

New Life Prison Fellowship church visit – September 10, 2019

made by George Den Oudsten and Steve Ver Meer

One of the men from the New Life Equipped for Service Team opened with devotions meditating on James 4:7 “Submit yourselves to God” with the understanding that we are the bride of Christ, called to covenant faithfulness to our bridegroom.

After compiling our notes, we have tried to format them in such a way as give that gives Classis Central Plains a sense of what is going on in at New Life. We wanted to highlight what we saw as the praises, concerns, and hopes for the future.

Note: We also attended a Thursday night worship service July 18, but were not able to meet with the Equipped for Service team that day due to a lack of a room to meet with them (see institutional struggles below). The service was a joyful celebration of the gospel, with Tyler Helfers preaching as part of his internship there this summer. Pastor Rick led the Lord’s Supper and members of the Equipped for Service team served the elements.

Praises

As we talked with them their joy in being part of the church became very clear. They thanked God for being part of a church, the camaraderie and support, the joy and love of this body New Life Fellowship. They also expressed the blessing it has been to be a member of the Equipped for Service team and the joy of serving as Stephen’s ministers. Being able to serve people and watch lives changed by the Word of God has been a powerful experience.

They thank God for the ability to participate in the services each month, especially serving the Lord’s Supper. They talked of feeling the presence of the Holy Spirit moving among them. Other things they praise God for were the opportunities some of them have to serve the special needs population within the prison.

They thank God for Pastor Rick and Rose Admiraal, and the joy of having volunteers who come in and worship, pray and study the Bible with them, reminding them they are part of the broader church outside the prison bars.

They shared excitement about how inmates are starting to do talks at Brothers-in-Blue events reaching out to the rest of the prison population.

Concerns

As we discussed what they were concerned about going into the future it became clear that many of their struggles are the same as we have on the outside engaging a world that wavers between hostility and indifference. They talked about there being so many different religious backgrounds within the prison with many non-Christian groups growing (e.g. Wiccan). They want to strive to live together while sharing the gospel faithfully with those who do not know.

An issue they are wrestling with is helping people take their baptism seriously. There are some people walking away, drifting away and they want to help them remain faithful.

They noted that there is some division among the different Christian groups within the prison that they want to overcome.

As a body behind prison bars, a perennial struggle, cross they bear, are the institutional struggles. They deal with the prison system and its rigidity as prisoners. They have constraints on what

they are allowed to do, when they can meet, where they can meet, what they can give their tithes towards. These are issues they are not able to change, but need to live with while seeking not to be discouraged.

Hopes

The hopes they shared are largely in response to the challenges they are facing. As they wrestle with people walking away after baptism, they are seeking to mentor/ give spiritual friends to the baptized to encourage walking the walk after baptism. They hope this support and mutual accountability will help reduce backsliding after profession of faith/baptism.

They are also seeking to pray for the fellow believers in the other Christian groups within the prison and build relationships across the other Christian groups to strengthen unity among the different Christian groups.

They also shared that they see the process of organizing as a congregation as a way of validating what is going on at New Life.