don’t know about you, but I left that service excited about our future in ministry together. God is at work in our church in some very cool ways right now, and my prayer is that the Holy Spirit is just getting started.

The theme of was “Who Am I?” mentioned the ables, because it head like crazy. I’ve wrestled with months, as I’ve what God wanted minister in his



Branson’s message and I’m glad he song from Les Miser- was rattling in my It’s also a question a lot over the last five tried to understand me to do as a Kingdom.

Who am I? My Twitter handle was @ncneric, my email was [erics@newcityneighbors.org](mailto:erics@newcityneighbors.org), and my phone number was actually New City Neighbors’ phone number. Was I New City Neighbors? No, but some days it felt like it. Part of my transition was wrestling away all of these things that kept me connected to NCN. The reality I had to be reminded of is that I am not New City Neighbors, nor am I Fourth Reformed Church.

The transition time allowed me to once again remember and believe that my identity is a beloved child of God. You’ve likely heard me say this a bunch through the last few sermons, and it is because I’m trying to convince myself of this gospel truth, as much as I’m trying to convince you.

Who are you? Well, as I’ve just said, you are children of God, bought with the blood of Jesus. You are loved, treasured, and valued more than you know. You are empowered by the Holy Spirit to follow Jesus and do good works. You are commissioned by God to be disciple makers, and called to give glory to God.

Who are we? We are a motley crew of believers desperately trying to live into our new identity in God. Together we serve Him as a group called Fourth Reformed Church. Together we have the opportunity to seek out Christ, call on His Spirit, and dig into a deeper kind of faith journey.

I’m excited about our future at Fourth Reformed. When I look at the past, there is so much evidence of God at work through this body. When I think about where we are, I’m encouraged by the stories I’ve recently heard of - people coming to faith and really pursuing Jesus. When I think about the future, I know that God is building on our past and present and I can’t wait to see where God takes us.

- Pastor Eric

## Men's Retreat



On the 18th of March twenty men from Fourth descended on the Christian Reformed Conference Grounds on the beautiful shores of Lake Michigan for a two day retreat discussing what it means to be "Rewired" and enjoying fellowship, good food

and fun together. There were four sessions divided between the evening and morning, all capably led by the area director of Man in the Mirror, Dale Redder, whose passion for discipling men was very evident.

- "From Performance to Grace" on why we can't live the Christian life on our own merit;

- "From Idols to Spirit and Truth" learning the importance of removing the idols from our lives and relying on God;

- "From Self-Sufficiency to Fruitful Dependence" and the importance of seeking to be faithfully dependent on God;

- "Rewired for Biblical Manhood" where we saw the necessity of knowing the Scriptures and having friends challenge and walk along side of us.

The facilities at The Grounds were outstanding with beautiful spacious cottages for sleeping and we had rented the recreation center which included a gym, game room and our meeting room. During our free time the four Brinks boys proved to be tenacious in all aspects of basketball while some "older guy," Brian Tubergen, showed his ability from the three point range. Branson Parler managed to beat everyone who challenged him in ping pong. We were able to take in the beauty of the lakeshore with cooperating March weather and did indeed enjoy great food and of course one of the greatest blessings of the weekend was just having time to connect with each other in relaxing and meaningful ways.

- Bob Scherpenisse



**Year End Picnic** will be held on Wednesday, May 18 from 6 - 8 PM at Aberdeen Park (weather permitting - otherwise at church). The night will include a picnic supper, games and recognition of our students. Kids Hope volunteers, please make your reservation by May 15.

## Birthdays

### May

2 - Amy Baragar  
7 - Tyler Berthiaume  
7 - Kara Berrevoets  
7 - Jaidyn Ann Bolt  
9 - Tim Randall  
14 - Sam Wammack  
16 - Liam Baragar  
19 - Jean Stadt  
21 - Grace Wammack  
22 - Jeff Boehm  
23 - Jeremiah Parks  
24 - Bill Pyper  
24 - Beka McDowell  
26 - Norma Boehm  
27 - Greg Hawkins  
28 - Mike Berrevoets  
30 - Ralph Simone  
31 - Amy Parmeter  
31 - Ethan Parmeter

### June

2 - Julie Schalk  
3 - Caren Bills  
5 - Lorraine Smith  
8 - Dawn Faasse  
12 - Owen Parmeter  
13 - Laura O'Brock  
14 - Eric O'Brock  
14 - Sam Tubergen  
16 - Violet Meendering  
16 - Ephraim Parler  
20 - Justin Leasure  
23 - Betsy Coutchie  
24 - Marty Pyper  
24 - Leslie Hawkins  
28 - Becky Berrevoets  
28 - Linda Randall



## C.E. Update



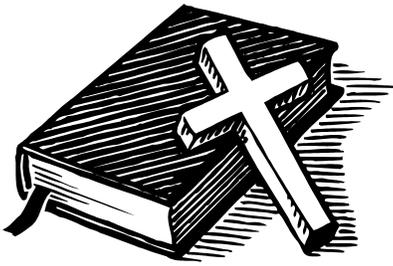
One of the best things about our 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade Christian Education class is that we all love Jesus! Our gathering is not only a time of learning more about Him, but also an open forum where we

can talk about all-things-middle-school, world events, and personal concerns. We support one another as believers celebrating joys and facing the issues of our lives with a desire to respond in God-pleasing ways. A recent focus in our curriculum was spiritual gifts. Each of us took a survey to identify our gifts and then reflected on how we can use them. It's great to see that these young people are eager to serve and already using many of their gifts in Children's Worship, nursery, GEMS, the Praise Team, Team21, the Breaktime Bakery, etc. Each week after prayer we close by reciting one of Dr. Brownson's benedictions: "People of God, you are greatly **loved**, richly **blessed**, and splendidly **gifted**. Now go in the strength of the Lord to **be His witnesses!**"

- Norma Boehm

## Reformed Church World Missions - Japan, Part II

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Because Dutch had long been the means of communication between Japan and the West, the Reformed Church sought an *Americanized Dutchman* who could speak the language. Guido Verbeck was originally trained to be an engineer, but his life was changed after nearly dying of cholera, and he became a missionary. He arrived at Nagasaki in November 1859. Able to speak Dutch, English, German, French and later Chinese, he now began to master Japanese.

Seeds of faith were planted before Verbeck's arrival. After Japanese ports were opened, an English New Testament was found floating in Nagasaki harbor. It was brought to Murata Wakasa, a prominent official. Able to read Chinese, he obtained a Chinese translation. Small groups began to have secret Bible studies and asked Verbeck questions about the Bible. Wakasa and Verbeck became close friends through letter writing for three years. Eventually the two joyfully met in 1866 when Verbeck baptized Murata and his brother.

Japanese leaders craved both Western culture and the English language. Verbeck began teaching in a government school for interpreters. Many of his students became future leaders. He used the Bible as his textbook and distributed English and Chinese New Testaments to his students. Beginning in March 1869, Verbeck relocated to Tokyo to manage what would become the Imperial University. Top officials sought his advice, including the prime minister who had three sons at Rutgers. Always shunning the limelight, Verbeck wrote *Whatever happens, I am convinced that I am not called here by a mere chance, ....being quite aware of my insufficiency, I look to the Master for counsel and guidance...*

Verbeck helped introduce other changes. He translated many Western legal documents into Japanese. He advised that a modern defensive military would prevent outside interference. It is ironic that a strong military soon enabled Japan to wage war against much of the world, including eventually the United States. Verbeck suggested that the government send delegates overseas to meet with American and European governments. Because of the continued state-sponsored persecution of Christians, the group was coldly received everywhere. This international outcry brought an end to persecution.

With the blessing of the RCA, Verbeck ably served the Japanese government for a decade. On July 1, 1877, he was decorated by the Emperor Meiji with the Third Class of the Order of the Rising Sun medal. Verbeck said that this *indirectly...is a tribute to the cause of missions*. Within 20 years, Christianity in Japan had come full-circle, from a religion punishable by death to one of its representatives being awarded one of Japan's highest honors.

Sara Couch, who arrived as an RCA missionary in 1892, was the first single female Reformed missionary to become fluent in Japanese. At Nagasaki, she taught at the Sturges Seminary for women from 1892-95 and 1898-1914. A twelve-year old girl named Tomegawa Jun began at Sturges in 1899. Upon completion, she returned to teach. She and Couch developed a lifelong friendship, likened to a daughter and mother.

For some time, Reformed missionaries successfully carried on outreach in the newspaper. Couch and Jun started to publish their own eight-page monthly publication called the Ochibo (Harvest Gleanings). The newspaper was published from 1914-1942.

Despite reaching retirement age, Couch continued her work, saying that she felt more at home in Japan than the United States. As American-Japanese relations worsened by 1941, Reformed missionaries began to leave. Eventually, all were gone except Couch, who would never leave. The day after the Pearl Harbor attack, she was arrested. She eventually reached Camp Sumire, an internment camp for women. Here, she was well treated and became a source of comfort to her fellow detainees. Jun was permitted to accompany her there and visited her two or three times during the war.

After the war, Couch returned to Nagasaki, horrified by the devastation unleashed by the atomic bomb dropped over the city on August 9, 1945 that effectively ended World War II. Couch sought Tomegawa Jun and the two were reunited. Couch died on January 27, 1946. Jun died at the age of 89 on February 15, 1974. United both in life and death, they are buried beside each other.

## A Typical Sunday Evening



At quarter to five, students start trickling in and gathering in the basement. There's usually a pickup game of pool or Sam-invented ball game. At five, some-

one has usually started consuming some tasty food provided by the amazing Burggraafs. We then shift into the "darker" room for eating and settling down. We fellowship over food and conversation. After that, we settle into the lesson!

For the next 30-45 minutes we dig into the Bible. It's great! They have been splitting up into groups, asking questions about their portion of Scripture, discerning the bigger picture of what God was up to in these passages, and what those passages tell us about who God is - what that means for us as we interact with God today. They are then encouraged to interact with the paper that correlates with their question! They usually "name" their passage by a theme, or something that sticks out to them. Then, they can write with words or draw a picture about what the passage meant. They work on their passages with teams and a leader. Then, after their pictures/words are done, we go around the room and let each team answer their questions, explain their picture. It has been a time of learning, discovery, and interest as we learn together the larger narrative of Scripture, and how God worked through his people.

Be in prayer that students would start seeing God as a real, active part of their lives. Pray that God would open their hearts to desire his Word and his presence.

- Alisha Riepmma

## New Members

**Sam and Kristi Dennis** met at a camp in Gladwin, MI. They were both looking for a summer job and ended up in Gladwin. Kristi grew up in Pinconning, so it was only a half hour away from home, but Sam came all the way from Pennsylvania having just graduated with his bachelor's degree in Biblical and Religious Studies. When they met, Kristi was going into her senior year at Kuyper College. They are both passionate about youth and faith...as well as a rather "punny" humor. They became friends through this strange combination of things and despite their efforts to stay single, Sam and Kristi came out of that summer at camp great friends and two years later they got married in Caledonia. Kristi found Fourth as her church home through volunteering with New City Neighbors and serving with Julie Schalk and the worship team for her college internship. When Sam moved to Grand Rapids the summer they got engaged, they visited a few churches to make sure that Fourth was where they were called to become members. They know God has a way of calling people to things they don't expect (getting married and living in a city in Michigan are definitely on that list for them!). Sam and Kristi are thankful that God has called them to serve alongside a body of believers who in so many ways have become an extension of their family. They are excited to be here as many years as God allows, maturing in their faith as members of Fourth!



This year of GEMS has been one of transition. We jumped from 15 girls to 31 overnight. We started out with Courtney as our head counselor and due to commitments, ended up in January with Kristy Dennis as our new head counselor. In addition to our theme "Choose Truth", we focused on life skills once a month. Our latest adventure was

a lesson in cake decorating in mid-March.

We had a record number of participants on GEMS Sunday and all were eager to sing, speak, read Scripture and collect offering. In addition to the girls' enthusiasm, we have enjoyed the interaction with many new appreciative parents from the community.

On April 18, we had a wonderful time of fellowship and learning about Victorian life. The fellowship hall was filled with eager girls, special friends, mothers, sisters and other friends. The evening started with the girls singing followed by a short devotional on "spiritual dressing" given by Sarah Parler. Next our guest, Wendy Batchelder, demonstrated clothing, customs and life during the Victorian period. The girls imagined what it was like to attend 4<sup>th</sup> Church in 1875, over 140 years ago!

Wendy captured her audience sitting on the floor up front, and held their attention for well over an hour. Eager girls asked all the right questions, one after another. Although the ladies in back enjoyed the program, they were also entertained by the enthusiasm and interest of the girls.

The evening ended with making a Victorian autograph book, viewing and touching the many specimens from a different era on two 8-foot tables, and a wonderful smorgasbord of cookies and delicious punch.

- Laura O'Brock