



February 2021

# CrossWay Community Current

an Evangelical Free Church

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[www.crosswaygr.com](http://www.crosswaygr.com)

## Taking care of business

Members and guests at our semi-annual congregational business meeting Jan. 17 were treated to good news on the



Elected to represent the congregation at the Jan. 17 semi-annual business meeting were (at rear) Cody Hinkle & Penny Pullen on the nominating committee and (in front) Audrey Johnston & Becky Alves on the audit committee.

## BYOBottle!

Closing out January as Sanctity of Human Life Month, we ask that all CrossWay participants in the Baby Bottle Campaign bring your donations by Sunday, Feb. 7.

As we've been announcing in church, this is a fundraising drive for the Pregnancy Resource Center of Grand Rapids, to aid in their ministry to vulnerable expectant mothers, those who may be contemplating abortion or who may be in need of financial and prayer support as well as guidance for a joyful future.

Baby bottles can be filled with coins, cash bills and/or checks for this worthy cause. And the PRC/GR has provided forms to secure a receipt for your records or for tax deduction opportunity.

The gift you bring might well help save a life!



financial front. Finance elder Bob Greenhoe reported our revenue for the year is exceeding our expenses, both because some of the expenses are lower than projected and because the CrossWay family has been generous with offerings and special gifts.

A big boon to our coffers was the forgivable "loan" we received from US taxpayers aiding us to keep up with expenses while we were not gathering for worship last spring. But that does not happen every day (thank God!), and the congregation itself has done our part for the glory of our Savior and the sustaining of His church.

Church chairman and facilities elder Bob Johnston alerted us to the need very soon to replace our aged heating system in our north wing. So fasten seatbelts, CrossWay.

For now, though, a big THANK YOU!



Pastor Manuel has invited us all to read along with him the Book of Isaiah, as he launches an extensive preaching series on what has been called The Gospel of the Old Testament. Open your Bible and feast!

## Coming Up at CrossWay Community

Sundays • 10<sup>AM</sup> • Gather for worship together  
Sundays • 11:15<sup>AM</sup> • Sunday School for all ages  
Tuesdays • 1:15<sup>PM</sup> • Ladies Bible Study, south wing  
Wednesdays • 7<sup>PM</sup> • Hinkle small group  
Sat., Feb. 6 • 9<sup>AM</sup> • Ladies monthly breakfast, south wing  
Sun., Feb. 7 • 11<sup>AM</sup> • PRC Baby Bottles due  
Sun., Feb. 14 & 28 • 6<sup>PM</sup> • All-church School of Revival  
Wed., Feb. 17 • Ash Wednesday

## Growing - together - in Christ

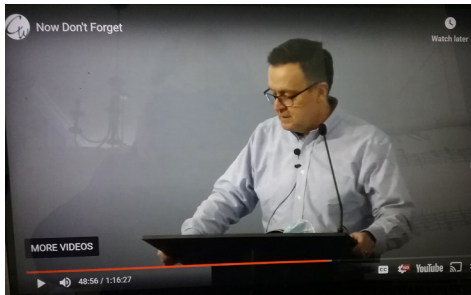
Our three-track Adult Education offering is working out well. Whether or not you have already begun attending one of the three classes, you are welcome to choose one and participate, after worship on Sunday mornings.

Christian education elder Michael Stevens leads “Principles of Proclaiming the Gospel, through a study of the Book of Acts” – in the lobby.

Bible scholar Cody Hinkle is leading “Reading God’s Word Well” in the south wing.

And Pastor Bob Manuel is offering “CrossWay Core” in the north-end library/conference room, especially valuable for those considering membership but useful also for anyone desiring a refresher in Evangelical Free Church doctrine and CrossWay distinctives. .

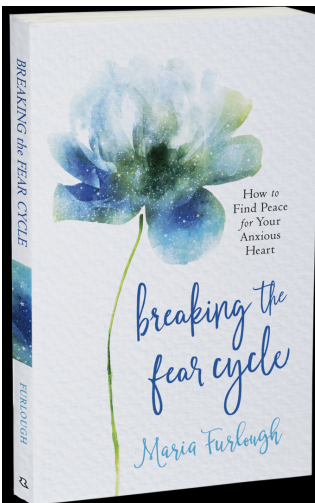
‘Live stream’ has come to CrossWay. Join us for virtual worship on Sundays at 10 a.m.



## Welcome...maybe this month!

Get ready, get set...Sign up now to join the crew that will welcome a refugee family to Grand Rapids! Contact Pam Reed, per the fellowship directory.

## Faith over fear



New this month to the CrossWay library: *Breaking the Fear Cycle* by Maria Furlough, who writes a blog at [www.mytrueworth.org](http://www.mytrueworth.org).

“The Bible calls us to ‘fear not’ on many occasions. But just how do we accomplish that, when every news item seems designed to get us wringing our hands? Using her own story as a catalyst, Maria Furlough dis-

cusses how to overcome fear for good. With practicality and passion, she shows us the steps we can take to bring those fears to God rather than act on them and to trust God with the future.”



## Calling all college agers

Have we got a deal for you! Apex, a mission of the Evangelical Free Church of America, is fielding teams of 17-24-year-olds for three-week trips this summer to places near and far. And CrossWay has budgeted \$200 toward a short-term mission trip this year to get your fundraising off the ground.

Where are the Apex teams going? As of this writing, slots are still available for service in Budapest, Hungary; Morehead City, North Carolina (disaster relief); Mexico City, Mexico; Manila, the Philippines; and London, England.

There are still three billion people who have had little or no access to hearing the Gospel of Christ. Apex serves the local church by mobilizing the next generation of Gospel influencers who will take the Gospel from here to everywhere.

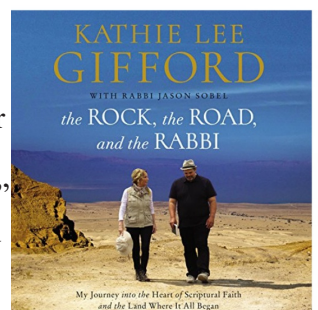
Intrigued enough to ask about it? Go to [www.apex-missions.org](http://www.apex-missions.org) and take a peek. Then send an inquiry to [apex@efca.org](mailto:apex@efca.org). Once it looks promising, be sure to contact Pam Reed, CrossWay Missions Coordinator, to discuss the possibility of receiving seed money to get you on your way.



Church chairman Bob Johnston, surprised by wife Audrey and the CrossWay “family” on the occasion of his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday

## Ladies Bible Study

Our Ladies Bible Study begins a new series this month, this time on video. Join us in the South Wing at 1:15 p.m. for “The Rock, The Road & the Rabbi,” an opportunity to “tour” the Holy Land with history and explanations from a Christian rabbi who knows it well.







## *“No Dutiful Flowers, Please”*

I want to encourage you this month to pursue beauty, actually, “BIG B” Beauty — the Beauty and Wonder of God. In a world that seems at times to get uglier and scarier by the day, how we need to delight in God. This is our Christian “duty.” Let me explain.

At one of our recent school of revival prayer meetings, we examined Isaiah 64 together. One verse in particular (verse 5) reached out and grabbed me: “You meet him who joyfully works righteousness, those who remember You in Your ways.” (*ESV*) The *NIV* says it this way: “You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember Your ways.” And *The Message* paraphrases it like this: “You meet those who happily do what is right, who keep a good memory of the way You work.” Let me share two simple observations here that I hope will be an encouragement to you.

- First, how we serve God — that is, the posture of our heart, as we serve Him — is incredibly important. You see, we are not simply to “work righteousness” or “do right” as God, through Isaiah, calls us to do. We are to serve God joyfully, gladly, happily. If we are only “doing our duty” when we read our Bibles, pray, serve others in the Name of Jesus, go to church, sing with the congregation, give our offerings, etc., we are missing something. We are not honoring God.

- Second, one of the key ways to serve God joyfully, gladly, happily, is, as Isaiah says, to “remember Him in His ways.” That is, when we remember Jesus and all He has done and is doing for us even now as you read this sentence, it will have the effect of generating gratitude, joy, gladness, happiness. Remembering Him (“Do this in remembrance of Me”) has the effect of moving us from duty to delight. In fact, we start to experience the wonder that delight becomes our duty. The two become one. “Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.” (Ps.37:4) “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.” (Matt.22:37)

- John Newton, the ex-slave trader who is most famous for his hymn *Amazing Grace*, wrote a hymn originally titled *Hymn 3* in his *Olney Hymnbook*. We read the following:

“Our pleasure and our duty,  
though opposite before;  
Since we have seen His beauty,  
are joined to part no more;  
It is our highest pleasure,  
no less than duties call:  
To love Him beyond measure,  
and serve Him with our all.

God deserves our whole-hearted, delight-driven duty.

Let me close with a story Pastor John Piper shared years ago. It’s one of my favorites. He says, “Consider the analogy of a wedding anniversary. Mine is on December 21<sup>st</sup>. Suppose on this day I bring home a dozen long-stemmed roses for Noel. When she meets me at the door, I hold out the roses, and she says, “Oh, Johnny, they’re beautiful; thank you,” and gives me a big hug. Then suppose I hold up my hand and say matter-of-factly, “Don’t mention it; it’s my duty.” What happens? Is not the exercise of duty a noble thing? Do not we honor those we dutifully serve? Not much. Not if there is no heart in it. Dutiful roses are a contradiction in terms. If I am not moved by a spontaneous affection for her as a person, the roses do not honor her — period; in fact, they belittle her. They are a very thin covering for the fact that she does not have the worth or beauty in my eyes to kindle affection.” (John Piper: *Desiring God*, p.93)

So, back to Isaiah. Do we joyfully work righteousness, gladly do what is right? IF we have lost sight of God and are not remembering Him and catch ourselves going through the motions with delight, we must “confess the sin of joylessness. Acknowledge the culpable coldness of your heart, pray earnestly that God would restore the joy of obedience. And then go ahead and do the outward dimension of your duty in the hope that the doing will rekindle the delight.” (*Desiring God*: p.301)



## Open Doors releases its 2021 watch list

*a BreakPoint commentary by John Stonestreet  
and Roberto Rivera, dated 1/26/21*

The devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic is still being tallied, both in terms of lives and livelihoods lost. In addition to the millions dead, the millions more who've been infected (including some who face long-term physical damage), there's the psychological and emotional harm of extended isolation and the millions who face financial ruin. In the midst of all of that, we are now learning of another, less obvious, but just as deadly fallout from the pandemic.

Early January, Open Doors, an organization committed to "serving persecuted Christians worldwide," released their World Watch List. The list documents the 50 countries where it is most dangerous to be a Christian, highlights global trends in religious persecution and provides unique insights into the global persecuted church.

In many ways, the 2021 report resembles those of previous years. North Korea is still at the top of the list, followed by Afghanistan. As in previous years, the list is dominated by either communist governments or overwhelmingly Islamic countries. Christian persecution in these countries may take the form of discrimination, restrictions on religious practice, imprisonment, violence or killings. The persecution may come at the hands of the state or at the hands of private actors with the state looking the other way.

However, the 2021 World Watch List does differ from those in previous years in a very important way. The COVID-19 pandemic has "exposed the ugliness of Christian persecution in a new way."

For example, in India, COVID-19 food relief has been used by some radical Hindu government officials to pressure Indian Christians to renounce their faith. In some regions of India, Christians are last in line to receive aid, including food. As a result, some Christians there are being forced to travel long distances in order to receive help. Some are forced to hide their Christian identity. Similar reports are emerging from other countries around the world, including Myanmar, Nepal, VietNam, Malaysia, Yemen and Sudan.

In some parts of Pakistan, the combination of COVID-19 and anti-Christian discrimination have wiped out Christian-owned businesses. Christians already struggling to make ends meet have found their Muslim neighbors using the coronavirus as a pretext to shut them down altogether.

In the Kaduna state of Nigeria, Christians who were already facing genocidal violence at the hands of Islamists and Fulani herdsmen are, according to Open Doors, receiving only one-sixth of the rations allocated to Muslim families.

In addition to the health and economic pressures, authoritarian governments around the world have used COVID-19 to consolidate power and further restrict religious activities they deem to be a threat to their authority. In China, a series of "strange and anonymous" messages on social media blamed Christian religious activities for a rise in COVID-19 in Hebei Province. It was fake news, but it still put Christians in the crosshairs of local authorities looking for an excuse to crackdown on their activities.

China's infamous surveillance capability was used to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Already well on the way to implementing a tyrannical "social credit system" to monitor the loyalty and compliance of its citizens, during COVID China has used surveillance to further scrutinize Christians and other religious minorities. Similarly, India, which has been steadily moving up the World Watch List in recent years, had already created what's been called the most sophisticated ID program in the world, AADHAAR. Nearly 40 percent of the world's population live in these two countries, countries that are already hostile to Christians and are actively perfecting ways to surveil their populations. To call it ominous would be an understatement.

Open Doors is right to warn us how COVID opportunism and the potential danger of "creeping surveillance" threatens religious freedom. Please pray for persecuted Christians around the world.



## China Report

Pastor Wang Li was the influential leader of the Early Rain Church, one of the best known house churches in China, when he was detained in December 2018 and charged with "inciting subversion of state power" and "illegal business operations." A former law professor, Pastor Wang has been vocal in calling on the state to uphold religious liberties. In addition to prison time, he was sentenced to deprivation of his political rights for three years plus a \$7,000 penalty.

