Each school year HCS selects a special school theme for the year. This year’s theme is ‘Difference Makers’. This is the focus of chapels and worship times. Examples of difference makers and ways to be difference makers are highlighted in classroom devotions and in Bible lessons. In addition, there are many other Spirit-inspired opportunities that God provides to understand more deeply the importance of being a difference maker for Him.

Reflecting on the life of Jesus and reading God’s Word, we realize that each one of us is called to be a difference maker. The words of the chapel call to worship summarizes this:

**Leader:** Lord, you created us in your own image. We are uniquely and wonderfully made - created in Christ to proclaim the goodness and wonders of God.

**Response:** We are all different from each other. God has given each one of us different gifts for doing certain things well. We are called to use our gifts to make a difference for God.

**Leader:** God, we are chosen by You. We are Your instruments to do Your work and speak out for You. We are to tell and show others the night-and-day difference You made for us and in us.

**Response:** Lord, because you made a difference in our lives we can be difference makers in the lives of others.

**All:** God, we will do whatever we can, whenever we can, wherever we are, with whatever we have, to make a difference. We ARE difference makers.
Celebrating the life of a Difference Maker

On August 3, 2015, a beloved HCS 8th grade student, David Talsma, was killed in a tragic car accident. This was an extremely difficult situation, especially for his family and his 8th grade classmates. During the first few days after the accident, time was spent remembering David. It became very, very clear that David chose to live every day as a difference maker.

David was a young man who had a kind heart and was sincere. He always had a smile on his face and a twinkle in his eyes. He was excited to be a child of God and his love for God was very evident. David was proud of the unique individual that he was and didn’t worry about what others thought about him. He did everything with enthusiasm.

He chose to notice people around him who needed a friend, who needed someone to talk with, who needed to be included. He noticed what people needed and tried to fulfill those needs. He made a huge difference in people’s lives. The things he did were not big, showy things, but to the people he did these things for they were huge!

David showed that you don’t have to be a grown-up; that you don’t have to be the most popular; that you don’t have to do big things that are noticed by anyone to be a difference maker. He lived his life using how God made him and the uniqueness of who he was to make a difference. He knew that is what God wanted him to do. He tried to be Jesus to everyone. He showed us through his example that each one of us can and should be a difference maker. What a tremendous gift that was.

On Friday, December 4, 2015, the 8th grade class, staff, members of David Talsma’s immediate family, and artist Mark Landacre, who created the artwork on the memorial stone, gathered to dedicate the memorial stone created to remember and celebrate David’s life. The artwork on the stone represents some things that David loved to do - sailing and downhill skiing. The anchor represents that David was anchored in The Rock; the lighthouse is a reminder for all of us to let the light of Christ shine to others just as David did.

During the memorial service we spent time in God’s Word, reflection, meditation, and prayer thanking God for David’s life and the impact he had on so many. We took comfort in the knowledge that he is now living with his Eternal Father and the assurance of the gift of eternal life offered to each one of us.

At the end of the dedication, the 8th grade students were given the opportunity to write a message on the bottom of the river rocks that they had created to be a visual reminder of the focus of our Spiritual Emphasis Week in October - Living Beyond Myself. Then they placed their rocks along both sides of the path that travels from David’s memorial stone. Allowing each student to place their stone was an important step for each individual student to continue to process his and her grief and feelings. It also symbolized a number of important things:

• The stones are a reminder to live beyond ourselves like David did and how God expects His children to live this way.
• The stones are all different from each other celebrating that each one of us has been created unique and special and the dot on each stone acknowledges that each one of us is an important individual making up the 8th grade community, HCS community and community of God’s kingdom.
• The gold river/band connecting from one stone to another is a reminder of our connection with David, with each other, and with our Rock - Jesus Christ.

Our time together as classmates, teachers, and family of David was incredibly special and truly a blessing. We covet your prayers as we continue to shepherd our students in this journey of life, love and loss. We ask as well for continued prayer for David’s family. Thank you for your support and partnership.
**JOY in Giving**

For our Christmas Collection this year, the Kindergarten and Pre-Kindergarten classes chose to support a community in Ethiopia called Burayu that is building new Kindergarten classrooms. Along with the actual structure the school needed supplies for their classrooms, so the Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten teachers decided to collect money for tables and chairs. As teachers we set a goal for our students to purchase 20 sets (one table and two chairs) totaling over $1000! Never before had we set a goal like this and admittedly we were skeptical that it would happen. But we encouraged our students to take responsibility and find ways to earn money for our friends in Ethiopia.

God knew we doubted, but He went to work in and through our students. It was slow progress at first. But we raised enough for 1, 2, 3...7 sets of tables and chairs. And that's when we started to realize that we were part of something special because along with the money coming in, stories started coming in as well. Stories of one child who donated all the money from his piggy bank, another child who scratched her Dad's back to earn money, and another who baked cookies for her dad to sell at work. Still another asked for pop cans and was blessed by people all over who donated their pop cans to her. A parent shared on social media how his daughter had given from her own piggy bank to give to others and numerous people stepped up to match what she gave. Grandparents heard what their grandchildren were doing and wanted to give too. From cleaning a brother's room, to doing extra chores, to babysitting a sibling, our students went to work and were used by God to be a blessing to others.

They were Difference Makers! And seven Kindergarten and Pre-Kindergarten teachers were in awe! We were in awe of what we saw happening and the stories that were told. We were in awe of a God who knew we doubted and showed us that not only could we meet the original goal, but He would DOUBLE it! Over $2100 was raised, enough to purchase 40 sets! We were in awe of small children who were used by God to be a blessing to others! And what we all took away from this project is that there is great JOY in giving and you're never too young to be a Difference Maker!

**Celebrating Musical Gifts**

Four middle school students: Madeline, Sydney, Brad and Micah, spent the day at the Middle School Honors Orchestra in January where they practiced and performed with many other schools throughout Kent and Ottawa Counties. They were selected by Orchestra Director, Sara Jager. Also, Brad performed in the All-State Orchestra at DeVos Hall with other middle school students from around the state. Brad auditioned in October and was selected out of hundreds of students throughout Michigan. This is a top honor for a middle school orchestra member.
SEW 2015: Living Beyond Myself

We've all heard it before, “The world doesn’t revolve around you!” And let’s face it; we all need to be reminded of that from time to time. Though it may be human nature, it certainly isn’t how God has called us to live. Throughout the first two full weeks of October, middle school students participated in Spiritual Emphasis Weeks (SEW). The theme, “Living Beyond Myself,” challenged students and staff to contemplate how God calls each of us to stop thinking about ourselves and focus on making a difference for Him in the lives of others.

Galatians 5:13-14 from the Message says, “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” These words were at the heart of two weeks of experiences and conversation. Through various speakers, classroom activities and discussions, devotionals, small groups, and individual reflection, students and staff arrived at a better understanding and appreciation for what it looks like to live beyond yourself. What exactly did students walk away with? Here are a few samples of student reflections on SEW.

“What it means to ‘Live Beyond Yourself’ is to put yourself last and everyone else first. Not because you are worthless but because everyone else is also priceless. We are rich with blessings that God has given us, so let’s use them. Forget about selfies and bubbles. Living beyond ourselves means getting out of our comfort zones and doing all we can for others.”

“Some other people that inspire me are the teachers at Hudsonville Christian. They care about us with all their hearts, they even like the naughty kids. You can see Jesus through them every day.”

“Not thinking of me but of we.”

“Many people think about themselves a lot. Why else would there be so many selfies on the Internet? We have to learn that the world isn’t all about us. To me, living beyond myself is thinking of others first. Not always having the camera face us. Many people think the world revolves around them but it doesn’t. Living beyond ourselves means we see others through the eyes of God. If we see people in need, we help them and take care of them. It’s not that hard to be nice and to smile at people. It can build someone up and make their day just a little bit better.”
Sponsoring a Refugee Family

The middle school has been collecting money and household items for a refugee family they will be sponsoring through Bethany Christian Services. The idea began last fall when 6th grader Braedyn Dykstra heard about the refugee crisis in Syria in a sermon at church and was prompted to help. Braedyn says, “I thought we should help the refugees because they need help and we have been so blessed. We should give to others because God has given us so much.” Braedyn gathered support, talked to Mrs. Broene, and presented her ideas to the student leaders. The student leaders agreed that sponsoring a refugee family was a great way to live out the “Difference Makers” school theme. They spread the word to the other students in the middle school, and students and their families signed up to provide household items like dishes, bedding, and furniture. Students also raised funds through pledge drives, special spirit days, and concessions stands at sport events.

HCMS recently received information that we have been matched with a refugee family! A Christian family consisting of a mother and her five kids, ranging in ages from eighteen to two will be coming to the West Michigan area. We will be involved in meeting the refugee family at the airport, moving the collected items into their home, and providing support as they adjust. Sixth grader Grace Karel looks forward to interacting with the children of the family when they come. Grace says, “I hope to show them the love of Christ through what we do.”

To hear more student reflections and learn more about the week, head to http://hcssew.weebly.com. You’ll find more student reflections in a video that was shared in a culminating chapel on Friday, October 16.

“This week reminded me that I need to do more and say less. It’s not going to be easy but it’s possible.”

“Living beyond yourself is caring for others more than yourself. You must be willing to sacrifice things to even help other people. If someone sitting alone is having a rough day, just a smile can help. That may not be a big deal to you but it could be big to them. It isn’t easy to live beyond yourself but in the end, I want to hear the words, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’”

“Living beyond yourself for me is living as David lived. I remember in second grade, I was getting pushed around a lot. David told them to stop. A few weeks later, I looked at him and said, ‘Why are you so nice to everyone?’ And he said, ‘Why not?’ Why not? That’s the question we should really be asking ourselves. Why not volunteer? Why not donate? Why not make a difference in someone’s life? We need to live beyond ourselves because...why not?”
Our Mission is Growing!

These are exciting times at Hudsonville Christian! The plans for the Expansion Project are coming along nicely. On January 18, our School Board approved the financial plans for the project, the last piece needed before we begin. Since we began this campaign in August, we have received gifts and pledges totaling more than 1.6 million, more than half of the 2.9 million dollars needed for this project. Through the Lord working in the hearts of His people, we are well on our way!

The timeline for this project is tight, but if all goes well we will be able to move our 4th and 5th grade classes into the North wing when school begins on August 30. Additionally, our Early Childhood classrooms should be open, as well as Kids’ Corner. Although our classes will be moving into the North wing this fall, our current plan is to renovate that wing and a few of those classrooms the following summer in June of 2017. This will give us an opportunity to “live in” the new wing for a year and determine the best educational updates for that space.

Many have asked what will be happening with the North and South gymnasiums. Our students will use the North Gym during the day for some of our elementary and middle school classes. Unity Christian students and athletic teams will have access to the gym at night. At this time, the plan for the South Gym is to keep it up, at least until a final decision can be made in the next year or two. With a few modifications, the South Gym is a facility that may be available to rent to groups in our community, beginning next fall.

We are grateful to God for His leading and we covet your prayers in the coming weeks and months. Our goal is to have all the funds raised before the end of 2016. With your continued support and God’s leading, this can become a reality! We do need every parent, every grandparent, every HCS community member to support the project. Attached you will find a pledge card, and we ask that you prayerfully consider how you will participate. You can also give on-line at [www.hudsonvillechristian.org/growing](http://www.hudsonvillechristian.org/growing). Praising Him in all things…“Our Mission is Growing”!
“Can you read more than Miss Staal?”

According to Statisticbrain.com, “If you read just 15 minutes a day, in one year you will have read over 1,000,000 words!” Over Christmas break, I challenged students to the first annual “Can You Read More Than Miss Staal?” Christmas Break Challenge.

Reading outside of school is such an important tool in building reading skills and a love for reading. Students were excited to read more than me. I couldn’t walk down the hallway before break without students saying that I was going to lose and they were for sure going to beat me. I didn’t know what to expect when students returned their calendars after break. I had gotten some feedback from parents that their children were reading, but I wasn’t prepared for the overwhelming participation!

Once all the calendars were collected and tallied, the Hudsonville Christian staff and students had read a total of 1,834 hours and 51 minutes...that’s a total of 110,091 minutes! WOW! I was also thrilled that 16 students and 3 teachers had read more than my 18 hours and 2 minutes. I think the best treat of the whole experience was looking at calendars that simply had a daily time of 15 minutes. 15 minutes a day makes a huge difference in the life of a developing reader, so to me that is the biggest victory.

Keep your eyes and ears open for the second annual “Can You Read More Than Miss Staal?” Christmas Break Reading Challenge, coming to HCS during the 2016-2017 school year! Happy Reading! - Miss Mary Jo Staal

Hudsonville Christian’s website gets a facelift!

We hope you have had an opportunity to check out the “new” HCS website. The layout is the same but the look is clean and fresh! The updated website is also mobile-friendly, loading faster and offering a better display on smart phones. The website offers great resources to current families and to potential families. On the top right are tabs designed for current parents. These tabs offer information on current forms, calendar of events, photo galleries, homework, current news items as well as a link to RenWeb, the online school management system, which allows parents to access their tuition account and student grades at anytime.

The HCS website offers an abundance of information. Did you know we have a staff member who played hockey in Europe? Did you know we have world travelers? You can find out these facts and more by visiting the staff pages under Elementary and Middle School tabs. Each staff member has a biography page to help you learn about their personal, educational, and philosophical views. If you have been unable to attend an elementary chapel, you can watch past worship times by visiting the Chapel tab under Elementary. Please share our website with your family and friends to communicate what makes HCS such an inspiring, God-filled learning environment!

www.hudsonvillechristian.org
Good Friday Chapel

Good Friday is a time for remembrance, community, and reflection. We remember the sacrifice that Jesus made to allow us to live a life of freedom, with the hope of eternity. We come together in community to call on His name with one voice. We reflect on the grace that God has so generously lavished on us and wonder how we might allow that same grace to spill over and penetrate those around us.

This year we have the privilege of joining together as a middle and elementary school in remembrance of Good Friday. Beginning Monday, March 21, the students will be walking through Holy Week together with shared experiences and devotions. Please watch for more information coming soon in the Home Communicator if you would like to follow along with the devotions at home. On Friday, the students will have a culminating activity where middle school classrooms will be paired with elementary classrooms and proceed to chapel together.

We would like to invite you to this time of worship on Good Friday, March 25 from 10:00 AM - 10:40 AM in the North Gym on the elementary campus (Formerly known as Unity’s North gym) to experience the grace and love of Jesus together.

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