

Naji Umran, Minister of Outreach, Council Report for January-February 2008

Among the big joys of this last couple of months was the long-postponed staff retreat we had at Carol Muller's house late in January. It was preceded and bathed in much prayer, evidenced in how open our communication was, and in an emerging desire for us all to do more collaborative ministry. The aftermath of that meeting includes practical planning and discussion about the summer—giving us all further reasons for continued optimism!

Another joy I look back on and forward to is something in the area of Evangelism, called "Ordinary Attempts." In January I spoke with the youth-group/leaders about it, then again to staff, and finally, in February, to the Household Nurturing Committee. In short, "OA" is a doable form of service-and-prayer based evangelism. It is a call to be intentional, and to notice people around us, to listen for the Holy Spirit's promptings, to follow-through, and to pray for those strangers and loved ones we serve—trusting that even a cup of cold water given prayerfully has the potential: (1) to answer others' longings and prayers, (2) to draw them closer to God and be reconciled to him, and (3) to expand the network of 'un-churched' people we know and related to, opening up possibilities for us to talk about our faith in the future—not because we're pushing it on people, but because we're doing the hard work of developing good foundations in our relationships, we're becoming trustworthy, we're being authentic ambassadors of Christ, and we're reliant on the Holy Spirit to guide our thoughts, actions, and conversations. Not only does this allow us to 'just be ourselves,' respecting and developing our God-given gifts, *it's also Reformed*: it puts the onus on God to multiply and transform *whatever we can give* into fodder for salvation. At this point, our plans are for me to offer a 'training' opportunity in this form of evangelism in April, but I am also trying to be intentional about sharing it in my conversations.

A few Specific Ministry Updates:

- As some of you know, the Mobile Food Pantry is a well-received facet of COS' ministries in the neighborhood. It was developed by Steve Huyser-Honig, and has many committed volunteers. Right now we're discussing how to recruit more, and a real prayer-need is that God will raise-up leader(s) to take Steve's place leading/coordinating on Saturday mornings, especially during the 'good-weather months' (when he will be out of town on weekends expanding his own work/business).
- On a similar note, our Emergency Pantry, coordinated by Jane Lang and also a ministry that many of our neighbors rely on and express deep gratitude for, needs more volunteers—we are organizing regular work-nights in the coming months, and we hope in that way to develop congregational awareness and ownership.
- As reflected in the minutes from the Refugee Task Force, there has been ongoing discussion about the role of the committee, whether to limit or expand it, and how to address the needs that we are growing conscious of in the community and in our congregation. Please pray, and if you have input or suggestions, email me!
- ESL continues to thrive under the leadership of Coni Huisman, Barb Carville, Helen Bonzelaar, Yvonne Reiffer, and dozens of committed volunteers. The total number of students attending on a bi-weekly basis has grown to 60, and although child-care occasionally becomes unruly, on the whole all is well and joyful!

- Christians for Prisoners too continues to actively recruit volunteers, corresponding with and visiting prisoners, and developing the ministry: just read their minutes!
- I have also been trying to catch up a bit with assisting the deacon teams identify their goals and tasks—helping with the larger than usual amount of benevolence, making progress with oversight of outreach events (note Splish Splash June 14 on your calendars), missionaries, and matters pertaining to the budget, etc.
- Another joy that I’ve shared with a number of members of the congregation is the ongoing Dunamis—Holy Spirit—study and prayer a group of us have engaged in. Having presented the program and goals to the staff (who encouraged us to keep moving forward), the group would like to give council members to learn more—so to that end we are planning a Wednesday Evening presentation where you and COS members can learn more about it in April.
- Also on the spiritual support/discipleship end of things, I continue to attend/help lead the Saturday morning men’s Bible Study, the Friday morning Prayer Group, am engaged with several members in mentor and accountability relationships, and though it always feels a bit rushed at month’s end, I write the COS prayer-guides.
- One last regular area to report on: David Brondsema, our volunteer *web-guru-guy*, recently notified Janice and I that COS’ website is growing in popularity—getting well over 3000 “hits”/month (the main area of interest is the mp3 sermons I post online each week). We could do more: *at least* keeping it before the congregation.

In Brief: My other ‘Outreach’ Interests/Ministries

- This week I’m going to the Organic Church Greenhouse Conference with Rich Rienstra to learn about alternative-church/church-plant models, etc.
- Anne and I continue to work with CTS and the Evangelical Seminary in Cairo and other denominational representatives to assist the CRC in its goal of potentially/ eventually working out partnerships in Middle-East/Muslim-oriented ministries.
- This past weekend Anne and I (along with Judy and Simon Ko) led and co-taught about cross-cultural relationships for about 3-dozen Calvin College students.
- This Friday I’ll get to work with Lillian Samuel again leading/serving communion among a Calvin College based Bible-Bonanza group of college/graduate students.
- I attended Classis in January (though my attitude is sometimes ‘someone’s got to do it’) and, more happily, I helped plan/lead February’s Classis Renewal meeting.

Oh, and finally, for you who wondered, in follow-up to my last council report, where I let on about how exhausted I’d felt and my hopes for a bit more balance in the beginning of this calendar year—an update: with one less babysitter I didn’t continue with the class I started at the seminary, and, though I worked less over these past two months, keeping my commitment to a ‘lull’ (my work logs hover around the 40 hour mark), somehow I still got sick again last week—I guess I’m only human. Suffice it to say, *I am looking forward to summer weather!* On the other hand—in many respects, I feel good, and look forward to upcoming events, and to a real respite coming even sooner than the summer: a much anticipated reunion with my family in Canada during Spring Break.

Thanks to all for your prayers and support! Yours in Christ, in His service,

Naji Umran