



CONNECTIONS

OAK HILLS CHURCH

Spring 2015

ESL Plus!

By Carl Leep

Corinne Bosch hosts an extension of ESL on Friday mornings in her home where trust is built, relationships are deepened and the gospel explored through open honest dialog and encouraging times of prayer. Jennifer Atsma, Elyna Ross, Susan Tibbs and Evelyn VanderVeen have each participated on occasion and have helped refer others to the group. This ministry started 2 years ago after the ESL class wanted to continue through the summer. They meet



The first summer group

on whatever day works for the group, presently Fridays, and continue year round touching the lives of a dozen people. The gathering included people from China, Korea, Mexico and Indonesia. This year Corinne meets with one Chinese woman who had no knowledge of the Bible and a Korean man, who studies city government at PSU, and his wife; their child attends Pre-K at Oak Hills Church.

Over two years they have inductively studied Acts, Mark, Ruth, the Parables and are now beginning John. The hospitality shared in the group among different cultures reflects the beauty of the body of Christ and serves as a support system for daily challenges. One woman's husband had a liver transplant last year. Others go back to their home country to help ailing family members. Always they long to return to the group that welcomes them back. Two women will leave this June to return to their country. This pattern has repeated several times so the gospel experience is literally going around the world.

Corinne is a quiet evangelist who describes her experience as "so of the Spirit of God intervening in my life." Responsive to the Spirit's lead, she provides a gospel-shaped welcome of hospitality that God is using to bring people closer to Jesus and deepening relationships with the Lord and his people.

The Story Behind the New Hymnals

By Marilyn Duistermars

We hope you have taken time to look through the new hymnal *Lift Up Your Hearts* and book of Christian creeds *Our Faith* to think about the meaning of our faith and traditions as well as the changes that occur over time. Replacement of the *Psalter Hymnal* (grey) and *Hymns for the Family of God* (red) was an ongoing study of the Worship Committee for five years. We believe the pew Bibles, hymnals, and creeds reflect and confirm us as a Christ centered church.

Discussion began as a result of assessing the worsening condition of both hymnals. We realized there was not enough of either hymnal for steady use and Praise and Worship team members noted that the words and music

were not always consistent between hymnals. These differences added work for both bulletin and sound system volunteers. The 2013 Worship Symposium at Calvin College introduced the newly published *Lift Up Your Hearts* and Pastor Carl was gifted with a copy that he shared with us. As a committee we outlined the process necessary to implement such a significant change.

Fall of 2013 we ordered 12 copies and gave each Praise and Worship planner and each pianist a copy to use, looking at what was currently used, where the hymnals overlapped, and how each might use in worship. We received positive feedback from them. February of 2014

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Pastor's Ponderings

Pastor Carl Leep

"I've been particularly sensitive lately when I ask you or you ask me: "How are you doing?" Asked casually (or not), how honest can you or I be with a brief response? After polite banter, I'm wondering if a more appropriate question might be: "How are we doing?" I'm not referring to the "royal we" but to the "communal we." Then the follow-up question becomes: "How can we pray for you/us?" Immersion in the Psalms during our worship times continues to shape us.

We are experiencing these psalm prayer gems like those who first used them ... in worship as a community trusting God and following Jesus. Space in worship for praying as a community rescues us from mere personal needs and narrow biases when speaking to God. Jesus affirmed this psalm praying practice when he said: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am with them." Matthew 18:20 We are embracing psalm praying in worship so we can be shaped into a community growing in and through praying together.

Perhaps you are wondering who gets to pick the psalms that we use in worship each week. The answer removes anyone's selfish angle from such inquiry. No, it's not the pastor or the worship leader or even the pastoral elders. This body of collected prayers we receive as the Psalms makes that choice. So if you come suggesting your favorite psalm worship leaders would likely decline. God's Word speaks in our worship and even our answer to God comes provided through the prayers of his own words, the Psalms. Gratefully we receive our prayer language.

So regardless of how you and I are feeling on any day, the Psalms engage us in our community whose feelings are all drawn up into our praying. Praying the Psalms we are rescued from the control of our emotions and the small world of our pride. Eugene Peterson observes: "Left to ourselves, we are never more selfish than when we pray." Praying in communal worship pulls us out of self-concern into the exhilarating openness to see and

participate in what God is doing! Here we join in pulses of God's grace given and received, love poured out and filling us up.

How are the Psalms in worship stimulating your practice of praying? What stirs your soul to see God at work in ways you forgot or for which you need encouragement? To this we must return!

These days I see trees as pictures of our spiritual stature because Psalm 1 helps me imagine how God is building his Word into our lives like he grows trees. You experience through Psalm 2 a renewed sense of security in the sovereign rule of God in Jesus over chaotic, terrorizing events world-wide. Suddenly we realize that in praying Psalm 10 our powerless efforts to help victims of violence still rouses God's strong arm to hold the helpless and break the stranglehold of terror.

So how are we doing? Praying together with the Psalms in worship, we are discovering all is well with our souls in vibrant conversation with our faithful God. So we keep praying together.



Ladies' Fellowship Update

By Kim Culver

Our next **Ladies Fellowship** will be on Sunday April 19th following church in the Fireside Room. Please bring snacks or brunch items if you wish. We can share how our "star gifts" are impacting our lives, how we celebrated Resurrection Day, and all kinds of things. It is a time to fellowship and sharing. Also if you have a craft you would like to share, please do so. Just let Kim Culver or Sharry Kragt know if you need any special set up for it.

A Prayer For Today

This is the beginning of a new day. God has given me this day to use as I will. I can waste it – or use it for good, but what I do today is important, because I am exchanging a day of my life for it! When tomorrow comes, this day will be gone forever, leaving in its place something that I have traded for it. I want it to be gain, and not loss; good, and not evil; success, and not failure; in order that I shall not regret the price I have paid for it. (Anonymous)

When we think about our life and how we use it, is our focus on living it for God's glory? Do we think about the legacy we are creating during our life and will leave behind when we leave this world to join Christ in Heaven? When people see us, do they see Jesus actively at work in our lives through His Holy Spirit?

Satan would love to distract us from focusing our lives on Christ. So to that end, I ask you to read Ephesians 6:10-18. God gave us the Holy Spirit to strengthen us and enable us to persevere to the end through whatever life or God or Satan may throw our way. As stated throughout the whole Bible, several things are clear. God is all powerful; nothing is impossible for Him. He is in control. He is our provider. He is our strength and our shield.



So was you wake each morning, give thanks to God for our restoration through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and think on Isaiah 6:8. May your life bring God glory this day and every day.

Ministry Team Updates

As ministry teams are leading and facilitating our church family, here are some highlights of areas they are working on. Some aspects have been completed while others are partially accomplished. We trust that what you read in the following descriptions will inspire you to praise God for all those involved and for ministry that's changing people's lives. Use this opportunity to pray through your ministries that God would bless all of these together with fruit of growing people who glorify our God.

Worship

We will be assessing our Children's Ministry this spring. We ask for prayers for leadership and what may come for Fall of 2015.

The Praise and Worship members have implemented songs from the new hymnal, *Lift Up Your Hearts*, as well as readings from *Our Faith* books. We pray that our worship is enriched by both of these new resources.

Candy Weber will be taking a year off from playing the piano for worship. Thanks for Candy's faithful service in worship planning and playing piano. We will be researching other pianists to fill in one week a month in her absence.

Prayer

While we always pray in a variety of ways in public worship, this season we are engaged in a more disciple practice of praying using the Psalms. Each week worship planners incorporate a new psalm in a way that highlights its prayer focus: our call to worship, the praise section, the confession time, the pastoral prayer, the sermon and the songs. As we discover new insights, the biblical prayer book is teaching us how to pray in a dynamic relationship with God, deepening our trust and our honesty with him. We're learning that Jesus prays the Psalms and leads us in this way of praying.

The adult education class "Get Ready To Pray" also served as an introduction to our prayer series in Lent. These sermon focus on The Psalms of Ascent (prayed by worshipers going to Jerusalem) as we journey with Jesus going to Jerusalem and the cross in obedient suffering for us.

To encourage each other in praying you, your family or small group can use the weekly prayer list in our bulletin

Ministry Team Updates *continued*

to pray for our church family and ministries. We recommend the prayer resource *Seeking God's Face* to stimulate your practice of prayer as an individual or family. It's available at FaithAliveresources.org.

Outreach

Tuesday morning ESL classes lead by Jennifer Atsma, Corrine Bosch and Evelyn VanderVeen provide a setting for building relationships around the love of Jesus. The good news of Jesus and his Word feed the conversations about everyday challenges in language and living. Stories of God's faithful relationships with people highlight the reason for trusting in Jesus.

Corinne Bosch hosts an extension of ESL with several of the women on Friday morning's in her home where trust is built, relationships are deepened and the gospel explored through open honest dialog and encouraging times of prayer.

Missionary Point Person - For more than eleven years Nan VanDyke has served OHC and missionary Minnie Hill with personal support and encouragement, financial accounting and complex service projects that advance Minnie's ministry to students & churches in the Philippines. Minnie deeply appreciates Nan's attention to detail, patient perseverance and willing spirit. OHC joins her in applauding her service for God's glory! Beginning January Kim Culver transitioned into this Point Person position. Thanks for two generous people who serve with joy and make better ministry possible locally and across the seas.

Sunday School Education

Our children are working hard to memorize the books of the Bible. Students would like to learn how their parents and other adults learned these Bible books by memory. Kids are hoping to share what they learned with our church family. So don't be surprised if one of these children ask you for your secret to memorization! Since teachers are inviting adults to visit their class once a month, you could share your memory secret as their guest some Sunday. Please talk with teachers Shelly Bosch, Dan and Dana Shuff or helper Camille Andre.

Adult Education

Sunday morning's adult education classes are arranged by Donny Cameron and Kim Culver.

They endeavor to advance two main goals in this ministry:

1. Develop and offer teachings on the essentials of the reformed faith, and its applications to today's life. This is an opportunity to disciple and be disciple in our faith community.
2. Arrange opportunities for willing members to discover, use, and grow their teaching gifts in the adult ed., home group, and youth arenas of ministry. We want to develop teaching leaders.

The bulk of the classes focus on the reformed faith expressed through the Heidelberg Catechism. Weekly dialogs explore how to apply the teachings of Scripture expressed in the catechism. Lively discussions provide a stimulating group for deepening our understanding and practice of following Jesus daily. Recently Pastor Carl led a class on prayer which introduced the importance of using the Psalms in corporate worship for learning how to pray. Ron Leistra taught two classes on creation care and a third class later this spring will be a field trip around our church property to learn immediate and practical ways to care for our small place in creation.

Youth Ministry

The energy flowing around youth ministry tells a story of kids eager to belong together as they have fun and explore faith in Jesus. Sunday evenings buzz with activity as about 26 kids Grade 3-8 run, laugh, play, talk and eat together with their adult leaders. They have been learning about key Old Testament prophets and are now exploring the path to Jesus (3rd -5th Graders) and challenges from Jesus (6th -8th Grades). The High School group gathers with about 8 youth on Wednesday evenings. Last month they joined in a retreat with two other church youth groups. CTHIN High School Bible Study gathers twice a month on Sunday afternoon to dig deeper into Scripture and explore the spiritual challenges of be a follower of Jesus.

Kids Club explodes on Wednesday afternoon with more than 60 1st -5th Graders meeting to play games, do crafts and share in a Bible lesson also from the Old Testament prophets.

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Ministry Team Updates *continued from pp 4-5*

As an expression of thanks for the leaders' and volunteers' faithful service, Youth Pastor Curtis Holm organized a special dinner on March 7 hosted at the vanBuren home with Matt preparing the meal for this large group with their spouses. Add your appreciation to these leaders and tell them "thanks" !

Sunday Evening (3rd-5th Grade and Middle School): Curtis Holm, Kara Leep, Brad Buchholz, Renee Gillenwater, Ian vanBuren, and Bryan Buchholz

High School leaders: Curtis Holm and Brittany Frazer

Kids Club: Curtis Holm, Sharry Kragt, Floyd Helm, Kara Leep and Ian vanBuren

Small Groups

Small Groups have had some challenges lately that make their importance clearly vital to the health of our fellowship here at Oak Hills Church. When these challenges arise, the members of each group have surrounded each other with care and encouragement and prayer. We all begin to share the load and seek to be a blessing to those facing loss, injury, illness, and needs of many kinds.

Along with the challenges many praises are also shared; praises that are evidence of God's presence among us and in us. Many times praise is as simple as the sense that there is love for everyone in the group. This love comes from God as we study His word together, pray together, receiving encouragement and blessings from brothers and sisters in Christ while sharing our personal stories of faith. Often these stories lead to prayers of praise as well as prayers for healing or encouragement and peace. They also help us to pray throughout the week for the needs and praises of the group.

Currently there are ten groups meeting either weekly or biweekly at various homes and various days of the week. Each group is composed of couples and singles. The study material varies from group to group but is always centered on God's word with discussion and testimony.

Many groups try to do service work within or for the church, for charities in the community, or to serve in other ways as time and abilities allow thus following Jesus' example of service. Groups are also encouraged to invite missionaries or other kingdom workers to meet with them as a way of encouraging the missionary and to learn more about their work so that prayers for them will be specific to their needs. At least one group has sponsored a needy child with financial aid.

Anyone not currently participating in a small group and desiring personal and intimate fellowship with other believers who deeply love God and his people are encouraged to talk with our Small Groups elder, Dave Slotemaker, or Pastor Carl, Sherry Kragt, or any of the other elders. A number of our groups include people who do not attend worship services at Oak Hills Church but still desire the fellowship of the small group. So feel free to invite a friend, neighbor, or relative to join with you in a Small Group.

"And I pray that you being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." Ephesians 3:17-21.

Hospitality Ministry

We plan to continue those events that have become a tradition such as the Soup/Salad Supper and Easter brunch. We are also looking into trying some new events in the coming year. We are interested in having a craft making fair at Oak Hills in the fall of 2015. This would be a time for people to work on their projects in a group atmosphere and include an invitation to the community. You would be able to have a table to work on your craft and the Hospitality team would provide a simple lunch. We would also like to plan a seniors lunch or brunch.

Building and Grounds Ministry

As spring arrives, keep an eye out for bulletin and e-mail notices for work days and special projects. You're always welcome to refer to the posters in the Narthex with guidance on the kind of maintenance different sectors of the grounds require.

As an ongoing effort, we seek involvement from the younger generations in volunteering time to improving and maintaining the Building and Grounds. We continue to encourage involvement from the Boy and Girl Scouts and encourage Small Groups to contribute time to Building and Grounds.

And as important as all other aspects, we continue to pray for the mission of Oak Hills Church in how the facilities and physical assets can better serve the congregation and community.

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Ministry Team Updates *continued from page 6*

Preschool Ministry

Last issue, an article celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Preschool and the impact this ministry has had over the years. As a reminder, a couple key areas of emphasis for us include:

- OHP will continue to be a preschool that serves ALL children regardless of finances or other obstacles.
- OHP will serve entire families and not solely pre-schoolers.
- We will welcome all faiths.
- We will be intentional about publicizing and continue to grow our program.

Communication Ministry

Over the past few years, we've distributed this CONNECTIONS newsletter three times each year, working to feature the stories of individuals in our community in addition to sharing all the necessary news. Beyond that, we've worked to be more deliberate about updates to the web site, bulletin boards and Facebook page. We've also worked with Pastor Carl to include congregation members' faith stories as part of our Sunday worship. Just about a year ago, we coordinated with Sheila Deeth to modernize the Sunday bulletin with a new font and format.

With the Holm family's departure, this opens up an opportunity for someone to replace Maureen and take CONNECTIONS and Communications into the future.

Oak Hills Church will be hosting an open house for the Holms Saturday, April 11, from 3-5 pm in the Fireside Room at church.

Everyone is invited to come, enjoy some refreshments and express your thanks, share stories and wish the Holms blessings for their future.

New Hymnals—*Continued from page 2*

we presented the plan to the Council for discussion, insight, and timeliness. Our 2014 budget included the cost of replacement hymnals and the book of creeds. We are thankful the congregation passed the budget.

We placed the order, thinking it would take some time for the order to be filled. Not so. The boxes arrived within a week...the week of Son Seekers Camp. Late summer we offered the grey and red hymnals to anyone who might like a copy. We donated the grey *Psalter Hymnals* in the best condition to the Grangeville CR Church in Idaho. Love, Inc took some copies to give away. We recycled those in the worst condition. We placed *Lift Up Your Hearts* and *Our Faith* in the pews mid September.



It is a joy to have this project completed. Thanks to all of you who helped plan, study, introduce, process, remove old hymnals, clean, cart, and finally place these in the pews. We pray that each person will be blessed in worship and grow in faith as we sing old and new songs, read the catechism and creeds, and hear God's word.

The Holm Stretch—*Continued from page 8*

By now, you should all know that I have submitted my resignation as youth pastor at OHC. If I could just look each and every one of you in the eye in this moment I would simply say: THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST be with you. There is so much more I could say. But right now these are the only words I can give to you as the winds of change blow down the church doors. These are the only words I can give you as tensions wrestle inside your hearts and inside the doors of the building. These are the only words I can give you when you feel like throwing in the towel. My prayer for you is to receive the GRACE of God through Jesus Christ. I love you all and will miss you dearly!

Peace of Christ to You,

Curtis

The Holm Stretch

By Curtis Holm

"You say good-bye, I say hello." BEATLES, Hello-Goodbye

Whatever happened to the art of hand-written letters? It does not seem that long ago, lovers and dreamers would put pencil to paper and write out poetic feelings of anticipation until the day comes for you to see the face of the recipient. Maybe this is one reason today's church has a difficult time relating to the poetic letters of the New Testament. In our age of instant messages and images, most spend little time pondering the stroke of the next letter or the meaning of the next thought. The most prolific writer of letters was the Apostle Paul. Like most letters of ages past, Paul wrote to people he deeply cared about and whose presence he missed dearly. At times, we overlook the beauty of these relationships in pursuit of weighted theological propositions. Not that the gospel truth cannot be found in the incredible intellectual dialogues of the book of Romans or the book of Hebrews. Meanwhile these were all heartfelt letters to people that Paul (and other writers) missed.

Paul and other letter writers per the format of the age would almost always conclude with final instructions and blessings. One of the most beautiful and personal endings to a Pauline letter comes from the first letter of communication with the church in Thessalonica. Most scholars agree that this is certainly a letter from Paul and might be the oldest book of the New Testament.

Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-14:

"Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, and be patient with everyone. Make sure nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else."

This is the kind of personal letter Oak Hills Church needs to hear today. It is a close friend whose voice echoes through each powerful word. When our close friends that we respect work among us, we better listen. Think about the staff members of OHC. Think about the elders and deacons who volunteer to fill in the void where the community lacks the Kingdom of God. Think of the people who clean the toilets, turn off the lights and lock the doors. We are also called to send warning to some, while

encouraging others. We are called to be kind to one another and then to be kind to everyone else.

Paul continues to write: "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Jesus Christ." (1 Thessalonians 5:16)

More words to encourage us in an uneasy and uncertain spiritual landscape called the Pacific Northwest. We are to share the joy and to be thankful for all that God has granted us. We communicate to God how thankful we are because this is his will in Jesus Christ.

And he goes on: "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it." (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

We at Oak Hills anticipate the coming of God's kingdom through Jesus. Until then, we basically wait. And wait. And wait. But we are people of faith and that faith helps us stay blameless with everything in our created being. We are not a people that just sit on our hands and wait. We are the body of Christ, the bride, actively waiting through our love for one another and with God's creation. We live as if God will do as he promised because he will.

Paul finishes the letter with the simple phrase: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." (1 Thessalonians 5:28)

Like the best letter writers, Paul finishes simple, yet powerful. Sometimes, we write a letter to say goodbye, if not forever, at least for a period of time. With every goodbye, there is a time for hello. Hello to grace. Hello to encouragement. Hello to joy. Hello to Jesus. As I type these words on a computer screen, I think of all my dear brothers and sisters in this church community.

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