

Classis Lake Erie

Agenda Supplement

March 5, 2016

STATED CLERK—SUPPLEMENTAL

1. Ann Arbor CRC Council requests an examination for Candidate Brandon Kim, who has accepted a call to minister in Ann Arbor Hope CRC. [Brandon's sermons are at the tail-end of this long document!]
2. River Terrace Church council and Rev. Sam Parry request that classis approve a separation according to Church Order, Article 17. [Relevant documents will be available at the classis meeting.]
3. River Terrace Church council requests that classis approve a position description for a commissioned pastor at Hmong Christian Ministries. [The description is included below.]

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes — February 2, 2016

- I. Attendance
 - A. John Groen, Eunice Bossenbroek, Larry Fisher, JungUn Park, and Bob Arbogast are present.
 - B. Paul Bouman and Gary Adams are absent with notice.
- II. Continuing business and interim actions
 - A. We approved the minutes of the October 3, 2015, classis meeting.
 - B. Student support
 1. Support for Jiyong Kim (Ann Arbor, Hope CRC) was increased to \$9,800. (This incorporates the \$2,500 increase approved by classis in October 2015.)
 2. At the request of Student Fund, we approved support for Mark VanAndel in the amount of \$1,500. (The total student fund amount is within the overall budget maximum.)
 - C. We appointed a team of church visitors, Ben Van Arragon and Harvey Stob, to visit River Terrace Church.
 - D. Gary Adams volunteered and was appointed to be Classis Vice-President.
 - E. In response to a request from Elim Christian Services, we decided not to grant permission for the denominational offices to "rent" to Elim the Classis Lake Erie portion of the denominational mailing list.
 - F. We received a report on the closing and dissolution of West Park CRC.
- III. Plans for the March 5, 2016 classis meeting
 - A. Request for organized status: Ann Arbor Hope CRC.

- B. Request from Ann Arbor CRC for the examination of candidate Brandon Kim, who has accepted a call to minister at Ann Arbor Hope CRC.
 - 1. We appoint Chris Lanham (Jackson: Cascades Fellowship CRC) and Victor Chen (Ann Arbor CRC) to be sermon evaluators.
 - 2. Assigned text: Lord's Day 16
 - 3. Examiners
 - a) Practica: JungUn Park (All Nations, Toledo)
 - b) Biblical and Theological Position: Nathan Gritter (Community, Saginaw)
- C. Release of service to a congregation (Article 17): River Terrace CRC/Sam Perry
We charge the church visiting team to meet with RTC council and with Sam Perry in order to formulate, in accord with the Supplement to Church Order Article 17-a, a recommendation regarding evaluation and assistance necessary before Sam Perry would be eligible to accept another call.
- D. Election of synodical delegates (minister, elder, deacon, plus one)
- E. Introductions to synodical study reports on:
 - 1. Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage: Rolf Bouma (Ann Arbor Campus Chapel)
 - 2. Religious Persecution and Liberty: Terence Visser (Willard CRC)
 - 3. Doctrine of Discovery: Dirk Evans (emeritus; Ann Arbor CRC)
- F. Mary Rupke: 5 minutes for World Renew Direct Response Services.
- G. Ed Williams: 5 minutes for Safe Church Team update.
- H. Faith Formation Ministries requests 10 minutes for a presentation—no, too much on agenda.
- I. At the request of the World Renew Board, we recommend that classis approve Mary Rupke for a second three-year term as CLE delegate to its board.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CREDENTIALING

We are pleased to announce that **Melody Van Arragon** was recently awarded a credentialed status in the area of Music Ministry by the Office of Pastor-Church Relations on behalf of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Melody is currently a member of the ministry staff at First CRC of Detroit as the Worship Coordinator.

We ask that this accomplishment be recognized and celebrated through announcements and notation in the formal minutes of your organization (church or classis).

After several years in the making, the credentialing process was approved by the CRCNA Board of Trustees in May, 2009. Credentialing for church ministry staff in the CRCNA is a process through which candidates are examined, supported and encouraged to grow in knowledge, skill and character. A key requirement is the demonstration of the Reformed perspective which informs and is lived out through the ministry of the staff member.

In the past few years an accelerated credentialing path was created for those church ministry staff who meet the criteria of formal education in their area of ministry and/or years of experience in a staff position. To date 35 church staff members throughout Canada and the United States have been credentialed.

The credentialing process benefits the credentialed staff member, the local congregation and the denomination as a whole, and is an important step in moving the church toward a more professional, educated staff that will support the development of healthy church life.

Please join us in congratulating Melody and rejoicing in her accomplishments and ministry.

On behalf of the Credentialing Council,
Jeanne Kallemeyn

COMMISSIONED PASTOR POSITION DESCRIPTION

River Terrace Church council asks that classis approve the following position description for a commissioned pastor working at Hmong Christian Ministries:

1. Prepare to teach/preach God's Word weekly. Encourage members in their walk with Christ and train members for service at HCM and in God's kingdom. Administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.
2. Meet with and/or have a good relationship with all committees and church members. Spend time with the youth, women's group and men's group during their meetings as time permits.
3. Set a time throughout the week for prayer meetings and for visitation of members who request visits.
4. Attend meetings of Classis Lake Erie.
5. Attend classes or training sessions as time allows. Notify HCM before attending such events.
6. Teach those who will become new members of the church and/or those ready to make Profession of Faith, about God's Word (the Bible) and about the doctrines and practices of the Christian Reformed Church.
7. Prepare to bring God's Word at significant events in members' lives such as weddings, funerals, birthdays, and the like.
8. Prepare regular reports to the HCM Council about your activities on behalf of HCM.
9. Follow the guidelines for the office of Commissioned Pastor set forth in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook published by the Christian Reformed Church N.A.
10. Perform other duties as may be agreed by HCM and pastor.
11. Pastor shall be devoted to Jesus and committed to the church and its mission.
12. The position of Commissioned Pastor at HCM is a part time position. HCM recognizes that pastor has full time employment in addition to pastor's responsibilities at HCM. Pastor shall devote no more than 14 hours per week to pastor's duties at HCM as described in this Position Description, but is not required to spend more time than this. Pastor shall be paid for his service as specified in a letter of agreement between pastor and HCM.

REPORT TO THE HISTORICAL COMMITTEE OF THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA

December 2015

Classical Representatives

The Historical Committee encourages each classis to appoint a classical representative who acts as a liaison between the Historical Committee and churches within a particular classis. In a classis that has no classical representative the stated clerk has agreed to act as our representative until a classical representative is appointed. The Historical Committee today has classical representatives in some, but not all of the classes.

- In Classis California South William Verhoef has resigned as our representative. Cornelius Pool, who comes highly recommended by Cindi Fairchild (our Greater Los Angeles representative), has accepted our invitation to be our representative in Classis California South.
- In Classis Central California, Stated Clerk Larry Fryling is now our representative succeeding David Vander Meulen.
- In Classis Chicago South Stated Clerk Jeremy Oosterhouse has enthusiastically agreed to succeed former Stated Clerk Bryce Mensink.
- In Classis Hamilton Stated Clerk John Den Otter's term has ended. Classis Hamilton mandates that their stated clerk act as the Historical Committee's representative. Thus, Dick Kranendonk succeeds him.
- In Classis Muskegon Richard Hamstra has resigned and has been replaced by Stated Clerk Drew Sweetman.
- In Classis Niagara John Te Brake who had been stated clerk has agreed to continue as our representative even though he no longer is stated clerk.
- In Classis Northcentral Iowa Thomas Vos, who as stated clerk was our representative, has been succeeded by Stated Clerk Jonathan Spronk who now is our representative.
- In Classis Northern Illinois Stated Clerk Gerald Frens has agreed to continue as our representative even though his term as stated clerk is ending.
- In Classis Pacific Northwest Matthew Borst as stated clerk acted as our representative. Even though he no longer is stated clerk he has agreed to continue as our representative.
- In Classis Quinte Stated Clerk Bernard Bakker is retiring at the end of 2015. He has requested the Classical Ministry Committee to name a new representative.
- In Classis Zeeland our representative, Robert Bosch, has resigned. Stated Clerk Ronald Meyer has agreed to succeed Robert Bosch as our representative in this classis.

E-mails or letters have been sent to each of our representatives thanking each for the service he/she rendered throughout this past year. Each representative has been requested to continue serving throughout 2016.

Update

The Historical Committee sends letters to each classical representative and stated clerk indicating what historical material each church in a particular classis has been sent to the Archives for preservation during the course of each church's history. The classical representatives and stated clerks are encouraged to use the classical inventories and send their official records, anniversary booklets, membership directories and newsletters to the Archives.

Official minutes of seventy-nine Christian Reformed churches and two Christian school organizations were received, microfilmed, and the reels stored in our vault. When originals were sent they were returned, usually by UPS. When copies of minutes were sent, with the consent of the churches sending them, they were shredded once they had been microfilmed. At least one set of classical minutes was received from each of the forty-eight classes. If minutes were not sent in a timely fashion, the tardy stated clerks were contacted. Anniversary materials were received from fourteen Christian Reformed churches.

Anniversaries in the Denomination

The following Christian Reformed congregations will celebrate anniversaries in 2016 and 2017:

25th Anniversary

1991 – 2016

El Cerrito, CA – East Bay Korean
Houston, TX – Peace Community
Madison, WI – Geneva Campus Church
McMinnville, OR – Sunrise
Monterey Park, CA – Chinese
Ottawa, ON – Barrhaven Fellowship
Rochester Hills, MI – Han-Bit Korean
Surrey, BC – Hope Community
Tacoma, WA – True Light CRC of Tacoma

1992 – 2017

Anacortes, WA – Anacortes
Fontana, CA – Friendship Community
Gaylord, MI – Friendship
Grand Rapids, MI – Westend
Miami, FL – Iglesia Buenas Nuevas
Northridge, CA – Dong San of Love
Red Valley, AZ – Red Valley
West Valley, UT – The Community CRC

50th Anniversary

1966 – 2016

Lake City, MI – Lake City
New Brighton, MN – Faith
Rapid City, SD – Hope
South Windsor, CT – Avery Street
Troy, MI – North Hills
Vergennes, VT – Champlain Valley

1967 – 2017

Akron, OH – Akron
Bellevue, WA – Bellevue
Fountain Valley, CA – Fountain of Life Fellowship
Woodbridge, ON - Marantha

75th Anniversary

1941 – 2016

Arcadia, CA – Hope International
Cedar, IA – Christian Reformed Church of Cedar

1942 – 2017

Grand Rapids, MI – Boston Square
Mount Vernon, WA – First
Ridgewood, NJ – Ridgewood

100th Anniversary

1916 – 2016

Brooten, MN – Brooten Community Church
Chandler, MN – Chandler

1917 – 2017

Austinville, IA – Austinville
Hawarden, IA – Hawarden

125th Anniversary

1891 – 2016

Kanawha, IA – Wright
Parkersburg, IA – Parkersburg
Rock Valley, IA – First

150th Anniversary

1866 – 2016

German Valley, IL – Grace Valley
Holland, MI – Niekerk
Pella, IA – First

1867 – 2017

Berwyn, IL – Ebenezer
Wellsburg, IA – First

Archival holdings of church minutes

Total number of organized churches	849
Number whose minutes have been microfilmed	654
Number whose minutes have not been microfilmed	195

The Sunrise CRC in Lafayette, Indiana (organized in 1995), had its minutes microfilmed for the first time as did the New Hope Community CRC in Kincheloe, Michigan (organized in 1990), and the Hope Fellowship CRC in Courtice, Ontario (organized in 1999).

At the beginning of each year the Archives sends communications to each classical representative and each stated clerk. This communication informs each stated clerk and each representative concerning the materials the Archives holds for each of the individual churches within the classis that the stated clerk or representative represents. The stated clerks and representatives are asked to share this information with each church within the classis.

If a church has not sent minutes to the Archives for at least a decade the Archives encourages these churches to ship them to the Archives for microfilming. Contacts with these churches are made by telephone, e-mail, regular mail, and by personal contact. Although a few churches have made a conscious decision not to cooperate in this venture, most are amenable; some understand well the need for microfilming records and express appreciation for reminders.

In the following classes every church has sent official records to the Archives to be microfilmed: Arizona, Eastern Canada, Grand Rapids East, Hamilton, Niagara, Thornapple Valley, and Zeeland.

Churches organized prior to 2000 whose records have not been microfilmed:

During the 1960s Beaverton, OR – Oak Hills (1965)
Farmington, NM – Maranatha Fellowship (1962)
Fountain Valley, CA – Fountain of Life Fellowship (1967)

During the 1970s Burbank, IL – Immanuel (1973)
Chatham, ON – Calvary (1975)
Fullerton, CA – Orange Korean (1978)
Kelowna, BC – Kelowna (1972)
Oakdale, CA – Community (1979)
San Francisco, CA – Golden Gate (1973)
Sparta, MI – Trinity (1974)
Wheeling, IL – Korean (1971)

During the 1980s – Abbotsford, BC – New Life (1986)
Abbotsford, BC – Zion Chinese (1987)
Ames, IA – Korean (1988)
Anaheim, CA – Latin American (1983)
Anaheim, CA – The Good Shepherd (1987)
Chicago, IL – Roseland (1985)
Church Rock, NM – Church Rock (1983)
Crystal Lake, IL – Fox Valley (1982)
Fort Wingate, NM – Fort Wingate (1982)
Guelph, ON – New Life (1988)

Houston, TX – Hope (1988)
Las Vegas, NV – Pilgrim Church (1989)
Los Angeles, CA – Community (1988)
Naschitti, NM – Naschitti (1982)
Orange, CA – Korean American of Orange County (1986)
Plainfield, IL – Christ Community (1986)
Red Deer, AB – New Life Fellowship (1989)
Rimbey, AB – Rimbey (1985)
Silverdale, WA – Anchor of Hope (1986)
Spokane, WA – Hope (1988)
Teec Nos Pos, AZ – Four Corners (1982)
Tohatchi, NM – First Navajo (1983)
Vicksburg, MI – Korean (1987)
Winnipeg, MB – Good News Fellowship Ministries (1989)
Wyoming, MI – Emanuel Hispanic (1981)
Wyoming, MI – Hahn-In (1985)
Zuni, NM – Zuni (1987)

During the 1990s – Albuquerque, NM – Korean Presbyterian Galilee (1997)
Anchorage, AK – Alaska Korean (1997)
Artesia, CA – Cerritos Woori Church (1993)
Camarillo, CA – Iglesia Cristiana Ref. de Camarillo (1993)
Chicago, IL – Back to God All Nations Church (1993)
Cutlerville, MI – Discovery (1994)
Darien, IL – Suburban Life Community (1998)
El Cerrito, CA – East Bay Korean (1991)
Fife, WA – Hebron (1994)
Fresno, CA – Love Song Community Outreach (1995)
Grand Haven, MI – Covenant Life Church (1996)
Holland, MI – VictoryPoint Ministries (1993)
Irvine, CA – Urim (1998)
Jenison, MI – Friendship Chapel (1998)
Jersey City, NJ – Jersey City Mission (1997)
Kent, WA – Kent First Korean (1993)
Las Vegas, NV – Yung Kwang (1994)
Miami, FL – Iglesia Buenas Nuevas (1992)
Mission Hills, CA – Korean Peace of Los Angeles (1998)
Monterey Park, CA – Chinese (1991)
Moreno Valley, CA – Oasis Community (1999)
North Liberty, IA – Chinese Church of Iowa City (1993)
Northridge, CA – Dong San of Love (1992)
Philadelphia, PA – Spirit and Truth Fellowship (1999)
Red Valley, AZ – Red Valley (1992)
Rochester Hills, MI – Han-Bit Korean (1991)
San Diego, CA – Trinity Fellowship (1994)
Santa Ana, CA – Hmong (1996)

Savage, MN – Bridgewood Church (1999)
 Schererville, IN – Crossroads Community (1998)
 Surrey, BC – Hope Community (1991)
 Tacoma, WA – Tacoma (1990)
 Tacoma, WA – True Light of Tacoma (1991)
 Three Rivers, MI – Three Rivers (1996)
 Tualatin, OR – Christ Community (1997)
 West Valley City, UT – The Community (1992)

The mailing address of the Archives:

Archives of the CRCNA
 Attn: Dr. Robert Bolt
 Calvin College – Heritage Hall
 1855 Knollcrest Circle SE
 Grand Rapids, MI 49546-4402

bolt@calvin.edu

616-526-6922

Summary of Archival Holdings of Christian Reformed Churches in Each Classis

1December 2015

	Organized Congregations	Microfilmed	Not Microfilmed
Alberta North	30	23	7
Alberta So/Saskatchewan	18	16	2
Arizona	4	4	0
Atlantic Northeast	18	11	7
British Columbia NW	17	16	1
British Columbia SE	21	11	10
California South	19	5	14
Central California	23	19	4
Central Plains	19	18	1
Chatham	26	24	2
Chicago South	15	9	6
Columbia	13	9	4
Eastern Canada	19	19	0
Georgetown	20	18	2
Grand Rapids East	15	15	0
Grand Rapids North	18	14	4
Grand Rapids South	16	15	1
Grandville	16	14	2
Greater Los Angeles	26	9	17
Hackensack	22	11	11
Hamilton	15	15	0
Hanmi	22	0	22

Heartland	18	15	3
Holland	29	23	6
Hudson	14	7	7
Huron	20	18	2
Iakota	21	19	2
Illiana	22	18	4
Kalamazoo	17	13	4
Ko-Am	7	0	7
Lake Erie	13	12	1
Lake Superior	24	22	2
Minnkota	15	14	1
Muskegon	19	17	2
Niagara	12	12	0
Northcentral Iowa	11	10	1
Northern Illinois	17	11	6
Northern Michigan	14	13	1
Pacific Northwest	33	23	10
Quinte	19	17	2
Red Mesa	16	6	10
Rocky Mountain	21	17	4
Southeast US	11	8	3
Thornapple Valley	11	11	0
Toronto	21	20	1
Wisconsin	19	18	1
Yellowstone	7	6	1
Zeeland	18	18	0

ARCHIVAL HOLDINGS OF THE CHURCHES OF CLASSIS LAKE ERIE — 2015

AKRON, OH

Akron (1967)

Consistory minutes: 12 Jan 1963 – 16 Aug 1989 (restricted)
 25th anniversary booklet, program, three photos
 Reports of home missionary, Henry Karsten
 Church history
 Ground-breaking program, 1966
 Installation program for H. Karsten
 Mission Analysis and Projection report
 General assessment, *Where We Are Now at Akron CRC*
 Directory, 1965-1972, 1975, 1984
 Clippings

ANN ARBOR, MI

Ann Arbor (1955) Consistory minutes: 08 Jun 1955 – 10 Dec 1979 (restricted)
25th anniversary booklet
Dedication program, 1962
Directory, 1976, 1985, 1986, 1990, 1994
Clippings

Ann Arbor Hope No official records
(emerging 2006)

Ann Arbor Rock No official records
(emerging 2006)

Campus Chapel Ministries Local Committee minutes: 18 Feb 1957 – 10 Mar 1971
(restricted)
History of Campus Chapel, 1937-1978
Directory, 1965, 1976, 1986, 1987
Newsletter
Clippings

CHARLOTTE, MI

Charlotte Board minutes: 09 Sep 1985 – 1993 (restricted)
(emerging 1973) Congregational meeting minutes: 1986 – 1989
Mission Analysis and Projection
Reports, 1984-1993
Correspondence
Membership directory, 1976, 1980, 1985, 1986, 1988, 1991
Clippings

CLEVELAND, OH

East Side (1872)

WARRENSVILLE HEIGHTS

Consistory minutes: 03 Mar 1880 – 21 Dec 1995 (restricted)
Bible Society minutes: 07 Jun 1895 – 12 Nov 1898
Men's Society minutes: 06 Jan 1924 – 06 May 1928
50th and 75th anniversary materials
120th anniversary booklet, 1872-1992
1872 membership records (microfilm)
List of charter members
History by J. D. Westra, 1872-1992
Newsletters
Directory, 1977, 1982, 1987, 1990
Photos, church, 1907-1911; church; church picnic, 1906-1910

COLUMBUS, OH

Olentangy (1957) Consistory minutes: 17 May 1953 – 09 Dec 2003;
04 Aug 2005 – 01 Feb 2007 (restricted)
Elders' minutes: 27 May 1971 – 02 Dec 2003 (restricted)
25th anniversary material and booklet
35th anniversary pictorial directory
Directory, 1961, 1977, 1986, 1990, 1992
Clippings

DEARBORN, MI

Dearborn Christian Fellowship (1939) Consistory minutes: 02 Apr 1938 – 09 Dec 1987 (restricted)
Elders' minutes: 12 Jan 1970 – 16 Dec 1987 (restricted)
Executive Committee minutes: 29 Sep 1982 – 09 Dec 1987
(restricted)
25th and 50th anniversary material
Christian school booklet (microfilm)
Building dedication, 1949, 1974
Directory, 1975, 1977, 1985, 1990, 1994

EAST LANSING, MI

Campus Edge Fellowship (campus ministry) No official records

River Terrace (1935) Council minutes: 09 Nov 1934 – 13 Dec 2007 (restricted)
Elders' minutes: 11 Dec 1995 – 09 Jun 2003;
06 Nov 2006 – 01 Nov 2007 (restricted)
Executive Committee minutes: 04 Jan 2000 – 02 Jun 2003
(restricted)
Deacons' minutes: 18 Dec 1995 – 01 Nov 2007 (restricted)
Congregational minutes: 08 Dec 1969 – 07 Jan 2008
25th and 50th anniversary material
Farewell program for Hoksbergens, 1990
Directory, 1976, 1980, 1987, 1990, 1996
Building dedication
Historical analysis
Clippings

GROSSE POINTE PARK, MI

First CRC of Detroit (1914) Consistory minutes: 12 Jan 1914 – 06 Jun 1994 (restricted)
Council/Elders' / Congregational minutes:
13 Jun 1994 – 03 Jun 1996 (restricted)
Deacons' minutes: 1930 - 1947; 16 Jun 1986 – 21 May 1989
(restricted)
Council/Congregational minutes: 03 Jun 1996 – 17 May 2004
(restricted)
Elders' minutes: 24 Jun 1996 – 24 May 2004 (restricted)

Ladies' Aid Society minutes: 01 Oct 1924 – 19 Feb 1939
Young Ladies' Society minutes: 12 Nov 1923 – 20 May 1930
Men's Society minutes: 01 Mar 1932 – 21 Jan 1941
10th, 25th, 50th, 75th, and 100th anniversary materials
Directory, 1945, 1949, 1977, 1983, 1986, 1988, 1993
Photos of church, undated
Clippings

IMLAY CITY, MI

Imlay City (1928)

Consistory minutes: 11 Jun 1928 – 19 Dec 2006 (restricted)
Congregational minutes: 1952 – 29 Oct 2006
50th anniversary booklet and directory
Financial records, 1928 - 1959
Men's Society minutes: 1947 - 1957
Building dedication program and directory, 1941
Bulletins, 1938-1940, 1943-1947
Pictures of church and consistory
Directory
Clippings

JACKSON, MI

Cascades Fellowship (1959)

Council minutes: 08 Apr 1957 – 02 Jul 1985;
08 Jun 1992 – 20 May 1997 (restricted)
Elders' minutes: 03 Sep 1985 – 09 Apr 1992 (restricted)
Congregational minutes: 22 Jun 1992 – 27 Apr 1997
Clippings

LANSING, MI

Hmong Christian Ministry
(emerging 1991)

No official records

ROCHESTER HILLS, MI

Han-Bit Korean (1991)

No official records

SAGINAW, MI

Community (1940)

Council minutes: 19 Sep 1937 – 14 Dec 2005 (restricted)
Elders' minutes: 15 Oct 2002 – 14 Dec 2005 (restricted)
25th and 50th anniversary booklets
Building dedication, 1966
Directory, 1970, 1976, 1985
Clippings

TOLEDO, OH

All Nations Community
(emerging 2006)

No official records

TROY, MI**North Hills (1966)**

Council minutes: 02 Apr 1962 – 20 Oct 2009 (restricted)
 Elders' minutes: 26 Mar 1966 – 01 Mar 1998;
 15 Feb 2000 – 20 Oct 2009 (restricted)
 Deacons' minutes: 16 Jan 2001 – 19 May 2009 (restricted)
 Executive Committee minutes: 14 Aug 2001 – 14 May 2009
 (restricted)
 Congregational minutes: Feb 1966 – 19 May 2009

ROYAL OAK

25th anniversary booklet
 Handbook, 1965
 Organizational service, 1966
 Directory, 1975 - 1977

WILLARD, OH**Willard (1896)**

Council minutes: 07 Sep 1896 – 18 Aug 2002 (restricted)
 40th anniversary program
 50th and 75th anniversary material
 Centennial materials
 Directory, 1975, 1980, 1984, 1991
 Photo of church and parsonage, undated
 Clippings

13 congregations

1 no records

Have any of the following churches produced an anniversary booklet or historical sketch?

Ann Arbor	50 th
Cleveland, West Park	125 th
Columbus, Olentangy	50 th
Dearborn Christian Fellowship	75 th
East Lansing, River Terrace	75 th
Flushing, Good Shepherd	25 th and 50 th
Grosse Pointe Park, First CRC of Detroit	100 th
Imlay City	75 th
Jackson, Cascades Fellowship	25 th and 50 th
Willard	100 th

The original minutes of the discontinued Community CRC of Toledo, Ohio, and the Crosspoint CRC of Cincinnati, Ohio, should be deposited in the Denominational Archives, located in the Calvin College Library.

Records overdue:

Akron, OH
Ann Arbor, MI
Ann Arbor, MI, Chapel
Cleveland, OH, East Side
Dearborn, MI, Dearborn Christian Fellowship
Jackson, MI, Cascades Fellowship
Rochester Hills, MI, Han-Bit Korean
Willard, OH

Not Under Law, But Under Grace

Classical Sermon of Candidate Yongwan (Brandon) Kim

Assigned "text": Lord's Day 16

Q& A 43; Romans 6:1-14

Let me read the last part of today's text once again. "Because you are not under law, but under grace."

In his book, *What's So Amazing About Grace*, Philip Yancey, talks about his friend who invited him to his home one night. In the conversation, this friend says that he is considering leaving his wife after 15 years of marriage because he has found a younger, prettier, and more attractive lady. The friend says that she makes him feel more alive. She makes him happy.

The friend knows how his decision will destroy the life of his wife and his three children. He knows that his relationship with God will never be the same again. But, the friend says that he can't stop. The force pulling him toward the younger woman was like a powerful magnet. So at the end of the conversation, he asks Philip Yancey, "Do you think God can forgive something as awful as I'm about to do?" The friend was looking for assurance that he'd still be accepted by God. Maybe, he might want to hear only the last part of today's passage, "You are not under law, but under grace." Because I believe in Jesus Christ, God will still forgive me and save me by his grace. Even if I am doing wrong, it's ok because the salvation is not by my works but by God's grace. I am not under law, but under grace.

This might have been the same response from the Roman Christians after hearing what the Apostle Paul was saying in the previous chapters of this letter. What does Paul keep saying? He says this. There is no one righteous, not even one. We can't be righteous by keeping the laws. Instead, only by faith in Jesus Christ, we are justified. Only by God's grace, we are forgiven. Only by his grace, we are saved.

The church at Rome was made up of both Jews and Gentiles, but Gentile Christians were the dominant group of the church. Who were Gentiles? They were the ones who lived outside of God's law. Instead, they had been influenced by the moral standards of the Roman society. We see how immoral their life standards were from what Paul says in the Ch. 1 and 2. The life of people in Roman society was full of sexual sin, murder, bitterness, deceit, and idolatry. Morally, it was messed up.

When these Gentile Christians heard Paul's message, they might've thought, "Why not keep sinning so that grace may be abundant? We don't really care about our moral lives because we have grace. We can lean on the forgiving grace. We are sincere Christians who lean on the grace."

But, my question is, “Is that what the apostle Paul really means when he says, “You are not under law, but under grace” in this context?”

No. In verse 2, Paul asks a rhetorical question. “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?” Paul answers, “μὴ γένοιτο” “Not at all.” “ Absolutely Not.” His answer is very negative and vigorous. It’s definite.

And he goes on as he throws a bombshell statement. “We died to sin. How can we live in it any longer?” Over and over Paul hammers the point home. We are dead to sin. That’s what we experienced in our baptism. We were buried with Jesus through baptism into death. We who are Christians cannot go on living in sin the way we used to. We can’t.

He doesn’t stop there. In verse 6, he says, “You and I know that our old self was crucified with Christ so that the body of sin might be done away with.” This is what the Heidelberg Catechism says, too. “Through Christ’s death, our old selves are crucified, put to death, and buried with him.”

Let’s stop here! Paul says that we died to sin. Our old self is crucified. It is put to death. Our body of sin might be done away with. What does it mean that our old self was crucified? What does it mean that we died to sin? What does it mean to us?

Does it mean Christians completely stop sinning anymore? Some people believe that Paul here is referring to a fresh leap of faith. When a person comes to Christ, that “old self” is literally done away with. What the person has is the “new self”. Progress in the Christian life comes not by way of struggle but by letting go of sin and letting God do the work.

Really? If that’s what Paul is talking about, then none of us are really Christians yet. If that’s what Paul is talking about, I should be in trouble. I shouldn’t stand in front of you to preach because I am being attacked by a lot of temptations to sin. Not only being attacked by temptations, but, to be honest with you, I also continue to sin each and every day. We all continue to sin each and every day. We all continue to violate the law of God. We don’t completely do what God commands us to do. And also, we continue to do what we shouldn’t do.

Here is the problem. Sin is all too active in us. There is an interesting research on frequency of lie. According to the research, by age four, 90% of children have grasped the concept of lying, and it just gets worse and worse from there. According to a 2002 study conducted by the U of M (University of Massachusetts), 60% of adults cannot have a ten-minute conversation without lying at least once. It’s quite a surprising result. In general, we lie about things that are important or not important. Sin is active in us.

If Paul's statement that 'our old self is crucified' means 'we don't sin anymore,' we are in trouble because it doesn't feel that way; because we find that we easily fall into sin in our lives.

If the death of our old self means a complete death of our sinful nature, where does our strong tendency toward sin come from? We still have old sinful nature within us.

If then, what does it mean that our old self was crucified? What does it mean that we died to sin?

Today, in our passage, the Apostle Paul gives an answer to this question, especially in the last part of verse 6. I will read this verse again in direct translation from the Greek text. It says, "We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be done away with; AS A RESULT, we should no longer be slaves to sin." It doesn't say, "as a result, we should longer sin anymore." Instead, it says, "as a result, we no longer be slaves to sin."

What Paul is saying is this. When Paul talks about "old self", he is not referring to a part of us or to a nature within us. The concept of "old self" is not ontological. Instead, it is relational. It is positional. It is judicial. He is using a court language. In other words, what is crucified, what is put to death is that relationship. What kind of relationship? We all began life 'in Adam'. We were under the power of sin. That's where we were. That's where we belonged. But, when our old self is crucified, when we died to sin, the power of sin in Adam has been absolutely broken. The power of sin no longer rules over us and dictates our conduct because we have been placed in a new position in God; we have been placed in a new relationship with God.

Then, we should ask this question. How? How does this dramatic change in relationship take place? How does the power of sin no longer rule over us? Do we have an answer?

Yes, it's in the very beginning of the answer of Heidelberg Catechism #43. It starts with three words. "Through Christ's death." (x2) Then, what is the essence of his death? Paul describes the essence in v.10.

He says this. "The death he died, he died to sin once for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God." When he died on the cross, Jesus Christ died to sin. Nobody was able to do this. Nobody will be able to do this. But, Jesus, the sinless Lamb of God, died to sin once for all. His death and resurrection were to break the power of sin and death. Jesus Christ knocked it over through his death and resurrection. That's what God has done for us because nothing can separate us from the love of God. This is the grace of God.

Only through his death, our old self can be crucified. When our old self is crucified, we are now on a completely different side. We are now in a completely different status.

We are now in a completely different position. We are now in a completely different family. We start a life not under the power of sin but the power of the Holy Spirit, because Jesus Christ takes over us through his death. Our master has changed. We are now freed from sin's life-destroying power.

But, even in a new relationship, even in a new family, we know we struggle. We struggle with our sins because we are still in the flesh. We are not resurrected yet. The following illustration describes this situation.

Let's imagine that you rent a house from a landlord, it's me! But soon, I turn out to be a bully, demanding extra payments, coming into your house without asking, rudely knocking your door, yelling at you, and threatening you with legal actions or violence if you don't give in to my demands. You may get used to doing what I say out of fear. There doesn't seem to be any way out because you don't have enough money to move out.

But then, you find somewhere else to live. Pastor David comes and pays off your remaining rent and you can leave. You move out and settle in the new place that he owns. But, unfortunately, a few days later I show up at the door. I am angry and demand more money. I threaten to take you to court. The old habit might return. You are strongly tempted to pay me whatever I demand, just because you want me to leave. You see the old habit.

How can we deal with it? Is it okay to leave it as it is? Paul strongly answers, "Not at all!" Then what should we do in response to the grace? How should we respond in the new relationship whenever our old sins are still active in us?

That's what the apostle Paul tells us in the last part of our passage. Interestingly, in vv.11-13, Paul changes the mood, from the "indicative", which states the fact of the wonderful grace of God, to "imperative", which is command. This shows that his intention is to tell us how we need to respond to the grace.

First of all, Paul tells us "Continue to count ourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." That's the thing many of us are missing. "Count ourselves dead to sin." Not once, but everyday, every moment, we should count ourselves dead to sin. We should remember this. "Grace is the controlling power of in my life. I live under the control of God in Christ through his Holy Spirit. In Him, I am a child of God. I am redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. That's the fact of my life." People of God, if we are in Christ, this is my story and your story that we need to hear over and over in our battle with sin.

But, that fact doesn't become powerful in our day to day living, until we make it part of the story as we face life's choices. We need to continue to put away those sins that plague us as we remind of the power of God in us. That's what Paul says in vv.

12-13. Even though sin is still a force in our lives, it's not supreme. It's not our master. We are under the power of God. We have the help of the Holy Spirit. Whenever we are tempted to sin, Christ has given us the opportunity to choose not to sin. In other words, that's how we offer ourselves to God. That's how we dedicate ourselves, every single part of our body, to God as an instrument of righteousness.

But, Paul knew this. Paul knew our weakness. He knew that we might become overbalanced toward the imperative side. He knew that we might focus on our work-righteousness. That's why Paul concludes with one more reminder of the "indicative" in v.14. That's why Paul reminds us of one truth. "Sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace."

People of God! If you believe in Jesus Christ, remember this whenever you fail; whenever you are weary. You are NOT under law, but under grace. You DO NOT belong to the power of sin. You are NO LONGER slaves to sin. You are on God's side. You are in His family. You are a child of God. This is the precious gift that we receive from Christ's death on the cross.

The Difference-Maker: God's Presence

An Old Testament Sermon by Candidate Yongwan (Brandon) Kim

Joshua 1:1-9

Last year, the world was in festive mood because of the Brazil World Cup. A lot of people watched the game. I believe that many of you watched the soccer games as you supported your favorite countries; USA, Netherland, Australia, or the South Korea. I am pretty sure that most of us wanted to see the victory of our favorite countries.

What are the important elements for winning soccer games? Having star soccer players is very important. What else? I want to say LEADERSHIP. I think, no matter how many star players play together, it's hard to be a strong team without good leadership. However, even if there is no star player, the excellent leadership of a manager could bring the team of the victory.

The South Korean team is a good example. Before the 2002 World Cup, which was held in Korea and Japan, Korea never won, not even once. This team had never even passed the first round. So the Korean team scouted a very famous Dutch manager, Guss Hiddink. When Hiddink became the manager, the Koreans hoped for the first win in the World Cup. They knew that their team was not an excellent team, so they would be satisfied with the first win in 2002.

But, surprisingly, under the leadership of Hiddink, the Korean team achieved not only the first win in the World Cup but also fourth place in the 2002 World Cup. That was a miracle. Behind this miracle, Hiddink's leadership was a crucial key to the success. He encouraged players. He was a real support for them. When they accomplished the first win in the first game, Hiddink wasn't satisfied, as he said, "I am still hungry. I am still thirsty." He put a full of fighting spirit in the minds of Korean team members. He became a hero to the Koreans.

But, after the World Cup, Hiddink decided to leave, and it was the new challenge for the Korean Team to keep their winning spirit without him. The Koreans still remember and miss him during every season of the World Cup.

In our passage today, the Israelites are facing a similar challenge as the Korean soccer Team because their leader, Moses, is gone. He died. The death of Moses left a huge gap in the leadership for Israel because Moses was not a mere leader. He was their hero. Moses was the one who performed great miracles whenever he stretched out his hand in Egypt. He was the one who led them out of slavery to freedom. Under his leadership, the long journey to the Promised Land began.

He was also the charismatic pastor. He was the mediator between God and them. He was the one who saw God face to face. Whenever the Israelites were in spiritual

darkness, Moses brought a message from God. He brought all of the laws from God to the Israelites.

Under his powerful leadership, it seemed that the Israelites drove on without a stop, and finally, they arrived at the plain of Moab, just across from the Promised Land. They were almost there. Now, it's time to cross the Jordan River to take the land. Big smiles were on their faces because they had a bright future with Moses.

But, something happened. In the previous passage, Deut. 34, Moses died. Can you imagine their sense of loss? Can you imagine their fear because their great leader was gone?

Coming back to our passage, the Lord confirms the death of Moses to Joshua who takes over leadership. Of course, Joshua was prepared to become Moses' successor before he died. But, when Joshua accompanied Moses as his assistant, he saw what Moses had done for Israel, which he has to do from now on. Can you imagine how much pressure Joshua is feeling? Leadership is very important for Israel because it stands tied to the gift of the land. Joshua's task is to complete Moses' unfinished mission to take over the Promised Land.

This is what the Lord commands him to do in v.2. "You and all people, be ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them." Joshua looks at the river. If I were Joshua, I would've thought. "Lord! I don't see any bridge to cross this wide and deep river. We don't have any boat. It is too dangerous. I am not Moses who divided the Red Sea." Actually, the valley of the Jordan River was very steep and dangerous. This river flows into the Dead Sea, which lies over 12 hundred feet below sea level.

But God keeps giving his commands. "I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the Euphrates River to the Great Sea on the west – which is the Mediterranean." It's quite big. It sounds good to hear.

But, Joshua looks at the people. He might've deeply sighed not only because most of them were nomad, not trained soldiers, but also because they were still heavy in grief. They grieved for Moses in this place for thirty days. It seems that they have lost their fighting spirit.

There is uncertainty concerning how well Joshua will handle the huge challenges ahead of the Israelites. Will Joshua be able to take over Moses' part? Of course, Joshua believes God. But, uncertainty makes him helpless because nothing is under his control. This uncertainty causes fear in Joshua and the Israelites. They are afraid of the danger and the failure.

We are all on a Christian journey towards the Promised Land according to God's calling for us. But, an issue is that this journey is not easy-going. Sometimes, our journey is like a minefield. We faced, are facing now or will face in the future a challenge in unsuspected time and place. The problem that I want to bring up is, these challenges build but also challenge our faith because they cause a sense of uncertainty in us. If there is nothing uncertain, then it is no challenge, is it? This sense of uncertainty sometimes brings about anxiety. If this anxiety is intensified, a sense of fear grabs us, so we became afraid of danger and failure.

Last year, I was at Palo Alto CRC as an intern pastor during the summer. When this church was first assigned, it was a huge challenge for me, not only because English is not my first language but also because the whole environment of the ministry would be completely different from that of the seminary. During my three year of study at the seminary, I have learned lots of things about theology, preaching, worship, and pastoral care. Many idealistic things!

But, when I decided to jump into the reality of the ministry, the sense of uncertainty came over me. 'What things should I put into practice first? Will this work? What if it will not work well? What if people don't like me because my look (accent)? What if the people don't like my preaching? What if... What if... What if...?' This uncertainty started grappling me. I was afraid.

This church has a similar challenge with Joshua and the Israelites as there is the change of leadership, new elders, deacons, and a pastor. It's the time of transition. It's a challenging time for the Council and the whole congregation because there is uncertainty about how this church will go on.

What about us? We are faced with lots of challenges in the midst of our lives. Academic challenges in every new year for students, parenting challenges for brand new-parents... we all have challenges in new relationship. We are often times uncertain about our future plans. All of us have our own Jordan River that we have to cross. There might be a sense of uncertainty. This uncertainty might cause the problematic question of 'what if?' We may become anxious and afraid of our possible failure.

How can we get out of the sense of uncertainty? How can we and Joshua get out of the sense of fear? Should we stop this journey? Are we hopeless? Is Joshua hopeless in front of uncertainty?

Today's passage gives an answer, "No!" Joshua is not hopeless because God does not leave Joshua afraid. Joshua is not hopeless because he is not the leader of Israel. Instead, God is THE LEADER OF ISRAEL. This is what God is talking about in his assurance in v.5. "Joshua, I will be with you. I promise that I will never leave you alone. I will never forsake you."

Joshua had seen this powerful presence of God through Moses in his unbelievable miracles. He knows God himself protected His people. He knows God Himself led his people ahead of Moses. He knows the meaning of the powerful presence of God. This promise is what he desperately asked.

Yes, Moses died. The great hero moved on from the Israelites and Joshua just as Hiddink moved on from the Korean soccer team after the 2002 World Cup. But, God doesn't leave. God, the source of power, is taking care of Joshua and the Israelites. The promise keeper doesn't withdraw his promise.

But, God doesn't finish with the promise of his presence. In his presence, God asks for Joshua's response. "Joshua, be strong and be courageous." "Joshua, be Strong and be Courageous." "Joshua, BE STRONG and BE COURAGEOUS." God repeats this command three times. Three times! Why? Because, challenge will not disappear in God's presence. When they move on in their journey, they should keep facing continuous challenges.

Sometimes, Christians assume that we don't / shouldn't face any hard challenge if we are in God's presence. Our life should be calm and comfortable. But, it's not true. The reality is that new challenges are waiting in our Christian journey towards the Promised Land.

But when Joshua and the Israelites are strong and courageous, as we read a few chapters later, they cross the river. They courageously fight against people because God's PRESENCE MAKES THEM DIFFERENT. This presence empowers Joshua to lead Israel with boldness, conviction, and confidence. In this presence, this people are special. As God's promise, no human enemy can stand up against them. They see what God is doing for them even in a critical situation.

Also, there is another reason that God commands Joshua to be strong and courageous. Strength and courage lead them to focus not on themselves but on the Law of Moses and to obey it. It is their manual from God. God doesn't want them to find their own ways to get out of the sense of uncertainty. God wants them to stick to his Word and obey it because obeying the law means obeying God. This is the only way for Israel to live. This is how God calls them to be holy and distinctive among the nations because God is the Leader of Israel.

People of God! God is THE LEADER of this church. God is THE LEADER of our lives. Our leader gave us the promise of his presence through Jesus Christ. In Matthew 28, after Jesus got the victory over the powers of evil in his death and resurrection, Jesus Emmanuel promised, "Surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Finally, through the Holy Spirit, this crucified, resurrected, victorious Christ is within us. He's here in this place where we come together in his name. And he assures us saying, "() I am with you. () I am with you. My people in Escalon CRC, I am with

you. When you face any challenge, you are not alone because I never leave you alone. I never forsake you because YOU ARE MINE.”

There was a woman whose name is Mary. Mary decided to take a trip to California because her husband had business there. He was already in CA. She agreed to drive her car from Michigan to California (which I did) because the cost of the flight was so high during the Christmas-time. Unfortunately, the day before her departure, she fell and broke her left wrist. Despite the heavy cast from wrist to elbow, she decided to drive anyway and left.

About the fourth day out, she felt so tired that she pulled off the road for a short nap, then drove to a restaurant to have some coffee. As she stepped outside the restaurant, things got interesting. A man approached and asked if she was driving a Ford Explorer with Michigan plates, and whether she had pulled off the road somewhere earlier. This lady was understandably concerned about being questioned by a stranger, but he assured that he meant no harm. Once she answered his questions, he asked her to wait while he made a phone call and then promised to explain.

He returned and explained everything. Truck drivers had been following her since Indiana. One of them had noticed this little white-haired lady, with a cast on her left arm, driving a stick-shift across the country. They had taken it upon themselves to watch over her. Even though she did not recognize them, they carefully tracked her to the motels she stayed each evening. Each morning another truck driver picked up her trail and shadowed her progress. If a truck driver had to exit, he would radio another rig-driver to take his place. But, when she pulled off for that nap, they had lost her and were about to alert the State Police. They were still seriously searching for her when one of them spotted her car at the restaurant. The woman had no idea that somebody cared enough about her to initiate such a protection plan. Until that moment, she had been totally unaware that, across all the miles, someone was looking after her day and night.

Your initial response to truck drivers might've been 'what?' They seem like stalkers. But, at the very least, this story shows what God's presence looks like. When we are anxious about uncertainty in our challenges, this faithful God is always with us. Without His presence, we are nothing. Without His presence, there is no point in living for the kingdom of God.

Therefore, today God commands us one thing. “DO NOT BE AFRAID. BE STRONG and BE COURAGEOUS.” If we are caught up by fear, we don't focus on God's Word, the manual for our lives. Instead, we try to find our own way. That's being human. Getting away from God! Then, we don't see what God is doing in our lives. We become afraid. This kind of fear is not from God. This is from our sinful nature.

But, in the face of uncertainty from our challenges, when we make a decision to be strong and courageous in God's presence, when we sincerely stick to his direction,

when we faithfully obey his Word, we can cross our own Jordan River because He is our true leader, because his presence makes us different. In his presence, we will see that it's not us but God who is working through us. In his presence, we are his special.

So as I close the sermon, why don't we share this presence of our difference-maker with others? When I say to you, "The Lord be with you", I ask you to respond, saying "And also with you."

10,000 Talents vs. 100 Denarii

A New Testament Sermon by Candidate Yongwan (Brandon) Kim

Matthew 18:21-35

This morning, I want to share with you some episodes of people about struggling forgiveness. First! I'm struggling with forgiving my husband. Last night, we had an argument concerning a bad grade our son received. My husband started to harshly blame me. He argued that I failed in my responsibility to take care of my son and his study. I felt verbally and emotionally abused. How can I let it go?

Second! I was driving my car yesterday. The speed limit was 30 miles, and I drove about 28 miles, keeping in my lane. All of sudden, a car in the rear honked at me to prompt me to go faster. When the car passed me, the driver gestured with his middle finger. I felt the anger rise in me. How can I let my anger go?

I'm a 7th grade student. I have a very close friend. We have been great friends since the 1st grade. Last week, she and I had a small argument, and we stopped talking to each other. Last Saturday, she had a party and invited all her friends except for me. I was so angry because I felt betrayed. I don't know how to deal with it. How can I let it go?

These are episodes. I think that these examples are common. Most of us might have experienced at least one of these situations. In our relationship with others within our family, at school, work place, road or in a shopping mall, and even in church, we are hurt by others, and we also hurt others verbally, emotionally, and sometimes physically. And in this broken relationship, WE struggle with forgiveness.

In our passage today, PETER seems to struggle forgiveness as we see in his question to Jesus, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" I'm pretty sure that forgiveness was not only a struggle for Peter but also for other disciples in their community.

We might ask, 'Why did he specifically suggest 7 times?' Because, the number 7 was the traditional number that represented fullness. It meant that seven times would probably have been regarded as "over the top." Peter is now suggesting an extreme proposal for the sake of argument.

But, Jesus gives a more extreme answer. "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." Other translations translate the number as seventy times seven. Which is right? It doesn't matter because the number is symbolic. Peter recognizes that number 77 indicates an unlimited number. Now, Peter might've asked himself, "How can I forgive an unlimited number of times?"

Jesus starts telling a parable. In a village, there was a servant, and he was in debt to his master, the king. His heart was always filled with much concern about how to repay his debt, which were 10,000 talents.

Finally, the day came. His master notified the servant that he would settle accounts with him. This servant's heart jumped, and he dawdled along the way to his master because he didn't have the money to pay back his debt. In front of his master, this servant honestly confessed that he didn't have the money as he wished the master to extend the term of the debt.

But, the master was firm. He ordered the servant and his whole family and all he had to be sold to repay the debt. Right away, the servant knelt down. He fell with his face to the ground as he begged for mercy. "Be patient with me. I will pay back everything." He began sobbing.

Looking at him, this master took pity on him. It was compassion. And he made a big decision. "I cancel your debt so you may just go!" This servant stared blankly at his master. "I forgive you. You don't have any debt to me. Go!" He finally realized the reality of the words. He kept saying "Thank you" until he got out of the house. "Now, I'm free! Let's go tell this good news to my wife."

On the way home, he met a fellow servant. Actually, he had been looking for this fellow to get him to pay back 100 denarii that he lent to him. In an instance, he totally forgot what happened just few minutes ago. This servant grabbed the fellow servant and began to choke him. He might've shouted, "Pay back what you owe me!"

The fellow servant knelt down and fell with his face to the ground. "Could you be patient with me for couple weeks? I will pay you back." This scene was exactly the same as the one in the master's house. Unlike his master, this servant refused the request and threw the fellow servant into prison.

At the same time, some other fellow servants were watching this scene from far away. They were greatly distressed and outraged because they knew what the master did for the servant. They decided to tell what happened to their master. Then the master called the servant in. "You know I forgave you because you begged me. Then shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" The master was so angry that he handed the servant over to the jailers to be tortured until this servant could pay back all he owed.

In this parable, Jesus shows Peter and probably the other disciples that this servant failed to forgive his fellow servant as his master forgave him.

After listening to quite a long parable, how would you feel toward the unmerciful servant? To help your understanding, let me calculate the value of the debt that the servant owed and lent. Let's do 10,000 talents first.

In the first century, one talent was equivalent to 6,000 denarii. One denarius was about a day's wage for common workers. If we suppose that a servant works for 300 days per year, a talent would be worth nearly 20 years' wages. And this servant owed not 1 talent but 10,000 talents. Then, it was an incredible amount. Compared to 10,000 talents, the amount owed by his fellow servant was 100 denarii. This was a reasonable amount close to three or four months' wages!

Now, we more clearly see that the unmerciful servant was not gracious about such a small amount, compared to the amount that he owed. His refusal was too quick. His retaliation was too decisive. He seems ruthless.

What about us? Are we much different from the unmerciful servant? Aren't we struggling forgiveness for such a small amount?

Yes, we struggle. We struggle to forgive. We often fail to forgive others even in a trivial trouble. We don't easily forgive our debtors. If anyone is disrespectful to us in our relationship with our parents, children, or spouse... in our relationship with co-workers or friends... or whenever we drive... whenever we help... we easily feel compelled to get them back for the debt that we think that they owe us. We are sure, saying, "I am sure that we have a right to pay them back; I have a right to be mad; I have a right to stay mad." In our sense of justice, we justify our offense. We justify becoming unmerciful.

We sometimes practice forgiveness in our own way. But, soon, we feel the limitation of forgiveness toward our enemies because we think that their debts are too huge to be forgiven.

In the parable, we might've given a negative light to the unmerciful servant, but we find that we are on the same page. We struggle. We fail to forgive others. Like Peter, we are tempted to ask, "Is forgiving seven times enough? After seven times, I meet my obligation, right?"

But, that's not what Jesus says. He says that we should forgive others an unlimited number of times. We want to set up a boundary. But, Jesus doesn't set up any boundary even for our enemies. We might want to be satisfied with number 7, but Jesus asks us of number 77. Then I think that it's natural to ask, "How can we do that? What is the ground?"

To find Jesus' answer to this question, we should look more closely at what the master first did to the unmerciful servant because that's what God did for us. The servant had the debt of 10,000 talents. It's an impossible amount to pay back forever. He didn't have anything to pay back his debt. He was totally in misery. It is no wonder that he would be punished. BUT, he was set free from misery because the master forgave the debt. This is what God did for us.

There is a 1995 film *Dead Man Walking*. I know that it is kind of old, but it's memorable because it's based on the true story. In the movie, Matthew Poncelet is waiting for a punishment. He is waiting for his execution for his brutal crime with another man. They terrorized, beat, raped, and murdered a teenage couple. But, they are not regretful. Instead, they are proud of themselves for the power they hold over the teenagers. It seems that he doesn't deserve to be forgiven at all.

But, what the movie focuses on is not the crime but the relationship between Poncelet and Sister Helen Prejean, who becomes his spiritual adviser during the last two months of his life. He is arrogant, sexist, and racist. He is not pretending to feel any kind of remorse. Many people eagerly await his death, saying that he gets what he deserves. But, the Sister Helen offers friendship and love to one of the most detestable human beings we could imagine. She tries to have his sentence commuted to life imprisonment, never excusing his actions (She tries to let Poncelet admit what he did), but loving him as a person. She demonstrates forgiveness.

I know the story is quite extreme. Of course, we may not be criminals. But, we were sinners in front of God. We were the enemies of God because of detestable sins.

You may feel uncomfortable to the work 'detestable'. Am I that much detestable in front of God? You may not feel that you are that much detestable like Poncelet. But whether we feel or not, that's the truth. We are detestable sinners because we sin as Adam and Eve did in trying to be as God. Our sinful nature / our corruption is detestable to God's holiness.

This is one of what Jesus wants to tell us in the parable. It's not 100 denarii, the reasonable amount. Instead, it's 10,000 talents that we owe to God. It's impossible amount to pay back forever. And like the Sister Helen, God is no pushover. It is a deadly mistake to picture God as a sort of heavenly grandfather. God is firm against sin. He never excuses it. What we deserved is punishment and trouble.

But, God cancelled 10,000 talents of our sins. That's what our King did. He does justify sinners because of Christ's atonement. God excuses his sons and daughters from the punishment we deserve because Jesus Christ paid it all that we owe. Because he shed his blood, we receive forgiveness of our sins. We are reconciled to God. We have peace with God. He initiated what we cannot do because he is loving; he is powerful; he is compassionate. This is the grace. This is the gospel.

But here's one more. At the end of the parable in v.35, this is what Jesus says. He says, "If you don't forgive others like the unmerciful servant, the heavenly Father will do what the king did in the parable." It sounds like God will withdraw his forgiveness if we don't forgive others. Really? Will God's forgiveness be cancelled?

No, it doesn't mean it. Again, we shouldn't interpret Jesus' parable literally. That's not what Jesus is talking about. If human forgiveness is a precondition for God's forgiveness, no one could ever be forgiven by God because our forgiveness is never perfect. This parable does not teach that forgiving others is a prerequisite for gaining God's forgiveness.

Instead, this is Jesus' point. His point is that we ought to forgive others because we are God's forgiven children. We've been the forgiven, and his forgiveness and his grace lead us to become a forgiver. Forgiveness cannot be received without repentance, but **FORGIVENESS CAN BE OFFERED WITHOUT REPENTANCE.**

I know it's difficult in our sense of justice. But we can do because the spirit leads us. Calvin Seminary Preaching Professor, Scott Hoezee gives a short illustration. He says, "Think about a situation that you dive into a lake. When you immerse yourself in water, as a result, you get wet. When God immerses you in forgiving grace, as a result, you forgive. The problem is, we forget, or we are not fully immersed in his grace.

People of God! God forgives us daily, so we forgive others daily. We struggle with forgiveness. Sometimes, we fail to forgive even in a very trivial situation. But, we can ask forgiveness to God, and he forgives. And again, we forgive others. Forgiveness is our lifestyle. Forgiveness is our habit.

Don't think that others' debt is 10,000 talents. It's the forgivable debt of 100 denarii. But, this amount is not cancelled at once. That's why we should forgive brothers and sisters an unlimited number of times, maybe at least 77 times, as we remember God's forgiveness. The Church of God! We are the forgiven. Let us forgive!