



The 4th Focus

“People Walking in Darkness”

My most recent sermon revealed how Jesus became a rejected refugee to Egypt, escaping from the murderous, self-preserving Herod, so that he could ultimately become a Refuge who offers acceptance and a home for refugees who sadly and aimlessly wander because of sin. I also confessed that I had wept with joy as I watched the story of Michael Oher as it was told on the “big screen” through the movie called *The Blind Side*. It’s a true story about a homeless African-American boy who is taken in and adopted in every way by the Tuohy family in Memphis. God especially used the intense, persistent love and costly investment of Leigh Anne, the mother, to redeem and transform Michael’s life, dreams and future.

I also tried to explain why a grown, yet-still-maturing man like me would weep over this movie. I am prone to weep over redemptive stories like this because I identify with and see myself as an otherwise-homeless refugee who, without the gracious intervention of God and his Spirit, would still be wandering aimlessly with no meaningful purpose in life except to preserve and promote myself. When life is about me, it is a small and pathetic world that generates a repulsive odor that would be comparable to the sheep and goat manure of the stable where Jesus was born. God intervened and inserted his Son into my foul, self-oriented world so that I could live with peace, joy, and a purpose that is worth living and dying for.

I work and study intensely to see and understand the world from God’s perspective as it is revealed in his Word. When I zig-zag through Meijer or see my neighbors work the garden or walk through the church parking lot, I see “people walking in darkness” (Is. 9:2) and I have “compassion on them, because they [are] harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Mt. 9:36). And so another reason that I weep over redemptive stories is because I live for this grand, cosmic purpose of redeeming the creation. My life is defined by participation in this amazing gospel transformation that exploded into motion with the birth of Jesus. Stories such as those that were shared in our congregational meeting and the kids and families that are being drawn to Jesus through New City Neighbors are strong evidences that Jesus and his Spirit are wonderfully with us and working through us.

So I don’t merely see people walking in darkness. I am repeatedly stunned and encouraged by the stories of those who have “seen a great light” (Is. 9:2). And what a privilege to be employed in God’s strong, unstoppable efforts to turn back the darkness and despair of this world! As the Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians, I often pray with joy because of your partnership with the gospel, I see growth in love, and I am confident that “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (1:6).

As a pastor, I should especially seek to see as Jesus sees and be a shepherd on his behalf. But God would have us all seeing and loving as Jesus sees and loves. We are redeemed to redeem our community—to be a redeeming presence in our families, workplace, school, and neighborhood. So as we celebrate Christmas and make the turn into the New Year, we revel in the joy of being a people walking in darkness who have seen a great light. We celebrate being rejected refugees who have found perfect acceptance and an eternal home through Jesus. But we should also be challenged in the New Year with a resolution to see and love as Jesus sees and loves—to be a sweet fragrance that draws people in to embrace Jesus.

Do your kids or spouse see you revel in the joy of knowing the light, acceptance and refuge of Jesus? Would your family, neighbors, coworkers or classmates describe you as one who is on a mission to love and care for others? Regardless of what you encounter, does a foul odor or a sweet fragrance linger in the place where you have been? Let us love and be the light in a world of darkness.

- Pastor Tim



Our 11th Annual Christmas Party with our Kids Hope families was awesome! We enjoyed a delicious ham dinner together, followed by the telling of the Christmas story through a play that each of our Kids Hope students participated in, along with Marty Berthiaume, Eric Schalk, Matt Simone, Brian Townley, Pastor Tim who was our narrator, and Noreen Reitsma who played the piano. This play served as a great way to present the real meaning of Christmas. Watch the bulletin board for pictures!

We ended our night with cookie decorating and the giving of the Christmas boxes. The boxes were warmly received by our families, and very much appreciated. Thank you to everyone who made this possible through monetary gifts and donated items.

A special thank you to the Kids Hope Events team for all of their hard work – Amy Coeling, Lisa Fles, Sue Hawkins and Sharon Van-Timmeren – and to Amy Parmeter and Skip Hawkins for their help in the kitchen.

- Mary Kay Townley

DECEMBER

- 1 – David Bolt
- 3 - Sharon VanTimmeren
- 4 - Lyla Ring
- 7 - Anna Wetzel
- 11 - Caleb Coeling
- 18 - Bob Berthiaume
- 19 - Amy Coeling
- 20 - Kurt Faasse
- 21 - Beth Rossiter
- 23 - Mary Ellen Berthiaume
- 24 - Elise Adams
- 24 - John Studebaker
- 25 - Gert Belbot
- 25 - Gabriel Hawkins
- 28 - Tom Boehm
- 28 - Marv VanderVelde
- 29 - Dave Bolt
- 29 - Pauline Plooster
- 31 - Greg Coutchie
- 31 - Eliana Parler



JANUARY

- 2 - Jim Berthiaume
- 3 - Delores Christians
- 3 - Laura DeMaat
- 6 - Lynn Berthiaume
- 6 - Jennifer Parks
- 9 - Connie Wierenga
- 10 - Ed Van Timmeren
- 11 - Jim Rinkenberger
- 13 - Dave Gleason
- 16 - Marge Berrevoets
- 17 - Amalie Woods
- 19 - Brian Kriekard
- 22 - Doris Kelly
- 24 - Gary Proos
- 26 - Justin Bierens
- 27 - Steve Wammack



New City Neighbors



newcityneighbors

I feel like there are a lot of things to talk about. We haven't chatted in a while and there is a lot to tell you. I'd love to talk about life with three children. I'd love to chat about the new roles I have in my life. However, it's likely best that I talk about New City Neighbors, though on a blizzard day like today, it would be more fun to talk about the weather.

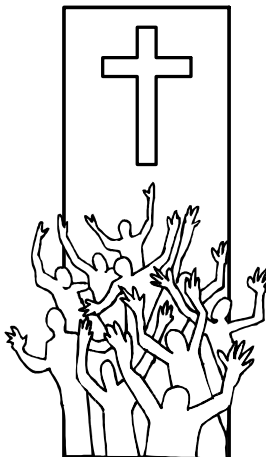
The story of New City Neighbors in 2009 is much like the classic Charles Dickens story, *A Tale of Two Cities*.

On the one hand, this has been a great year. We were blessed to work with over 150 different kids through our youth ministries and another 40 families through the garden. The relationships that have formed in the past year are bearing fruit, and we can clearly see lives being changed. Children are being encouraged, their hope is being restored and some have renewed their commitments to Christ.

Breaktime was amazing again last summer. We had numerous kids find love and place to belong. The Bakery soared to new heights and the bakery students were recognized through a grant, a newspaper article and even a promotional video. On top of that, God moved in the hearts of many of them to strengthen their Christian walks.

I'm still amazed at how the garden produced quality friendships this past summer. Even now, people who met at the garden are hanging out regularly and finding creative ways to take care of each other. I'm

I would lie to you though, if I didn't tell non-profit trying to exist in a down economy and it has been a challenge to do minimal to run the ministries without interrupting activities with kids because the money meals for EMS. I don't say that to lay times are tough. It has been nerve wracking more about trusting God, and he hasn't let



you it has been a challenging year. NCN is a ministry. We are significantly under budget this ministry. By God's gracious provision, we've been able to continue, but we haven't been able to do a lot of extra things. It's even been hard this year to get things done, only as further evidence that a couple times this past year, but I'm learning to trust God down yet.

Despite the financial hardship, there is also hope that will carry NCN into the future. Through connections we have in the Creston Business Association, and Creston Neighborhood Association, more and more people are learning about NCN. We have a new church supporter that is lined up to provide \$1,000 towards Breaktime next summer. There is even some movement with some business leaders to figure out a way to do the Bakery program year round. On top of all that, over 100 new people gave to NCN this year. God is at work and it is amazing.

As 2009 draws to an end, I want to thank you for supporting NCN again this year. Seriously, without the volunteer and financial support from 4th, we wouldn't be here. As 2010 dawns I want to ask two things.

First, please consider making a year end contribution to New City Neighbors. I've already sent out 200 letters asking people to give this way, and I need to make sure I invite you as well. We need your help to start the new year on a strong financial foundation.

Second, keep praying for NCN. Pray that the connections being made will bear fruit. Pray that God will continue to draw kids to our programs so that they can encounter Jesus. Pray that the volunteers will be sustained in their work and that they will be able to develop significant relationships with children and adults. Finally, please pray for Julie and me and the board as we labor to lead NCN forward and guide it to be a beacon of light that brightly displays Christ in our community.

- Eric Schalk

A PUBLICATION OF

**FOURTH
REFORMED CHURCH**



1226 Union Ave. N.E.
Grand Rapids, MI 49505

Pastor Tim Meendering
Phone: 454-1561
www.fourthchurch.com

Sunday Service
9:30 AM

**Family Fellowship
Lifeline Groups**
5:00 PM

Christian Education
11:15 AM

Our Vision

Seeking to be a joyful,
welcoming
community that is
transformed by the gospel
and nurtured in God's
Word, and led by His
Spirit - to redeem the
city and beyond."

**A COMMUNITY REDEEMED TO
REDEEM OUR COMMUNITY**

Progressive Dinner



On Tuesday, December 8, fourteen women from Fourth gathered at Meenderings' house for appetizers and the annual Women's Progressive Dinner. Weather forecasts—and the blowing, arctic wind—made the penguin appetizers prepared by Ruth and Julie Schalk an appropriate—and adorable—way to start the night. Despite the generational differences (from women with adult children to high school students), conversation and laughter flowed, so it was no surprise that we left Ruth's house about fifteen minutes later than we had planned.

Amy Parmeter had the Kooyer/Parmeter family van, so most of the ladies could ride together. It is never quiet when ten women ride in one van, and Laura O'Brock even noted, "There are four different conversations going on all at once!" The traveling is one of the nicest parts of a progressive dinner. We arrived safely at Leslie Hawkins's house for our second course—salads. Leslie began our meal with a short Christmas reading. We then enjoyed two lovely salads over talk about family Christmas traditions. Before we knew it, it was back to the cars for the drive back to the North-east side of town and Betsy Coutchie's house.

Betsy's house is always full of clever decorations. This evening was no different as her Christmas decorations included lovely Moravian stars, including a handmade star given to them on a family trip. Betsy prepared a wonderful meal of chicken cordon bleu, buttered carrots, and cranberry relish. As we ate, we enjoyed conversation about neighborhood restaurants (did you know that Chad Kooyer and Amy Coeling first met as teenagers while they worked at Sweetland's on Plainfield?), learned superstitions we should employ to ensure snow days (ask Amy Parmeter's kids for the true method—it worked for them for the next three days!), and shared memories of three of the saints from the Fourth family who are spending this Christmas in our eternal Home. As a new(er) member of Fourth, I enjoyed hearing the stories about Jane Damon, Margaret Phillips, and Helen Ryskamp from women who were shaped by their relationships with these women. We laughed at some of the stories and wondered what the next generations might say about us as they gather for their progressive dinners.

When we left Betsy's house, bound again for the Southeast side of town, we noted that it wasn't just our dinner that was progressing—the bitter wind had given way to snow-covered roads. Soon the freezing rain would begin. But we had one more stop, so we certainly weren't heading home early!

Jeni Wammack welcomed us into her beautiful home for desserts that she and Katherine Ring had prepared. We enjoyed eggnog, macarons (with and without chocolate), mint candies, brownies, and other goodies while we chatted about all things Christmas.

Though none of us wanted the evening to end, all things must, and we parted ways. Amy expertly maneuvered our fifteen-passenger van—in reverse, even!—out of the Wammacks' driveway and then drove us safely back to church on the slippery roads. I am grateful to all of the ladies who joined us for the dinner. I also encourage those of you who couldn't be there to try to join us next year. It is always a fun evening with wonderful food and good fellowship, often with women outside of our "normal" fellowship groups. Thank you, too, to Ruth, Leslie, Betsy, and Jeni for opening your beautifully-decorated homes to us; Julie Schalk and Katherine for helping to prepare food; Don for working in the kitchen and allowing Betsy to join us for the entire evening; and Amy Parmeter for your excellent driving skills! I'm already looking forward to next year!

- Beka McDowell