



December 2023

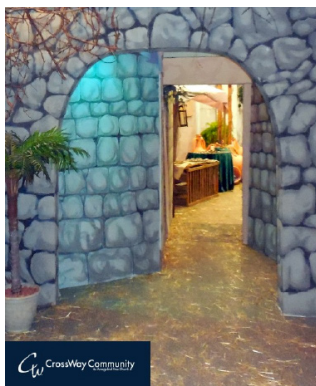
CrossWay Community Current

an Evangelical Free Church

3950 Burton SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546 • 616.949.5690
wheelchair accessible • www.crosswaygr.com • crossway.communitygr@gmail.com

Focus on Bethlehem

The CrossWay congregation is reaching out to our neighbors this month with a pair of evenings designed to provide a taste of the setting for the birth of our Savior two millennia ago in an insignificant little town in Judea.



An Evening in Bethlehem

Bring your friends and family to this unique Christmas event!

Featuring actors in a beautiful re-creation of the stable, the marketplace, and more

CrossWay Community Church
3950 Burton St SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546
A mile east of Calvin University

December 15th & 16th, arrive anytime between 6:30 pm - 9 pm.
It takes about 30 minutes to see everything

FREE ADMISSION




For more information call: (616) 949-5690
www.grandrapidscrosswaycommunitychurch.com

You've seen the sets being erected at the south end of CrossWay. But there's still much to be done. Contact Cody Hinkle and volunteer to bring items for donation and/or to dress in costume and play a role in this unusual outreach event. And invite friends!

Caring, sharing

As a result of the fighting that began with the terrorist attacks in Israel on Oct. 7 and the humanitarian crisis that has followed, EFCA ReachGlobal Crisis Response is giving us an opportunity to help. ReachGlobal staff serve in the region and have strategic partners with established relationships in the area. Leaders are assessing the situation and determining next steps. Our denomination's financial goal for this project is \$200,000. Your gifts help to share the love of Christ with those in need. Donate online via <https://give.efca.org/projects/middle-east-conflict-response>.

And join us in prayer as we lift up those affected by this war:

-  Pray that ReachGlobal staff in the Middle East will have wisdom, endurance and fruitfulness;
-  Pray for comfort and healing to all those affected;
-  Pray that Jesus will bring peace, justice and reconciliation to the region.



We're pretty hardy at CrossWay, but if winter storms ever do make calling off Sunday worship a necessity, we will post the cancellation by 8 a.m. on a given Sunday on WOOD-TV (www.woodtv.com/weather/closings) and on WCSG Radio, 91.3 FM (secure.wcsg.org/closings).

Shoeboxes that bless

Thank you, CrossWay family, for once again blessing children around the world with 40 shoeboxes stuffed with gifts to be delivered by Samaritan's Purse's project Operation Christmas Child. And thanks to the Stevens family for organizing our efforts.



Coming Up at CrossWay Community

Sundays • 9:30^{AM} • Prayer, south wing classroom
Sundays • 10^{AM} • Gather for worship together
Tuesdays • 7 - 9^{PM} • Small group @ Hinkles' home
Wednesdays • 6:30^{PM} • Underhill Club @ Marchiones'
Sat., Dec. 2 • 9^{AM} • Men's breakfast @ Bob Evans
Sat., Dec. 2 • 9^{AM} • Women's breakfast @ Russ's
Sun., Dec. 3 • 11:30^{AM} • All-church prayer meeting
Tues., Dec. 5 • 1^{PM} • Ladies weekly Bible study
Wed., Dec. 6 • 7^{PM} • Elder meeting
Tues., Dec. 12 • 6:30^{PM} • Ladies Christmas party @ Audrey Johnston's home
Thurs., Dec. 14 & 28 • 6:30^{PM} • Veurink small group @ Le's
Sun., Dec. 3, 10, 17 • 11:30^{AM} • Sunday School
Fri. & Sat., Dec. 15 & 16 • 6:30 - 9^{PM} • An Evening at Bethlehem
Mon., Dec. 25 • Merry Christmas!

8th annual Christmas cardwriting party

With the mid-December Bethlehem event construction already underway at the south end of CrossWay, our 8th annual support for persecuted Christians was sited back in its original location of Fellowship Hall, even spilling over into the lobby a bit to accommodate all participants.

New this year was a focus on prisoners in a single country: Eritrea, where most of the eight prisoners to whom we sent greetings have been imprisoned without charge or trial for close to 20 years. Their crime? Sharing their faith with their communities, offering opportunities to come to saving faith in Christ.

Eritrea is located in Africa, just across the Red Sea from Yemen, and has earned a fourth-place ranking on the Open Doors “watch list” for 2023, a report of the ministry’s evaluation of persecution by government and/or society around the world. Eritrea is known for its desert conditions and its practice of housing Christian prisoners in no-ventilation shipping containers.

This year, between 25 and 30 adults participated in our writing and prayer time, with an additional opportunity for our Sunday School children to draw and/or color pictures to be included in the cards. We’re sending 180 cards, stuffed with encouraging Scripture verses printed in the Eritrean language, and many containing the bonus of a child’s whimsy to brighten dark days.

Thanks to Dick Ritsema for our furniture set-up, Cody Hinkle for helping design the space this year, Penny Pullen for her support throughout the process, and Becky Alves for our table decorations. Thanks also to Jocelyn Ostoich, Samantha Montgomery, Linda Stevens, and Jane Tucker for jumping in to help the children with their activity. We’re also grateful for the several participants who contributed greeting cards and everyone who took the time to reach out to our brothers in their time of distress.



Fun & fellowship – the Ladies’ Christmas Gathering

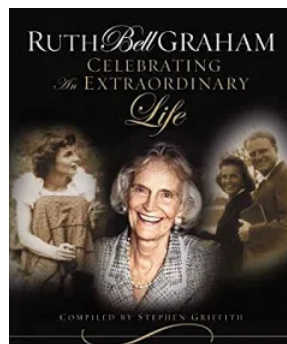


It’s a CrossWay tradition and an evening of fun ... the ladies Christmas party at the home of Audrey Johnston, this year scheduled

for Tuesday, Dec. 12, 6:30 p.m. Each lady is encouraged to bring a wrapped ornament and a snack to share.

New to the CrossWay library

Celebrating an Extraordinary Life: Ruth Bell Graham is a compilation of memories, “a unique portrait of one of America’s most revered and influential Christian women as seen through the eyes of those who knew her best.” Enjoy this retrospective via the CrossWay library. You’ll find it featured this month on the lobby table near the coffee bar.



Our source for prisoners’ profiles and pictures is a website maintained by The Voice of the Martyrs, presenting the stories of our brothers and

occasionally sister who have permitted their stories to be posted online. Currently, you’ll find information about 13 prisoners from Eritrea, China and North Korea by searching <https://www.prisoneralert.com/>.

Please remember our fellow Christians in your daily prayer time.





The Advent of Jesus: the REAL Real Thing

Last month I got a bit ahead of myself and shared with you what an “Epiphany” (an *appearance*) of Jesus would look like for us.

Studying Titus, I couldn’t help noticing how important an epiphany is to the follower of Jesus. In Jesus’s first appearing, we are told “the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.” (Titus 2:11) This first coming gets us ready to celebrate His second coming as “we wait for the blessed hope — the *appearing* of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.” (Titus 2:13) Finally, we are reminded what a difference His appearing made to us, for “when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us. . . .” (Titus 3:4)

In each of those verses, the English word “appeared” translates the Greek word *Epifanh* (Epiphany!). Jesus has appeared to us, and He will appear again. In the next four weeks, we will return to the common Advent themes of **Hope, Love, Joy and Peace**. Nothing new. Nothing fancy, but in these four words are *everything* we need and long for.

During Advent, we long for His appearance, His “Epiphany.” You probably know, as well as I do, that our longings for hope, love, joy and peace are the very things of life *everyone* longs for, Christian or not. People live their entire lives for the things that come with hope, love, joy and peace. And, most often, apart from Jesus, people grasp for these things and end up cynical and disillusioned because the world cannot deliver the real thing that endures. The real thing.

Some of you might remember “The Real Thing” was a slogan for Coca Cola for many years during the “Cola Wars” of the 1970s. The implication, of course, is that if you or I drank any other kind of cola (Pepsi, RC, etc.), we would not be enjoying Coke, “The Real Thing.” How silly, yet even Coke itself went off on a little bit of nonsense years ago, coming up with what they called the “New Coke.” Oh, you could still get the classic formula, but the “New Coke” was touted to be better than the old stuff which of course, was the “Real Thing.” New Coke didn’t last long. Coke

made a mistake. People wanted the classic Coke, or the “Real Thing.” And so do we. I speak of Jesus of course, not of the caramel-colored sugary sweet soft drink!

Please allow me to ask, as you read, a few “personal” questions. These are reflections/questions I ask myself in one way or another every day God gives me breath. No, I don’t always literally or consciously ask these questions each day, but I am acutely aware, by the way I live my life these questions are shaping me. I encourage you to ask them or similar questions of yourself. Let’s begin with a few HOPE questions:

- What are your hopes and dreams?
- What longings (for a “better” life) are you aware of when you first get out of bed?
- Are your hopes mostly pragmatic? —
I hope I get to work on time.
I hope my car starts.
I hope the furnace doesn’t go out.
I hope my friends are still my friends.
I hope my relationships endure . . .

You get the idea, I hope!

LOVE. Does anyone truly love me? Does anyone who truly knows me truly love me anyway? Do I know how to love, to give it and to receive it? And that loving your enemy stuff — how impractical and other worldly. No one loves like that, right?

JOY. Deep inside do I have an abiding can’t-be-touched sense that all is well? A lightness of soul that bids me to smile, even when so much of life outside of me is dark, confusing and scary?

PEACE. When it seems much of the world is at war, who or what will bring peace? And, peace, not as in a “simple” absence of conflict, but the very presence of the hope, love and joy we long for, a sense that nothing needed is missing, a sense of a healthy life and soul, both within, and the enjoyment of this peace in my relationships.

Who will bring us the Real Thing, not fleeting and fickle imitations? As Christians, the “Answer” is in our name and the One we long for in this Advent season — our Lord Jesus Christ. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Taking shape

*In last month's edition of the CURRENT,
we documented the beginning construction work
of bringing Bethlehem to life at CrossWay
for our special Evening at Bethlehem
welcoming friends and neighbors on Friday & Saturday, Dec. 15 & 16, 6:30 - 9 p.m.
During November:*

Actors tried on costumes ...



items began to form
the marketplace ...



a synagogue
emerged ...

hints of
Roman
influence
appeared ...



and now ...

The producers of this outreach are still recruiting for key roles: Mary & Joseph, Innkeeper & wife, and Scribe.

A few items are yet needed to complete the set: 8 bales of straw, a goat & a sheep, and simple jewelry to be "sold" in the marketplace.

Contact Cody Hinkle (in the fellowship directory).



CrossWay Community Mission Statement:

God has called us to make disciples of Jesus Christ who respond to His Gospel by committing ourselves to loving God, one another and the world in Christ's name.

The media ministry *BreakPoint* provided thoughts on a tool for developing our evangelism skills in September. Here we reprint this piece by John Stonestreet and Kasey Leander:

For over 30 years, my friend Greg Koukl has taught Christians how to engage with people across world-view lines by asking questions. His first book *Tactics* has equipped thousands of Christians to communicate with wisdom and passion. This month, Koukl is releasing a follow-up to that book, entitled *Street Smarts: Using Questions to Answer Christianity's Toughest Challenges*. Among the goals of the book is to make evangelism a less intimidating and more successful endeavor:

There are few things that cause more nagging guilt for Christians than sharing their faith. They feel guilt because they don't witness enough. They don't witness enough because they're scared. And they're scared for good reason. Sharing the Gospel and defending it—apologetics—often feels like navigating a minefield these days. For most of us, engaging others on spiritual matters does not come easy, especially when people are hostile.

Koukl helpfully distinguishes what he calls “harvesting” and “gardening.” Because God brings the harvest, our goal is simply faithfulness to what is true about the world and about people. According to John's Gospel, some Christians harvest and others sow, so “that sower and reaper may rejoice together.”

A singular focus only on “harvesting,” Koukl argues, leads to a number of problems. For example, the very important “gardeners” are encouraged to sit out the evangelism process, in favor of the “harvesters.” This is often the case when Christians fail to understand the power of the cultural forces shaping the worldview of non-believers, one reason our Gospel seeds seem to only bounce off “hard soil.” Christians, therefore, must also commit to “spadework,” or digging up the faulty preconceptions about life, God and humanity that people hold, often unknowingly. One great way to do this “spadework” is by asking questions.

Ask questions. Lots of them. Your first step in any encounter should be to gather as much information as possible. It's hard to know how to proceed — or even if to proceed — unless you first get the lay of the land. You need intel, and friendly queries get it for you.

When you need to buy some time to catch your wits, ask a question. When you face a challenge you're not sure how to deal with, ask a question. When the conversation bogs down and you think it best to move in a new direction, ask a question. Whenever you're in doubt about how to move forward, ask a question.

In *Street Smarts*, Koukl teaches the kinds of questions that are most effective while also providing sample conversations on the most common topics, which is another very important contribution of this book. In addition to answering the misconceptions about faith that people often have — from God's existence to the divinity of Jesus — *Street Smarts* helps believers engage others on the moral and social issues at the center of our cultural discourse, such as abortion and gender and the many topics related to human sexuality. Koukl provides the questions, the talking points and the examples that can open up significant conversations, invite skeptics in and challenge presuppositions. In the process, Christians will develop confidence in what is true.

Our job is to jump in. The results are up to God.

You may be serving quietly, in the dark, often not knowing the true extent of your impact — going out in obedience, doing what is right, speaking what is true, laboring faithfully. The course of history is often changed by small things done by ordinary people at opportune times, even though they never realize it. We take what we have — our skills, our gifts, our capabilities, our opportunities — then place everything in the hands of the Savior. ... A person may rebel at what you share, but if you're thoughtful in what you say and gracious in how you say it, chances are good you'll give him something to think about.

As Koukl writes, “Now is not the time for fear of any kind. It's not the time to circle the wagons or to pull up the drawbridge. It's the time for ambassadors equipped with knowledge, tactical wisdom and character to seize the moment as agents of change for the kingdom of heaven when the world needs them most.”

For more resources to live like a Christian in this cultural moment, go to breakpoint.org.