

# MRC NEWS

## The G-Force (or, if You're Musically Inclined, Living in the Key of G) By Stan Roesler

Last fall, Pastor Jeff preached a spot-on sermon on *Generosity*. Generosity, of course, is one of the key components of faithful Christian stewardship. But after the sermon message, I realized I needed to learn more about generosity: roadblocks to generosity, motivations for generosity, etc. So I “hit the books”. Here’s a snapshot of what I discovered:

- the road to generosity starts with *faith*, and grows out of our *gratitude* toward God. Moreover,
- there is a widely-held belief that there’s a strong connection between God’s amazing *grace*, our *gratitude* toward God, and our *generosity*.

The theologian Karl Barth puts it this way: “Grace and gratitude belong together like heaven and earth. Grace evokes gratitude like the voice an echo. Gratitude follows grace as thunder follows lightning.” Others have taken Barth’s finding one step further, noting that “gratitude...overflows into generosity”, or perhaps more pointedly, “*Practicing* an attitude of gratitude spills over to *acts* of generosity.”

Somebody then cleverly packaged all of the above and labeled it the “G-Force”. Another person saw it as “Living in the key of G”. These catchy slogans fittingly affirm that divine Grace, our heartfelt expressions of Gratitude, and our choice of Generosity are all closely linked together, and form the spiritual foundation of Christian stewardship.

If you make a decision to embrace “The G-Force”, then you need to delve a little into each of the three components, the first one being Grace.

Quite a few years ago, in another church I attended, the pastor gave a sermon on grace. He defined grace as what happens “*When God treats you better than you deserve.*” Since I had been treated much better than I ever deserved on a great many occasions, I adopted his interpretation. Until more recently, when I learned more about God’s *mercy*; being treated better than you deserve started to sound more like mercy than grace...

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## Updates from the Property Committee *(from Leslie Hooper)*

### **After the last flood—before the next??**

Two and a half years ago after Hurricane Irene dumped massive amounts of water and mud on our property, we are looking good. The 2011 flood recovery was very expensive, but we were blessed with good insurance, great donations, and our own rainy day savings. Under new federal and state guidelines, flood insurance for our property is no longer feasible. Our savings are far less than they were prior to the flood and donations are unpredictable. So what if it happens again?

Many of us remember the floods from 1955, 1987, 1996 and now 2011. Each time we cleaned up, repaired things and made some changes for the “next” time. Our collective efforts have allowed us to worship together in the same space so many have worshipped in before us. The recovery from the 2011 flood included a multitude of modifications designed to minimize the cost for cleaning and repair of future flooding. It is unrealistic to expect that our property will never see high water again.

The property committee has been working on a plan to protect our property as much as possible. We will rebuild coverings for the sanctuary windows and foyer doors. Grates will be cut into the sanctuary floor to help equalize pressure from major flooding. Sump pumps have been installed in the basement. Proposals to further protect the fellowship hall are being considered. The Consistory has set up a fund dedicated to pay for expenses to clean up and repair damages from future flooding. This new fund will be opened as an investment account with \$ 25,000 left in our Flood Recovery Fund which will then be closed.

### **Looking for an opportunity to share your time and talent at the MRC??**

Our church budget for 2014 (adopted in December 2013) reduced the line item for cleaning by 50 %. In order to keep our facilities in good shape, we are asking families, friends or groups to sign up for a month to clean the sanctuary. This is primarily some dusting and spot mopping. Guidelines and supplies will be available and cleaning can be done whenever time allows on an “as needed” basis. See Leslie Hooper or Doug Kingsbury to pick your month. Your participation will save money. We plan to start in April.

The rest of our building will be cleaned by our property caretaker and by groups who use our facilities. Larger tasks both inside and outside will be accomplished on church work days where everyone can be involved. Our spring work day will be either the end of March or the first part of April. The saying “many hands make light work” is still true. When we join together we can accomplish so much more than any of us alone.

Please plan to attend the Congregational Meeting on March 9th to hear updates from all the committees.

## **Annual Congregational Meeting: March 9th**

Join us for the congregational meeting and brunch. At this meeting we will elect Elders and Deacons to Consistory, hear reports of interest about our life and ministry and eat together.

While only members are able to vote, we would encourage everyone to attend, listen and eat.

## The Pastor's Post

We have been in the Ridder Church Renewal process for almost a year. The team is beginning to take on the learning and practices to see change in our own life so that we can join God's preferred future. One of the concepts that they call a 'gateway for transformation' is integrity. They define integrity as:

**doing what you say you will do,  
when you say you will do it,  
in the way it is meant to be done.**

This goes deeper than questions of telling the truth, though it includes that as they well. Integrity, they say, is workability: life working in the way that God designed it. We are designed to be in relationship with others and our self and called to care for creation. God is unique in that only God creates from nothing with his word (cf. Gen 1:1). Yet, God calls us to care for and shape what is created (cf. Gen 1:28). Before Adam sinned he was lonely. Before sin entered the picture, Adam desired com-

panionship. Being human means in our doing we join our word to God's word to shape creation. In our Being and Doing we are called to reflect God's glory. This is immediately practical: I am personalizing it for myself: *Am I keeping my word to being the image-bearer God made me? Am I keeping my word as a husband and father? Am I keeping my word by giving the person before me appropriate honor and respect? Am I being a good parent of children in the school?* What does workability look like for you? This includes all the relationships that we are in- whether in families, or informal with friends, or through more formal relationships like the places we work and civic spaces. Integrity is more than just telling the truth in a land deal. Living with integrity is joining with God's word to participate in resurrection throughout all creation. Jesus-resurrected is our model. Paul calls Jesus the firstborn- in Greek: protokos, like, prototype)

***“God calls us to care for and shape what is already created (cf. Gen 1:28).”***

This may kick up all sorts of feelings for us like shame and guilt (I'm not doing or being enough), anxiety and excitement (how can I? how can't I?) And maybe joy. This immediately pulls us into the work of healthy relationship with others. I am thankful we are with friends that extend grace in the mess and support each another as we try to be obedient to the Lord's calling. I am happy that we can experiment and play at what integrity looks like for us as a church. I am relieved that we have a guide in the Holy Spirit following the pattern of Jesus in the Father's work creating and re-creating.

In Christ,  
Pastor Jeff

## Operation Christmas Child Update

More than 9,950,000 shoe box gifts were collected by OCC in 2013. They are now being distributed to children in need in many parts of the world. Our gifts have gone to Ukraine and the Philippines. Because we have been so richly blessed, we are able to bless children in a place of intense political unrest and in an island nation devastated by a typhoon. We pray that each child who receives a shoe box gift will feel the Savior's love represented by that gift.



## Advent and Christmas in our Sunday School *(by Sarah Bramer)*

Aren't Advent and Christmas some of the most exciting weeks of the year for children? Judging by my own children and the rest of the children in our Sunday School, I'd say that without a doubt, they are.

The season of Advent is always busy and this year proved no exception. Our Sunday School students and the older youth our church family were invited to participate in a Chrismon Service to celebrate the beginning of Advent. The beautiful tree in the sanctuary was decorated with traditional white and gold chrismon symbols. It was a wonderful and meaningful service. After worship, we enjoyed a pot luck lunch and were able to make our own chrismons to take home and hang on our trees.

On December 22nd, the Sunday School children presented their annual Christmas program. This year's program was called "The Reason for the Season" and featured the kids portraying common holiday objects and discussing why each one is important (or why they think they are important). In the end, the candles helped the other holiday objects to realize the real reason for the season. Following the service we kept another annual MRC Sunday School tradition and enjoyed a birthday cake for Jesus. Some pictures from the program are on the back page.

In January, we began a unit of lessons called "Cornerstone Construction" that examines some of the fundamental ideas that we believe as Christians. Our next unit will be on The Lord's Prayer.

We have enjoyed a great "year" so far and we hope that you will pray that our momentum will continue and that our students will continue to eagerly learn about God and Jesus.



## **The G Force continued** *(by Stan Roessler)*

In my confusion, I sought out some experts on grace. Here's what Frederick Buechner says in *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC*:

"Grace is something you can never get but can only be given. There's no way to earn it or deserve it or bring it about any more than you can deserve the taste of raspberries and cream or earn good looks or bring about your own birth. A good sleep is grace and so are good dreams. Most tears are grace. The smell of rain is grace. Somebody loving you is grace. Loving somebody is grace. The grace of God means something like: Here is your life. You might never have been, but you *are* because the party wouldn't have been complete without you. Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid. I am with you. Nothing can ever separate us. It's for you I created the universe. I love you. There's only one catch. Like any other gift, the gift of grace can be yours only if you'll reach out and take it. Maybe being able to reach out and take it is a gift too."

***"...the gift of  
grace can be  
yours only if  
you'll reach out  
and take it."  
- Frederick  
Buechner***

**In the next issue: The Second G: Gratitude**

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***Looking for good friends and good food?***

***Enjoy both at NET dinners!***

***Dinners are held every Wednesday from 5:00-6:30pm***

***We host dinner the first Wednesday of the month!***

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## **Ecumenical Food Pantry** *(summary of a year end report by Russ Ryan)*

The Nutrition Resource Manager from the Regional Food Bank of NENY recently did a review of food safety and distribution methods of the food pantry housed at the MRC. She praised the food choices being offered and the generosity given to those who come for assistance. A nutritionist from Cornell Cooperative Extension comes to our food pantry on Wednesdays from 4 to 5 PM to assist clients with their questions regarding nutrition and food choices.

In 2013 there were 273 client visits which provided food for 861 people. While no one has ever been turned away without food, there has been an increase in regular use as well as emergency needs. The pantry is operated by volunteers and is open every Wednesday from 4 to 6 PM and every Saturday from 9 to 11 AM and by appointment if necessary. The goal is to provide 3 to 4 days of balanced food supplies in emergencies.

## **News from the Church Archives** *(by Marian Lynes-Bouck)*

Are we “high” or “low”? Way back when our valley was first settled, the term “Schohary” referred to the entire middle section of the creek valley. The Schohary Reformed Dutch Church meant the two Reformed churches in the valley, one in Foxendorf and one in Weisersdorf. One Consistory and one Domonie served both congregations. That continued until just after the Revolution, when each band of worshippers was able to assume independence and support itself. Generally speaking, the Schohary Church was the High Dutch Church and the sermons were delivered in Dutch, while the Middleburgh Church was the Low Dutch Church and the sermons were delivered in German. Because one pastor served both congregations for many years, it was necessary for him to be able to speak both languages. Later, English was also used on certain occasions. So, we were once the Low Dutch Church.

## **Mission: An update from The Rodriguez Family**

It's 2014, a new year. Our family certainly has had lots of "new" in the last few months. The transitional newness and culture shock has evened out; now we are adjusting to being a family of 4. Doriana is back to her old cheerful self. She talks non-stop, repeating our last words in Spanish and English. Dancing and "jumping" and walking on curbs are favorite activities. In addition to the normal two year old activities, Doriana has fallen in love with her little brother, Tobias Nathaniel, who joined us on December 14 at 12:30am. From day one she has bestowed kisses every chance she gets. She is also our big helper, making sure his diaper is changed, attends to him when he cries, and that we don't forget him when we are out and about. No jealousy in this family. Albino and Sandy have been thankful for the extra help from family and dear friends.

Part of our job in these next few months is to advertise La Casa del Maestro. Being a new ministry, youth don't know we exist. What better way to spread the news than to speak at a youth conference attended by 600? This first week of January the youth from the Cusco Maranata church came as far away as the jungle area of Cusco. The leaders invited Albino and Sandy's mom, Mary, to participate one afternoon. After recounting the stories of Esther, from the Bible, and Nadia, a young woman who is a rescued victim of human trafficking, Pastor Mary's "take-away" was that God is always at work and is ready to rescue us. After translating for his mother-in-law, Albino shared the vision and mission of La Casa, details of what we have to offer, and made sure the youth had our contact information. Our guess is that at least 2/3 of the youth that heard the message will make their way to Cusco city in hopes of bettering their lives. We have already received several phone calls from the youth asking for assistance with a government scholarship program offered here in Peru. This week Albino is teaching his worldview course at the organization we worked with previously. Thirty plus pastors from surrounding rural communities are in attendance. This opportunity provides Albino with the time to sit down with the pastors and talk about their youth and Casa del Maestro.

\*Our mailing address is:\*

Rodriguez Family  
300 Tr Trail,  
Holland, MI 49424

**SPECIAL DATES TO NOTE:**

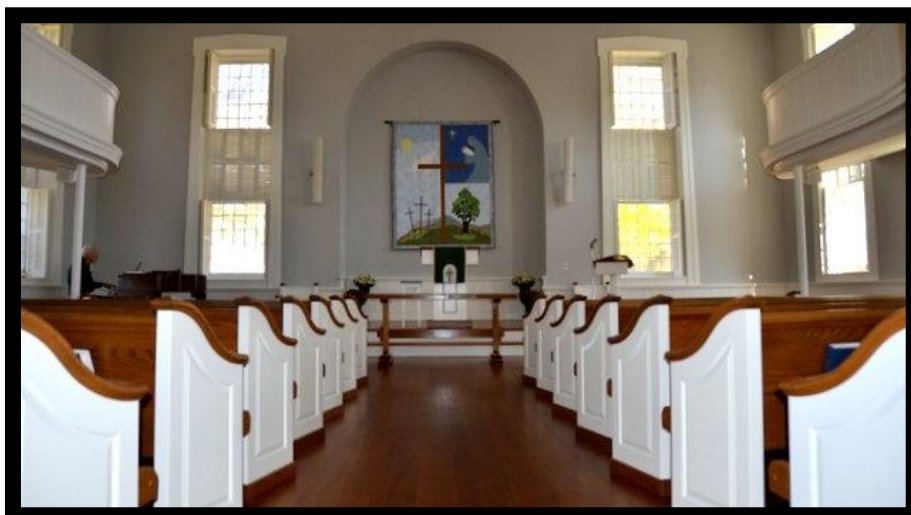
- *Feb 9: Communion*
- *March 5: NET Dinner at our church, 5:00-6:30 pm*
- *March 9: Congregational Meeting and brunch  
Daylight Savings Time - Spring ahead!*
- *March 15: Classis Meeting hosted at our church*
- *April 2: NET Dinner at our church, 5:00-6:30 pm*
- *April 13: Palm Sunday*
- *April 17: Maundy Thursday*
- *April 20: Easter*
- *April 30: Hosting community Pot Luck NET Dinner, 5:00-6:30pm*



Camp Fowler Registration is open!

Register online at <http://campfowler.org/online-registration>

Financial assistance is available! See Pastor Jeff or Shawn Smith



**CONTACT  
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*Consistory Members*

James Spencer, Vice President

Sarah Bramer, Elder

Joan Youmans, Elder

Brian DeFeo, Deacon

Leslie Hooper, Deacon

Karen Miller, Deacon

Sunday School: 9:45 am

Sunday Worship: 11:00 am



**How do you get your news?**

Here are some options for you when getting your church newsletter.

Newsletters and Monthly Events sheets are available on our website:

[www.middleburghreformed.org](http://www.middleburghreformed.org)

Please contact us via email: [reformed@midtel.net](mailto:reformed@midtel.net) if you would prefer to receive our newsletter electronically and stop receiving the paper version.

Thank you for helping us save paper and postage.

P.S. You can also find us on Facebook!