



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
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Journeying in Faith

Dear Hope Church friends,

What follows is from Rev. Cindi Veldheer DeYoung, chair of our Worship Ministry, sharing some reflections that draw us into the Lenten season. You'll see Cindi make mention of walking the labyrinth: a labyrinth will be available for our use at Hope Church during Lent. We plan to set up a temporary labyrinth in the Chapel space, and resources there will help you engage with it. Whether this is a new or familiar practice for you, all ages and stages are welcome to the labyrinth experience. Just one note to add to what Cindi shares: During our Worship Ministry discussions about using a labyrinth, someone said, "in a labyrinth there aren't any wrong turns; all paths lead eventually to the center," which struck me as a meaningful touchstone for Lent. Journeying in faith is not a straight path, but the promise of God's grace is that we are always being drawn toward the love of Christ at the center of our lives.

And from Cindi Veldheer DeYoung:

The first Sunday of Lent plants us firmly in the wilderness with Jesus, having started the 40-day Lenten season on Ash Wednesday. While we might fault the Israelites for their penchant for wandering because they didn't ask for directions often enough (geographically or spiritually), we also wander and wonder if God is with us, if there will be water or food or healing or grace. Such wandering can be symbolized by intentionally walking the labyrinth, a spiritual exercise of following a path that can include some sidetracks. As we make our way, we receive indicators that we are not alone, that the energy to go ahead is a grace, as is the nourishment and doses of hope and surprising acts of God, sometimes dazzling us with glory, or infusing us in what we know as justification and sanctification. The path compels us to find the center, and then to return to the world having been grounded in God. The familiar texts for the season of Lent offer us solid lines on the path as we live again this time of being mindful of Jesus' wilderness journey, and represents our own pilgrimages in walking in the Way of the cross.

– Pastor Gordon

Lenten Season Programs



Lenten Devotional

For the Lenten season, we are making a devotional available for all of our households. This creative resource from the *Salt Project* will be available in the Gathering Area.

Henri Matisse and the Colors of Lent: From the gray of Ash Wednesday to the brilliant dawn of Easter Sunday, the season of Lent is a journey through color. And so what better guides to this journey than the words of Scripture and the art of Henri Matisse, one of the most daring, influential artists in modern history? In this devotional full of Scripture, art, and weekly practices, we walk alongside Matisse from his childhood in northern France to what he called his “masterpiece,” the Chapel of the Rosary in Vence. Matisse once said he liked to pray with a pencil: “At the moment I go every morning to say my prayers, pencil in hand; I stand in front of a pomegranate tree covered in blossom, each flower at a different stage, and I watch their transformation... filled with admiration for the work of God. Is this not a way of praying?” Week by week, we’ll travel through the colors of Lent—all the way to the beautiful, joyful dawn of Easter morning.

Small Group Experience for Lent

Thursday Afternoons or Evenings in March

You are invited to join for a group gathering of reading and reflection, engaging with insights from author Kate Bowler. In **Bless the Lent We Actually Have: 40 Days to Read, Reflect, and Bless our Imperfect Lives**. In *The Lives We Actually Have: 100 Blessings for Imperfect Days* ([preview the book here](#)), Bowler invites us to engage with “whatever this season is bringing you—the lovely, the difficult, the heartbreaking—let’s bless it all this Lent.”

Small groups will meet on Thursdays both from 1 to 2 p.m. and from 7 to 8 p.m. throughout March—March 2, 9, 16, 23, 30. Pastor Jill and Pastor Gordon will lead the groups, and all are welcome to participate.

Sign up for the small group in the Gathering area or using this [link](#), order a book for \$10 (cost is subsidized) that will be received by the end of February. Accompanying devotional and group discussion materials will be provided.

Lenten Worship & Fellowship: Beginning and Concluding the Season

Ash Wednesday, February 22

We’ll be joined by some of our neighboring congregations for fellowship and worship. At 6 p.m., a soup supper will be served in the Commons. A worship service will follow at 7 p.m. in the Sanctuary: scripture, music, prayer, and an invitation to receive the imposition of ashes. The imposition of ashes is an ancient symbol of repentance and blessing that calls us into the Lenten season of renewed faith and discipleship through the story of Jesus Christ.

Holy Week, April 2 — Easter Sunday, April 9

On **Palm Sunday, April 2**, 11 a.m. service will be “Worship for the Way of the Cross,” a dramatic weaving together of scripture, music, dance, and song to draw us into the gospel narrative from the triumphal entry of Palm Sunday to the passion of Jesus.

Our **Seder Dinner, Thursday, April 6, at 6 p.m.** is a traditional Jewish meal that remembers the events of the Passover told in the book of Exodus. There will be a potluck meal as part of the Seder, so please bring a dish to pass. Sign up for the Seder in the Gathering Area or by using this [link](#).

The Maundy Thursday Tenebrae Service, April 6, at 7:45 p.m. follows the path of Jesus’ passion through the Last Supper and includes communion, prayer, scripture, and music.

On **Easter Sunday, April 9**, we’ll gather for Easter Brunch at 9:40 a.m.; please bring a breakfast item to share. At 11:00 a.m. our worship service will Celebrate the Risen Lord!

The Ministry of One Another

Phil Quinn

“If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect, whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.”

—1 Corinthians 12:19–26

Abundant research is showing the impact of the last few years on emotional and mental health, particularly for students and those in their early adult lives. Social rhythms were shattered. Major milestones missed. Many of us are still floundering for a rhythm that feels normal, or for ways to re-engage in community life when we’ve grown used to loneliness and feeling like an outsider.

Some of us struggle to believe that we deserve to matter and belong, imagining that our worth in our community is based on what we are able to offer those around us. Maybe we would feel more secure in our worth if we were funnier, smarter, more knowledgeable, prettier, more skilled. We would feel more secure if there was nothing we needed from the group—if we can show up and give, “be for” others and never need anyone to be for us.

“I don’t want to be a burden.”

“I don’t know why anyone else would want me there.”

In the dozens of coffee talks and afternoon walks I’ve had the privilege of sharing with students and young adults connected to our youth groups, Bible Pride, and Pub Theology this fall and winter, I have heard these fears and longings again and again. Some look in the mirror and see “not enough.” Some look in the mirror and imagine they wouldn’t be missed if they were gone.



And Paul enters the conversation to remind us that every body part is of great worth. And those bits no one wants to see? Paul reminds us just how grateful most of us are for those, too. I’m not sure I would use that analogy to comfort someone questioning how a group sees them, but the message is clear—you do matter and you do belong.

The work of community is hard. Maybe it is better to give than to receive, but the vulnerable, humble work of learning to receive care and love is a spiritual discipline in its own right.

This season, we are leaning into that challenging discipline. The middle and high school youth group is leaning into the disciplines of community, focusing this winter on hospitality, intentional accessibility, healthy boundaries, listening well, and reconciliation. The Hope College students of Bible Pride are engaging in conversation around queer theology this semester, leaning on the gift of community as we open up about the ways scripture and theology have used to harm and marginalize, and explore ways these tools can be reforged into plowshares that foster flourishing. Pub Theology will continue to be a space where adults can bring their stories and their questions, passions and doubts, and grow together in the gift of one another. Pray for us as we do so, or better yet... join us, and let yourself be blessed by your siblings in Christ.

“How Could I Not?”

Bob Luidens



On the four Sundays of March, the Adult Education Ministry will focus on a Gospel text, followed by one or two readings based on memories from Hope Church member Bob Luidens’s pastoral ministry experiences that relate, explicitly or implicitly, to that Sunday’s Gospel text.

Following is an excerpt from one of the readings, to be considered in the context of Luke 22:13-20.

It was springtime some two decades ago, but I still remember it as vividly as if it had happened just last week.

I was paying a pastoral call on a young mother and her two little children. Monica and her daughters were much loved members of my parish and were enduring unbearably trying times. Monica’s beloved husband had passed away very suddenly two years earlier, leaving behind a grieving—and desperately impoverished—threesome, including two preschoolers.

As I had been doing with some regularity, I was stopping in to see how the little family was faring. When I had called a few minutes earlier, Monica had responded in her typically warm way. “Sure. Come on by, Pastor Bob. We’re not going anywhere.”

On arrival, the front door was open. Looking through the screen door into the living room, I saw Monica in the middle of the floor, busy with kids around her. She waved me in. On entry, I stepped gingerly around scattered toys. Monica looked up from diapering a squirming little one, pointing her chin in the direction of the cluttered couch. “Make yourself some space and have a seat, Pastor Bob.” I did so, and then took in the scene before me.

I did a head count, coming up with a number well exceeding three. In addition to Monica and her two little ones, including the squirmer now getting diapered by Mommy, I noted three other preschoolers, all running about with toys in hand, raising a ruckus that would’ve roused the entombed Lazarus. It was a lively scene.

I quickly realized I didn’t recognize the additional three kids, who each gave me passing glances before continuing with their

frolicking play together. I smiled at each, and then looked back at Monica, who was now patting the back side of the newly diapered tyke as she joined the cacophonous fray.

Monica gestured towards the nearby dining room table at one end of the living room. We grabbed seats and took in the living room now turned into a wildly entertaining play room, five youngsters enthralled with each other’s joyous company. Understandably curious, I couldn’t resist asking Monica the obvious question. “Five kids today, Monica? Wow! Who are the lucky little visitors?”

Monica looked smilingly at the rowdy fivesome tearing about the room, and said, “They’re Bonnie’s kids.” When she could tell by the look on my face that Bonnie’s name was ringing no bells, she continued. “Bonnie’s a neighbor friend from around the corner. She cleans houses whenever she gets a call to do so. She got an emergency request at 6:30 this morning, so she called me and asked if I could watch her kiddos for the morning.” She smiled at the somewhat chaotic scene playing out in front of us, and said, “So, here they are.”

That’s when the surprise—no, the shock—unfolded for me.

I said with a silly look on my face, “Win-win for the two of you, I guess.”

“How do you mean, Pastor Bob?” she responded, with a seriousness that made appropriate mockery of my facial expression.

“Well, she gets emergency childcare help, and you generate a little extra income for your household.”

To which Monica said, with a look of mild disbelief at my foolish naiveté, “Oh, I’m not getting paid for watching her children. She has less money than I have.” She paused an instant, during which time the serious nature of the moment soaked into my embarrassed soul. “No, I’m simply doing this to help her out. It’s a gift,” she explained.

I confess I then dimwittedly asked, “How could you do this for free, given your own financial straits, Monica?”

To which that amazing—yes, Christlike—young mother responded by saying, “How could I not?”



A Variety of Gifts

Judith Boogaart

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit... the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

- I Corinthians 12:4, 6b-7

The congregation at Hope Church loves to use the arts to enhance communal worship—whether that be music, dance, poetry, or various art installations. During Lent and Easter, we experience a striking art installation in the sanctuary that shows an interesting interplay between the artist’s vision and the worship environment. Kari Miller shares thoughts about her life as an artist and this work in particular. I started by asking her for a brief bio:

Kari: I was born in 1956 in Mount Pleasant, Michigan, and grew up in Fremont. I saw myself as an artist from a young age and have been a working artist since I was a teenager. I always loved archeology, ancient history, and making art, and attended Aquinas College, receiving my BFA in 1978. After moving to New York City I spent twenty years on the East Coast and studied further with the Smithsonian Institute for restoration and conservation, along with many other institutions and studios in New York City. I have worked with museums, galleries, artists, universities, and private dealers and

collectors. I moved back to Michigan in 1996 and continue working in restoration.

What media do you work in? What do you consider some of your best art?

I am considered a master of materials and work in sculpture, printmaking, paintings, drawings, environmental-site-specific works, along with textiles and drawings. Watercolors are the most immediate medium and most personal. I love worship and found that sharing my paintings with spiritual communities is an important part of my life.

You have said that your art often begins with something you have encountered in scripture. Can you describe a bit about that process?

When I listen to God’s word, I am often drawing. I took Bible study for a number of years and began to make drawings rather than just taking notes. I think this relates to a more visceral experience of the Word.

What prompted the art that we will be using during Lent this year?

The series of gray woven panels were made to create a kind of Tabernacle of the Lord, which symbolizes where the Lord lived prior to Christ’s



life. I wanted a feeling of cloistering, and the series of crosses refer to Jesus' experience. Rachelle Oppenhuizen and I collaborated on this work together—a wonderful sharing of our disciplines and our work together. I then developed the Butterfly panels in response to this first environment created by the tenting of the sanctuary. The hangings are rolls of Pellon interfacing fabric, and the butterflies are hand-painted with acrylic and gilding.

Wasn't this artwork tied to the renovation project at Hope Church a few years back? How does environment influence your art?

We did make these when we restored the church, as the use of the cable system allowed us to use the space above the congregation's heads. I love utilizing all the space. Making works that facilitate deep worship time together is important to respect our place of worship and

challenges our worship family to see beyond. I think God calls us to be creative and reflective.

How do you hope this work will enhance our worship at Hope Church?

I think the tenting experience of the gray panels affects the light, the sound, and the feeling within the space, and then the white butterfly panels are an awakening, a transformation and a reference to the metamorphosis of the butterfly. I believe it refers exactly to the work Christ does within each of us to bring out the new and transformed life that we all long for. The Lent tent and Easter butterfly cross represent some of my earliest creations for Hope Church. I am so grateful for the opportunity to share my artwork within this faith community.

We are grateful to Kari for sharing her artistic and spiritual gifts with our congregation.



Lisa Sharon Harper



Denise Kingdom Grier

Embracing Truth beyond Comfort

Tom Arendshorst, member of the Justice and Reconciliation Ministry

The hope to overcome racism, even if only personally or for a group like our church congregation, reminds me of the ancient Buddhist parable about the six blind men each trying to understand the nature of an elephant after feeling one part of the noble animal: one its trunk, another an ear, another a tusk, another its leathery side, etc. Racism is not one thing and is not simple. Each of us encounters racist feelings in many different ways, and victims of racism bear the barrages of its myriad impacts from a hundred directions.

The wisdom of two Black women, Lisa Sharon Harper and Denise Kingdom Grier, can help us develop as anti-racist allies and actors. Lisa Sharon Harper is a writer and activist, the founder and president of Freedom Road and author of *Fortune*, *The Very Good Gospel*, and other books. The Reverend Dr. Denise Kingdom Grier is a teacher and poet who has committed her life to proclaiming the gospel of peace and justice. She was for twelve years the lead pastor at Maple Avenue Ministries in Holland.

Harper describes three steps to racial repair: truth-telling, reparation, and forgiveness. Truth-telling is open honesty, without evasion or sugar-coating. It's also confronting the fullness of history, dealing with the failures along with the glories. And truth-telling is exchanging stories, creating interpersonal bridges through mutual sharing. Reparation is fixing what's

broken, making good on debts, compensating for loss. Reparation is atonement for guilt, the substance that makes apology real, the payment that restores justice. Forgiveness is the third step, following truth-telling and reparation. Forgiveness does not undo history and cannot take the place of reparation, but creates the opportunity for reborn connection, for new trust and fairness in relationship, for redemption.

Truth-telling, reparation, and forgiveness are necessary for inter-racial healing. Our American anti-Black racism is built on centuries of terrorizing, race-based slavery and subsequent legal and economic subjugation. Truth-telling means embracing the realities and effects of this history—interpersonally, educationally, and at societal levels. Reparations, another elephant in the room, means finding ways, as a White-dominated society that has benefited from our history of racial injustice, to compensate the victims of anti-black racism for their generations of systemic economic deprivation. The third step, forgiveness, can provide a new platform for redeemed relationship. Truth-telling and reparation can create new space for Black forgiveness—and White forgiveness as well.

Kingdom Grier presents a complementary three-step process for becoming an interracial bridge and dismantling racism: rehearsing, remembering, and re-minding. Her ICor13 Project

intends to counteract the debilitating effects of the American church's complicity in 400 years of failure to love Black people, and is a healing space for Black people to locate sources, practices, and opportunities to heal the wounds of racial trauma. Kingdom Grier's ministry seeks to engage allies, non-Black people who are aware of racial injustice and seek understanding, to honestly examine their historical, unloving relationship with Black people and actively enter the work for racial equity.

In this context "rehearsing" is similar to "truth-telling;" it is unflinching confrontation with the unloving practices of a church, an institution, or an individual in order to open the potential for repentance. "Re-membering" is about bringing Black people, Black thought, and Black culture into membership with non-Blacks in the body of Christ, by acknowledging Black dis-memberment and recognizing the church's need to engage Black people in a new way. "Re-minding" aims to contribute to a new mind or a new way of thinking and acting toward Black people based on new information.

The issues and horrors of racism are overwhelmingly complex, born long before we were born and driven forward by other people and institutions. We have been immersed in the ruinous effects and rotten norms of American racism all our lives, and have indirectly benefited from Black people's subjugation. Like the blind men feeling the elephant, we each perceive racism from our own unique experiences and viewpoints.

Can we, the people of Hope Church, aspire to be bridges who unite people across the American chasm of racial dis-memberment and racist inequities, all compounded over centuries and cemented into our American caste system? Can we hope to embrace truth beyond our own comfort, to become agents of repentance and reparation both within and beyond our church boundaries, and to be missionaries of racial healing in our society?

Are we the people to attempt these challenges? Can we do this?

The Justice & Reconciliation Ministry, inspired by the people of Hope Church and empowered by the Consistory to engage these racial justice challenges, believes that together the Hope Church community can. Where and how could we begin? Explore with us the ways that Hope Church has been and can continue to be a faith community embracing racial justice as a core commitment of our faith calling.

Extracted from the Justice and Peace Ministry's draft statement on Anti-Racism Commitment and Policy, January 2023

The Shalom of Beloved Community

Shalom of Beloved Community,
good news of abundant life,
God's gifts for creation's full unity
brought near in this church by Christ.

We recognize how we have profited
through racism on our way:
complicit in silent acceptance of
the structures of racial hate.

To challenge behaviors and attitudes,
to call church and state to change,
confronting the sin of racism,
is mission that isn't strange.

We'll seek out and listen to voices of
the people whom we've ignored.
We'll seek to discern their guidance as
we learn how to be transformed.

In settings both sacred and secular
we'll join with the ones who lead,
as partners for justice and leading to
Beloved Community.

*David Alexander, 16th January,
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Jane R Dickie celebrates a local marriage with friend Mazabata Molete, former Hope college exchange student

The Unconscious Devil Within

Jane R. Dickie



Thirty-three years ago, in 1989, Larry and I were on sabbatical in South Africa. Apartheid was in its strongest, most deadly final throes, and Nelson Mandela was still in prison. I wrote the following article for the RCA magazine, The Church Herald. I don't think I could have anticipated that this many years later we would have people in this country proclaiming themselves Nazis and marching through American cities chanting anti-Semitic and racist phrases. That white nationalists would go to churches and malls to hunt down Black folks. Nor would I have imagined that in Ottawa County there would be attempts to censor accurate portrayals of America's racist past and terminate enlightened attempts to educate for greater inclusion – calling such attempts “woke” (which only means to be awake to the realities of people around us and sensitive to their cries for justice). I realize that there is a huge amount of work to do in our cities, in our state, in our country, and perhaps especially in our institutions, including the church. With that reflection I share an edited version of what I wrote all those decades ago.

Henry Strydom knew how to use a gun. He had been a police officer for five years. One day, he coolly walked into a busy shopping area in Pretoria, South Africa, and began shooting. People ran screaming. He reloaded

and continued his hunt. Within 15 minutes he had shot 23 Black men and women. When the white police officers finally arrived, he handed them his gun and said “I’m sorry to trouble you officers. I would never shoot a white man.”

Henry was a good boy, very respectful. He never smoked or drank and every Sunday he attended the Dutch Reformed Church where his father was an elder. He was also a racist, a member of the AWB, the South African equivalent of the Ku Klux Klan and the Nazi party combined.

As North Americans we point to such events as the convulsions of a racist society while distancing our countries and ourselves from such behavior.

We reason I'm not a member of the Nazi party or the clan. I deplore the actions of such organizations. Thank you, God, for not making me like those racists. Thank you that my nation and my church have rid themselves of racism sanctioned by law and tradition.

But is the apartheid society that produces a Strydom that different from our own? Chicago, for example, is still 80-percent segregated. In our towns and cities, we know where the minorities live and for most of us it is not where we live. Our churches, schools, and other institutions reflect this separation. We still confront radical groups that burn crosses, harass, and even kill for racial reasons.

Our concerns with our immediate social environment detach us from those outside of it or being systemically excluded. When asked if racism is an issue in our schools or churches, we may respond the way one of my students at Hope College responded: "We have no racism problem here, there are so few Blacks." The understanding is that to be a racist requires the presence of people of color; that racism is a Black or Hispanic problem.

There was a time when I believed that because I personally didn't light flaming crosses on lawns and didn't feel racial hatred, racism had nothing to do with me. In fact, the presence of blatant racist actions around me gave me a smugness about my own purity. I could distance myself from racism because, as an individual, I didn't believe that "white is right"

or that Blacks were genetically inferior. I didn't use racial slurs, nor did I disapprove of busing children to equalize educational experiences.

What I failed to understand was that racism involved more than conscious individual attitudes and behavior. Racism can be unconscious, and it can involve institutions as well as individuals.

I now see that racism is a white problem and that it runs deeply in the North American psyche. It influences our lives by maintaining privilege and power for the few and denying it to many others. Racism affects whites as well as people of color and it exists even if there are no Blacks around. It exists in our myths and fears, in our institutions, and in our hearts. Like it or not, we participate in it.

I'm speaking out on white responsibility for racism because I firmly believe that as white Christians we need to recognize racism in ourselves and to commit ourselves to combat it. Rather than judging others, we must first "remove the beam from our own eye," as Christ commands us. Confronting racism means confronting the demonic.

Racism and Prejudice

First, we need to understand the difference between racism and prejudice. Prejudice is an unfavorable opinion, formed beforehand or without knowledge, thought, or reason. It is unreasonable feelings, opinions, or attitudes, especially of a hostile nature, directed against a social, religious, or national group. It is a pre-judgment.

Racism is a belief that human races have distinctive characteristics that determine their respective cultures, usually involving the idea that one's own race is superior and has the right to rule others. It is the policy of enforcing such essential rights in a system of government and society based upon those assumed rights.

Prejudice and racism are different: racism is prejudice plus power. In order to see if racism exists, one must look at who has the power to control government and society. Who has

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the power in the United States? Whites. Only whites, by virtue of their control of government, business, the church, etc., have the power to be racist—to determine the rules of the game. Given that power structure, people of color may be prejudiced but they cannot be racist.

Unconscious Institutional Racism

Whites control the institutions of this country: government, judiciary, business, church, education. Whites hold power disproportionately to their numbers. But do institutions act in racist ways?

Institutions such as the Reformed Church or our RCA colleges do not formulate policy that is intentionally unfair; in fact, our intention is God's justice. Yet our attitudes and actions may unconsciously perpetuate white racism and superiority. It is then that racism creeps in.

Racism creeps in when we assume that minority staff can meet only the needs of minority people, but that white staff can meet the needs of everyone. Thus, our Black and Hispanic seminary students go primarily to Black and Hispanic congregations. How many minority ministers are now serving predominantly white congregations in the Reformed Church? It seems that few congregations recognize that these gifted people of God could serve whites too.

Similarly, our colleges hire minority recruiters and deans for minority affairs, yet we assume that white recruiters can go to all schools and white deans of students or counselors can counsel all students. Assigning minority staff to designated minority posts limits their opportunities for advancement, while at the same time assigning whites to any posts opens their opportunities.

Racism creeps in when institutions consider only white experiences and needs in developing products, programs, or services. When churches consider how a program will be received and only imagine a white congregation, or when Sunday schools portray Jesus as blonde and blue-eyed,

it is racism. When schools and colleges teach world literature that is really white European or American literature or history that excludes Black or Hispanic or Native American perspectives, it is racism. When businesses create products for white consumers and do not label them so as in the "flesh colored bandage" it is racism.

None of this is conscious. It occurs at an institutional level, but it affects us all in damaging ways. As members of institutions, we need to work to bring unconscious racism into our awareness. Only then can we combat white privilege.

Unconscious Individual Attitudes

Often the sins of institutions seem distant from our responsibility. After all, institutions are groups of people and responsibility is diffuse. Therefore, we must recognize that racism can function at an unconscious individual level as well in attitudes and behavior. My experience with people in the church is that for the most part we think of ourselves as fair. It is precisely because we want to act in just ways that we resist recognizing our own complicity in injustice. Yet some dearly held beliefs may contribute to the perpetuation of racism in our churches and in ourselves.

Racism creeps in when we believe that the United States is a melting pot. The melting pot view says that all Americans become one after having been here long enough, but which one do we become? When white norms, values, and perspectives are considered American, other views take on an alien air. We are saying, we

can all be united if you become just like us. In our white churches I often hear, "I don't know why Blacks or Hispanics, or Native Americans or Asian Americans don't join our church. We would welcome them." But notice that we are not willing to change or be changed. They must become as we are in music, dance, clothing, food, and prayer.

Racism creeps in when we deny racism. "I don't see black people; I don't see color. People are people." The good intention is obvious, but does this mean at an unconscious level that we

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The inequitable of housing. When racist systems rob children of their future.

don't see a heritage or culture separate from the dominant white one? That we don't see the beauty of rich brown skin or curly dark hair? I remember being asked at a picnic whether I had seen Maureen. "Who is she," I asked. "She's a tall woman, wearing a blue dress. She's a singer. She was here just a while ago." The description didn't ring a bell. Later I met Maureen. She was the only Black woman at the picnic. My friend avoided identifying her as a Black woman, not because she didn't notice, but because she thought it rude to mention that she was Black.

To deny seeing one's face is to deny one part of who we are. We need to see individual people with all their facets—color, culture, heritage. It is all part of the complexity of being human.

To deny seeing African Americans or Asian Americans is to deny their heritages and at an unconscious level to say, all I see is white.

Racism creeps in when we believe that in the United States all are treated equally. This denies white privilege, which is still very real. It may be illegal to discriminate in jobs or housing, but a recent study has shown that it is still very common. Being born white in this country increases the probability of better housing, better schooling, better jobs and income, and better medical care.

The reality belies the ideal. A Black friend of mine considered moving into a small community near us but changed her mind when she

heard about the typical racist comments of children in the school. She did not want to subject her children to such harassment. Her housing choices and her children's schooling choices were restricted by racism.

Why Combat Racism?

White privilege is so embedded in North American culture and institutions that to do nothing is to support it. It seems to me that as Christians we are called to combat the powers and principalities that damage our lives and the lives of our neighbors.

Racism robs whites of an honest integration with the world in which we are only one-fifth of the population. It robs us of the appreciation of sources of culture beyond Western tradition and understanding. We have been mis-educated and misled into what Reinhold Niebuhr identifies as the most basic sin, pride. Whites have developed a false sense of superiority which makes us believe that we deserve all the privileges and advantages that come our way and which blinds us to the injustices of the system.

Black students describe their discomfort when shopping. As they walked through the shops of Holland, Michigan, sales personnel hover over them. They are not allowed to browse comfortably like white shoppers.

In class a Black college student found herself ignored until issues concerning race arose. Then the professor would turn to her and say, "what do Blacks think?" She felt isolated and unprepared to respond.

A male student who was a gifted writer and athlete found he had lots of friends but no dates. The white women that he knew said, "My parents wouldn't allow me to date a Black man."

Employers often look for people they know, people recommended by friends, or people they think they would feel comfortable with. Because more whites are in positions of power, unconscious preferential treatment for whites

results. Even if a Black candidate made it to the final interviews, whites who are hiring may prefer a white candidate because they feel more comfortable with him or her.

To say that all people are treated the same in our country is to soothe our own conscience and to allow the devil and racism to creep into our unconscious attitudes.

Often our unconscious behavior supports white privilege and undermines our Christian love for all God's people. These actions are not blatant, their intent is not to do harm, but the effect perpetuates a system of injustice.

Racism creeps in when we tell and laugh at racist jokes. I remember sitting at a family gathering. One uncle told a joke that demeaned Blacks. Many laughed. I felt uncomfortable, but rather than confronting him, I smiled. No doubt the devil smile too.

Racism creeps in when we conduct business with companies that discriminate. Who repairs our church buildings? Who constructs our sidewalks and parking lots? What accountants and lawyers do we hire? Do we check to be sure these are equal opportunity employers? Do we ask how many minority employees they have and in what capacities? We should. To fail to do so is to support white privilege.

Racism creeps in when we use pro-white, anti-Black language. What do we mean when we say our choice is black and white? Are we unconsciously equating white with good and black with evil? I read the CS Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia several times to my children. They are moral stories that I love. However, after the second reading, I noticed how often Lewis equates evil with people of color. Our first daughter heard it all. From then on we edited the language for our five-year-old and use the language with a critique of the implicit racism for the 11-year-old.

These few examples illustrate the point that racism need not be intentional or conscious, but

The first step is to acknowledge that we are racist. Then prayerfully and humbly we must learn to act against white privilege.



Desmond Tutu doing the work of restorative justice with the Truth & Reconciliation Commission.

through unconscious attitudes and behaviors, we perpetuate the injustice of white privilege.

We must combat racism because it is a lie, and it is a sin. Racism robs us of seeing God in all creation, in all people. It prevents us from doing God's will on earth. Does the good news proclaim that we are all one in Christ? Racism prevents us from really knowing our neighbors and from loving that person it prevents our oneness in Christ.

The task will not be easy. The enemy is most often acting unconsciously not only in individuals and institutions around us but in our own unconscious attitudes and behavior.

The first step is to acknowledge that we are racist. Then prayerfully and humbly we must learn to act against white privilege. We cannot do it alone. In a Christian community, we must lovingly criticize one another. We must be ready to create structures which challenge unconscious racist actions and behavior.

We can do this through such practices as asking all contracted services about their employment practices; actively seeking people of color for

ministerial and other staff positions; searching for curriculum materials that are multicultural and anti-racist; sending staff for anti-racism training; conducting workshops and seminars and racism in our businesses and churches; and reading books written by people of color. We can set up committees of concerned people to think of other ways to combat racism: committees whose task is to monitor policy and practice within our institutions.

Finally, and most importantly, we can pray for God's guidance. For the love of God for the love of our neighbor let us continue the struggle against racism.

The analysis of structural, conscious, and unconscious institutional racism and individual racism is based on the work of Judith Katz (White Awareness: Handbook for Antiracism Training, University of Oklahoma Press).



Hope Church Responds to RCA Restructuring

Larry Schuyler, chair of the Futures Task Force



The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) appointed a team of a dozen people to study and propose a new organizational

structure for the RCA because of the recent departure of many congregations from the RCA. The team, called the RCA Restructuring Team, has been at work throughout 2022 and in October issued its latest report to the denomination, which you can read at the [RCA website](#).

The report identified four biblical mandates that the Restructuring Team said they will follow as they shape the future structure. When the Hope Church leaders (as well as others around the denomination) read this report, it was readily clear that other significant biblical mandates were omitted. Specifically for our congregation, the biblical mandate that guides Hope Church was not included. The mandate, found in Micah 6:6-8, is seen every week on Hope Church communication pieces: Do Justice, Love Kindness, Walk Humbly with your God.

The Consistory has sent the following letter to the RCA Restructuring Team and shares this letter with the congregation to help all of us be informed about the ongoing work of the Restructuring Team and our church's continued attentiveness to our denomination.

January 5, 2023

The Consistory of Hope Church reviewed the recent Fall 2022 Report distributed by the RCA Restructuring Team (RT). We thank the team for your ongoing work. We recognize that a thorough restructure plan takes time to develop, and we commend you for your enduring dedication to offer a proposed design that can work well for our denomination. We understand that the RT is seeking feedback on its fall report.

We must share with you that we found the list of four mandates for the RCA to be incomplete. One Biblical mandate that is significant to Hope Church, the mandate that is found on Hope Church masthead and stated in our weekly bulletin, is lifted from Micah 6:6-8 "With what shall I come before the Lord and bow myself

before my God on high? ...He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." We were not able to discern the parameters of this mandate—this requirement from God—to be within the four mandates the RT shared in its Fall 2022 Report. We believe this mandate should be stated as clearly as the other four cited mandates.

In Luke 4, Jesus having read the scripture from Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor," then said that this scripture is "being fulfilled in your hearing." It states his mandate. Jesus' mandate reflects the Micah 6:8 directive. As the body of Christ, the church is responsible to carry on this proclamation of good news; which is to say that the gospel going forth from the Body of Christ is to be the message of justice in action which the poor, those with ableism challenges, and those who are bullied and received unfair treatment need to experience from the Church as well as one of salvation. "What is required of you?" asked the prophet, "but to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God." As the Hope Church Consistory, we believe that there is a clear, unequivocal mandate for the Reformed Church in America to be committed to the role of justice and the treatment of all people with kindness and acceptance. We advocate for the Micah 6:8 mandate to be added to the other four already identified mandates.

As far as other possible mandates? What about the directives to be "salt of the earth" and "light to the world" that our ordination liturgies highlight as mandates? We wonder if the words of our litanies and liturgies have been considered and therefore humbly commend them to you also for consideration as you do your work.

Thank you for receiving our critique and suggestions.

May the Lord be with you.

(Approved by the Consistory on December 12, 2022; submitted dated January 5, 2023)

All In All: A Lot to Think About

Peter Boogaart – Creation Care Ministry

Picture an infinity loop,
one circuit
crossing over
and
starting the next.
Then
back over again,
retreading the first.
Motion
without ending.



Or,
better yet,
be
in motion.
Pick up a pencil.
Draw
one loop
crossing over another.
Meaning
without words.

In his analysis of Mark's gospel, theologian Ched Myers represents the literary structure as an infinity loop. One story sequence follows Jesus and disciples through Galilee. The second sequence travels with them to Jerusalem. Returning to the point of intersection, post crucifixion, the disciples are told that Jesus has gone before them into Galilee.

What are today's disciples to make of the Gospel? Dietrich Bonhoeffer suggests that Jesus is only known in following.

Disciples aren't asked to believe, to join, even to organize—just to follow. Disciples are invited to walk away from every life affirming instinct they have—mother/father, vocation, and state. Following is the heartbeat that circulates life.

At the intersection of the two loops is the story of blind Bartimaeus. Well and good that Bartimaeus was healed. That's not why Mark tells the story. Mark is looking you straight in the eye and asking: "Can you see it? You're living in the presence of God. Are you going to follow? Or, are you blind?"

Myers visualizes the story sequencing in each loop as mirror images. On paper, the plotting looks like butterfly wings. Each wing distinctly itself—each clearly the other. Beyond the words themselves is an embedded image of nature, of the Creator. Knowledge and Sophia are embodied in the most vulnerable and most delicate.

Steven Chase in *Nature as Spiritual Practice*, calls us back to the butterfly; to the one thing that is most fundamentally true—God is known in being embodied. In Jesus, yes. In nature, yes. What happens to Jesus happens to God. What happens to nature, happens to God.

It is reported that in the ancient world mining was forbidden. Because the earth was the body of God, wounding the earth was wounding God. The Earth is not a product of God. Earth is the embodiment of God and as such, does what God does—absorbing

our damage and abuse while steadfastly returning life.

In her reflections, climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe takes note of humanity's brilliance and says "I wouldn't want to give it up. Coal and oil have improved our lives. But we can't go on like this." Climate scientists know that the trajectory of our way of living isn't leading to life; it's leading to death. Those with eyes to see are saying: "Stop. Turn around. You're going the wrong way."

Chase reflects too on "way of living." Nature is witness to a way of living. A way in which all things work together for good. A way in which death and damage are absorbed, reprocessed, and returned again as life. Disciples are called to a way of living.

In God's grace we are called to follow. Each tour of the infinity loop drops another scale from our eyes and we see God more clearly. Christ is not an outlier; not the ultimate bondsman for fines and penalties. The brilliance of our own achievements blinds us to what was more obvious to the ancients: God is all and in all.

Creation Care is not a subset of Christian tasks. Caring for creation is caring for God. And caring for God is caring for creation.

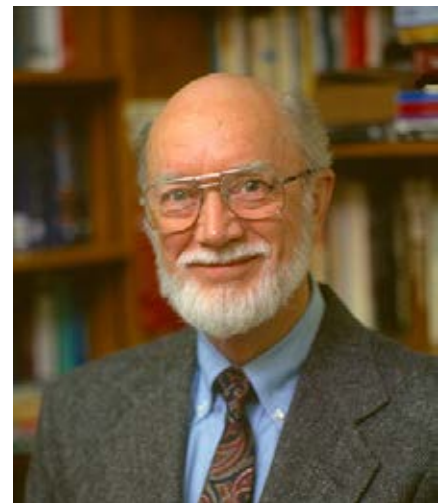


Poetry Corner

Hosted by Rhonda Edgington

Many of you know that a long-time supporter of “Poetry Corner” died this past year. Francis Fike was, among many other things, Professor of English at Hope College (1968-1998) and Poetry Editor for the *Reformed Journal* (2005-2010). Randy and I often turned to him for last-minute help when a *Salt & Light* deadline was looming, and he, a frequent contributor, was always ready with a suggestion. I’d asked him this past summer if he’d like to take over the in-person Poetry Corner (displayed in the Gathering Area near the office) and enjoyed reading his well-chosen selections there. While Francis had many opinions about poetry (he once gently took me to task for relegating poetry to the so-called-corner!), I know he would read whatever Randy and I printed, even if it wasn’t to his taste, and often commented on poems he appreciated. He collected poems for me to read and consider, often from his years as poetry editor (always metered, of course), and would include with them a hand-written note, in his beautiful handwriting. This issues’ column is a tribute to Fran (as he was known) and his poetry, with many thanks and appreciation for a fellow-lover of the written word.

If you heard or read the beautiful tribute by his son Matthew, you’ll remember he referred to Fran’s 1997 book *After the Serpent’s Word* as his best. Matthew chose from that collection what he called his father’s best poem, the serious and intense “Lazarus.” I want to share with you here a lighter side of Francis, from the same collection, pondering the place of a poet in the world.



Francis Fike

Roofers

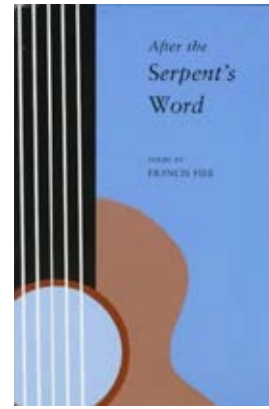
The sound of hammers overhead
(Two roofers at their skillful trade)
Tells me I need no longer dread
Damage by errant water made.
Their rhythms are insistent, steady.
Accurate eye and supple hand
Soon will have the roof at ready
For water that it must withstand.
Each shingle, like a fish's scale,
Must overlap the one beneath
And do it so that every nail
Is covered by a single-sheath.

Less noisy in my work below,
I sit with pen and dictionary,
Making ideas ebb and flow,
Causing rhymes to repeat and vary.
They see me sitting in my chair.
Do they wonder why I do not work
High in the sweet and open air
Far from the room in which I lurk?
Or wonder if I work at all?
Or do they feel a slight disdain,
As they risk sunburn, cramp, and fall,
To earn their cash at cost of pain?

Theirs is a hard, demanding skill
Learned through years' repeated acts,
Acquired by patient force of will
And strict attention to the facts.
They've served their long apprenticeship
With shingle, hammer, tar, and nail,
Learned how to kneel, how not to slip,
To build a roof that will not fail.
I haven't told them, but I see
In what they do, a parallel:
They are endeavoring, like me,
To practice art, and do it well.

No matter that my work is here,
Indoors and quiet, underplayed,
A work of words, or mind and ear-
Never, like theirs to be displayed
On high for everyone to see-
Yet durable, useful, dignified
By patient will and industry,
By time exploited and defied.
Although there is no guarantee
That roof and poem will abide
Into a time we will not see,
Poet and roofer are allied.

- Francis Fike



*Having also just recently learned
that he was an avid guitar player,
I found this poem especially apt.*

To His Guitar

In you, laid in the case, I see
An image of a mortal me
Whom someday friends will lay
Silent into a box, and pray.
And I pray now;
 Lord, on that day,
Lift me from darkness: on me play
Your music of eternity.

- Francis Fike



Under the Woodpile

Mary Van Andel

The menagerie on my family's small farm included a Border Collie. Lady took her work seriously—keeping track of my dad and me. One warm spring day, my dad and I set out to plow a field. While Dad drove the tractor, I perched on the plow seat. As we neared the end of each row, my job was to pull a rope that lifted the plow. Usually Lady trotted along beside me, but that day she got in the furrow, between the back of the tractor and the merciless blade of the plow. Her hind leg was nearly torn off.

Lady wouldn't let us carry her. Instead, she dragged herself back toward the barn, where she claimed shelter and shade under a stack of lumber raised on logs to about 10 inches off the ground. Since I was the youngest child, it was my job to crawl under the pile, pushing bowls of food and water far enough for Lady to reach them, but not near enough to distress her. Months later, when she was ready, Lady came out from under the woodpile. Like Jacob, she limped for the rest of her life, and she remembered she had been remembered and cared for while under the woodpile. In the context of a congregation, it seems a good bit of loving one another involves bringing and receiving food and water, literally and figuratively, during the woodpile times.

In the life of any congregation, there are always people under the woodpile. Sometimes, we ourselves are under the woodpile. Some wounds are readily recognized—deaths, life-threatening injuries or illnesses, natural disasters. But often, the injuries are invisible, kept hidden to avoid the added pain of shame and stigma: job losses, loneliness, addiction, strained family relationships, abuses, the infirmities of advanced age, mental illness, violence—circumstances

that could overtake any of us. Always, the less obvious the wound, the more discreetly care must be given by the few who see it.

When our loved one dies, a hard diagnosis is received, we are downsized, our spouse walks out, it can feel as if the world stops rotating on its axis. Even if we wonder if it's all a bad dream, nothing else matters. We drag ourselves toward shelter and shade under our woodpiles.

In the life of a congregation, pastors and closest friends usually bring the first water. As emissaries of the community, they keep vigil; they stay, they listen, maybe offering some practical direction. Most essentially, their presence reminds us that the community and God recognize a great loss has occurred, that it is real, that the bereaved will be remembered by both the community and God. In the event of a death, the work of the larger community soon becomes obvious and public. Through our religious rites, we acknowledge that one of our own has died, that this person's death is also a loss to the community, that our griefs will be borne neither alone nor without hope. We share food, stories, and laughter. One by one, and over time, gentle acts make the world outside the woodpile safe enough to venture out.

Each of us brings different gifts to the care of those under the woodpile. Some will build the woodpile, never imagining it to be more than a woodpile. Some will pump water while others will push bowls in just far enough. This is the ministry of remembering, accompanying, attending. However imperfectly, it's what we do for one another in the church.