

THIRD CHURCH NEWS

THE SEASON OF LENT 2023



March 9, 2023

Volume IV No. 10

THIS COMING SUNDAY,
MARCH 12:

*"Repentance, Restoration, and
Rest"*

*Rev. Dr. Ryan Boes
on Hebrews 3:7-4:13*

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Services this Sunday, March 12

Our 9:00am will feature English worship accompanied by the organ and our choir, with communion.

Our 11:00am service will be the closing worship service for our All-church StayTreat Weekend, as a combined English and Spanish service, with communion. There will be no education hour or El Encuentro worship service this week, given the other opportunities and activities provided throughout the weekend.

Both services will be accessible via Zoom at 9:00am, and 11:00am respectively.

Transportation to and from Freedom Village for the Staytreat

One of our wonderful bus drivers, Jim Vander Meer, will have the bus at Freedom Village before each Staytreat session this weekend, and both the 9:00 and 11:00 AM worship services on Sunday, to transport folks to the church. Those times are:

- 6:10 PM Friday
- 12:10 PM Saturday
- 8:40 AM Sunday
- 10:40 AM Sunday

Abundance at the Border: Part 1

—Mark Hiskes

Pastor Angel's invitation to visit the southern border made two things clear. "Bring only a backpack—a few necessities, a change of clothes, a sweater if it turns cold." For a five-day trip it seemed spartan even to me, a life-long adherent to Thoreau's "Simplify, simplify." He added, "And try to answer two questions: 1) What is the story you hope to find at the border? And 2) Where did you see God at the border?"

He prepared us well: the backpack was plenty, and it was appropriate, given that every migrant we saw in the airports, shelters, or on the streets carried one too.

During the trip his goal for us became clearer to me. We weren't visiting the shelter as tourists, or as a church group on a mission project to build or paint or clean: though we did have fun teaching a little English to the migrants at the shelter. We weren't there to serve. Nor were we going so that we could return with a heart full of showy guilt over our white privilege. No, Angel's purpose was deeper.

Like most Americans, too many Christians see the humanitarian crisis at the border as a headline, a political or economic or, even, racial issue. Until an election comes along, they don't really tune in. Angel's ultimate goal was that we'd see God's heart at the border and realize, that if *God's* heart is there, mine should be too. Because it's through the heart we feel it as a *human* crisis, and only then can we take meaningful, rational action by advocating, educating, voting properly, sending needed resources. Only then can we "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God."

We landed in El Paso and took an Uber to the border. There, with Pastor Angel's guidance, our group—Bethany Bulthuis, Angel's daughter Lorena, and me—walked the half-mile bridge that spans the wall to Juarez. "The wall" we northerners talk about is really a series of barriers. Beyond the Customs office, I counted ten walls of one sort or another: several high, chain-link fences topped with razor wire; concrete block walls again topped with razor wire; the Rio Grande River forms another, almost-natural barrier on either side of the main wall, running slowly through two man-made, cement canals. In Juarez "the wall" itself stands at the middle of these lesser walls and barriers, vertical bars of rusted steel at least 20 feet high with horizontal steel plates at the top. This is the wall in Juarez.

Looking down on this half-mile of inhuman obstacles, I felt in my heart the Robert Frost truth I'd taught students for years, not fully understanding it until then: "Something there is that doesn't love a wall, that wants it down." I wondered how any politician could call it a "beautiful wall." I wondered what it does to a kid to grow up with a horizon of wall, day after day. I wondered what effect the bold white message on the distant mountainside had on Juarez, if any: "la Biblia es la verdad, leela," ("The Bible is the truth, read it").

Beyond the wall was an abundance of brokenness. Unlike El Paso, the streets of Juarez are peppered with potholes. Food wrappers and other trash mark every patch of grass. Plastic bags sprout from fences and razor wire. Stray dogs and feral cats roam most every street. Homes are more like condos—one or two stories, stucco siding, with a small, walled-in area in front and sometimes back. Some communities were gated, but we never saw a "wealthy neighborhood:" the gates added safety, certainly, but not beauty, as far as we could tell. Every window and door we saw had metal bars and locked metal gates for safety; razor wire topped every fence or wall like Christmas lights in Holland during December. It was as if the monstrous wall had spawned thousands of mini walls throughout the city, like a fallen tree across a creek can create a dam that collects more branches and more garbage until the creek becomes a filthy pool. A city of walls and trash and "keep out" and fear. Welcome to Juarez.

But meeting the people I was reminded that no city should be judged by appearance alone. Juarez has an abundance of happy, generous men and women. Maybe it's our West Michigan reserve, but I was struck how the people of Juarez laugh often and without restraint—whether inside malls or restaurants or outside at middle-school volleyball games, laughter and joy dominated. Meals were more about celebrating friendship and family than food—though the food was—oh my!—abundant, and this old Dutchman learned to love Mexican food (which, for you skeptics, is only as *picante* as you make it). To say the least, we ate well, and were reminded that sharing a meal together has as much to do with gratitude as it does with nourishment.

Pastor Samuel [pronounced "Samwel"], Angel's older brother, is the founder and leader of Frontera de Gracia, which is both a church with its own congregation and a shelter for migrants waiting to cross the border. He has no office and likely wouldn't use one if he did, since his work keeps him in motion all day, back and forth in his car to Frontera de Gracia, meeting migrants in the city he finds along the way or visiting those who have reached out to him, working with local NGO's to get any available resources for them, and a host of other tasks he sees as a calling. He has an athletic build, dresses for comfort, and he greets everyone—migrant from the south or stranger from the north—with *mucho* warmth. When he isn't doing church or shelter work, he is coaching his daughters' volleyball team, tending to the chickens he raises for sale in his back yard, or carting visitors like us around a city he knows intimately.

Pastor Samuel's English is about as good as my Spanish, so we had to speak through Angel. He carries two cell phones, and with good reason. One, is for the migrants he serves at the shelter and those who know of him and his shelter throughout Juarez. Two of the days we were there it was raining hard, and so he was getting a lot of calls from migrants living on the streets about any available rooms. Sadly, the shelter was packed, with thirty or more men, women, and children, spreading out mattresses and blankets on the sanctuary floor each night. When that phone wasn't buzzing, the other *was*, a phone he reserves for family and the church/shelter. "I need two phones," he said through Angel, "in case the cartel ever gets control of one I can still reach my people with the other."

His wife teaches art and music at a local Christian school their daughters attend. She, is deeply involved in the ministry of Frontera de Gracia, serving as musician and worship leader on Sunday mornings. Their two middle-school daughters are student-athletes and help out with Sunday school each

week. For safety's sake, I leave out their names, because this family operation is filled with risk: each of them knows Dad's life has been threatened more than once for the work he does with migrants. After all, the cartels see the migrants as desperate people easy to exploit by demanding thousands of dollars for a dubious chance at crossing the border, by enlisting them to smuggle drugs into the States for a promise of safety, and by other even-more sinister means. Pastor Samuel's ministry challenges all this, offering safe shelter, food, and spiritual nourishment, and a commitment to help each migrant cross the border legally, asking for nothing in return. In other words, a border of grace—Frontera de Gracia.

I must mention Pastor Angel's role there. The familiar way he could talk to each migrant at the shelter—listen, advise, gain their trust—was inspiring to watch. Having migrated himself, he understands them in a way that I can't. So, when Angel helped us generate a list of essential phrases and questions to teach them how to say in English, each migrant was eager to learn. They were simple lines like, "Where can I get water?" "I am alone." "Can you help me, sir?" As a life-long English teacher, I'll just say it was like teaching an adult ed. class at Third: these folks were smart, serious, and so grateful for our time and effort. Next week, in "Part Two," I'll share some stories of the border we were told by the many migrants we met at the shelter. Sorry about the length of this article. I wanted to write a shorter version of this adventure for our newsletter, but I couldn't. A backpack is plenty for the trip down to the border, but a carry-on heart isn't enough for the trip back.

LIFT Next Week, March 15



Next week it's Chili and Cornbread for dinner!

We hope to see you all there for dinner at 5:30 and kids activities, Middle School Youth Group, and adult bilingual Bible study as well as lots of opportu-

nities for fellowship after the meal at 6:30.

Transportation Need

Arshad Amiri (17 yo), son of the Afghan family Third has been helping resettle, contracted bacterial meningitis a few weeks ago. It is anticipated that he will be at Mary Free Bed for a stay of 2 weeks to one month. There will be lots of transportation needs for family to visit him, and if you are willing to help, please contact Laura Baer at laura.m.baer@gmail.com.

Micro-Pantry Needs

The Micro-Pantry is currently in need of the following: cereal, canned soups, canned vegetables, canned meats, canned tomatoes, canned baked beans, canned fruits, spaghetti sauce, peanut butter, rice, and noodles. As always, thank you for your support for this important community resource.

Announcements

Consistory Nomination Forms Due Next Week

This past Monday, March 6, we emailed/mailed out information on submitting nominations for Consistory. This information included a list of all eligible communicant members of Third. Please have your nominations in to the office by March 15.

Please Update Your Information...

We are coming up on traditional spring cleaning time, and one area we could all "dust off" and clean up is our contact information in ShelbyNext. We want to make sure our church directory is up to date, so please take some time and look at the directory and make sure all of your contact information, birth dates, anniversary dates, etc. are correct. This would also be a good time to update your individual and family pictures too. If there is incorrect information please inform Kristen in the church office so that the directory can be updated. If you need assistance accessing the directory please contact Kristen in the church office.

Prayer Requests

Please pray for the following:

- Condolences to the friends of Eileen Resch who died on March 1.
- Condolences to Betty and Jerry Van Wyngarden on the death of Betty's sister Trudy.
- Betty and Jerry Van Wyngarden's grandson dealing with cancer.
- Steven and Laurie Orlow's son dealing with cancer.
- Continue to pray for Arshad Amiri (17 yo), son of the Afghan family Third has been helping re-settle, contracted bacterial meningitis and has been at DeVos Children's Hospital. Give thanks that he is now out of intensive care, and please pray for a full recovery as the family anticipates a move to Mary Free Bed for rehab soon, and for transportation for the family to be able to visit him.
- Prayers for the Wiebe family, Lora, Todd, Harrison and Maya, on the passing of Lora's father.
- John Hubers who is teaching in Ethiopia.
- Staytreat this weekend, those attending and those planning the activities.
- Those who quietly struggle with medical, emotional or family issues.
- Bread for the World who work to bring end to hunger in the world.

Remember in our prayers: Dennis DeWitt, Reno Lamania, Joanne and Jack Kuiper, Larry Loss, Dennis and Nancy Gebben, Mary and Harry Borsen, Margaret Doorenbos, Bob and Elle Kuiper, Tom Norman, Lucille Schroeder.

Prayer Spotlight: Home - Bill Charlton, Barb Mummert, Ruby Steketee; Out of Town - Lucille Schroeder, Ellen Rieck.

Missionaries: Linn G. (Asia), Cheryl Barnes (Malawi), Lubna Y. (Asia).

Third Church Family News Anniversaries

Happy anniversary to Bill and Sarah Unzicker who celebrate 60 years of marriage today!

Sympathy

To the family of Eileen Resch who passed away on March 1.

To Betty and Jerry Van Wyngarden on the passing of Betty's sister, Trudy on March 2 in Iowa.