



### Different Kind of Worship, Praising the Same God

Steve Swets, pastor at Rehoboth United Reformed Church in Hamilton, Ontario, taught and preached in Kenya in early April. His most vivid memory of his time there was of worshiping at a local church. Speaking with ITEM newsletter editor Matt Crossman, he broke down his Sunday experience.

#### THEY ARRIVE EARLY AND STAY LATE.

The congregants showed up Sunday holding their Bibles and wearing their best clothes. The morning started with an hourlong prayer meeting at 7:30 a.m., followed by Sunday school. The service itself ran from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m. But it was not a hard start like we have in North America. There wasn't a formal call to worship. People wandered in within about a 15-minute period. Time in Africa works that way.

After the service started, there was an hour of singing followed by a sermon. They don't want sermons of less than an hour.

Their attitude is: it's the Lord's Day, and time doesn't matter. The whole day is for worshiping God. In the U.S. and Canada, we say, I have to be at Grandma's at 12:30 for lunch, then I have to go here, then I have to go there. Other stuff happening on the Lord's Day takes away from the worship.

#### THEY ARE NOT THE FROZEN CHOSEN.

They can't stand still when they're singing; that's for sure. There's a lot of clapping. One difference, which I really liked, and I think it has Biblical precedent, is that there was somebody up front singing. The person said a line, and the congregation responded to the line. For example, he said, "*There's power in the house of God,*" and the congregation echoed that back to him.

They don't have song books, so that's how they learn the words. They certainly don't have monitors displaying the lyrics. They don't even have electricity ... which means no air conditioning, in a building with no windows. It was 90 degrees out.

They seemed very engaged during my sermon. Part of that is because the translator was passionate. I talked about John Newton, a slave trader in Africa, and quoted from the song he wrote, "Amazing Grace."

All of a sudden the congregation started singing it. They sang the whole first verse right in the middle of the sermon.

I thought, "*Praise the Lord for that!*"

#### AN OFFERING UNLIKE ANYTHING IN AMERICA.

At the end of the service, they had an offering. Most of the congregation works in agriculture and lives in poverty. Some of them didn't have any money to give, so they brought produce.

They auctioned off the produce, including one sugar cane that they gave to me (I'm holding it in the picture above). The pastor's wife cut it up, and we ate it. It tasted like sugar but very woody. It was like chewing on the pulp of a tree. You chew it until the taste is gone then spit out the woody part. What a great time of worship!



## 4 Pastors, 2 Countries, 3 Conferences, 10 Days

*By Rob Toornstra, Pastor, Sunnyslope Christian Reformed Church*

Four pastors visited two countries, ran three preaching conferences and traveled thousands of miles all in the span of 10 days – this is what God was doing through the ministry of ITEM in March.

The trip by pastors Fritz Harms, Perry Tinklenberg, Bill Wilton and I marked a coordinated effort between three different organizations, as well as a mentoring experience with the goal of training a new instructor for ITEM's preaching conferences.

Each event focused on preaching Christ from the book of Hebrews and utilized a three-fold format of instruction, small-group workshop time, and model sermons, preached by the instructors.

First up was the fifth preaching conference in Campina, Romania, hosted by Wilton and Tinklenberg. More than 40 pastors participated. A large number of these pastors had returned for their

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third or fourth conference, and a couple of pastors there had attended all five conferences.

As the conference progressed, we saw pastors were learning the core skills of expository preaching and adapting those skills to the various genres of the Bible.

After Romania, Wilton and Tinklenberg travelled to Kiev, Ukraine, where they met Fritz Harms and me. We taught advanced homiletics at the Evangelical Reformed Seminary of Ukraine. One important goal for this trip was to expand the pool of conference instructors. Harms proved to be a good one and will serve ITEM well in the future. The class featured eight seminary students representing several Eastern European countries, including Ukraine, Slovenia, and Belarus.

Upon the conclusion of the Seminary class with ERSU, the four of us went next to Kiev Regional Bible College, where we hosted a preaching conference for the Baptist Union of Kiev attended by about 25 students.

This was a busy 10 days, and the four of us are deeply grateful to God, ITEM and its supporters. God blessed these preaching conferences with pastors who are eager to learn and are “getting it.” We pray that as these pastors learn and apply the method of Christ-centered, expository preaching, the gospel will be faithfully proclaimed, the church of Jesus Christ will be strengthened, and her Savior will be glorified.

### Prayer Requests

1. Praise God that Phil DeHart just returned from teaching in Indonesia and Steve Swets and Marc Jagt just returned from teaching in Kenya.
2. Pray for Jeff Richards as he teaches Acts and the Pauline Epistles May 27-31 in Kiev, Ukraine and for Mark Vander Hart teaching Ecclesiology in Latvia in early June.
3. Pray for our Spring Board meeting May 17 in which we will interview a candidate for Executive Director.
4. Pray for Will Hesterberg as he travels for fundraising and instructor recruiting in Louisiana, Chicago, Kentucky and Ontario.