

The 4th Focus

“A Coal Removed from the Fire”

God’s design for our spiritual growth and health involves a balance of critical efforts. And so, for example, throughout this fall season, we have intensely focused on loving, studying and applying God’s Word. The sermons and small group teaching times have worked together to equip us for being transformed by God’s Word. And then for the last couple of weeks, we have seen that studying the Word is never an end in itself. We are to engage in relationships and intentional conversations that point people to Jesus. We learn to listen to the prodding and guiding of the Spirit and at the same time, we listen to people so that we can respond with the truth of who Jesus is for them. We have made progress in our love for and understanding of Scripture.

But I have a concern, with this emphasis on biblical study for this season, in that we might let up or forget the critical component of authentic community. God’s Word makes it clear that we need each other for the study and application of Scripture and for progress in faith and life. One text that speaks clearly to this concern is Hebrews 10:24-25: “*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*”

In the book *Habits of the Heart*, a team of sociologists headed by Robert Bellah discusses the testimony of nurse Sheila Larson: “I believe in God. I’m not a religious fanatic. I can’t remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It’s Sheilaism. Just my own little voice . . . It’s just try to love yourself and be gentle with yourself. You know, I guess, take care of each other. I think He would want us to take care of each other.” Unfortunately, she has missed the point that believers taking care of each other requires regular times of being with each other and practicing authentic community.

Like Sheila, we all come up against strong competition for our attention and devotion to practicing community where we deeply love one another, pray for one another, bear one another’s burdens, teach and admonish one another, serve one another and are hospitable to one another. Do you get the idea here? I could go on and on with this list of “one anothers.” How can we do these things unless we are regularly and significantly with one another?

In a recent pastors’ small group meeting, we talked about the increasing competition for the time, attention and energy of our church families so that it seems the “Michigan Summer” syndrome where we neglect worship and gathering together has stretched into the fall. It’s always a matter of priorities and who or what is first in your life, isn’t it? What does your practice relating to regularly meeting in worship and small groups communicate to your spouse, kids and friends about your priorities? This is not a new concern. Paul wrote sadly, in 2 Timothy 4:10, “Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me.”

All of this highlights why we, as a church, have emphasized the idea of “simple church” where we strongly urge everyone to commit to regularly participate in the three efforts of worship, small groups and service. When the author of Hebrews urged the believers to “not give up meeting together,” it was likely because they faced persecution and their lives were at risk when they did gather together. Around the world today, believers still gather at the risk of their lives. And yet in our culture of comfort, we bail on our obligation to practice community with an excuse like, “I just don’t feel like it.”

Again, God’s design might be compared to a wood fire where you see how a coal removed from the fire will glow for a while, but not for long. We need each other to keep the fire of his Spirit burning brightly in us and through us. Our Lord was alienated and rejected by an ugly and artificial community so that we can revel in the love and joy of an authentic community.



On December 14 we will be having a Christmas Party for all of our Kids Hope USA students and their families. As has been our tradition in the past, we would like to give each family a gift. This is where we need your help! We have decided on a winter theme for our gift this year which will start with a saucer-style sled, followed

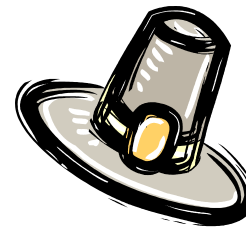
by packing the sled with various items. Items that will be purchased are the sleds and a fleece blanket for each family. Items that we need donated include the following:

- 12 boxes of Nestle hot cocoa mix (10 packet boxes)
- 12 boxes of microwave popcorn
- 12 packages of cookies
- 12 plastic snow block makers

Monetary donations may also be given for the sleds and fleece blankets. Monetary donations can be placed in an envelope marked "Kids Hope Christmas Gifts" and placed in the offering plate until December 4. Please sign up for the donated item(s). They are needed by December 6 and can be placed on the marked table in the Fellowship Hall.

Thank you so much for helping us with the gift of giving. If you have any questions, please contact me.

- Mary Kay Townley



December

- 1 - David Bolt
- 3 - S. Van Timmeren
- 4 - Lyla Ring
- 7 - Anna Wetzel
- 11 - Caleb Coeling
- 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
- 28 - Tom Boehm
- 28 - Marv VanderVelde
- 29 - Dave Bolt
- 29 - Pauline Plooster
- 31 - Greg Coutchie
- 31 - Eliana Parler

November

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



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, the deadline is Sunday, December 4.

Here is this year's list:

Bud Waterloo, Jim & Peg Blanksma,
Geneva Horling, Alice Krause, Charlton Meyer,
Anne Nordyke, Pauline Plooster, Tim Randall,
Joyce Van Neuren, Dee Christians,
Marv & Bertha Vander Velde

High School Retreat

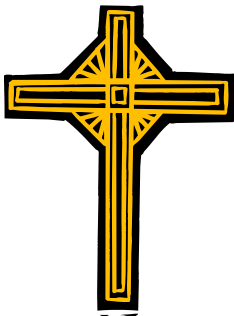
From November 4-6 the High School Group from NCN went on a retreat to Cran-Hill Ranch. Four guys from our group joined 17 kids from two other churches for a weekend looking at what it means to be a godly leader. We had a blast exploring Scripture, playing games and being challenged on the high ropes course.

I have known most of the kids connected to our High School for at least eight years, and it has been cool to see them grow as people and believers. The retreat was an opportunity to see some of that growth realized. One of our guys conquered his fear of heights by climbing forty feet to the top of the high ropes course. Others made new friends faster than I had ever seen.

I came back from that weekend euphoric because I saw God working in so many ways. Thank you for your prayers as we were away, and please continue to pray that God would reveal himself to all our students so that they desire to follow Christ with their lives.

- Eric Schalk

The History of 4th Church - The last 25 years



By the mid 1980s, Fourth Reformed Church began to move toward a wider community ministry which has developed and continues to the present day. Following his ordination, Rev. Kenneth W. Kuiper was installed on June 27, 1984. During his pastorate, a special emphasis was placed on the church's youth. Duane Smith served as church youth and education leader during this time. Worship was enhanced in 1988 by the private donation for a new piano and the introduction of the *Hymnal for Worship and Celebration*. During this period, the *New King James Bible* replaced the *King James Version* in the pew.

Rev. Kuiper brought the biblical message to the greater community. A community-minded vision formulated in 1987 sought to define the congregation as a *highly visible, outreach centered metropolitan church*. To this end, he hosted weekly half-hour programs over two local radio stations from June 1987 to March 1989. He remained at Fourth until June 1989.

The installation of Rev. Terry Thole took place on July 18, 1991. During his pastorate, the Women in Touch group began. His brief stay at Fourth ended in the summer of 1993.

Our current pastor, Rev. Timothy A. Meendering began serving at Fourth under contract in October 1994. Following further study, he was formally ordained and installed by the Reformed Classis of North Grand Rapids on March 17, 1996. Membership nurture continued through Women in Touch, a structured men's ministry starting in 1995 and small group Bible studies. Since 1997, Eric Schalk has served congregational and community youth. Fourth Reformed Church has actively sought to meet the needs of the community during this time. On April 18, 1999, the congregation voted to participate in Kids Hope, a national organization involved with voluntary tutoring in schools. Church members served as tutors and prayer partners, meeting the needs of children at nearby Kent Hills School.

The new millennium brought new changes to the life of the church. Fourth went global in April 2003 when it first appeared on the World-Wide Web. Gradually, the traditional evening worship service was replaced by small groups by late 2004. In November 2006, Fourth Church would become home to the Trinitas Classical School for the next five years. In September 2008, the *New International Version* became the new pew Bible. The following month, a digital recorder was obtained, making it possible to put audio worship services on the web.

In February 2005, a new mission statement *a community redeemed to redeem our community* was adopted. This describes a still ongoing community renewal. During 2003, congregational members assisted in the renovation of two local houses. Since the summer of 2006, the Breaktime Bakery has helped kids develop basic job skills. The bakery was featured in the Grand Rapids Press on June 29, 2009 and Fox News on July 22, 2010. Since 2007, a community garden has brought neighbors into closer contact with the church.

On April 1, 2007, New City Neighbors, a non-profit organization, was launched by Fourth Church. This ministry seeks, in the words of its mission statement, to *restore and develop community*, helping to meet the spiritual, material and educational needs of the neighborhood children and families. Its board members represent a variety of community-minded organizations making it a team effort. Currently under the New City Neighbor banner are the Fourth Church ministries of GEMS, community garden and Breaktime Bakery. In addition to these is Breaktime, which involves tutoring and life skills for 3rd-5th graders, EMS which reaches out to needful students with meals, activities, homework assistance and Bible study and High School, where students are challenged to make godly life choices through Bible study.

- Eric O'Brock

**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,
nurtured in God's
Word, and led by His
Spirit - to redeem the
city and beyond."

**A COMMUNITY REDEEMED TO
REDEEM OUR COMMUNITY**

GEMS Update

Get Wisdom: Go beyond the Gold! Proverbs 16:16-17

On October 24 the GEMS, leaders and friends headed out to Post Family Farm for a taste of the country life. When we arrived they had a wagon waiting for us. It was a little like Cinderella gone backwards--we went on a hay wagon driven by a tractor out to the pumpkin fields. Though quiet out in the fields there was a lot of singing and fun on the wagon. We learned a great shark song from Julie Gleason. The tractor driver gets an A+ for getting us through some muddy tracks.

Upon returning to the main farm area, we found a great bon-fire waiting for us with hot chocolate, marshmallows and doughnuts. Some of us had forgotten how good roasted marshmallows taste and the fire warmed us up. Before we headed back to the city, we were able to pick out a small pumpkin to take home.

During the ride home I heard Ellie McDowell and Analie Woods singing, "Jesus Loves Me" together. My heart was warmed beyond any words. Yes, Jesus, loves us and cares for us.

- Nancy Aukeman

November	December
15 - Progressive Dinner	3 - Breakfast at Russø
20 - Mission Offering	4 - Christmas Card Deadline
21 - GEMS with Special Friends	5 - GEMS
24 - Thanksgiving Day Service	5 - Consistory
29 - Congregational Meeting	11 - Secret Sister Reveal
	14 - Kids Hope Party
	18 - Christmas Program
	19 - GEMS

Don't forget!

TRIP Tidbit

Giving gift cards at Christmas? Please check the Christmas TRIP order sheet for some great choices. Also, Taco Bell & Seven's have been added to the regular order sheet.



Support the ministry of New City Neighbors by buying gift cards from NCN at face value. Questions? Stop in the office after church. Our 2011 goal is \$3000! We're getting close!