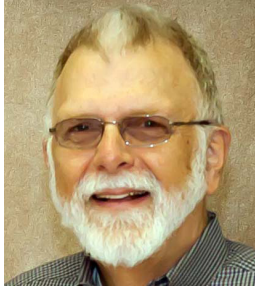


# GRACE NOTES

News from and about Grace Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan Vol.7 num.8, OCTOBER, 2015

## THINKING ABOUT SMALL GROUPS AT GRACE AN INVITATION

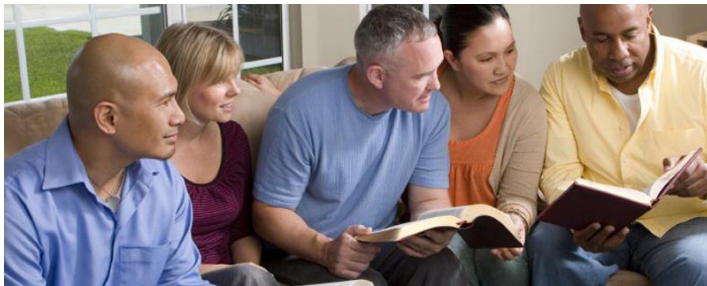


Grace is committed to strong Body life -- we are the Body of Jesus, committed to him and to each other, committed to discipling each other. We express this all together on Sunday mornings when we worship, take the Lord's Supper, baptize, sing, and pray, and hear Pastor Jack preach the Word. And we express this in many more ways too, in families, class, projects, and small groups. Fellowship is important at Grace. How are you plugged in? Want to help form a group? or, Want to help form a RENOVARE group? Talk to Karl Westerhof, Pastor of Congregational Life, (581-5592),

*Karl Westerhof*

What are small groups for? Why do churches like them so much? should they all be part of a system? All alike? Or, how about a wide diversity of groups, with each group forming its own purpose and pattern of doing things?

In this Grace Notes you will find an article inviting you to a kind of group aimed at strengthening and developing your life in Jesus. "Christ being formed in us", as Paul talked about it. (Gal 4:19) But there are all kinds of activities and groups we do together, and we disciples of Jesus are constantly helping each other to live lives that are pleasing to God, whether it's a quilting group, or a movie group, or a bocce ball group, or a fishing group. It's just that the RENOVARE spiritual formation group you'll read about in this issue is really primarily focused on and systematic about forming its members to be more like Jesus.



I don't think there is anything magical about a spiritual formation small group vs. a book club small group. But a book club is not primarily a spiritual formation group. So..... are we about having small groups at Grace for "fellowship," etc. or is our new focus more narrow -- having spiritual formation? Yes. that's our answer -- Yes. There are lots of "small groups" already formed at Grace -- Bible study groups, prayer groups, book clubs, music groups, maybe even a movie group -- and the new thing being formed right now is Renovare groups -- specialized groups committed to spiritual formation. Or if that term is too "grand," maybe "spiritual growth," or we could call them DISCIPLESHIP groups. Renovare groups use a prepared format to shape their meetings.

## PINE REST Christian Mental Health Services

**"That which does  
not kill us, makes  
us stronger."**

Bob VandePol, Executive Director of Pine Rest's Employee and Church Assistance Programs, began his conversation with this quote by Friedrich Nietzsche when he met with the adult Sunday school class on October 4.

VandePol followed up his comments to the congregation in September, when he outlined the resources Pine Rest offers, through churches, to members who are experiencing crisis and needing short-term professional help. Things that "don't kill us" but leave us reeling and dealing with pain include relationship issues, substance abuse issues, financial crises, work-related problems, and emotional challenges like anxiety and depression. According to VandePol, through Pine Rest's Church Assistance Program (CAP), there's help to make us stronger when we encounter such challenges that threaten to cripple us.

The CAP program offers up to three face-to-face visits at no cost to someone struggling with a particular issue (and you are not limited to the number of times you call with a new issue). All contacts are confidential and reports made by CAP to Grace don't contain names or specific issues dealt with during counseling visits. Anyone needing help may call Pine Rest 24/7 (616-455-6210) to speak with a counselor—or may make an appointment by calling between 8:00 and 6:00 M-Th, 8:00 and 5:00 on Friday (be sure to identify yourself as a CAP member).



VandePol took the conversation to a new level on October 4, addressing the pain a congregation, like Grace, can experience when going through a dark valley. He mentioned three ways we can define ourselves in response to a crisis: as a victim, as a survivor, or (as he coined the term), as a “sur-thriver.” “Sur-thrivers” are those with a commitment to a cause greater than themselves, access to support from others, and a healthy way of dealing with life’s challenges BEFORE the crisis. As we reflected on our life as a Grace Church family, we felt encouraged to know that we are strong—and that our reliance on the Lord undergirds who we are and how we respond to crises.

We also looked at how to face—and help support others who face—challenges that threaten to undo us. Two things! LISTEN to what people need. . . and BE THERE to stand with those who are in crisis. And, of course, pray! With God’s help we will become stronger (Nietzsche was right!) “sur-thrivers.”

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## AN INVITATION

This is an invitation to consider becoming part of a new group at Grace -- a small group designed specifically to help the members grow spiritually by learning and using some new habits or practices (disciplines). The model we will choose to begin with is the Renovare (say, ren oh VAR ay, Spanish for “I will renew”. Each person will have a work book.

A Renovare group is a certain type of small group aimed at spiritual health and growth. The group focuses on balanced spiritual growth, that is, both knowledge and practice, on changing habits, and on accountability to others in the group in a gentle, encouraging manner. There is a structured process that occurs in each meeting, and encouragement for each member to choose a habit he/she wants to change to focus on during the time between meetings. Groups can be as small as 3 people or as large as 8.

For example, I may be aware that my negative thinking is a barrier to spiritual growth and I want to change that habit to more joyful, thankful living. The process in the group helps me make that change. Or I may be aware that my prayer life is really all about what I want and not much about listening to God’s direction for my life. The group process will help me focus on how to add a listening component to my prayer life.

And many other things.

If you would like to try out such a group, tell Karl Westerhof. And think about whether you might be a convener. We hope there will be enough interest to form groups for both day-times and evenings and on different days of the week. This is an entirely risk-free investment in developing a closer relationship with God and a more Christ-like way of living. Try it!

Groups can meet weekly, bi-weekly or monthly -- though progress is, of course, directly related to time invested. It doesn’t need a leader but a convener or facilitator is probably helpful to start, at least, say for a couple months. The process in the book involves a 7- or 8-session commitment

to begin and then an evaluation about who wants to continue. The process also suggests periodic evaluations by the group. At which time people could drop out. Time depends a lot on numbers in the group. A 3-person group could do a session in an hour. An 8-person group might need 2 hours. ETC

We’d like to get groups rolling in October and November. Please contact Karl Westerhof, Pastor of Congregational Life. (581-5592)

*Karl Westerhof, Pastor of Congregational Life*



Baptism quilts designed by Chris Stoffel Overvoorde for the North Hills Christian Reformed Church in Troy, Michigan. Members of the congregation constructed and quilted the design.

## Faith Formation Lunch Discussion

Sarah Schreiber

On September 13 the church hosted a luncheon to discuss the faith formation of Grace’s children and youth. Kate Kooyman facilitated the conversation by helping us collect, organize, and prioritize our hopes and dreams. We began with the commitment the congregation makes to children when they are baptized. In baptism we promise to love and support each child through teaching, modeling the faith, and prayer. At the lunchtime conversation we worked in small groups and as a large group to imagine how we could keep our vows well.

Among other things, the group agreed on the importance of inclusion and a sense of belonging. Youth should have opportunities to lead and serve in our congregation and beyond. As parents we want to be equipped to continue Christian education and faith formation at home. There were also ideas for specific programs, including a weekday family night and matching youth to adult mentors.

Kate presented the full results of the conversation to the Education Committee, and the committee will suggest next steps to the council. There is a desire to meet again for a similar follow-up discussion in the coming months.

*Sarah Schreiber*

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