



Congregational Meeting

Monday, December 9 • 7:00 PM

Church Updates • Budget Approval Vote • Childcare Provided

Lasagna dinner at 6:00 PM served by youth group

Freewill donation for summer SERVE trip

A Note from Pastor Joel

On November 24, we observe “Christ the King Sunday.” On November 28, we celebrate Thanksgiving. I will be at Covenant for Christ the King Sunday; I will be visiting Tricia’s mother and other family members on Thanksgiving. And I will be back for first Sunday of Advent on December 1. Such a schedule reminds me that we have multiple families: We have the families of origin into which we are born or adopted. Many of us have families of marriage and children. And we have the family of faith into which we are baptized. As I look ahead to Thanksgiving, I find myself grateful for all my families. So on Thanksgiving, I will feel gratitude for my family of faith here at Covenant. You have blessed Tricia and me in countless ways.

-Pastor Joel



Who: All are welcome!

What: Pool & Pizza Party

When: Saturday, December 14
4:00-5:00—swimming
5:00-6:00—pizza

Where: The All Seasons Center

Why: Beat the winter blues and enjoy some fun with our church family! Come for swimming or pizza or both!

Courier

December 2019

COVENANT
CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

Notes from the Elders

There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under heaven:

a time to be **born** and a time to **die**,
a time to **plant** and a time to **uproot**,
a time to **kill** and a time to **heal**,
a time to **tear down** and a time to **build**,
a time to **weep** and a time to **laugh**,
a time to **mourn** and a time to **dance**,
a time to **scatter** stones and a time to
gather them,
a time to **embrace** and a time to **refrain**,
a time to **search** and a time to **give up**,
a time to **keep** and a time to **throw away**,
a time to **tear** and a time to **mend**,
a time to **be silent** and a time to **speak**,
a time to **love** and a time to **hate**,
a time for **war** and a time for **peace**.

(Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

Dear Covenant brothers and sisters, when I look at the above passage and notice the many pairs of opposite actions, I recognize in the life of my immediate family as well as in the life of our church family, that many of us have experienced or been engaged in some form of these opposing activities. It's comforting to know that the preacher tells us that all these things are appropriate in their time. Things keep changing. Including in the congregation of Covenant CRC.

In the church calendar we will soon change from "ordinary time," the period of time between Easter Sunday and the first Sunday in Advent, and "Advent," the time of waiting and preparing for the coming of Jesus Christ in glory and the celebration of his birth in a little town in Israel, a couple of thousand years ago.

The season of Advent will bring with it a couple of changes in our services that the elders want you to know about. The first is that we plan to celebrate sharing the bread and wine of communion that the Lord so freely gives us, each Sunday. We hope you will accept this gift with gratitude for our Lord's love for us. Second, the elders and the Worship Committee have been talking about introducing an "elder of service." What is an elder of service, you may ask? She or he is one of the current elders who will be on a rotation to serve as the pastor's right-hand man or woman. This person will pray for a blessing on the pastor, congregation, and service prior to the service, as is already done, but this person would also be prepared to lead the service should pastor Joel be incapacitated in any way. To use his own example—should he slip and fall on the ice on the way between parsonage and church some icy Sunday morning. (God forbid!)

The season of Advent also brings with it the annual Sunday School Christmas program. A couple of our young people and an experienced elder and teacher have put together a wonderful program and the Sunday School kids are busy preparing for it.

May God bless us as a congregation as we enter this new season. In these times of violence in our own nation and around the world, it is good to know that Christ will come again to make all things new.

-Sanneke Kok (on behalf of the Elders)

Eggrolls and Covenant

Did you notice the egg roll order form in your mailbox? When you think of egg rolls and the Laotian Siouxland Unity Church, there is an interesting connection way back in Covenant's history.

In 1980 the Lo family was sponsored by Covenant Church. They came with their 4 youngest children Dara, Kingsada, Saybansa, and Tounechay after receiving refugee status in Iowa after their family left Laos in 1975. The whole family was baptized in 1982. Dara Lo was married in our church—we were all invited and we enjoyed lots of egg rolls!

Today, Dara and her husband, Mike Rasavanh, are missionaries, bringing God's love and the good news of Jesus Christ back to the people of Southeast Asia: Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Myanmar. They are supported by New Life Church of Sioux Center.

What an amazing God we serve!

-Carol Oostra



Mike & Dara (Lo) Rasavanh

Advent Resources

Looking for some Advent resources for your family? Here are a few things our denomination has put out that may be of interest to you during the season ahead!

Jesse Tree: God's Big Advent Story

This is reprinted from The Network and can be found here: <https://network.crcna.org/faith-nurture/might-be-best-jesse-tree-set-ever>

Ever since Faith Alive developed the popular God's Big Story cards as a faith formation tool for churches to share with families, I've been dreaming of a way to use the cards' beautiful story symbols and simple devotional style in a Jesse Tree format. So today I'm thrilled to announce that this dream just came true in ways that were more than I could have ever asked or imagined. *Jesse Tree: God's Big Advent Story* is here, and it might just be the best Jesse Tree set ever!

This family-friendly set includes 25 colorful Story Symbols to download, print, and use as Jesse Tree ornaments, plus very simple devotions every family can do with kids of all ages. The symbols are the same symbols used in the Dwell curriculum. Each day's reading invites families to read and wonder about a Bible story together, pray together, and step away from the busyness of the season by taking a moment together to just breathe.

And how's this for exciting? Thanks to the financial support of donors from across the Christian Reformed Church in North America, *Jesse Tree: God's Big Advent Story* is 100% free. So help yourself! And share the link to this page with others too. Download and use *Jesse Tree: God's Big Advent Story* in whatever way makes sense for your household. And if

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December Birthdays & Anniversaries

4	Bernie De Wit	18	Kelly & April Crull	28	Joel & Tricia Kok
6	Canaan Hawley Nico Ribbens	19	John Kok	29	Emily Kramer Jeff & Shirley Taylor
7	Elia Eppinga	21	Ruth Clark Gianni & Georgina Gracia	30	Natalee Drissell
8	Jason Wyenberg				
12	Mike Vanden Bosch	22	Amelia Lappenga Shirley Matheis		
14	Megan Ribbens	23	Ryan & Val Zonnefeld		
16	Kathy De Wit Matt & Becky Drissell	25	Betty Vander Plaats		
17	Nico DeVries Lily Wyenberg	26 27	Dennis Vander Plaats George & Jo Faber Dave & Jeri Schelhaas		



Offering Schedule

December 1

AM General Fund

December 8

AM Christian Education Fund

December 15

AM General Fund

December 22

AM Compassion/Tuition Assistance Fund

December 25 Christmas Day

AM World Renew

December 29

AM Building Fund

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Formation Sunday Evenings

Our 5:00 PM Evening Formation Gatherings this month will include the following:

December 1: Pastoral Teaching

December 8: Our Christmas memories and practices

December 15: Children's Sunday School Christmas Program

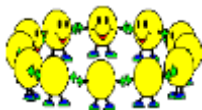
December 22: Candlelight service

December 29: No evening gathering

December Assignments

Here are the assignments for members to “practice hospitality” this month...

Remember to wear your name badges!



Nursery

Parents of the month:

Jason & Dani W

December 1

AM Kurt & Sharon V, Laura L

PM Eldon & Marcia W, Dave & Jeri S

December 8

AM Erik & Barb H, Dave & Emily K

PM Tom & Ruth C, Dennis & Pam DJ

December 15

AM Ryan & Angela H, Kathy DW

PM Chris & Rin G, Lee R

December 22

AM Nick & Jenni B, Laremy & Rebecca DV

PM Andy & Rachel L, Tricia K

December 25—Christmas Day

AM Doug & Marge DB, Bob & Rebecca DS

December 29

AM Mark & Lisa C, Alejandro & Isabel C



Coffee Servers

Alejandro C, Chris G, Sarah H,

Joan MC, Dennis VP, John V



Greeters

AM George F, Cal J, Jeff T



Ushers

AM Wil A, Mark C, Kurt V

Substitutes

If you are unable to serve on your assigned date for coffee, usher, or greeter, contact

Jo A, Rob H, Andy L,

Rockne MC, Marcia W, John Z



Courier Copy—It's up to you!

The *Courier* is issued monthly at Covenant church. If you have copy that you wish to be included, send it to the church office. Each issue is distributed on the last Sunday of the month. **Copy deadline** is Monday, **December 16** for the January issue. (Early deadline because of the holiday.)

Giving To Date

Fund	Budgeted	Received	Difference
General	(1/1/19-11/17/19) \$237,337	\$206,699	-\$30,638
Missions	(1/1/19-11/17/19) \$19,110	\$28,891	+\$7,961
Christian Education	(8/1/19-11/17/19) \$59,900	\$68,278	+\$8,378

Notes from the Deacons

First, I want to remind everyone of the congregational meeting on December 9. That evening we will enjoy a lasagna supper put on as a fundraiser for the youth group and then go over the church budget which has been prepared and approved by the church council. At the end of the evening, there is a vote for the church as a whole to approve the budget, of course.

Second, as we wind down the year, we've seen a few things in regards to the church's budget. Our giving overall is behind what we had budgeted, but thankfully, our spending is down that much as well. As Treasurer Adam Fedders said in our last meeting, "We're breaking even. Barely."

However, this is not the gloom and doom scenario that it may seem. As I write this, I just can't find a way to say we're doing ok financially without it seeming a negative. God has richly blessed our congregation, and our congregation has done a great job of returning those blessings; one of those ways is in the form of the offerings.

By looking at where your gifts have been designated, we can see the priorities of Cove-

nant. Two that stand out to me are missions and being caring and compassionate. Those two funds are fully funded year in and year out. We know our missionaries, we love our missionaries, we support our missionaries. The same is true with the Compassion Fund—when we know of a need, we are able to step in and help out, knowing there is money sitting in the fund from members of Covenant for just such an occasion.

As we finish up this year, knowing that the Missions Fund is flush, we deacons have decided to make a few changes to even out the rest of the General Fund. For the short foreseeable future, the Missions Fund will be taken off of the offering schedule and will be replaced with a General Fund offering. It's our hope to build up the Building Fund and get ministry shares its share of the offering, too. We will be keeping a close eye on those funds as time goes by, and when they start to show a need for more giving, we can insert them back into the offering schedule.

For you all out there, we're suggesting giving be shifted to the Christian Education Fund and the General Fund. Of course, any moneys designated to either the Missions Fund or the Compassion Fund will go to those.

-For the Deacons, Joe Eggebeen

Advent Resources

(Continued from page 3)

you aren't able to do all 25 devotions, that's okay. There's always next year!

P.S. The ideas that people have been sharing with us for how they intend to use this resource are amazing! You'll find them all here: <https://network.crcna.org/faith-nurture/super-ideas-making-and-using-jesse-tree-god's-big-advent-story>

-Karen Deboer

Advent Devotionals

God promises a future kingdom with “no more death or mourning or crying or pain,” (Revelation 21:4) but that's hard to imagine in the present moment. Headlines from 2019 include terror attacks in New Zealand and Sri Lanka, persecution in Myanmar, political unrest in Hong Kong, and economic despair in Venezuela. Over 20 million people are fleeing persecution, war, or violence and rising global temperatures are contributing to unprecedented natural disasters that have a tragic toll on human life.

Throughout scripture, God's people call to him, asking, “how long, Lord?” and often-times, whether by our own despair or looking at the pain of the world around us, we ask the same question: “How long, Lord?”

In this advent season, we join the prophets and all creation “in eager expectation” of the coming of a new kingdom where peace and justice reign (Romans 8:19). Just as the prophets could rely on the God of Jacob who promised to go with him and not leave him (Genesis 28:15), so we can rely on the God who sent his “one and only Son” to save us from our sins (John 3:16). As we continue to

wrestle with despair and ask, “How long, Lord?” we can have hope that our pain will not be forever and that the God who made us is with us, now and forever.

World Renew and the CRC Office of Social Justice are providing a devotional series for Advent 2019 called *How Long, Lord?*. The devotions will be delivered to your email every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday during Advent. You can sign up to receive these at <http://justice.crcna.org/advent-devotionals>

Serving at Covenant

This is part of an ongoing series about the many ways Covenant members serve in our church, our community, and beyond.

We just completed another 12-week season as assistant leaders in GriefShare group. Our group works under the auspices of Love INC. and Trinity CRC in Rock Valley.

GriefShare provides support and guidance for people who have lost a loved one. In each weekly session, a video about some aspect of the grief experience is shown; it might deal with topics such as the impact grief may bring to relationships or it may be about dealing with anger toward God. These highly professional videos commonly show brief interviews with people who are struggling with the issue and professional counselors giving Biblical advice and comment. Each weekly session also includes discussion of the video and Bible passages. The sessions can be very helpful to those who are grieving.

If you or someone you know is dealing with grief, consider joining a GriefShare group or encouraging friends to join.

-Marv & Mary Wielard

-Carol Onstra

In Search of The Light: Baby Canaan in Three Acts

Holding his little light,
he toddles behind the processional—
Sunday school children
from tallest to shortest
walking in two-tone tan robes
to the Bethlehem set
at the front of the church.
Baby Canaan trails
a few steps behind,
until his father
sweeps him up.

Canaan's votive candle—
realistic, but not real—
slips from baby fingers,
tumbling
one
two
three
rows up,
appearing at my ankles.
I pick it up
and turn back,
only to see his father
pointing down,
down to my feet
where Baby Canaan crawls
in search of his light.
Scooping him up, I wonder:
Will he cry? (We've never met.)
But I receive only
a wide-eyed gaze
of guilt?
Of curiosity?
Of beauty.
I pass Canaan
to his father,
waiting at the end
of our row.

Back on his feet,
the service almost complete,
Baby Canaan joins
in Christmas hymns
with squeals and shrieks
while ambling up
the side aisle
toward Bethlehem.
Folks turn and smile.
His father bends down
to catch him
once more.

“He's his own show,”
my husband remarks
at the program's close.
Canaan's father laughs,
nods, agrees.
And I go home smiling
and pondering
the faith
of a child.

*-Rachel Hibma
(written after a Covenant Christmas
program a few years ago)*

Christmas Program: The Symbols of Christmas

Thanks to Deb Hibma, Joya Breems, and Hannah Landman for the hard work in coordinating the Sunday School Christmas program this year. We plan to rehearse Sunday, **December 8** at 9:00 AM, **December 15** at 9:00 AM, and **December 15** at 3:30 PM. Take note and tell all grandparents that the program will be at 5:00 PM. Contact Deb Hibma if you have any questions.