

WHEATON

CROSS † CONNECTIONS

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But Then This ...

By Pastor John

There is a service station that I frequently stop at for gas and for a cup of coffee. One of the men that works there is retired and now works the counter at the service station to “make ends meet.” He is a nice man and can usually be counted on for a cheery “good morning.” But lately, with the economic calamity, with the change of administrations in Washington, and the curious antics of our ex-governor, this man has turned pretty sour. I truly do not know if he is a Democrat or a Republican because he never had anything good to say about Bush either. I think it is that he just does not like or trust politicians.

To him, “they are all a bunch of crooks.” He complained about “the bureaucrats” who ran things. Taxes and his utility bills are prominent in his mind. But it isn’t just those things.

The real thing is that, “The big shots were out to get the little guy.” “They’re all either rich kids who never worked an honest day in their life, or else they’re lawyers who went to school to learn how to lie.” “All they do is spend other people’s money.”

The man felt besieged and taken advantage of. He did not trust his rulers.

He might understand Psalm 72. Psalm 72 is a prayer for good government. Probably written for Solomon’s coronation, the Psalm is a prayer that as v. 1 says, “the king will be endowed by God with righteousness and justice,” which in Old Testament times were the virtues that were most highly esteemed in a leader. Perhaps in our media age there might be some sort of prayer that the President might look good on TV, or that he might have sound economic sense. Those are the two criteria our electorate seem to value most highly. But here the writer prays that the king might be “endowed with righteousness and justice for the afflicted and needy.” (vv. 2 & 4)

It is also a prayer for economic prosperity—but with a twist—the writer prays for the blessings that come as a consequence of righteousness and justice. The psalm clearly indicates that there is a connection between righteousness and justice for the weak and economic prosperity for everybody else. Verse 3: “The mountains will bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness.” Verse 7: “In his days the righteous will flourish; prosperity will abound till the moon is no more.”

Do we not all long for such a place and such rulers? We yearn for what this psalm talks

about. This kind of government is what we were made for.

God made people this way. A good proof of that is how upset we are when things do not go that way. Oh, everybody sort of laughs at the graft and corruption of Chicago-style politics. I have often cynically thought of it as a twisted sort of nightly entertainment. But in truth, all of us are disgusted by corruption in high places and we yearn for the things of which this psalm so eloquently speaks. We long for rulers who “will be like rain falling on a mown field, like showers watering the earth.”

And we might be quick to resign ourselves and too quickly say, “Well yes, that will be wonderful and when Christ finally comes again and the new heavens and the new earth begins, then we will be able to enjoy such happiness and trust—but for now don’t get your hopes up, for now it is politics as usual.”

But this isn’t a psalm for the sweet by and by when we all meet on that beautiful shore. This is a psalm about the real world. We mustn’t spiritualize it away and thus destroy its timeliness for us.

Let us pray this Psalm for our leaders regularly, “ Endow the rulers with your justice, O God, ... may they judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice.”

Missions:

The Women and Children of the Gwaimen Center

By Mary Sytsma

Editors Note: After reading the e-mails she sent back during her most recent visit, I asked Mary to write a series of articles to introduce us to some of the women and children of the Gwaimen Center. Some of us remember the Executive Director of the center, Beatrice. She lived in Wheaton for many years before returning to Kwoi, her home village in Nigeria. She has a Masters Degree from Wheaton and a PhD from Loyola. In addition to her work for the Gwaimen Center, she is the academic dean of a new Christian University in the capital city of Abuja.

Vincent and Precious

We hear a lot of talk about financial troubles in this country, and we worry about the economic downturn and what it means for our personal situations. For Dan and me, it is concern for the costs of Jonathan's college education on top of our other responsibilities. But for some people in the world poverty is a crushing reality. It affects every aspect of their lives.

It wasn't until I went to Nigeria that I saw poverty that kills. Poverty there is not a result of losses from their investments. It is a way of life. It is no more or less devastating to be poor there than in the US, but there is less hope. I think, for me, that is the difference. I have seen what happens to folks who live without hope. I have also seen what happens when you offer hope, such an intangible thing, to people who do not expect anyone to care. In January I asked the congregation to pray for little Vincent. He is 4 years old, and while I was

in Nigeria, he had malaria, typhoid and worms, all at the same time. His stomach was distended and very hard to the touch. He was passing blood. He was listless and wouldn't eat. His father is dead, and his mother is HIV positive. For the past year, we thought Vincent was also HIV positive. However, in September, Abigail, the director of the center, had him retested. The test results showed him to be HIV negative, so he won't have to take the medicine that is so hard on such fragile bodies. Praise God. But what if . . . ? The test was wrong before. I worry, while the women who work at the center rejoice over God's miracle. Keep praying for him.

Vincent's mother works at the Gwaimen Center as a cook. He has a little sister who is growing up loved and nourished because she came to the Gwaimen Center as an infant. Vincent and his sister don't have the same father. Mama Vincent married her husband's brother after Vincent's father died. He wanted a baby and didn't care that she was HIV positive, so she got pregnant.

When it came time for Mama Vincent to deliver the baby, they were unable to afford the hospital or a doctor. Abigail went to the house to help. Abigail arrived just as the baby was ready to be born. She caught the little girl in her arms as she came into the world, and then she rushed her to the hospital to find out what to do. The name of that baby: Precious – a precious little life.

That is a common name for a child in our center – Precious, as if we needed a reminder of the words of that children's song – "they are precious in his sight." They are. I remind myself that each one is just as precious to Jesus as my own son.

Abigail treats every child in the center as if that little one were her own. She comforts their hurts. She scolds them when they need it. She smiles at their stories. She is proud of their accomplishments. She worries about them. She sacrifices to give them what they need. She treats them as if they are precious. She loves them.

But sometimes the stories of their lives seem so sad and hard. The reality of their lives can

break my heart. And then I am reminded of a quote from the founder of World Vision: "Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God." If our hearts are not broken by these things, then something is wrong. Where is the hope in all of this? Vincent and Precious will get the care and nourishment they need because of the Gwaimen Center. They will be able to go to school. They will be able to dream about what they want to grow up to be. They already know what it means to be loved. They already know the words to one of the children's favorite songs: "Joy, joy, joy. Jesus keeps me singing. See what the Lord has done for me – died just to set me free. In my heart a melody - joy, joy, joy."

Community Service

By Jen Ellens

We are here to serve! Serving God through caring for His people everywhere and through acting as good stewards of His creation continues to be the focus of the Community Service Committee. Our goal is to organize a wide variety of service opportunities throughout the year. We want every member of the congregation to be able to serve a cause that is near and dear to his heart one month, and to try something totally new the next. We have been very excited over the past year to see so many of you from so many different walks of life participating in our projects! There are many ways to give to God's people. Some projects require giving of our time and talents. For instance, gifts provided by the Humanitarian Service Project's birthday program were beautifully wrapped by members of our congregation to brighten the birthdays of many underprivileged children in Carol Stream. A fall yard clean-up at Senior Home Sharing's apartment complex in Lombard warmed the hearts of those who participated. Other projects ask us to give of our rich financial resources. We have worked with the GEMS to collect new socks that were donated to the People's Resource Center. We also cleaned out our closets and donated those gently used blue

jeans to the PRC's community clothing program. Many members of our congregation contributed to the Community Outreach Center's Christmas Store toy drive and some were doubly blessed by participating as volunteers at the Store itself. One project even allowed us the opportunity to literally give "of ourselves" by donating blood! We have been able to help those who are nearby through preparing and serving a lunch for the homeless in our community at DuPage PADs (Public Action to Deliver Shelter). We served those who are far off by packaging nutritious meals to be sent to children in dozens of countries around the world (ask many of the 5-year-olds in our congregation what the phrase "Chicken! Veggies! Soy! Rice!" means to them and they'll be able to tell you all about the Feed My Starving Children project).

We hope to continue to provide regular opportunities for service in the future. What we need most is you—your participation in the projects, as well as your ideas for projects themselves. We know that many of you already volunteer on your own with a variety of different causes. If you are aware of a project in need of a great group of volunteers, let us know! Or if you really enjoyed a particular project that we have done at church, tell us about it so we can repeat that project in the future. Even if you simply have a desire to help a certain target group (for example, to work with the disabled or the elderly), let us know so that we can search for projects in this area. You can either talk to a committee member (Nancy Baarman, Jen Ellens, or Kim Ramaker) or you can e-mail us at our NEW e-mail address: communityservice@wheatoncrc.org. We look forward to hearing from you soon!

Getting to Know

Dave and Sandy Nelson

Names (including wife's maiden name), and any children:

Dave Nelson
Sandy (Tamel) Nelson
Heidi, Amy, John, & Remington the stinky farm dog

Where we were each born and raised, and about our families:

Dave was born in Rochester, NY, raised in Green Lake, WI and Glen Ellyn, IL
Sandy was born, raised and still here, in Wheaton

Places we've lived individually or together:

We lived on Linda Avenue for 16 years and now St. Charles Road for the past 3 years

How we met:

We met at Glenbard West High School our sophomore year and didn't see each other until senior year. Dave asked Sandy if she'd like a ride home from school, she turned him down 3 times before she agreed. Then Dave had the guts to ask me out on a date and the rest is history.

When and where we were married:

We were married on May 11, 1990 at WCRC by Dave's father. Our wedding was the first for Pastor John at WCRC

Occupations:

Dave is a self employed excavation and demolition contractor/ heavy equipment operator
Sandy is his book keeper and also a licensed beautician

Schools we attended:

We both attended Elmhurst College for a

semester

Sandy attended Canella School of Hair Design

Hobbies:

Snowmobiling, boating, fishing, motorcycles

Favorite TV show:

Sandy- any CSI
Dave- Survivor Man

Favorite movie:

Sandy- Grease
Dave- Willie Wonka & the Chocolate Factory

Favorite book:

Sandy- I don't have one
Dave- My Side of the Mountain

Favorite "pig-out" food:

Sandy- Pizza & ice cream
Dave- BBQ

Favorite vacation:

Sandy- snowmobiling in the mountains of Montana and Wyoming
Dave- fishing with John in Canada
Favorite Bible verse:

Sandy- Psalm 23
Dave- Romans 12:2-3

How long we've been attending WCRC:

Sandy- my whole life
Dave- 21 years

Favorite thing about WCRC:

Our favorite things about WCRC would be the caring people and the kids programs

Additional things people may not know about us:

Dave is very involved with Boy Scouts.
Sandy has relatives that most people don't know. Pete & Grayce Tamel are her parents, Hets Duncan and Edie Rooks are her aunts.

The Burden of the Crucifix:

What the Sweetbrier Pastor did instead of writing Lenten sermons

by **James Calvin Schaap**

Editors Note: Reproduction of this story is with the full knowledge and permission of the author. Dr. Schaap sends his warmest wishes to the many friends he has in this congregation.

It wasn't writer's block. It's just that he'd much rather do anything than sit down and write Lenten sermons, not because he didn't like writing sermons but because he didn't like Lent—all that doom and gloom when what the people wanted was joy, the glorious joy of Easter. And so did he.

So what he did instead of writing sermons was grab that huge crucifix and head out to the trash. It was two feet long at least, hung with the body of our Lord, face raised in anguish, legs traditionally bent, left over right. He wanted to get rid of it because, really, it was a Roman Catholic thing. He'd had it in his study for two weeks—not where people could see it easily, of course. He'd hung it off to the left of his desk in a corner. Originally, he'd thought it a novelty—imagine! a real crucifix.

The inner panels of sleek black metal were set against a mahogany frame, and Christ was pewter. It looked expensive and weighed a ton, the size of a small model plane. "Made in Germany," it said on the back.

He'd kept it because a crucifix was something

he'd never had, life-long Protestant that he was. There was something medieval about it, like stone-floored European cathedrals, the kind you tour in reverent silence. It reminded him of Central America, a phalanx of peasant believers following their hooded priest under the hot sun. It was a part of the Christian faith too, an ancient part—depressing, he thought, Christ the sufferer. Thank goodness, we're over all that angst—the agony of the cross, weeping and wailing. Thank goodness for Easter, he thought. Now that was a sermon he could write. What he believed in was the empty cross—the resurrection, the glory and the life everlasting.

Ever since he'd put the crucifix up on his wall, it had been an irritant, really, so he went out back of the church, carrying that crucifix in his hand.

Call it serendipitous, call it fate, call it what you will—things hadn't gone well with that thing around. Two of the church's most active families had decided to leave town for new jobs since he'd hung it on the wall. Besides, sometimes he'd found himself almost morbidly attracted to it. It bothered him. Of course, the crucifix didn't really belong in an evangelical's life. It reminded him of Gregorian chants, not praise-and-worship; of indulgences, not the open Word.

The garbage truck was coming in a few minutes, so there he stood, holding something he told himself was nothing more than a chunk of fancy wood decorated with—with the broken body of Jesus Christ. Well, not really. Only a sculpture, a graven image.

Just throw it, he told himself. He wondered whether he should tuck it beneath the bags of last week's bulletins or simply lay it on top—and how would that look, a crucifix crowning the garbage? On the other hand, what if the garbage guy picked up the paper and found this huge crucifix beneath it? Maybe he'd take it along, stick it somewhere on the truck where garbage men keep valuables they discover.

The crucifix felt almost radioactive in his hand. He couldn't just toss it. He'd gotten it from his sister, who worked for social services, visiting old people who had no other companionship. Some crotchety old woman had given it to her, had put it in her hands, she said, because his sister wasn't a believer. "Take it home," that old woman had told her. "Just you take it home, you hear?" So she did, to get out of the woman's apartment that day.

"I don't want it," his sister had told him, so he'd volunteered to take it. But once it was up on his wall, even inconspicuously, it made the whole place, well, unpleasant, a too-persistent reminder of Christ's suffering.

Put it in the trash, he told himself, put it right on top—don't be coy about it. In a way, throwing it out would be a confession of faith in the risen Lord.

So he laid it right on top, went back into the church, and sat at his desk reading e-mail for exactly a half hour, long enough be sure the garbage truck had passed. Later, when he looked outside, the blue barrel lay on its side. He took a deep breath, gathered his notes before him for worship on Sunday—second Sunday of Lent. Nothing came. Once more, he looked outside. The barrel looked gloriously empty.

The lindens' long upper branches turned almost sideways in the wind. He really should retrieve the barrel, he told himself, or it would disappear forever down the alley. He clicked off the Internet, walked out into the lawn, and found that crucifix—can you believe it?—lying in the dew. The garbage guy couldn't toss it either. Really, how do you toss out a suffering Christ?

Maybe he was supposed to have it, he thought. He reached for it, then jerked back his hand, as if it had mysteriously emerged from a furnace. He looked down the street to see if anyone was watching, then took it in his hands and walked back to the church, feeling naked. He brought it

back into the study and laid it on the couch, then put the afghan over it as if to shadow some strange glow.

Maybe he could live with it, he thought—maybe if he hid it in a drawer. But then why keep it? Wouldn't hiding it make it seem like contraband? It was Tuesday morning, there was work enough for two pastors lined up in his study, and that blame crucifix was making time disappear. If he didn't get rid of it, there'd be no Lent at all.

He went into the church kitchen and pulled out a garbage bag, which billowed behind him as he walked back to his study. Then he picked that huge crucifix up once again and laid it carefully inside. Once more, he stepped out the back door, then walked to his car. He laid the bag in the back seat, got in, started the engine, and backed out, the gravel crunching like thunder beneath his tires.

In ten minutes he was out of town and into the cotton fields north. It was something people did with dogs—just dropped them off in the country. This wasn't even a dog, and therefore it wouldn't suffer. He stopped the car, reached into the back seat, and tightened the knot he'd tied in the bag. He'd rather no one ever saw what was inside. He could just imagine some high school group coming by to clean the ditches eventually, some sweet kid picking up the bag and pulling out this . . . thing. Well, of course, you know what she'd pull out, and immediately her eyes would bulge like something from *The Exorcist*. One more knot.

Slowly he crept north, the garbage bag in his lap. He had a hold of it with his left hand as if it might suddenly jerk loose and make a break for some far corner of the interior, where it would demand not to be dumped.

He picked up a little speed, checked back over his shoulder, and swung over to the opposite side of the road. It was like old oil or battery acid or lead paint, he thought. Who knows what

it might do to the ditch?

A car came up over the bluff in front of him, and he swerved back into his lane. He had to get back to the office—he'd played golf yesterday and didn't get done what had to be done.

Keep it!—something in him urged. But we don't believe in a crucifix, he told himself again. We don't entertain morbid notions about the suffering Christ. We worship—hallelujah!—a risen Lord. We don't need to concern ourselves with punctured palms and a bloody gash. Christ is risen—now there's a theme to preach on.

He looked into the rearview mirror—nothing. Up ahead, a shimmering mirage rose over the country road like some vision. Once and for all, get rid of it, something told him, so he did—he threw it into the ditch, just threw it and ran like a terrorist.

When he came to the end of the road, he stopped, then made a U-turn and rode by again to make sure it was gone. Just beyond the ditches, the rows of cotton were dressed out gloriously in fluffy whiteness, ready for harvest. When he passed the spot, he saw nothing, the ditch falling away far enough beneath him to obscure whatever it might have held in its maw. At the stop sign, he turned right and headed back to the city, breathing easily for the first time that morning.

At Sweetbrier Church, he told himself, there was a service to create—What visuals? What music? What would he say for Lent? Really, everything aimed at Easter, didn't it? The empty cross, the joy, the praise, the trumpets, the lilies. He didn't want to fuss with the suffering, not with the glory a'comin'. Lent made long faces. Easter made the world sing.

That crucifix was lying in a ditch somewhere north of the city. The suffering Christ was

history. The cross was empty—no more pewter Jesus hanging in torment.

A half-hour later there was still nothing on the screen. Maybe it was some kind of mysticism, but the office somehow felt empty without the crucifix, and the mere idea of his having tossed it out in a garbage bag seemed a tormenting sacrilege. He felt guilty, and he hated guilt.

Maybe he needed it somehow. It was silly and superstitious of him to throw it out the way he did. Maybe he needed the suffering Christ, he told himself. Maybe he needed the suffering Christ.

The sermon still unwritten, he headed out the door and back to the cotton field—because he couldn't leave it in the ditch, just like the garbage man couldn't throw it away. The reason was so simple, really, and yet so deeply true. Of course he needed the suffering Christ. Of course. Of course.

Don't we all?

Author

James Calvin Schaap

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Christian Education

By Kieth Ellens

At the congregational meeting on December 8 the budget for the General Fund was passed with a line item for Christian Education. This was a change from previous years when Christian education was instead funded out of two other funds – Timothy Fund (for Timothy families) and the Christian Education Fund (for non-Timothy families). The deacons along with support of full council felt this change was important based on a report from the CRC Committee to Study Christian Day School Education. The committee gave a report to 2003 Synod about the importance of Christian education for our children. Included in the report were some guidelines for a financial plan. These guidelines, developed with the help of a major accounting firm, were meant to help congregations comply with the federal tax code. Along with many other guidelines which the deacons are working with, one major recommendation was to not have separate funds for Christian education but instead have it be from the General Fund. Several churches have had problems with the IRS when they had a separate education fund. The exact reasons for this are beyond the scope of a newsletter article. If you would like a full explanation please contact one of the deacons. Several people have commented about the size of this line item - \$32,000 – and expressed concern that it will be hard to meet this increased budget. But really this change is not requiring more giving from the church. If we had not made this change, we would have been asking for \$513,000 for the General Fund and \$32,000 for the education funds. With this change we are just combining these budgets and asking for \$545,000. If everyone who normally would give money to the Timothy Fund and Christian Education Fund would instead give that money to the General Fund, this change would have no impact on meeting the General Fund expenses.

In the dialogue during the congregational meeting and also in talking with members after the meeting it

was apparent that many of our members are passionate about sending our children to Christian schools and see it as an obligation of the church to help families afford the tuition. But also in those conversations we saw that there are many misconceptions about how the program works. In the following paragraphs we describe how parents can get the help they need for tuition.

As a supporting church we have a special relationship with Timothy Christian School. In the summer Timothy sends financial information to families. Included with that is a form describing their tuition options. The first option is to pay full tuition. The second option is to pay a tuition amount based on their Adjusted Gross Income. The third option is to take the Supporting Church Discount of 45%. Timothy processes those forms. Families are given the reduced rate. The discounts from all the families from Wheaton CRC are added up and they inform us of the total. The church makes regular payments to Timothy to fulfill this commitment.

Families sending their children to other Christian schools need to talk to their district deacon. The family and their deacon will discuss the need – up to 45% of tuition. The request goes before the deacons for approval. After approval the deacons work with the family and the school to develop a payment plan. We do not have a list of pre-approved schools. But probably any CSI or ASCI accredited school will be approved.

It is plain to see that it is easier for Timothy families to get assistance. The reason that non-Timothy families need to approach the deacons is not that we think they are less deserving. It is just because we don't have a supporting church relationship with these other Christian schools. If you want to send your child to a Christian school and tuition is a barrier, please contact a deacon. We understand that affording Christian school tuition is not easy, but the church is willing to help. If you have any further questions please don't hesitate to ask one of us or to leave a note in one of our mailboxes. If we get a question that would apply to the entire congregation we will address it in a future newsletter.

Sunday School

By Floyd Vander Meer

Grades 4-5

The 4th and 5th grade Sunday School has 5 great kids and they just finished the unit entitled “God Saves Us and Tells Us How to Live”. This unit highlighted the stories of the Israelites in the Old Testament. The story of the ten plagues in Egypt, the story of Sinai and giving of the Ten Commandments, the story of the Judges; Gideon and Samson. These stories showed how God saved His people, how they were supposed to live and how in spite of their weaknesses God still took care of His people Israel. The application to our lives is that God takes care of us even in spite of our weaknesses. That weaknesses are shown when we fail to live as God wants.

The current unit is “God’s in Charge – No Matter What”. We are studying great stories of Saul, David and Solomon. These stories make for a lot of fun to read out of the Bible and to see how God is always in “Charge”. We have seen how God uses circumstances and events to continue his plan of salvation no matter how people act. We have developed a “timeline” for putting major events in the history of the Israelites thru Christ’s coming, thus showing God’s hand all along the way in guiding events to bring Christ to earth.

We take time at the beginning of the class to pray for those we know who are not feeling well, or are having some difficulty and praise when we see God answering our prayers of previous prayer requests. Our next activity is a “quiz” where the class answers questions from the last lesson. This has been a lot of fun to see who can the answer the question first. Since these are really great stories the class reads the Bible passage first by themselves and then we discuss how God works in the lives of the characters in the story.

This is a really great class and I want to thank the parents for the opportunity to be with them for this time and teach them how God works in the lives of people in the Bible and how he still

is doing that in our lives today.

By Ed Bossenga

Grades 6,7,8

This year, our lessons are based on Heidelberg Catechism questions 1-78. The focus for the first part of the year is the Trinity. Each class session involves an activity to introduce the objectives of the lesson.

The majority of the lesson time is used to look at scripture that supports the lesson objectives.

We end our time talking about what the Bible passage means for our own lives and how to put the lesson objectives into action and service.

The class is regularly attended by eight students from the Wheaton and the New Hope Vietnamese CRCs.

By Mary Sytsma

Grades 9-10

Are you ever accountable for your friend’s behavior? If you could shop at the Parent Store for the perfect parent, what qualities would you look for? What if you needed a complete blood transfusion and all of the blood at the blood bank was contaminated? What do Communion and Baptism have to do with my faith? How could my actions point someone toward or away from Jesus? When you think about your own sin, where do you rate on the Sorry-O-Meter? If I respect those in authority, what’s in it for me? Have you ever killed anybody? (Check out what the Catechism says about the Sixth Commandment before you answer this.) What do these questions have to do with Sunday school?

These are just some of the questions the 9th and 10th grade students have been wrestling with on Sunday mornings. The Catechism is surprisingly current in the way it helps us to think about real life issues. A group of nine

students and I have been meeting in the Ministry Center since the beginning of the year, working our way through Year 2 of Questions Worth Asking, a Study of the Heidelberg Catechism, material Jane Vogel and I wrote several years ago with the help of a group of Wheaton CRC students who served as the field test for the project.

Our class usually begins with an activity that is designed to get us active and involved in thinking about a situation we might face in our lives. We spend time looking at God's Word, we see what the Catechism has to say, we journal our own personal responses, and we pray together. That is pretty much how our class works every week. We try to do things that appeal to all different kinds of learning styles and all different levels of faith.

The first goal of the course is to understand that the Catechism is a summary of the truths of Scripture, not a replacement for the Bible. It helps us to understand what the Bible says. The second goal is to help students understand that the Catechism is a really personal document which can help them to formulate their own statements of faith. The third goal is to encourage students to respond to God's call to live their faith in the world. The fourth goal is to help students to see how the Catechism articulates a Reformed world view, a unique and biblical perspective in the confusing world we live in.

The Catechism is written in the first person (For example: What is your only comfort in life and in death?), and the personal and challenging questions can help us to figure out where we are in our faith journey. This class is meant to be a safe place to be honest and to voice doubts and even disbelief. As we look at the Bible and at the Catechism, my prayer is that every student will come to a vibrant and real faith in Jesus, and hopefully learn to see that these faith questions are worth asking.

By Pastor John

Grades 11-12

In the Sunday School class for eleventh and twelfth graders – often called “catechism” – we

are going through the course called “What We Believe.” Our class is taught by Pastor John and generally has five or six students in it.

We begin the hour by sharing prayer requests and have prayer that Pastor John usually leads. Then we go into the course material that was written and prepared by Rev. Louis VanderMeer of Grand Rapids, Michigan. The course is essentially a trip through the Belgic Confession, one of the historic creeds of our church.

The first twenty minutes of the class is a video of Pastor Lou teaching. Pastor Lou does a great job of helping us see the relevance of the church's doctrines for our lives. We then go into a discussion led by Pastor John of the points that were made in the lesson. One of the highlights of the class is the “Bible Trivia” segment in the video. We enjoy testing ourselves on our knowledge of some of the stories and characters in the Bible.

Do You Know?

Do you know of someone who may be blessed by reading Cross Connections? Maybe a former member, a child who has left home, or a friend with an interest in knowing more about the depth of the spiritual life of our church. Every month, within a day or two of the issue date (the Sunday before the first of each month) the entire publication is available on our web site, www.wheatoncrc.org. Simply click on News for a list of past issues. You may attach and forward the entire file, or copy a portion to a separate file and attach it to an e-mail.

Insights and Encounters

By Dave Nyenhuis

I love baptism. It takes more than a village to raise a child. It takes a whole lot of committed people to change diapers, lead, guide, teach, cajole, listen to, laugh with and learn from a kid. One of the things I've grown to love about our church is that we mean it when we promise to "receive children in love, pray for them, help instruct them in the faith, and encourage and sustain them in the fellowship of believers."

Our pastor works hard. Just one example of Pastor John's service to us and His church is the number of meetings the man attends. There are weeks that include three or four evening meetings, which means three or four nights that he's away from his home and family, sitting around a table, discussing the church's business. I think he should be nominated for sainthood for his meeting schedule alone, but we don't "do" saints in the CRC. Perhaps instead, you could thank him for his faithful service the next time you see him. Just don't feel the need to call a meeting to accomplish

this.

Doesn't the refurbished sanctuary look cool? I especially enjoy all the light that streams in on sunny Sunday mornings. For some reason, I especially have enjoyed the worship space this winter. It seems to encourage feelings of a warm, safe, temporary retreat from the harsh coldness outside.

I worry about the economy. Despite the best efforts of many smart people, our country's economic situation doesn't seem to be getting any better and there are more and more people out of work. During previous hard times, many people looked to churches for both spiritual and monetary assistance. I can't help but think that our church may be tested more in this way during the coming months.

I love baptism (perhaps you've heard this?). To me, the baptism service exemplifies the deep sense of community shared by the Wheaton CRC congregation. Beth and I have enjoyed nearly 20 years of being a part of this community. Back in 1989, we were accepted at Wheaton at a very difficult time in our lives, when two of our parents were struggling with terminal illness. During the next two decades, we and our children have been blessed by the fellowship and hopefully have been a blessing to others. We hope to continue to thrive at Wheaton for many years to come.

"It takes a village to raise a child, but it takes a Viking to raze a village!" I'm not sure how that fits in with the rest of this, other than that it qualifies as a truly random thought.

By Mary Sytsma

Sunday School used to scare me. When I was four, I think my teacher loved me too much. She meant business, and she focused all of her considerable attention and presence on the kids in my class, me especially. I think it was because I had been pretty sick after a bout with the measles, and the congregation had prayed earnestly for me to live and many had sat by my bed in the hospital and taken turns holding my hand and had supported my parents through the whole ordeal, and so I was her kid

and she intended to love me. Every week my parents took me to Sunday school, and every week I cried because I didn't want to go. There was no compromise in the going or the loving. It just kept happening week after week. My teacher said I could stand by the door during the lesson if I felt better doing that, so I did, for several weeks.

Finally, I got over it. I joined the rest of the class, and that Sunday school teacher continued to love me, until the day she died. She was a woman who kept the promises she made when I was baptized, whether I liked it or not. That woman was Marge Karsen, who still loved me even after I was a grown up, even after I got married, even after I had Jonathan, even after she was too old to teach Sunday school. Of course, she never stopped telling the story of how scared I was in her Sunday School class. She told it every time I visited her in Windsor Manor.

That's the first thing Sunday school is about. It's about promises. God promised at my baptism that He would be God to us, me, my parents, the congregation, the church, all of us, and He kept his promises, without compromise. The congregation made promises too – to help my parents to raise me to know Jesus. Marge Karsen kept her promise, whether I liked it or not. She did it by teaching me about Jesus, week after week, even when I was standing by the door with one hand on the door knob. She did it relentlessly and lovingly and sometimes loudly. (That was part of the reason she scared me.)

The second thing Sunday school is about is presence. You have to be there to get any benefit out of it. God provides a teacher week after week, and all we have to do is show up. If you don't show up, you miss out on the loving. God's love and His Word is a part of every week's lesson. For some of the students, it is the only instruction they get in God's word in a whole week that is directed and focused on them, written for them, taught to them, reinforced for them, without compromise. Any parent who made promises to God when his or her child was baptized is keeping that promise when that child is present in Sunday school.

The third thing Sunday school is about is people. It's how God shapes us into His people. It is how the stories of who we are get passed on in age appropriate ways. It is how a child can learn to see his place in the story. A small child learns what it means to be a part of God's

family by going to Sunday school. There will be an adult who will know them and love them without compromise, even when the child squirms and doesn't like it very much.

A teenager can go to Sunday school and voice doubts and raise questions and mumble and do whatever teenagers do, but the love and the Word is relentless. Some of them absorb the love and the stories like a sponge, making it part of them, taking their place easily and eagerly in God's big story. Others resist and slouch and complain and say they don't want to go. That's okay, as long as they continue to show up where God's people are, where God has provided a teacher and his Word and His Holy Spirit to prod them, and to scold them, and to love them, without compromise.

It's a pretty simple equation really – God says He will be our God, and we say we will be His people. Sunday school is just one of the ways that those promises are kept.

You Know You're Dutch (or been around them too long) When...

Editors Note: While half of our members are not from a Dutch background, the half that are will be able to relate to many of these traits. I commend the tolerance of those who are not Dutch and suggest that you use this list as a guard against further infiltration.

You open a container of ice-cream, only to discover it's full of homemade soup.

You were green before it was popular.

You have a pair of wooden shoes in your house.

Your china cabinet is filled with Delft.

You've eaten oliebollen at New Years.

You wash and reuse plastic cups and plastic cutlery.

The most frequent phrase uttered growing up was "Turn off the lights!"

You get a chocolate letter every year for Christmas.

All the tables in your house are covered with tablecloths, the lampshades are wrapped in cellophane and all the pillows still have the tag that says, "Do not remove under penalty of law."

You have an afghan knitted by your Oma.

Your Oma had a calendar with everyone's birthdays & anniversaries spelled out in capital letters.

You've been known to recycle aluminum foil,

Christmas wrappings and Ziploc bags.

You know that Gouda is the best cheese ever.

You have at least 5 relatives with the exact same name and somehow you always know which one is being talked about.

You rarely have both meat and cheese on the same sandwich.

You have 100 rolls of toilet paper in your house because they were on sale.

You put a little water into the jar of tomato sauce and shake it to make sure you got it all out.

All your cookies taste like almonds.

You make the bed in your hotel room.

You have lace on your windows but not on your underwear.

You've put mayonnaise on your French fries.

You have a front room but nobody sits in it except on special occasions.

You have a spoon collection and pictures of windmills on your walls.

You leave a window open year round to get fresh air.

You hate the thought of hiring "Merry Maids" because you would have to clean the house first.

You go to the "Dutch Store" because the smell brings back so many childhood memories.

You have to explain what 'om' and 'tante' means when you're discussing your relatives.

You own tea towels and oven mitts patterned with windmills and dancing women in clogs.

You call it "MELK" not "milk".

Kids Korner

1. Right after Jesus was baptized, a voice from heaven said what?

2. Who asked Jesus whether it was right to pay taxes to the Romans?

3. How old was Enoch when the Lord took him?

4. In what city was Paul almost whipped for speaking to the people?

5. After he confessed, how many years did God add to the life of King Hezekiah?

6. How many years did the Israelites live in Egypt? _____

7. Where did Moses go after killing the Egyptian?

8. Who owned the sheep that Moses was watching when the Lord came to him?

9. In what month did the angel appear to the virgin Mary?

10. Who made his wife pass as his sister?

11. What was the Potter's field known as?

12. Whose staff turned into a snake?

Look it up

1. Matthew 3:17

2. Matthew 22:15-21

3. Genesis 5: 23-24

4. Acts 22:22-29

5. Isaiah 38:5

6. Exodus 12:40-41

7. Exodus 2:15

8. Exodus 3:1

9. Luke 1:26-27

10. Genesis 20:2

11. Matthew 27:7-8

12. Exodus 7:10

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Note: If you are between the ages of 7 and 12 any time during the calendar year 2009, sign your name and put your answers in my mail box (Gabrielse) by Sunday, March 15th.

Running Totals

Sarah Dykstra	24
William Fan	24
Kathryn Kmiecik	23
Dakota Nickols	12

Once again, we have a contest for a \$25 gift certificate to be awarded in the January, 2010 issue. Don't miss an issue.