



# CrossWay Community Current

an Evangelical Free Church

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## The local church . . . as God intended

As readers of the January *Current* will find in our pastor's monthly column, Pastor Manuel has been mapping out a sermon series focusing on the local church as designed by God and prescribed through the Apostle Paul in his two New Testament letters to Timothy and his letter to Titus.



These three epistles are full of encouragement as well as instructions outlining the expectations of God Himself for service to Him and to mankind through this heavenly institution on earth.

This would be a good season to invite friends to join you in worship at CrossWay and attention to the Lord's expectations of us as His church. Beginning Jan. 8, Brendan Marchione will be leading an adult Sunday School class in how we got our Bible. Invite your friends to stay for that study as well.

## Sanctity of Human Life Sunday

Recent actions by the voters of Michigan have put pregnancy care ministries into a precarious situation. CrossWay will observe Sanctity of Human Life Sunday with a several-week cash donation drive for the Pregnancy Resource Center of Grand Rapids, as is our custom at this time of year. We hope our church family will dig deep to help this local Christian ministry meet the challenges they face and serve moms and their babies

## Christmas behind bars



Thanks to CrossWay, 13 Christian prisoners, plus one persecuted evangelist, are receiving the encouragement of Christmas cards and heart-language scripture. This year, we sent 227 cards overseas to four countries where the Gospel moves underground. Thanks to The Voice of the Martyrs and Mike

Ward for information and postal addresses.

## Wintry weather advisory

We had a big enough storm in December to cancel both Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services, and you never know what's coming in western Michigan! So keep this info handy: cancellation to be posted by 8 a.m. on a given Sunday on WOOD-TV ([www.woodtv.com/weather/closings](http://www.woodtv.com/weather/closings)). (Photo actual, from Hudsonville in December!)



## We have lost a servant & friend

Long-time member and former Elder Board member Mike Bryant



went home to Jesus on Dec. 19 after a two-month illness. He leaves his wife Kathy (shown with him here) and a loving family, including daughters Shannon & Jamie, who also serve the CrossWay family. His wisdom, dedication and friendship will be missed.

## Coming Up at CrossWay Community

Sundays • 9:30<sup>AM</sup> • Prayer, south wing classroom  
Sundays • 10<sup>AM</sup> • Gather for worship together  
Sundays • 11:30<sup>AM</sup> • Sunday School for all ages  
Tuesdays • 1<sup>PM</sup> • Ladies Bible Study  
Tuesdays • 7 - 9<sup>PM</sup> • Small group @ Hinkles' home  
Wednesdays • 7<sup>PM</sup> • Underhill Club @ Marchiones' home  
Wed., Jan. 4 • 7<sup>PM</sup> • Elder meeting  
Thurs., Jan. 5 & 19 • 7<sup>PM</sup> • Veurink/Le small group  
Fri., Jan. 6 • 6<sup>PM</sup> • Men's discipleship program: What & Why  
Sat., Jan. 7 • 9<sup>AM</sup> • Men's breakfast @ Bob Evans  
Sat., Jan. 7 • 9<sup>AM</sup> • Women's breakfast @ Bob Evans  
Fri., Jan. 13 • 6<sup>PM</sup> • Men's discipleship program: How  
Sun., Jan. 22 • Sanctity of Human Life Sunday  
Sun., Jan. 22 • 11:30<sup>AM</sup> • Semiannual Congregational Meeting

## Greeting our frontline workers

At our Christmas potluck, many CrossWay folks signed greeting cards for our missionaries serving overseas and at home in the States. And by the end of the month, CrossWay sent each of these Gospel servants a modest gift from our missions budget.

So far, we've heard from four of them with their thanks and personal updates:

**From Dr. Luke & Nancy (Virginia/Pakistan)** — Please thank the church family on our behalf for the extra support given in December as a Christmas gift. We appreciate your wanting to help us in this way.

We are back in the US and will see our three Stateside boys over the next five days. Each of them was busy with other responsibilities over Christmas, so the New Years weekend will be our family time. On Christmas Day, we were able to visit with Luke's mother in a nursing care facility and with his brother and family, who live locally. We also attended a lovely Christmas Eve service at my home church [in Virginia] that was very special. This was the first time in four years that we've been home for Christmas, so we "drank it in."

Happy New Year. ... *Luke and Nancy*

**Kate & Matyas (Budapest, Hungary/ReachGlobal)** — Thank you so much for this extra gift! We trust God has every provision for what He has called us all to. I hope you all see His blessing in your lives as a church and individually. We are blessed to have partnership with you!

Happy new year! ... *Kate & family*

**Steve & Merrilee (Minnesota/SALT)** — Thank you to you and CrossWay brothers and sisters for this pleasant and unexpected gift! We sincerely appreciate it.

Merrilee and I are now at one of our sons' (Joe) homes in the Chicago area for the New Year. We are doing quite well and will enjoy these three grandkids for the next few days.

May the Lord richly bless the CrossWay ministry in 2023.

Grace and peace from us, ... *Steve and Merrilee*

**Denis & Diane (US/Pakistan/Life TV)** — Thank you so much, Pam, and everyone at CrossWay! That was really quite a storm you had. We had a very windy day and a drastic drop in temperature, but nothing that forced cancellations. Blessings on you in the New Year, ... *Diane & Denis*

## Christmas greeting with a twist



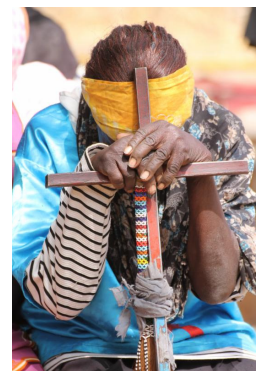
*"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven...."* Jesus's words recorded in Matthew 5: 11-12a

Militant Islamists in the Sudan Armed forces just sent a Christmas greeting to Christians in the village of Doka by burning down their church.

The Sudan Church of Christ (SCOC) is one of the largest denominations in Sudan. The church has a very strong presence in the Nuba mountains of Sudan but is active elsewhere in the country, including Eastern Sudan, where the church in Doka is located.

Sudan's government has been dominated by Islamists in the military for decades. The militants refuse to give up power unless they are granted amnesty for their many crimes against the Sudanese people. As a result, the people continue to suffer persecution and affliction by those charged with their protection.

As we enter 2023, please remember to pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world, especially in the "forgotten" places like Sudan. The persecution of the church in Sudan comes as a result of its effectiveness in spreading the Gospel message of love, forgiveness and reconciliation.



This information provided by *Persecution Project.org*. (Persecution Project Foundation)

## Pray that our persecuted brethren will:

- Sense God's presence
- Know we are praying for them
- Experience God's comfort
- See God open doors for evangelism
- Boldly share the Gospel
- Mature in their faith
- Be granted wisdom in covert ministry work
- Remain joyful amid suffering
- Forgive and love their persecutors
- Be rooted in God's Word

This prayer prompt from The Voice of the Martyrs.



I write this on Dec. 26<sup>th</sup>, a day after Christmas, and, two days after the cancellation of both our Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services. I can't remember if we have ever had to cancel a Christmas Eve Service. Perhaps we have, but I can't recall doing so. I always feel torn with such a decision, preferring to "tough it out" and get to church, but then again, I have only two blocks to drive to get here!

Honestly, I felt a bit lost not being with you during those two days. You all have become so central to our lives, and not being with the Body of Christ during these holy days didn't feel so good. Can I even say, the Body of Christ here at CrossWay has become a household, a pillar, and a foundation for my family. Yes, I'll say it, and, for good reason, but I'm getting a bit ahead of myself!

You see, I am reminded of the new sermon series I will begin on January 8<sup>th</sup> on the Pastoral Epistles. These letters from the Apostle Paul will cover I and II Timothy and the book of Titus. After discussing this upcoming series with your Elders, I was led to preach from them for a few reasons. First, I have never preached through these letters! Second, with the Covid crisis somewhat behind us, I felt it was timely and important to hear what the Bible has to say about the importance of the local church and our relationship to it. That is what the Pastoral Epistles are all about. Paul himself tells us directly why he wrote I Timothy, telling his young protégé Timothy: *"Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth."* I Tim. 3:14-15.

In II Timothy, Paul tells Timothy that he wants to *"remind him to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of hands."* (II Tim. 1:6). So

## The Local Church: God's household, pillar, and foundation

much of II Timothy is Paul encouraging Timothy, on a very personal level, how to stay faithful in ministry.

You may or may not be aware, but since Covid started and has somewhat abated, many churchgoers have not yet made it back to physical gatherings. They have preferred to stay at home and catch a service online. This has led many Christians to ponder the importance (or lack thereof!) of the local church and our actual physical gatherings. Over the course of this series, questions such as the following will be addressed:

- ▶ Is the local church necessary?
- ▶ What are the priorities of the local church?
- ▶ What are the roles/responsibilities of men and women?
- ▶ Who qualifies as a leader in the local church?
- ▶ What are the priorities of leaders, especially those who focus on preaching and teaching?
- ▶ How do we serve our widows?
- ▶ How should we use money and the other resources God has blessed us with?
- ▶ What should our worship look like?
- ▶ Is doctrine necessary, and, what comprises good doctrine, which makes us spiritually healthy, vs. false teaching, which leads to spiritual sickness and even death?
- ▶ And, finally, can one "do" or "be" the church at home, watching a service online via livestream, etc.?

Of course, while Paul knew nothing of the internet or "virtual church," these letters, I believe, have much to say about how we view/do church. As I close this month's article in *The Current*, I ask you to join me in praying that Paul's objective in these Epistles might be taken to heart by all of us. That is, as we reflect again on I Timothy 3:14-15, each of us would grow in our confidence on how we should conduct ourselves as God's household.

Think about that! Paul calls the church "God's household!" He also says it is the pillar and foundation of the truth. If the church, then, is the pillar and foundation of the truth — a truth Paul clearly articulates in these Epistles (see I Tim. 4:3, 6, 16; 6:3-4; II Tim. 1:11-14; 4:1-4; Titus 2:1) — then we are engaged in something quite significant, even essential for our faith. May God help each of us to be men and women who are committed to His truth as we live it out together in His household of faith.