

# Note from Pastor Joel

## Ever Ancient; Ever New

According to God, “It is not good that the man should be alone.” (Genesis 2:18) The same truth applies to every woman; it is a word from our Lord about every human person. It is not good for anyone to be alone.

Astonishingly, in the story of Eden, God speaks the words “not good” before the man and the woman eat from the tree from which they were told not to eat. In other words, it is not good to be alone even in paradise. So what does that say to us during the time of a pandemic that includes unchosen isolation?

We can hear our Lord speaking to us “a new commandment.” (John 13:34) We can hear our Lord saying, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35) And we can discern our Lord calling us to express love in ways that are both familiar and creative.

In the newspaper I read this morning, one contributor wrote the following: “I will spend part of the day doing something I’ve never done before on Thanksgiving. I will call a number of people in my life to whom I owe so much. I will thank them for their love and kindness and remind them that I’m so very glad they were born.” That prompts me to consider old and new ways to share thanksgiving, perhaps also lament, and certainly love.

-Pastor Joel

## Sunday School & Children’s Worship

Offering for December



Cleaning Supplies:  
dish soap, laundry detergent, cleansers,  
toilet bowl cleaner, etc.

## Happy Thanksgiving!



*Julia Kramer, Emma Henreckson, & Louisa DeVries celebrate Thanksgiving at school.*

Courier

December 2020

COVENANT  
CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

# Unexpected Blessings

Count your blessings; name them one by one.  
Count your blessings; see what God has done.  
Count your blessings; name them one by one.  
Count your many blessings; see what God has done.

Thinking of unexpected blessings, it has been exactly a year since the studio fire and its an unexpected blessing that we're about to have an open house for a new studio and display space on the same site. We want to thank the Covenant community for all the prayer support and concern for us; as well as all the physical help to make this a reality. We see God's hand in blessing us by using you, covenant members. We want to invite anyone to come visit during the week of Dec. 7 through the 12th, or call for an appointment.

-Jake & Trena Van Wyk

An unexpected blessing that has happened during COVID that I am thankful for is the many long walks on the beach... I mean through the prairie with my wife.

-Jeff Ploegstra

I've appreciated the opportunities to slow down and enjoy being less busy. I am always one who loves to be home and enjoys peace and quiet and the last 8 months or so have given more opportunities for that than we would have had before the world turned upside down. That, and I've had some great opportunities to grow some relationships in ways that may not have presented themselves before COVID hit.

-Erin Eggebeen

We are grateful for time together as a family during COVID.

-Merrill McCarthy

This pandemic has deepened our experiences to find delight in God's world: we have explored more nature spaces in the surrounding areas, we have learned names of our backyard birds and watched them eat from our feeders with joy and delight, and I (Ruth) have read more books than any other year.

-Ruth Clark

During this time of COVID, I've been especially grateful for the chance to worship with all of you through the livestream. Due to my health, I haven't been able to make it to many services during the last few years. However, since the beginning of COVID in mid-March, I've been able to experience Covenant worship almost every week! Even though I've only stepped foot in church once or twice this year, I feel connected to my Covenant family more than ever. What a blessing!

-Rachel Hibma

We are more thankful and appreciative of time we can spend with family and friends.

-Beth Vanden Berg

The surprise piece of good news that Linda and I received during the COVID timeframe is that our son Ben and his wife Meghan have been given a gift of new life, the expectation of the birth of their first child in February, 2021. We are also grateful that they've been able to avoid the COVID virus during this period when the health of Meghan and the baby is so important.

-John Visser

# Cardinal Ornament

After five years, my husband knows to put this one front and center: a pearly-white flattened sphere with a sparkling cardinal perched in a bed of holly. And though this design is nothing spectacular on a tree with décor both nostalgic and new, the black Sharpie cursive on the back sets it apart: “From: Everyone in Your Girls Group. We love you!”

And I’m back at my internship seven years ago wearing black dress pants, berry-colored sweater, and short pixie cut in a circle of junior high girls, all alike in this: small, burgundy, horizontal slits on their inner arms and wrists. Not one or two girls, but at least five or six, and me: Ms. Perfect (What do I know?), leaning in with my whole body, my whole heart because I can’t, for the sheltered growing-up life of me, imagine being in their place. But I love them—their obscure band t-shirts, contagious laughter, their bravery. And, somehow, they me. In our circle of Skittles-colored chairs, in an old classroom off the counseling wing, we have a place, a space, to be: together. And this ornament, a glittery red bird on smooth white, a gift to say goodbye, and thank you, and remember us that December.

And today,  
I look on it and wonder:  
Did they know the baby Jesus  
would one day wear red stripes too,  
for their pain,  
for mine?

-Rachel Hibma  
(Written December, 2018)



# December Birthdays & Anniversaries

4	Bernie De Wit	17	Nico DeVries Lily Wyenberg	27	George & Jo Faber Dave & Jeri Schelhaas
6	Canaan Hawley Nico Ribbens	18	Kelly & April Crull	28	Thea Wyenberg Joel & Tricia Kok
7	Elia Eppinga	21	Ruth Clark Gianni & Georgina Gracia	29	Emily Kramer Jeff & Shirley Taylor
8	Jason Wyenberg				
9	Lucas Stiemsma	22	Amelia Lappenga Shirley Matheis		
12	Shaun & Sarah Stiemsma	23	Ryan & Val Zonnefeld		
14	Megan Ribbens	25	Betty Vander Plaats		
16	Kathy De Wit	26	Ken Matheis Dennis Vander Plaats		



## Offering Schedule

**December 6**

AM General/Building Fund

**December 13**

AM Christian Education Fund

**December 20**

AM Missions Fund

**December 27**

AM World Renew

Thank you to everyone who made a donation to the World Hunger Campaign. The deacons counted \$507.80 in the Peter Fish this year! Together we helped support World Renew's sustainable approach to tackling the problem of world hunger, coming alongside families so they can put food on their tables. You play such a vital role in that story, and we are grateful!



### 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 20** for the January issue.

# December Scheduling

## Sunday Scheduling

None of our normal monthly volunteers will be needed for December. The nursery will remain closed as well this month, so nursery volunteers will not be needed.

## Formation Sunday Evenings

Join us for our 5:00 PM gatherings this month!

**November 29:** No Gathering

**December 6:** Teaching with Pastor Joel

**December 13:** Sunday School Christmas Program

**December 20:** Blue Christmas Worship Service

**December 27:** No Gathering

## December Worship Schedule

**November 29:** Pastoral Groups 1,3,5  
(Friend/Eggebeen, DeSmith/Feikema, Schaap/Rowe)

**December 6:** Pastoral Groups 2,4,6  
(Ploegstra/Janssen, Brue/Vos, Rhoda/Sybesma)

**December 13:** Pastoral Groups 1,3,5  
(Friend/Eggebeen, DeSmith/Feikema, Schaap/Rowe)

**December 20:** Pastoral Groups 2,4,6  
(Ploegstra/Janssen, Brue/Vos, Rhoda/Sybesma)

**December 25:** Christmas Day Worship

**December 27:** Pastoral Groups 1,3,5  
(Friend/Eggebeen, DeSmith/Feikema, Schaap/Rowe)

**December 31:** New Year's Eve Worship

## Giving To Date

Fund	Budgeted	Received	Difference
General	(1/1/20-11/22/20) \$245,300	\$207,957	-\$37,343
Missions	(1/1/20-11/22/20) \$21,385	\$15,786	-\$5,599
Christian Education	(8/1/20-11/22/20) \$62,372	\$59,687	-\$2,686

# Notes from the Deacons

“But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you all excel in this grace of giving... Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 8:7, 9:7)

As you may know, budget season is upon us again. As deacons we spent part of our October and November meetings discussing the upcoming budget and what our needs, wants, desires, and missions are. We all have things we'd like to see funded and ways we think these things can or should get funded, but ultimately the only way our budget gets funded is by financial gifts from each one of us.

We are all blessed in many ways and can give in many different ways. Some can give financially, some with their talents of music, some with gifts of labor; they are all great gifts. I would like to take time to talk to you about financial gifts.

In December 2019, we committed to a 2020 Budget of \$303,056. This was approved before we knew we would be working through the implications of COVID-19. When COVID hit, I was concerned we would see a drop in our giving so we looked at adding some electronic version of giving so that our members could stay engaged and active in their giving. All the methods we have implemented have worked well and members continue to faithfully give every week.

As of the end of October, our General Fund giving was running \$32,221.51 under budget. While this seems like we are a long way off, there is some silver lining in this when you

consider all things. In 2019, we were roughly \$30k under budget at the end of October. To date our giving is up compared to 2019 and 2018. We have received roughly \$800 more than 2019 and \$20,000 more than 2018. Along with this positive news, our expenses are lower this year as well. We have spent \$12,000 less than 2019 and \$15,000 less than 2018.

With the great news that giving is up compared to previous years and expenses are down compared to previous years some might say—we got this in the bag! We still have obligations to meet and would really like to fulfill our budget commitment. To meet our General Fund Budget amount, we will need \$77,454.21 to complete the year. Wowzer—you might say. How in the world are we going to do that? Well I have good news—I have faith in our congregation because we can do great things when we work together.

Our Missions Fund and Building Fund are doing well. We do a great job of supporting our missionaries and we are finding ways to keep our building in good working condition for minimal costs.

Lastly, we have the Christian Education Fund or the Legacy Plan. We do not pay for any of our Legacy Plan commitments from our General Fund—this is 100% funded by the gracious giving of each you. Currently we have a commitment to our Christian schools (Sioux Center, Western, and Unity) of roughly \$16,000 a month. When you couple that monthly commitment to our General Fund commitment, we need roughly \$54,000 a month for the next two months.

Together we can do this. We can support each other and work together to accomplish great things. Let's finish the year strong so that we

*(Continued on page 7)*

# Serving at Covenant

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

As a way to serve the community, Ron Oostra has planted lots of trees. A favorite way to do this job is to include young people in the process. So, when Al Bandstra asked if he would teach and demonstrate planting trees to his 6th grade science class at SCCS, Ron's response was, "Of course, gladly!" Selecting the trees and digging the holes took some time, but when the students came out for class, each with a specific task to do, the trees were planted within the hour! And that included instructions as to how to keep them growing sturdy and strong. Pictured on the right is David Henreckson who helped plant this tree. Our prayer is that in a few years, he will see how God made this tree grow.

-Carol Oostra



## Note from the Deacons

*(Continued from page 6)*  
are set well for 2021!

As Deacons we look forward to presenting the proposed budget on Monday, December 7 at

7:00 PM. There will be some minor changes—increases in salaries and denominational shares are the biggest changes. Stay tuned for a proposed budget to arrive in your inbox or mailbox.

-Adam Fedders, Treasurer

# Note from the Elders

We're all missing things these days: normal interactions, glorious music, festive celebrations. As elders, we commit to praying regularly for you, along with our community and our world during this Christmas season. The enforced slower pace of our daily lives—at least for some of us—also gives time to reflect, give thanks, experience differently, and wonder, even as we mourn things we wish could be.

In that spirit and in the spirit of the season, I invite you to read and be blessed as I was again by this poem from Dave Schelhaas' "Illuminated Manuscript" collection.

## I Attempt to Explain the Incarnation

How it ever happened—  
And it defies all knowing—  
God who is spirit  
Planted a physical seed  
In the womb of a flesh and blood woman,  
A seed that contained the essence of the Son  
Who had been of one substance with the Father from all time,  
Though not a created substance,  
For he was begotten not made.  
Where this unmade seed came from,  
How it joined with the ovum of the woman to become Jesus,  
What happened to the Son who had been co-eternal  
With the father and the Spirit  
Once the flesh and blood fetus began to grow  
In the womb of the woman,  
And how he was from that moment of planting

No longer simply spirit  
But flesh and blood and bone,  
This is deepest mystery.  
And this is mystery just as deep:  
Once committed to physicality,  
Jesus never looked back  
But took on flesh for eternity.  
His was not a thirty-three year gig on the  
Earth branch  
Of the Creation Corporation  
With guarantee he'd be transferred back  
to heaven  
To don again airy spirituality  
After discarding all the cumbersome flesh  
and blood and bone.  
When God in Christ took on flesh, he took it  
for good,  
Bound himself to his humanity forever,  
Right now Jesus sits in a real body at the metaphorical right hand of  
God the Father.  
Do you find this hard? It is hard! That  
Christ  
Having put on this ungodly flesh,  
Has chosen to retain it, eschewing perfect  
likeness  
With the Father and Spirit for continuing  
corporality—  
As if the human body, now incorruptible,  
was something desirable.  
Oh, joyful materiality!  
Praise God from whom all bodies flow.

