



# The 4th Focus

## “Always Hope”

In the wake of two significant deaths for our church family and at the start of the holiday season, I am amazed by God’s gift of hope. Where would we be without the hope we have through Christ? When a 47 year-old daughter and sister and a 99 year-old beloved father slips through the thin veil that separates earth and heaven, where would we be without hope?

In the chaotic and dazing fog of death, and for all of the deep struggles of our life journey, “we have this hope as an anchor for our soul, firm and secure” (Heb. 6:19). As we engage in the war against evil and all of its fallout, we have “the hope of salvation as a helmet” (1 Thes. 5:8) or defensive armor. And through faith, we can face reality, no matter how ugly, with confidence because we are “sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Heb. 11:1). “And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Rom. 5:5).

We can weep and grieve in the mess of illness, loneliness, broken relationships and whatever comes our way but we grieve with hope. We believe that our future is in the hands of a loving Father who is all-powerful and good. The resurrection of Jesus is our hope for a power that can change today’s circumstances but is not limited to relief from today’s struggle. We are saved from the miserable condition of having our hope be limited to this world only (1 Cor. 15:19). Future grace and glory will carry us (1 Peter 1:13) and empowers us with faith and love until the great day when we will see Jesus face to face.

This amazing, gospel-grounded hope sets us apart from others in a number of ways: First, this means that we don’t have to avoid reality or paste a happy face onto a fearful and anxious heart underneath. We naturally default into avoiding the reality of pain, wounds, shame, and fear in an endless number of ways that include alcohol, sex, busyness, overwork, staring at illuminated rectangles and buying stuff. There are some versions of religion, like the “prosperity gospel,” which define “prosperity” to include great health, great relationships, great kids and great finances. The preachers of this “gospel” tell us that you can have “your best life now.” The reality is that our faith is not a means of pain or suffering avoidance.

Life will often knock us over the head like a 2 X 4 and leave us dazed for days, weeks and even years. How could we expect that if Christ suffered through many of the effects of evil, sin and curse, that we would somehow be exempt? Jesus came to suffer the mess and curse of sin with us and the question is whether we will live through the mess and curse of sin with him. Through faith and hope, our union with Jesus enables us to boldly engage the struggle with his real presence and joy in us and a view toward the ultimate joy of seeing him (1 Jn 3:2).

In September, Rick and Kay Warren appeared on a CNN talk show to share their story about the tragic death of their son, Matthew. Matthew had killed himself after a long struggle with clinical depression. That’s about as heavy as it gets. But what was so amazing was the Warrens’ honesty and willingness to share both Matthew’s pain and their own. Warren noted that his son had said, “Daddy...it’s real clear I’m not going to get any better, so why can’t I just die. I know I’m going to heaven so why can’t I just die?” And Rick Warren told the show host that he “cries every day.” But, through prayer and the love and support of other Christians, the Warrens are working through their grief and finding the grace to turn their suffering into an opportunity to do good for others.

We don’t have to deny the pain nor do we have to be defined by the pain. We are defined by our relationship to Jesus who entered into the ugly, painful mess with us so that we could live with hope and joy and one day rise up to a reward that will infinitely overshadow our groans and “labor pains.” I am grateful to be always yet learning these things with you. “May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in you” (Psalm 33:22).

- Tim Meendering



Each year the GEMS program introduces a theme for the year and develops lessons, crafts, skits, games, and other activities created to teach the theme truth found in God's Word. This year's theme is *Who's the Greatest?* The text is found in John 3:30, "He must become greater and I must become less."

We have sung many songs about how great our God is and explored some new ideas about awe

and reverence. Our God is the greatest. The heavens declare it and His works affirm it. The story of His greatness is told to us in the Bible. For the world to see Jesus in us He must increase and we must decrease. This doesn't mean that we think less of ourselves (self-esteem), but rather less about ourselves. (self-centered) We have learned that you can only experience true joy by putting Jesus first, others second and yourself last.

At our last meeting, we had a skit about three GEMS girls who went shopping with their counselor for nail polish, markers, games and ice cream. All the while they planned to have these things for their own fun at GEMS. When their counselor suggested they go and visit a sick friend and give her their purchases, they were too selfish to go and walked away. The lesson followed up with some practical ways to become less selfish at home and elsewhere by putting others first, and the benefits of becoming unselfish.

We have already had a lot of fun together with the 15 girls in our group. We rejoice that we have four new girls already this year and pray that more girls in grades 1-8 will join us.

In addition to our usual group of faithful counselors, we are delighted to have Beth Sowers and Sarah Parler join us this year. We can always count on Beth for coming up with the best games and some wacky costumes. She keeps us moving!

On the first night we played some fun games with pumpkins, races and yarn tangles. The big hit of the night was a relay with some really ugly size XXXL men's tees which had to come off and on several times amid the giggles while searching for the head and armholes.

For crafts we made post it notebooks to remind us to pray for others. The next week we made pretty balls decorated with paper flowers and beads, and last week necklaces made out of washers sealed with colorful nail polish. Thanks Dawn for your creativity!

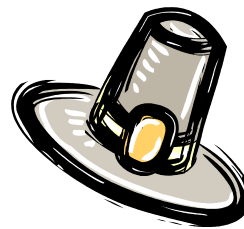
- Laura O'Brock

## Nov.

- 1- Iva Brus
- 1 - Michelle Couthie
- 6 - Marge Bolthuis
- 7 - Micah Meendering
- 8 - Madilynn Bierens
- 14 - Nick Kooyer
- 15 - MK Townley
- 18 - Philip Brinks
- 26 - Justin Bierens
- 27 - Sydney Hawkins
- 30 - Nancy Brinks

## Dec.

- 1 - David Bolt
- 3 - S. Van Timmeren
- 11 - Caleb Coeling
- 12 - Peg Blanksma
- 15 - Dennis Jingles
- 18 - Bob Berthiaume
- 19 - Amy Coeling
- 20 - Kurt Faasse
- 21 - Beth Rossiter
- 23 - ME Berthiaume
- 24 - Elise Adams
- 24 - John Studebaker
- 25 - Gabriel Hawkins
- 26 - Erin Broene
- 28 - Tom Boehm
- 28 - Marv VanderVelde
- 29 - Dave Bolt
- 31 - Greg Couthie
- 31 - Eliana Parler



## Christmas Cards



It's the time of year where we once again have the privilege of sending holiday greetings to our members who are not able to attend worship.

There will be a box across from the mail slots for you to drop your cards. To make sure there is plenty of time to deliver them and so they can enjoy the cards throughout the month, the deadline is Sunday, December 8.

Keep this list of names so you can send them an encouraging note throughout the coming year as well.

Peg Blanksma

Charlton Meyer, Tim Randall

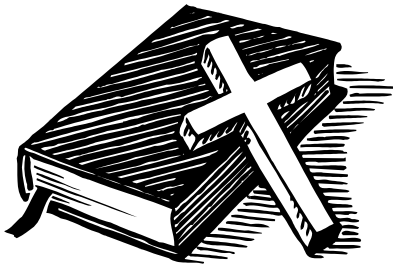
Joyce Van Neuren, Dee Christians

Marv & Bertha Vander Velde



## Reformed Church Heritage - Church Independence, Part III

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For many years the struggle between the Coetus and Conferentie devastated the Reformed Church. By the late 1760s, efforts to encourage reconciliation began to be made. Neutral ministers and the Netherlands church authorities worked together to heal divisions. In October 1768, Classis Amsterdam now announced that it was willing to drop the idea of subordination to seek what was now called a *Close Union*. The New York consistory, once supportive of the Conferentie, now began to take a more neutral stand.

While all of this was taking place, the catalyst appeared. John Henry Livingston (1746-1825) had studied law, but was led to train for the ministry. Although a lifelong member of the Reformed Church, his limited knowledge of Dutch and other factors caused him to consider joining either the Episcopal Church or the Presbyterians. He finally chose to remain with the Reformed Church, encouraged by Rev. Archibald Laidlie, the first Reformed minister to preach exclusively in the English language. Livingston sailed for Holland in May 1766, the last American compelled to travel to the Netherlands for training and ordination in the Reformed Church. While attending the University of Utrecht, Livingston kept in frequent contact with Dutch church authorities, comparing ideas on how to heal the American schism.

In May 1769, Livingston was called by the New York City church as the second English speaking pastor. He arrived on September 3, 1770. His godly character and thorough training appealed to both the Coetus and Conferentie. For a year, Livingston cultivated friendships on both sides, and then invited delegates to a convention aimed at making peace.

The convention met from October 15-18 1771. Rev. Lambertus DeRonde, once an ardent Conferentie member, now took a more conciliatory stand. To begin the convention, he preached from Ephesians 6:23 *Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. Attending along with 25 elders were 22 ministers, seven from the Conferentie, ten from the Coetus and five neutrals, all together representing 34 churches.

The convention generally adopted a plan suggested by Classis Amsterdam. While Classis granted self-government to the American church, it urged that certain conditions be met. The doctrinal standards and polity formulated at the Great Synod of Dort were to be retained. Established was a General Assembly and five Particular (specific or limited) Assemblies or Circles corresponding to geographic areas. The General Assembly, comprised of delegates from the Particular Assemblies, was empowered to ordain ministerial candidates.

Further progress was interrupted by the Revolutionary War. The war deeply affected the church, since much of the fighting took place in New York and New Jersey. While most ministers were dedicated patriots, some were considered neutral, while four ministers, together with a large minority of church members, openly supported the British. Patriot ministers often had to flee for their lives. It was said that Rev. Jacob Rutsen Hardenbergh slept with a loaded musket at his side. The British frequently converted patriot churches into stables, hospitals and prisons. In October 1777, the Reformed Church at Kingston, along with the rest of the town, was burned to the ground.

After the war, the church began to take steps to eliminate any binding ties to the Netherlands Church outside of the tie of Christian love. The five former Particular Assemblies became five Classes, namely Albany, Hackensack, Kingston, New Brunswick and New York. In 1788, a committee began to translate into English and publish the doctrinal statements and the *Articles of Church Government*. While retaining the 84 Articles of Dort on church order, the committee added 77 Explanatory Articles, explaining how they impacted the American church. This was approved in 1792, the same year The *Constitution of the Reformed Church* was drafted. A General Synod, first organized on June 3, 1794 has survived to the present day.

- Eric O'Brock

Next - From Dutch to English





Dawn and Erin enjoying a walk along Lake Michigan at the women's retreat.

The women have had several opportunities this fall to enjoy each other's company and stretch themselves in their walk with our Lord.

The focus of our annual **Fall**

**Retreat** at Pentwater was what can happen when you are faithful in your prayer life. In his book *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, Jim Cymbala shared many stories of how the Holy Spirit can do amazing things when we set aside our own agendas and get serious about prayer and the gospel. We were deeply convicted of the changes we needed to make in our own lives for the sake of ourselves and others. Thanks to Sue Hawkins for opening up her cabin and Becky Berrevoets for her leadership.

A group of women around a table of food can only mean a good time! **Progressive dinners** at 4th are a wonderful way to break bread with people who you truly care about and love. Thanks to Erin Broene, Leslie Hawkins and Sarah Parler for being such gracious hosts and also to Erin for organizing this gathering.

I know....it may mean you have to crank out a little earlier on a Saturday then you want, but **breakfast at Russ'** is another lovely way to be blessed, catch up with friends and hear ways in which you can encourage or support someone else. Thanks to Nancy Springfield for setting the dates and saving a table for everybody!

- Ruth Meendering

## Did you know....

...**Nancy Springfield** is New City Neighbors' first *Volunteer of the Year* award recipient?

...**Becky Berrevoets** was named March of Dimes MI Volunteer of the year?

In October the J-Walkers had a great time jumping around **Sky Zone** and eating pizza. The boys had a blast playing dodge ball on trampolines. Here on the right, Abbie Schalk just jumped into a bed of foam blocks.



## AMAZING RACE!



Zach Coeling and other team members are digging in wet dog food mush for gummy fish. Were some boys really gagging?



Gabe Hawkins is eating cup after cup after cup of "manna" hoping to find the one with the verse at the bottom.



And the winners of The Amazing Race are Avery Gleason, Abbie Schalk and Sydney Hawkins! Don't spend your million dollars all in one place girls!