



# THIS IS CHURCH UPDATE

Nov/Dec 2011

## A Simple Truth that Brings Life

### Numbers on my Mind:

- **167:** Students who rushed to sign up for our Spring Break trips the minute online registration opened. This NLC version of Black Friday brought so much traffic it crashed our server!
- **35:** Students regularly attending SouthSide life groups who have never been in a church small group before.
- **100:** Copies of Tim Keller's *The Reason for God* passed out to U of M students who visited New Life for the first time during our November "Friends Sunday" series.

This year has felt like a **runaway train** in many ways. Between the explosive growth in the SouthSide New Life Team, the innumerable challenges and opportunities in marriage, and the imperceptible ways in which God is molding my heart to look more like Jesus', my life is abounding with more activity than I could ever hope to observe, let alone manage.

The thing I love most about the Christmas season is that it helps me remember that despite the fact that this world is abuzz with activity and entirely overwhelming, God responded with **a remedy to every single brokenness** in our world-gone-mad two thousands years ago on a silent night in an obscure Middle Eastern village in a manger. That such a simple and modest event would define the course of human history forever is one of the great paradoxes of our faith, and one that my soul desperately needs for its vitality.

But of course, the good news only begins with the birth of Jesus. With this year's theme being **The Light of the World**, we've talked a lot lately about the Gospel: the Good News of the reconciliation between

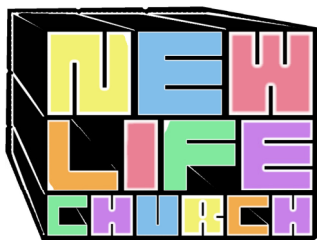
God and man that is available through faith because of the **death and resurrection** of Jesus. The power of this simple truth never ceases to amaze me, and I love that my job is nothing more than to apply its truth to my life and the lives of those around me.



*My apprentice, Ryan, and I baptizing Issac!*

The picture above shows one man's response to this Good News. My friend Issac was **so compelled** by the new life he received because of his faith in Jesus (more on this on the next page), that he chose to demonstrate it through baptism.

But as I look at this photo, I'm not struck by Issac's single story, but rather **our three intersecting stories**. As we do life together, I'm more growing daily more aware of how the Gospel has also transformed my life and Ryan's. We are three men who are walking in the fellowship that comes from a common God-transformation. And all this from news well worth sharing. Grace & Peace, *Mike*



### Verse of the Month

*"We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy."  
- Titus 3:3-5*

## The Prayer Corner

### Praises

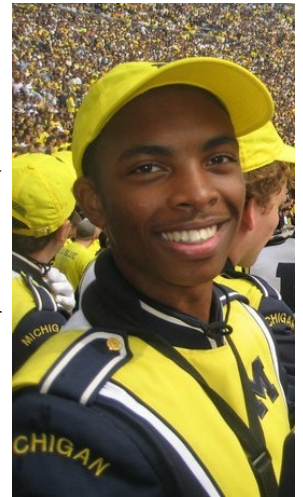
- **This semester has been one of "firsts" and "mosts" for NLC. Student participation has been at its highest in New Life's 20-year history in every single area!**
- **Jessie and I got a king-size bed as an early Christmas gift! We had been sleeping on a full-size mattress for the last 18 months, so we sleep much better now!**

### Petitions

- **One of the men in my life group, Micah, is in serious need of a car. He has exploded in his faith this year and is passionate about reaching out to other students, but lives a few miles off campus. Pray that God provides.**

# A Baptism Slice of Life: Issac Anderson

*(The story he shared with the church on the day of his baptism)*



When I came to college, I quickly noticed that I had been emotionally and physiologically affected by my childhood. Growing up with very few friends, and a pretty strict household, I discovered that I was having trouble interacting with those around me, and tended to just keep to myself. Eventually, I found that I struggled with depression. From academic stress, to dealing with the physical and verbal abuse from the past, to my own skewed perception of relationships, and myself, these issues arose, and escalated through my time here at college. I was always used to relying on my own abilities, and I was generally a good problem solver. But the issues from my past were simply not problems that had easy solutions. I became frustrated with myself, and with my inability to successfully address these aspects of my life. This soon spiraled into an even deeper depression, and soon, I found myself wishing I were not alive at all.

Suicidal thoughts and threats were a real problem that I faced, and severely affected the relationships around me. This past summer, I lived with my best friend at the time. He was involved in New Life's Leadership Training program (LT) here, and I noticed that he was changing as a person. He was happier, and just seemed like he was growing into a new being. One night when I was particularly depressed, he let me read both of his personal journals that he was writing in during the LT process. It was extremely helpful, as I learned that we struggled with much of the same things. I also saw that my struggles didn't have to define me. I saw the change God was making in his life, and decided I should try the same.

That's when I decided to contact and befriend Ryan Bondy. I ran into him randomly quite a few times during the summer, and I saw it as a sign from God as a way to bring me closer to Him. We talked about religion and some of my struggles, and how I could be more involved and grow spiritually. I came to New Life Church for the first time at the beginning of this semester, joined a life group, and started going to the Michigan Marching Band (MMB) Bible Study, and even went to New Life's Fall Retreat. Everything seemed to be going well, and I thought things were finally changing for the better. But I failed to address the source of my pain and struggle, which led to the betrayal of my best friend, and the destruction of our friendship.

I spiraled again to suicidal thoughts, and was left with the guilt and shame associated with what I had done to my best friend, who had done nothing but love me unconditionally, and who was a person I thought was a true gift from God. Over the next month since that day, I spoke with members of my life group, as well as other members of the Church, seeking counsel on what to do about the friendship. As terrible as everything was/is, I can't help but feel as though there will be more good than bad to come of this, although it's hard sometimes. Through this process of healing, I have come closer to God, I have been able to see God's grace through those around me, and I feel like a different person. This is all I ever wanted. I know that there will always be struggle, and even though the relationship between me and my best friend is not all the way healed, I believe in the power of Christ, and that everything happens for a reason.

I decided to be baptized today because it is something I feel in my heart is the next step in my spiritual growth, and in my walking closer with God. I have come to not just think it is something I "should do", but to actually desire and believe in the power of my faith in Christ. I have also realized that I need Him. I have become a slate wiped clean, and unable to be blemished, free from the overwhelming shame and guilt that consumed me. And although there will undoubtedly be struggles in the future, I am proud and confident when I say that I have accepted God's love, and wish to follow His ways, as I strive to live a new life, a life set apart, the life God has intended me to live.

The guys baptizing me today are Mike Filicchia and Ryan Bondy. Mike is my life group leader, and Ryan, a member of the life group, and one of the leaders of the MMB Bible Study. I've decided to choose them because of the great influence they have had on my walk with God. Both have demonstrated an immense level of wisdom, leadership, and compassion, more so than anyone I have ever known. In addition to my life group itself, Mike and Ryan have supported me and shown me the type of love that God wants us to give each other, and for that I am grateful beyond words. I admire both of them more than they probably know, as they have shown me what it means to be true men and followers of Christ, and I know that I wouldn't be where I am if I hadn't been led to them.