



SALT & LIGHT

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OUR FAITH

Hope Church is called by God and equipped by the Holy Spirit to be a witness to the unity, reconciliation, and justice given in the saving grace of Jesus Christ. These touchstones drawn from the Belhar Confession give voice to the historic Christian faith in our time and place.



See how you can join us at
[HopeChurchRCA.org](https://www.HopeChurchRCA.org)

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"Let the Adventure Begin"



This was the cover of a greeting card I received from one of you this month as Pastor Gordon's sabbatical was beginning and

the resignations of staff members were being announced. COVID cases were starting to climb, and our family was in transition with a multi-pronged move process. I placed the card among some other gifts I have received over the years. They all sit on the shelf right next to my standing desk. There are days when I feel overwhelmed or just want a quiet moment, and I look over at them. The messages themselves are meaningful. But so are the memories of where they came from and from whom. They link me to all of you. They connect me to the promises of scripture and to the presence of the Spirit.

There are days when I turn away from the news—most recently the reports coming out of Afghanistan—and the message of hope seems vacuous and empty. But then I am reminded that biblical hope is not a wish or a positive thought. Hope is born from the history of God's refusal to let humanity go. It is born from the long view. And I pray as I see that word. There are days when I am frustrated beyond belief with humanity, whether humanity on the whole or a very particular human, and reciting the Original Blessing from the book *Reclaiming Connection* centers me once again to remember who each one of us is at our core. There are days when the image I need is the circle of



women with the words “You Are Supported” reminding me of a long line of fierce women who have gone before me and continue to uphold me. There are days when I need to claim my role to be a blessing in the world as I take in the truth of God’s blessing for my own life.

But right now the words “Let the Adventure Begin” resonate. I like the playfulness it evokes by holding this season of complexity and chaos and always-changing plans with a spirit of fun and curiosity. I like the way it gears me up to expect the unexpected. If we know that life can turn on a dime then it is a little less disorienting when it does. Throughout this issue of Salt

*Hope is born from
the history of
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the long view.*

& Light you will be invited by fellow congregants to enter into life with a spirit of adventure. In the midst of all that is changing, who we are and how God asks us to live remain the same. Maybe not in the details but in the overarching themes, the values, the commitments, and the purpose of it all. This fall will not look the same in terms of how we engage in our programmatic life and worship. But the commitment to love God and to love our neighbor

as we love ourselves as well as the call to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly all remain intact. I hope you will join us with a spirit of adventure as the fall season unfolds.

Grace and Peace, Pastor Jill

Adult Education Announces Fall Schedule

All sessions are at 9:40 a.m. in the Commons; masks are required.

Iona Community—September 12; Food Club—September 19

The Iona Community and Iona Abbey Pilgrimage

September 12

Iona Community leader Ruth Harvey will Zoom to Hope Church live from Scotland's Isle of Iona, introducing the Iona Community's history, mission (peace/justice/worship renewal), and current activities. Dede Johnston will describe her multiple Abbey sojourns with Hope students.

Jill Russell will introduce the possibility of a Hope Church pilgrimage to Iona. David Myers, who has visited Iona 30+ times, will illustrate the travel and the Scotland setting.

Food Club: An Innovative Approach to Increasing Healthy Food Access

September 19

Traditional food support has relied on a patchwork of emergency-oriented programs no longer

matched to our community's needs and trends. To meet our community's needs, Community Action House plans to evolve its service model from a food pantry into a Food Club. Successfully piloted in Grand Rapids, this membership-based, grocery-store-style experience is an innovative, high-dignity approach to improving healthy food access. Partially financed through sliding-scale membership fees, the Food Club model enhances consumer choice, member participation, and access to healthy foods. Food Club will create the capacity to efficiently serve thousands more community members each month and dramatically improve our region's ability to address food insecurity. The long effort to bring the Food Club model to the lakeshore is now in its final stages, and this new approach to food access and social services delivery is set to open this coming October. Executive Director Scott Rumpsa will introduce us to the Food Club.

Effective Altruism Series—September 26 through October 10

This three-week series will explore ideas for more effective charitable giving and for "impact investing" that enables investors to do good while doing well. Come and consider ideas for "doing good better."

Making a Difference with Effective Altruism

September 26

Holland radiologist, Jason Dykstra — a subject of a Washington Post article on "The Rise of the Rational Do-Gooders" — will describe the faith-based choices his family has made about giving, and a simple evidence-based process for discovering highly cost-effective alternative giving possibilities.

Kim Tan Live from London: Jubilee & Social Justice

October 3

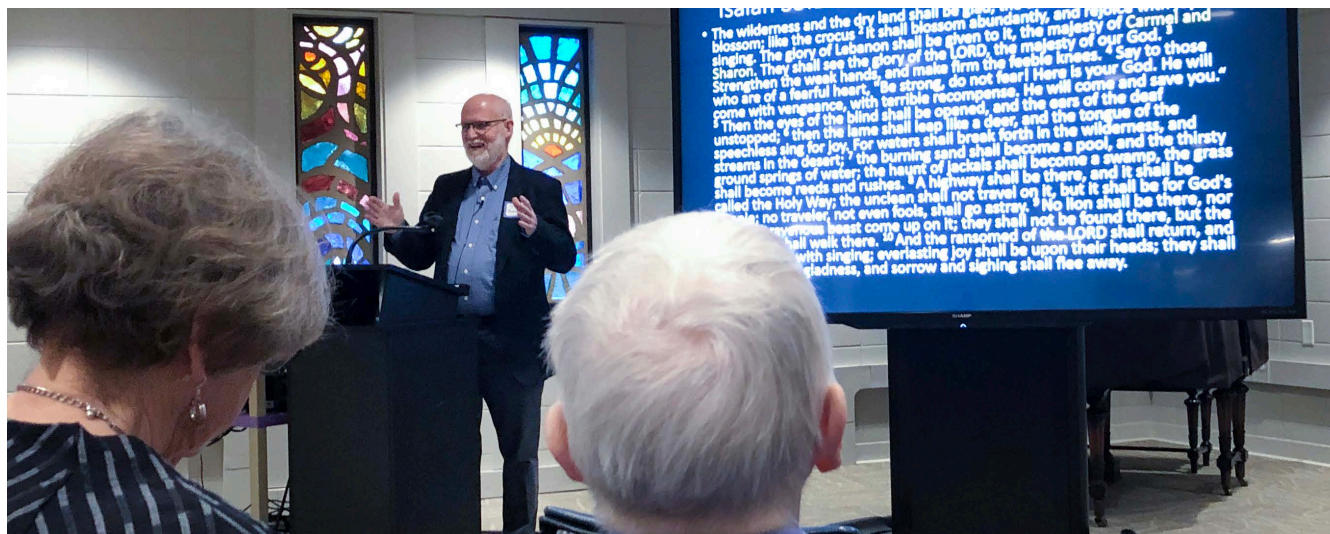
Biotech-entrepreneur-turned-impact-investor Kim Tan will Zoom to Hope Church to explore the implications of biblical jubilee principles for the church, our lives, business, and society.

He will illustrate how he is walking the talk with ventures in developing countries enabled by his social impact investment funds.

Effective Altruism in Holland-Zeeland

October 10

The Community Foundation of the Holland/Zeeland Area works with donors and nonprofit partners to enable a thriving community for all. Executive Director Mike Goorhouse and Director of Community Impact Yah-Hanna Jenkins Leys will join us to share CFHZ's approach to creating maximum impact with its endowment resources, and what they've learned from supporting hundreds of local individuals, families and companies as they developed their unique approach to philanthropic stewardship.



Kingdom—October 17; Synod Review—October 31



The Kingdom Will Come Anyway October 17 and 24

Bob Luidens, a Hope Church member since 2016 and retired pastor in the RCA, recently published a personal memoir entitled *The Kingdom Will Come*

Anyway—A Life in the Day of a Pastor. During the sessions, Bob intends to read aloud several pieces from the memoir, inviting those in attendance to reflect together, in one large circle, on what those pieces may evoke in each of us. The pieces will primarily draw from various

experiences Bob had while serving congregations in rural Kansas and upstate New York during his three-and-a-half decades in pastoral ministry. (Those interested in securing their own copy of Bob's memoir at cost can do so at the welcome desk; \$10 cash or check payable to Hope Church.)

General Synod Review

October 31

General Synod Professor Jim Brownson will provide a review of the RCA's General Synod meeting to be held October 14-19 in Tucson, Arizona.

Earthkeeping and Character: Exploring a Christian Ecological Virtue Ethic Series—November 7 through 21

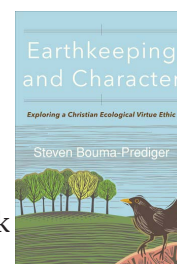
To properly care for our home planet, we can cultivate certain virtues in our homes, schools, churches, workplaces, neighborhoods, and cities. During this series, Steve Bouma-Prediger helps us explore the components of a Christian ecological virtue ethic: wonder and humility, self-control and wisdom, justice and love, courage and hope.

**Ecological Virtues We Need:
Wonder, Humility, Self-control, Wisdom**
November 7

**Ecological Virtues We Need:
Justice, Love, Courage, Hope**
November 14

**Cultivating Ecological Virtues
in Everyday Life**
November 21

Optional reading: *Earthkeeping and Character: Exploring a Christian Ecological Virtue Ethic*, by Steven Bouma-Prediger (ISBN 978-0801098840, Baker Academic), is available in both digital and paperback form on the [Baker Academic website](https://www.bakeracademic.com/). It is also available at Hope College's Geneva book store, Reader's World, and amazon.com.



If you have questions and/or suggestions for adult education, please direct them to Jane Schuyler, chair.



God's Spirit More Contagious: A Full Youth Program

Beth Carroll, Associate Pastor of Discipleship

How do we build and sustain community during a global pandemic? This question threads throughout all of our life together at Hope Church, and youth ministry is no different. It's hard to believe we're going into the third program year touched by Covid-19. Incredibly, there are middle schoolers in our midst who have yet to experience youth programming that has not been marked by masking, social distancing, and Zoom!

As I plan, there are two truths I have learned to hold in tension these past two years. The first is learning to be okay with change. There is an element of youth ministry that requires flexibility anyway, because of how demanding the balance of school, work, and extracurricular activities is for teens and their families. Families are doing the best they can in helping their youth care for themselves and connecting with each other, which means sometimes it is completely appropriate for families to say no to a Sunday evening youth event in favor of time together as a family. I strive to support families with this balance. In some ways, adding a global pandemic to this balance is no different from how I respond to family needs. It's important now more than ever to hold a yearlong schedule loosely as we all try to respond to developing health priorities—illness prevention, but mental and emotional health, too.

The second truth I hold is knowing God's spirit is more contagious than a virus. God is

not intimidated by our obstacles, fears, and stresses. God is at work in building up hearts and community in new and powerful ways; ways we might not even realize until months or even years down the road. While this season is painful, none of us has been left behind or is outside the bounds of redemption, maturation, joy, and growth. This knowledge helps settle me a bit and engage in more curiosity to see what God's love looks like in this season. I look forward to seeing that love at work this year!

So, for now, we three pastors have created a full youth program for 2021-2022, with some adjustments. High Hopes, Fish Club, High Hopes Unshowered, GIFT Class, and Bible Pride are all scheduled for the year in person for now. As appropriate, we will have some gatherings outdoors and will also gather indoors, but fully masked. While we normally love to share snacks and meals, we will either enjoy those outdoors or put food on hold until it is safer to do so indoors. Of course, we will adjust as health protocols adjust and change our scheduling as needed.

I invite you to join me in prayer for our youth and that I and other leaders will be responsive to their evolving needs this year. My prayer is also that we will share in the fruits of how the love of God is at work in our midst, no matter what change comes our way. Thank you for loving our youth!

How Can I, a Parish Nurse, Help?

Ginger Clark, Parish Nurse

What is a parish nurse? I'm a registered nurse with a certification in faith community nursing; I've been the parish nurse at Hope Church for over six years.



A parish nurse enhances the understanding of the relationship of faith and health. She teaches and models ways to integrate that into daily life. She is committed to providing individual health coaching and education and encourages spiritual support. She promotes self care of the whole person

and collaborates with pastoral staff to plan and support congregants in need. She makes connections to a network of resources in the community. She facilitates support groups for caregivers, those on a grief journey, and also those in need of mental health support.

You may wonder when to call the parish nurse. Reach out if you:

- or a family member is sick
- are looking for ways to improve your health
- don't understand something your doctor has told you
- are in need of medical equipment
- are concerned about yourself, a parent, a child, or a friend
- are feeling lonely or overwhelmed
- or someone you know is going to have surgery
- are dealing with a loss or death
- are in need of prayer or someone to listen
- are struggle with a relationship
- need an advocate



Contact:

Ginger Clark
Parish Nurse

Church office: (616) 392-7947

Cell: (616) 648-1046

Email:

gclark@hopechurchrca.org

OFFICE HOURS:

Wednesdays: 1 to 3 p.m.
Walk-in visits welcome



Brian Carder Thanked for Inspired, Faithful Service

These remarks and prayers were shared during an outdoor celebration on June 6, where many gathered to share memories, gratitude, and congratulations with Brian Carder on his retirement.

Jane Dickie, Personnel Committee Chair

After directing music for over 30 years and over the span of four decades, Brian Carder is retiring. A humble man, he wanted only to lead music; he really didn't want us to make a big deal at this time. So why do we insist...?

Perhaps this explains why: Over four decades ago, a very young man, a bachelor with a kind heart and laughing eyes and an easy smile stood at the front of the church and generously shared with us music of the soul. A singer, director, lover of music and life, he has been unafraid to invite such oddball groups as the Persisterhood Choir to sing faith-based politically tinged songs. He introduced us to Taize chants and Iona song prayers and choral masterpieces.

... If you responded to his invitation to sing when he raised his hands like this, put your hands together and sing ten times in any key: thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, Brian.



Pastor Gordon Wiersma on behalf of Pastors Jill Russell and Beth Carroll

As the pastors talked together about what we want to express about Brian and to Brian, it seems important to start... with our deep gratitude for Brian as a colleague and a friend. Brian has been connected with us and our families through many occasions of joy and of challenge, and through all of those circumstances, Brian has been a trusted, gracious, and valued part of our lives—and for that we are deeply grateful.





... For us as pastors, our core work with Brian has always been the planning and leading of worship. And there are three things I want to succinctly highlight about Brian's role in worship which we appreciate so much. The first is that Brian has an amazing capacity to hold the interplay of excellence and of inclusion in involving people in music for worship. Brian does things well and draws that excellence out in others, but that is always done also while including people at all levels of musical experience and ability. Excellence in worship is both about finely polished pieces of music and about giving a youth just starting out in music a chance to join in an ensemble. Brian has been amazing in that inclusive excellence in his service here.



to be at as you retire. It is a wonderful gift as a pastor to have someone like Brian in leadership

The second thing is Brian's creativity and his theological depth. I've been with Brian for twenty-plus years now, and as he retires, his creativity in finding music for the seasons of church life and his sense of the meaning of what is expressed in music has never been stronger, which is a pretty impressive point

who pays attention to and supports the faith life of Hope Church as we love and serve God together.

And the last thing is that although Brian's role has been at its heart about supporting the worship services of Hope Church, Brian has had a keen sense that worship is at the center of Hope Church life not as an end in itself, but to support the people and ministry of Hope Church. To work with Brian has been to be with someone understands that worship provides care and nurture to you all—that worship challenge and supports us all—that worship calls us to express the love of God in our Hope Church ministry beyond the walls of Hope Church. And in doing so, Brian has always had a deep sense that worship is an expression of love and gratitude to God, and a receiving of God's love and gifts for all.

For all of those things, and for so much more, we say: thank you, Brian. And together with all of you we give thanks to God for Brian's faithful service, as we embrace him with God's blessings for retirement.

Dawn Boelkins, Choir Member

... When she was 90 years old, Peggy DeHaan showed up for a Wednesday evening rehearsal. She didn't want to sing on Sunday mornings, because she couldn't manage the steps and her voice was quavery and thin, but she had missed the music and the people. Could she come just for practice?

Brian said, "Of course!" And that says a lot about Brian....

Connecting with One Another

Gratitude

Dear friends at Hope Church, Thank you for all the cards, prayers and kind expressions during Duane's father's illness and passing. Thank you, especially, to Jill, Gordon, and Beth for your prayers and words of comfort.

Duane and Karmen Kooyers

Thank you to our Hope Church family for the many cards, notes and expressions of sympathy and concern and for the prayers offered this past summer following the death of Janet's son, David. We were comforted by your care and support.

Paul and Janet Elzinga

I AM Academy Centers on Ubuntu

Thank you so much, Hope Church, for your continued support and encouragement in the work that we are doing! We are excited to begin our programming this coming year centered on the theme Ubuntu: I AM because we are.

For our Literacy Project: Igniting Change, students will be reading *Dear Martin*, by Nic Stone; our community leaders will be reading *Just Mercy*, by Bryan Stevenson. While these books are being read, our students, their mentors, and our leaders will engage in an intergroup dialogue process, gaining perspectives from multiple angles. This will help to inform students about the justice system, our local government, and the social justice work that needs to be done within our community. Students will then explore and solve an issue through project-based learning and present their solutions to the leaders they have engaged with. As part of this project, students will be attending the

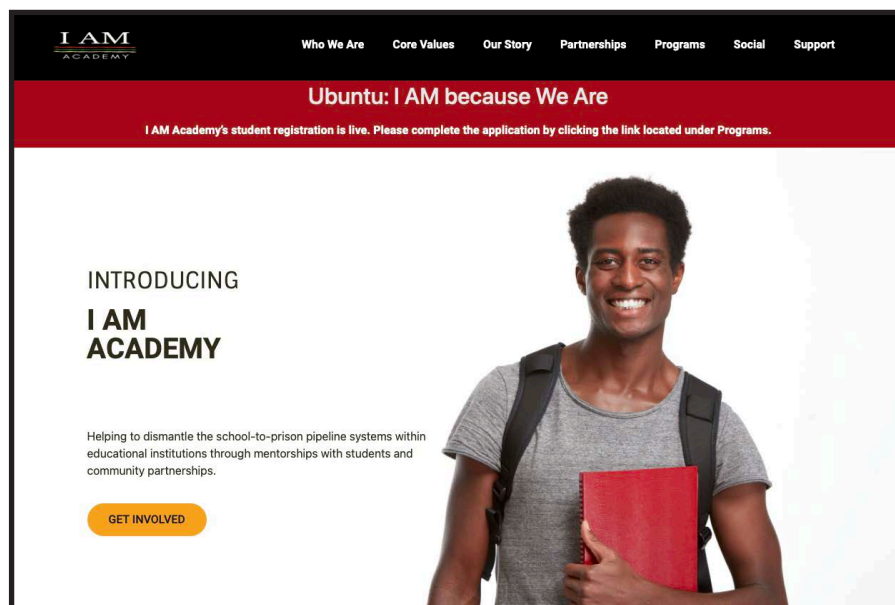
White Privilege Conference in the spring and going on a Civil Rights Tour in the summer.

Throughout the year, students will meet with their mentors each week within their schools and will be empowered during our large group monthly events happening at the northside Boys and Girls Club.

We will have more updates as we finalize plans for our Martin Luther King Day event and our "A Year of Ubuntu" exhibit. For our Martin Luther King Day event, we are looking for businesses/organizations in the trades to share their expertise with our students. If you and/or your business/organization are looking to partner with us, please email us at info@iamacademymi.org.

Currently, we are taking new middle school and high school students. Registration can be found on our website at iamacademymi.org.

~Lindsay Cherry





A Time for CARE?

Pastor Gordon Wiersma

Perhaps you've heard about "CARE"? Perhaps not? The acronym stands for "Community Action for Racial-Justice and Equity" and the CARE team has been active over the past year in our community. I'd like to share a bit about how CARE came to be: I'd like to wonder about how Hope Church collectively and as individuals can continue to explore connection with CARE.

Following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, the voice of the Black Lives Matter movement made an impact nationally and locally here in Holland, catalyzing many groups and individuals to come together around anti-racism efforts. Here in the Holland area, a group called Faith Leaders for Justice (FLJ) had been meeting since 2016, and from that group in the summer of 2020 emerged a team to particularly address policing/public-safety issues in the light of racial justice. All of the Hope Church pastors, Jill, Beth, and I, were involved in FLJ, and Beth and I transitioned into the policing justice work.

As our group of eight to ten

people met, it quickly became clear that this work needed to be part of a broader coalition for racial justice, and the concept of CARE emerged, believing that "Community Action for Racial-Justice and Equity" expressed the intention for broad-based advocacy centered in racial justice and guided by the voice of people of color in our community. And with that expanded focus, Pastor Jill also joined the ten-person CARE team.

This past March, CARE held a community forum on Zoom, and close to 100 households participated—including many from Hope Church—which was a great boost for visibility and momentum for CARE. The forum focused on concrete strategies to strengthen policing/public safety through anti-racist initiatives, and many participants expressed their interest in being a part of ongoing CARE efforts.

And with all of that said, CARE is very much a work in progress. The current CARE team is wrestling with: How do we expand the number of

people involved? How do we make the CARE team itself a broadly multi-racial/ethnic group? How does CARE get a foothold into advocacy and not just information/education? How does CARE connect to broader justice initiatives? How can congregations/organizations have connection with and input to CARE? How is the agenda and activity of CARE determined? What further organizational structure and funding are needed to make CARE effective and sustainable?

These are broad and challenging questions, but the Hope Church pastors are seeking to keep our leadership and congregation informed about the CARE initiative, and you have encouraged us to stay engaged and to explore such questions as a congregation. We believe these are not just strategy questions but faith questions, discerning together how the Spirit is calling and directing us to do justice in our walk with God. As you hear more about CARE, your input and involvement will be part of how we discern a faithful way forward.



Into Each Life Some Rain Must Fall

By Peter Boogaart, Creation Care Ministry

I just spent the last five minutes watching a storm front move through. Rain in sheets pummeled the garage roof. The wind-choreographed trees gyrated in symphony. The wind drove hard against the window. This brief blast was a mesmerizing experience.

In Creation Care circles, we like to say that nature has a healing capacity. The simple act of being outdoors has a way of dissipating the discontinuities of human experience. Admittedly, we're thinking of sunny, pleasant days when we say that.

But storms are of equal value. Storms recalibrate our sense of power and achievement. Our culture elevates technology to an almost divine status. I hear this theme often in climate crisis discussions. There's an expectation that deliverance is right around the corner. Someone will invent a new solution. Right?

Standing in front of the window, watching this storm front, my technological faith wavered. In the face of nature's power, I felt small. I had to rethink my place in the grand scheme of things. I suspect that this is what prompted David's thoughts when, in Psalm 8, he said; When I look at your heavens.... What are human beings that you are mindful of them....

Not every rain event is a threatening storm. Rain has more than one face. Who hasn't thanked God for that gentle three-day soaker after a hot, dry summer month?

Rain is also more than an event. It's a process; heat, evaporation, condensation, rain, soaking, groundwater, and springs. Climate scientists refer to the hydrologic cycle. The process, however, is impeded by the work of our hands, particularly in urban spaces. Impermeable surfaces—pavement, rooftops, and stylized plantings—don't allow for soaking, only runoff.

In a healthy ecological system, there's no such thing as runoff. The rain puddles and then seeps into the ground. Native plants

have root structure—sometimes twenty-feet deep—that wick the water downward.

As much as possible, we need to re-create this natural process in our urban spaces. The term you hear is rain garden. In these designed spaces, the water is allowed to puddle and seep slowly into the ground. Rain gardens are designed to employ those native plants which have evolved to survive the irregularities of rain events. They can cope with the dry times and thrive in the wet times. As an added bonus, who doesn't like flowers!

A good rain garden can be tucked in almost anywhere. We have one at Hope Church. The space between our north/south driveway and the adjoining parking lot is a rain garden. That may not be obvious because the water doesn't flow openly. You can't see it happen. In our case the flow is subterranean. The gutters from the church roof along with the driveway operate out of sight, underground. The sandy soil below the rain garden easily dissipates the water.

You have options at home, too. The City of Holland is encouraging homeowners to convert the boulevard space between the street and homes into rain gardens. Most of us have yard space which could be converted, too. There's help available if you want to access your property. The Macatawa Area Coordinating Council (MACC) conducts free assessments to determine the best location for rain garden/s in yards. Contact them at info@the-macc.org.

Back to that crisis reference. Climate science is telling us that Michigan will experience more, and heavier, rainfalls by the end of this century. Most of our storm water systems were designed to handle annual averages that won't exist anymore. Rather than retrofit the entire system—sounds expensive and disruptive to me—a community-wide commitment to rain gardens is a logical alternative. You can be part of the solution.



Understanding the Landscapes: A Report from the Futures Team

Larry Schuyler, Chair, Hope Church Futures Team

The Futures Team shared their work with the congregation during a special Adult Ed hour in June that focused on what is currently happening with the RCA and its General Synod. Formed by the Consistory, The Futures Team has the mandate to uncover the various options that are available to Hope Church should continued membership in the RCA prove untenable. Understand that Hope Church is not seeking to exit its long-term and historic relationship to the RCA, but our leadership is aware that circumstances could develop in the RCA that would be at odds with

Hope Church's values and vision. We are centered on this question: Will the future RCA help or hurt Hope Church's ministry? We recognize that we are engaged in a longer-term process and answers will not be a simple "yes" or "no."

Our work began with the questions: What is the landscape we are seeing? What is the RCA landscape? What is the Hope Church landscape? What's the landscape in other denominations? Our report at the Adult Ed particularly shared what we saw as the present landscape in the RCA.

Part One: A Summation of the RCA Landscape

This is a review of what was offered at the June Adult Ed session.

- RCA Vision 2020 Report. The 2020 Vision Team produced its report. Since General Synod didn't meet in 2020, nor in June 2021, the Vision team has yet to formally present its report. The report sets forth three recommendations/proposals:
 1. Classes be organized by affinity rather than geography; and Classes determine the bounds for ordination and marriage.
 2. A new nonprofit be formed to oversee the mission work currently done by the RCA.
 3. A regulated process be approved for churches choosing to depart from the current denomination.
- A Special Session of the General Synod is scheduled to be held October 14-19 in Tucson AZ. It is expected to receive the Vision 2020 Report and take some kind of action on it.
- General Secretary Eddie Aleman sent a letter to the denomination titled, "Exploring God's Preferred Future for the RCA," which set forth his perspective.
- The General Secretary has acted to minimize and end ecumenical relationships, which had been a significant value in the past for the RCA.
- The formation of the "Alliance of Reformed Churches" (ARC). This alliance is set up to be a quasi-denomination that local churches that choose to leave the RCA can join. ARC has chosen Tim Vink (former RCA staff person) and Dan Ackerman (former Zeeland Classis leader) to serve as leaders for this new enterprise. Churches joining ARC can choose their faith formation statements except they may not be inclusive of all persons or all committed relationships. It has been said that about half of the local churches will leave the RCA. This statement is an opinion, not fact-based, yet it has circulated within the RCA. ARC is apparently now accepting churches into its network.
- The Great Lakes City Classis (former South Grand Rapids and Lake Erie Classes) have sent an overture to General Synod calling for the formation of two "Affinity Synods"

that would divide the denomination into two camps: one pro-inclusiveness and the other rejecting inclusiveness. This overture doesn't seem to have much support and passed the GLCC classis by one vote.

- We are aware that Western Seminary has taken the position of deferring (refusing to) grant certificates for ministry to LGBTQIA students. These certificates are needed for a classis to proceed with the ordination of a seminary graduate with a M.Div. degree. This is disappointing. In response, the "RCA Queer Student Initiative" formed to support students caught in this conundrum.
- The bright spot on the landscape is the development of [RCAForward](#). This website is for RCA members to affirm their church and express their commitment to the positive, affirming, inclusive direction to which the RCA has arrived/is arriving. We encourage Hope Church folks to add their name to the growing list on the website, [RCAForward.com](#).

The Futures Team is taking notice of a couple of new developments in the RCA since our June presentation. First, the Vision 2020 Team has issued an update to its original report; the update can be read on the RCA website. The Vision 2020 Team has been working with the RCA Commission on Church Order to provide instruction for how a local church can leave the RCA. The Vision Team has made clear that their recommendations, while acted upon individually by the General Synod, are intended to all be approved as a unified action.

The second development is the departure of the New Thing Classis from the RCA. This had been one of the newest classes in the RCA, formed by a cluster of churches associated with Faith Church in Dyer, Indiana, one of the largest churches in the RCA. The Faith-Dyer conglomerate is forming their network and not joining ARC. This development likely changes the dynamics within the RCA, both for voting at synod and the formation of ARC.

Part Two: The Landscape at Hope Church

The Futures Team keeps its eye on the Mission Statement for Hope Church. Furthermore, the team members identified these values as significant to the Hope Church congregation:

- Hope Church focuses on being a Disciple first and denomination-person second; Discipleship is multi-faceted, touches all of life; the spirit of "compassionate room for all" leads us; worship and worship style are sacred.
- We strive for inclusion; we are engaged in community; we value meaningful worship; we are engaged in RCA for what we can contribute to the greater body.
- Inclusivity; thoughtful (Reformed) theology; sense of community/belonging; rich liturgical worship.
- "Love the Lord and love neighbor as self" is our pursuit; inclusivity is our intention/passion; spiritualism in worship is our strength; feeling called to our best is our fulfillment.
- Micah 6:8 "God has shown you O mortal what is good..." We work for justice with humility. "We will take anybody" was said to a member on his first visit. It is still a basic value and what we want to be known for.

- Inclusion: "It bothers me when people are left out."
- Liturgical Reformed worship; the pervasiveness of God's grace; we allow people to be themselves ("the gift of each person"); make a positive contribution/impact on our community; be a witness for justice; we discern our decision and actions together; we value being connected—we believe in community not separateness.

The Futures Team is exploring what it would look like to become associated with another denomination as well as become an independent church. We are firm that being an inclusive church which values the gifts and identities of all people is non-negotiable. God's grace and love extend to all.

It will likely take years for the RCA to sort itself out as it chooses a new reality after the Synod action in October. It is not necessary to rush to action at this time. But it is necessary (to reference Jesus' parable) to have our lanterns trimmed and primed for when the bridegroom appears. In other words, to not be caught off-guard and lackadaisical in our assumptions.



Poetry Corner

Hosted by Rhonda Edgington and Randy Smit

As we enter September and
look towards fall, Randy and I
thought it was time again for
us to share some original work.
Mine comes from wandering the
fields and meadows of Michigan
one fall, being absolutely taken
by the milkweed, in all their
various stages. Mary Oliver
tells us that, “Attention is the
beginning of devotion.” I urge
you to take a walk this week or
month, find some wild thing—a
deer in the woods, like Randy
sees, a milkweed pod, the wild
geese flying overhead (do you
know the wild geese poems
by Wendell Barry and Mary
Oliver? Some of my favorites!)
and really pay attention.

Milkweed
By Rhonda Edgington

Many of your sisters
and brothers stay inside the pod
huddled together, the brown
and brittle October hull either
protection or prison.

But you have broken out, pushed
away this dead house. Your arms reach
for the sun and wind. It pulls you
from the others, even as you remain joined
together. And the breeze
flows through you.

You are strong and silken,
fragile and holding sunlight.

The sun-drenched yet chilly
winds blow against you,
and I see a star formed
by the tension between
letting go and hanging on.

Other milkweed floss floats past,
being carried somewhere—
no one can say yet where.

I don't try to release you
before your time,
but I do wish you
godspeed.

Several years ago I had the honor of teaching a class alongside Tom Boogaart, now Voskuil Professor Emeritus of Old Testament at Western Sem. I suggested its title, "Training for Wonder," based on a book of quotes and blessings by Abraham Joshua Heschel, who over a lifetime of faithfulness "asked for wonder" and found God more than abundant in revealing.

This poem, plucked from the deepest heat of summer as the Olympics were quieting down, comes from that place in me still so desiring to train and remain attentive to every thirst and hunger, for God's glory that comes to us however the spirit chooses.

TRAIN

by Randy Smit

Upon the death of a fawn at the closing of the summer games of the XXXII Olympiad

Get outside.
Carry the flame.
Don't say anything.

Drive effortlessly.
However it is done,
Running is the reason for running.

You see what you see.
Don't ask what I think when I run
the speed of a jogger electric down
the bike path, I am moving.

Movement throws wind into lungs,
without constriction
or clenching or pushing or reaching or effort.
The fresh knobbed rubber
patterns of tread purchase asphalt
beneath, propel the wheels over
themselves, the blanched and buckled

pathway at intervals cracked by
marathon veins of Oak, Maple
perturbing the roadway with Herculean
roots, and on through mud
pools splashing after late
morning thunderstorms.

Sense everything. Rock steady
along the surface. Maintain
Athletic awareness. Athens Gold.
All the training for this.
Vehicles fly through here.

See the animal. See the course over a plane of a
human that one hour will deliver 8 miles ahead.

Left hub clicks at full speed... "one and two,"
front right caster, rear tire shift
of grit of sand, crushed
stone and gone, gone.

On a seat in a chair down a path near
open fields below a stirring sky –
kinesis, letting the wind run in, and in and in and
in to blow and press what presses and
presses and presses and gives and
gains and gives and gains and
gives and gains and gives.

They love each other.
Running. It never ends.
Its young body was bespectacled
with pure pearls. White sun shone
at the spine in rows as a flash.

Not thinking. Breathing. Running to train
to depart to arrive to chase to yearn
to live to love, to run. To notice.

Left, a blue butterfly, to the south,
a thick-winged hawk screeching
for life over balsam at the
back of the acre on the corner, white
fences framing leafy greens
feeding in the field across the road
three deer alive on the wind
as the other one was. As you are now.

Please wait. Please run.

Don't say anything.
Run home. Plan the next.
Promise yourself.