

# GRACE NOTES

News from and about Grace Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan

#23

December 2009

**Jail Ministry** *Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.*  
*Hebrews 13.3 (NRSV)*

Jail ministry has been part of Grace Church from the beginning of our life together. The biblical command to “remember those locked up” is explanation enough for the activity of the group that meets in the Kent County Correctional Facility every second Sunday afternoon to lead three worship services with inmates. John and Mary Vroon have been leading these services for more than twenty years. Although they are now retired from leadership, they still are on our security list, and John has been asked to fill in more than once. Cathy Bouwsma organizes the music and brings a portable speaker system. Sally Kikkert, David LaGrand, and James La Grand share the speaking parts: Bible reading, prayer and message. The newest member of the Grace jail ministry team is Bob Tigchelaar, who has already made a major contribution.

Security is tight at the jail. If you have ever tried to visit a relative or friend locked up in the Kent County Correctional Facility, you probably experienced frustration at being turned away. At the least you were distressed to learn that your visit would take the place of a visit from the inmate’s spouse. The importance of security is not surprising. What might seem an obvious proposal—to come along with the team for an introduction to this ministry—is out of the question. We are allowed eight security-cleared volunteers in our group, and currently we have filled seven places. What is surprising and encouraging is the support and appreciation extended to the ministry teams by the jail staff and administration. Grace is one of thirteen Protestant congregations represented. Every week Chaplain Bill Bruursema’s “Forgotten Man Ministries” holds 26 Protestant worship services and 26 Roman Catholic services.

The ministry team takes up the challenge to spend time with people in jail simply to obey the biblical command. This means remembering the prisoners as team members choose music, scripture readings, messages, and prayers that they hope will speak to and for the prisoners. The team finds that inmates are usually polite and orderly—though sometimes the rivalries and tensions between inmates erupt in screaming and sobbing.

The ministry team knows that the jail is crowded—something the rest of the church members read about in the paper. Since 1950 the number of those locked up in Kent County has soared 773 percent. This rise in jail population in Kent County is our participation in an American phenomenon—the fact that in the USA we incarcerate five times as many



people today as in 1972.

What can the congregation do to support the jail ministry?

- Pray for someone you know in jail—or for Forgotten Man Ministries.
- Identify with the ex-offenders in our church congregation, especially visitors.
- Support the Grand Rapids Restorative Justice Initiative and others who are working politically for prison and court reform.

## Welcome New Members



**John and Emily Helder** met at Calvin College and were married three years ago. John grew up in Grand Rapids and Emily in Chicago. John has four siblings and Emily has one sister. They lived in Detroit for two years, Emily went to Graduate School at Wayne State University. When Emily was done they moved to the Chicago area. Last June they moved to

Grand Rapids so that Emily could begin teaching Psychology at Calvin College. John is completing his studies at Grand Valley State University and is looking for work. He is interested in health care, finance and web designing. They are fixing up their home in Ottawa Hills. John is a long distance runner and Emily enjoys hiking and cooking. They were told about Grace and checked out our website. Emily is already involved with Gems and John is starting a class in personal finance. They love the integration at Grace and that we are a smaller church.



**Ken and Irene Kraegel** have been married for ten years and moved to Grand Rapids last January from Ohio. Ken grew up in Indiana and Irene is from many places. They met at Wheaton College. Irene is a Psychologist and worked for a private practice, but recently has become a Counselor at Calvin College. Ken was an apartment

manager and is currently writing and illustrating a children’s book, fixing up the house they bought, and is a avid reader. Irene likes music, was a violinist and together they enjoy camping, hiking, and kayaking. Friends told them about Grace. They each have different interests as worshippers and feel that both of their needs are met at Grace. They are very comfortable with us.

**Sheila Sewe** was born and lived in Kenya till she was 12, when her family moved to Iceland. Sheila has three younger brothers who live with her parents in Iceland. She wanted to study abroad and chose



Grand Rapids because she has an Aunt living here. She is a student at Grand Rapids Community College, majoring in Social Work. She likes to work with children, loves music, shopping, and when in Iceland, ice skating and skiing. She goes home for the holidays and in the summer. Sheila came to Grace to watch a friend play in a drama, she returned on Sunday, and has been coming regularly since then. She feels very welcome and likes it when people notice her absence and her return to worship.



**Mary Nasca** has been worshipping with us for almost a year. She grew up in Sand Lake the youngest of 6 siblings. Mary managed a grocery store and drove bus for 13 year in Greenville. She became involved in youth ministry and began taking classes at Kuyper College. Karl Westerhof led one of the Community Development classes and told her about the Buckley House. Mary loves living there and likes worshipping at Grace and she feels that God has led her to us. Mary enjoys spending time with the neighborhood kids and is working with the Cadet Program. She has one daughter who attends Cornerstone University and she herself continues her studies at Kuyper College. She loves to ride motorcycles, write poetry and short stories, and create liturgical dances. She feels like Grace is her home and is looking forward to getting to know the members here.

**Look for additional new members in the next issue of Grace Notes**

## Elders Approve Communion Proposal

Worship Committee and the Elders have been discussing communion practices at Grace for several years. In November, Worship Committee recommended, and the Elders approved, that we try celebrating communion every Sunday over the next few months.

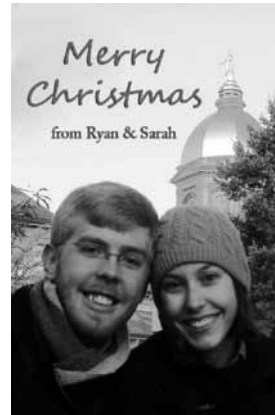
In its study of communion, Worship Committee learned that the early Christian church gathered weekly to celebrate communion, and worship occurred around the sacrament, not the other way around. The purpose for gathering was to remember and celebrate what Christ had done. Worship Committee included the following additional reasons in its rationale for weekly communion:

1. The sacrament of communion is central to our faith, to our understanding of who God is and what has been accomplished through Jesus Christ.
2. Through the celebration of communion we gain a clearer understanding of ourselves and in particular our ongoing need for God's grace.
3. In observing the sacrament we remember how precious we are to God, and we re-member who we are as a body of believers made up of interdependent parts, each one of us indispensable.
4. The contemporary testimony Our World Belongs to God, reminds us that "God meets us in the sacraments, communicating grace to us by means of water, bread and wine." Worship Committee believes that communion not only expresses our faith but also nurtures it. Participation is a gift to the people of God, a channel of God's grace.

Since we already celebrate communion weekly during Advent and Lent, Worship Committee recommended that we add the Sundays in between those two liturgical seasons. The Elders approved this for a

trial period, which will be evaluated by seeking broad congregational input after Lent ends.

Worship Committee is also recommending that baptized children be invited to participate in the Lord's Supper. The Elders have requested that broader congregational discussion occur around this idea before implementation is approved. Possible ways to have this conversation are being considered by Worship Committee.



Dear Friends at Grace Church, Sarah and I have been wanting to write for you for some time. It has been a long while since we left Grand Rapids for South Bend, Indiana. We hope things are going well for all of you and for the church as a whole. We're guessing that it's about time that the shepherds are hanging in front of church in anticipation of the newborn king. We hope that your Advent is blessed with great peace, love, and wonderment.

For the past months Sarah and I have been easing into the new surroundings here in South Bend. Sarah has begun her PhD program in the theology department here at Notre Dame. As you can imagine, it is very challenging! We are very grateful for this opportunity. She enjoys learning in an environment where faith is respected and valued. She hopes to use this education to serve God's kingdom as a professor. We thank you for your excitement for us.

As for me, I have gotten a position in a clinical pastoral education program at St. Joseph Regional Medical Center, a Catholic hospital here in South Bend. I serve as a chaplain resident. This hospital's values are much the same as those of Grace Church. Each person, no matter their history or background, is seen as a child of God and is treated with dignity and compassion. I come face to face with many different people needing basic kindness and assurance of God's presence. I am thankful that the same Spirit at work in Grace Church is with me in these times.

Sarah and I hope that everything is going well with you. We were a part of your community for three years. During this time you generously allowed us to practice leading worship and preaching and being involved in many other ways. Grace Church is a great place to learn in ministry. As a church, you are abundant in charity and came alongside us with consistent encouragement. We pray that you are blessed mightily by God in ministry and in worship. Our hearts are bound to yours. Feel free to contact us any time!

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Marie Ippel send us this story. This morning our daughter Josie was studying the new banners around church, and this evening she ate the watermelon that she happily unearthed from the Harvest Table on Thanksgiving. After church this morning she was looking at the floor in the narthex and said, "Hey mom, look, there is a white cross in the middle, then red around it for Jesus' blood and then purple around the edges for Advent!"