

A Note from the Elders



As Elders (along with the Pastor) seek to nourish “the spiritual well-being of God’s people,” we listen to our congregation, to one another, and, first and foremost,

to our Lord. After several months, even years, of such listening and discernment, the Elders at Covenant have been led by the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit to administer the Lord’s Supper every Sunday. We will celebrate that sacrament during the morning service on most Sundays, and we will practice communion during the Vespers (evening) service on the final Sunday of each month. So, most months we will have three Sunday morning celebrations followed by communion during the evening of the fourth Sunday of the month. When months have five Sundays, we will typically administer the Lord’s Supper during the first four Sunday mornings and then experience communion during the fifth Sunday evening of such months.

For the Elders to agree on the practice of weekly communion, we spent much time in thought and prayer and even in some experiences of agony. While the Elders felt strongly united among ourselves, we also knew that different members of the congregation hold different views. Therefore, during the Elders’

meeting of August 22, we considered four different proposals. As we engaged in dialogue and took some votes, we agreed on the following proposal: “We have the Lord’s Supper every Sunday morning for the first three Sundays of the month. On the fourth Sunday of the month we have the Lord’s Supper in the evening service; if there is a fifth Sunday, we will hold the evening communion on that Sunday.” As the Elders carry out this sacramental ministry, we will continue to live out our full callings, while relying on the phrase from our promise in which we say, “God helping us.”

Having written on behalf of the Elders as their fellow shepherd, I, Pastor Joel, speaking now for myself, add another paragraph with one more quotation from the liturgical form for the ordination of Elders. When we as members of Covenant pledged to receive these Elders as having been called by God to their office, we promised to do so in accord with the following “Charge to the Congregation;” we promised:

“...to receive these office-bearers as Christ’s gift to the church. Recognize in them the Lord’s provision for healthy congregational life. Hold them in honor; take their counsel seriously; accept their help with thanks. Sustain them in prayer and encourage them with your support, especially when they feel the burden of responsibility. Acknowledge them as the Lord’s servants among you.”

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Courier

September 2022

COVENANT
CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

There is so much love and beauty and mystery laid out on the Lord's Table. Pastor Joel reminds us of that every time we gather there. And whether we've gathered just last week, last month or three months ago, the mystery is real, I think.

While traveling this summer and being away from Covenant and church altogether and therefore the Lord's Supper, I came across this short article on the communion table by Dr. Lester Ruth, professor at Duke Divinity School. Here, Ruth explores the mystery once again considering St. Augustine's understanding of the communion table as a mirror. We will never have a perfect understanding of the Table or the Lord's Supper. I am grateful for theologians and poets, songwriters and pastors who keep us exploring the mystery. Who keep us hungry.

-Rebecca DeVries

Be What You See and Receive What You Are Augustine's Understanding of the Communion Table as a Mirror

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What do you call that piece of furniture upon which we place the communion elements? A table? The Lord's table? The communion table? Many worship traditions emphasize this connection to the Lord's Supper by emphasizing some form of that name.

But another common name for that piece of furniture is altar. It's a name that resonates with the sacrificial nature of Jesus' death on Calvary, not to mention his ongoing priestly ministry at the right hand of God in heaven.

Table or altar: those seem to be the two most common names. But I'd like to suggest another: mirror. The piece of furniture used in communion serves as a mirror in which the church can see—should see—a true reflection of itself.

You may be thinking, "How can that be? There's no glass, no frame, and no metal reflecting the church's image." True. But there's something else there that gives insight

into the true nature of the church: bread.

Think about it: there's a playful multivalence in the bread laid on that piece of furniture. We pray, then point to the bread and say, "Look, the body of Christ." We tear off the bread (at least we did before the pandemic), hand it to one another, and say, "The body of Christ, broken for you." However, ever since the apostle Paul, we apply the term "body of Christ" to ourselves too. Which is it? Is the bread the body of Christ, or are we as the church the body of Christ? The answer is "yes." The liturgical way of saying "yes" is "amen," which is what Christians in many traditions say both when the bread is handed to us and when we affirm the nature of the church in a creed.

Augustine of Hippo, that wise pastor of the fifth century, understood this. Drawing on Paul's theology of the church as expressed in I Corinthians 12, Augustine exhorted Christians to understand who they really were—the body of Christ, member for member—and to realize, therefore, that "it is your own mystery

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Be What You See and Receive What You Are

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that is placed on the Lord's table... Be what you see and receive what you are." Moreover, Augustine exhorted believers to live faithfully as the church: "Be a member of Christ's body, then, so that your "Amen" [when handed the bread] may ring true!" (Augustine, *Sermon* 272).

Indeed, there are parallels in how we make bread and how God makes us the church. As a loaf is formed from many grains of wheat, so the church is made up of many members. As the wheat has to be gathered in a harvest, so too the love of others has brought us in. By our repentance from sin, we are ground. By our instruction in the Word, we are leavened. By our baptism, we are moistened and molded anew.

And by the coming of the Holy Spirit, we are baked. Finally this loaf is set on the piece of furniture and the words are spoken: "The body of Christ." We can see—should see—ourselves in communion as in a mirror.

In a culture steeped in consumerism, it is a helpful thing to come to communion expecting to look in a mirror. Without this perspective, we might reduce this holiest of moments

A Note from the Elders

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As your Pastor, I can testify that these Elders (alongside our Deacons) are "Christ's gift to the church." We can all give thanks for them as we participate in the Eucharist.

-Pastor Joel

to the base questions that drive consumerism: Did I enjoy it? What can I get out of it? But to perceive a mirror in that piece of furniture that is simultaneously table and altar allows us to step into expansive realities. As a table it becomes an occasion for offering ourselves as the body of Christ in love and service to each other and to the world. As an altar it becomes the setting in which we can offer ourselves in union with Christ, as members of his body, in praise and thanksgiving to God.

With such an abundance of deep truth resting on it, it is amazing that this piece of communion furniture doesn't collapse under the weight. Altar, table, and mirror: may our contemplation of and participation in these mysteries bring us into closer communion with God and our fellow believers.

-Dr. Lester Ruth

Dr. Lester Ruth is the Research Professor of Christian Worship at Duke Divinity School. He is passionate about studying the history of worship to enrich the worship life of current congregations, regardless of style. He believes that careful reflection on the worship of other Christians—whether past or present, whether Protestant, Roman Catholic, or Eastern Orthodox—can serve to enrich the church today.



September Birthdays & Anniversaries

4	Rylan Brue Angela Hannigan Isaac Maletoungou Val Zonnefeld Tim & Mimi Kamp	15	Adam Kramer	25	Rachel Hibma Becky Stevenson
		16	Kelly Crull	26	Morgan Hummel
		19	Charlie Wyenberg	27	Michael Ribbens
5	Marcia Westra	20	Pam Adams Oliver Moss	28	Paul Clousing Aidan Vos
8	Shirley Taylor	22	Rockne McCarthy Rose Rylaarsdam John Stevenson Viola Stiemsma	29	Levi Landman
9	Doug DeBoer				
13	Laura De Kruyf				

Thank You, Covenant!

Covenant Church Family,

You are embracing the Riazantsev family, and they are very appreciative of all the support they have received. As needed items and many types of help are provided, they are becoming increasingly independent. This is evidenced by the fact that they have been walking and biking on their own to shop and enjoy area parks. Illia has prepared meat on the grill, and Olga has been baking pastries.



George loves playing with the toys and reading books he has been given.

ESL classes are a top priority for them, and they are proving to be excellent students. Stepping Stones tour and a medical check have prepared George to begin school. Important papers are being obtained. Many blessings!



George checks out the garden produce.

The family loves to learn all about Sioux Center, and they would even like to get acquainted with our neighboring towns (perhaps some

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September Scheduling



Coffee Servers

Ed B, Rin G, Andy L, Sarah S



Nursery



Greeters

Ruth C, Marge DB, Eldon W



Ushers

Wil A, Lisa C, Mark H

Substitutes

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

George F, Sherri TN, Del VZ,
Linda V, Marcia W, John Z

Thanks for serving!

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, **September 19** for the October issue.

September 4

AM Shaun & Sarah S, Jason & Sara H

September 11

AM Marty & Kris VP, Dave & Jeri S

September 18

AM Luke & Sarah H, Jo F

September 25

AM Ryan & Val Z, Kathy DW

October 2

AM Joe & Erin E, Dennis & Pam DJ

Formation Sunday Evenings

Join us for our 6:00 PM gatherings this month:

September 4: Joint CRC worship at Bethel, Pastor Kurt Monroe preaching

September 11: Vespers

September 18: Vespers

September 25: Vespers

Notes from the Deacons

It's not always an easy thing to serve. It requires sacrifice of the one thing that we seem to have less and less of: our time.

The Hibma family was recently gifted the book *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein for baby Isaac. I always enjoyed the book as a kid, and I took notice in recent years as the book was attacked for not teaching people about boundaries in their giving. In quick summary, the story tells of a tree that gives and gives and gives until all that is left is a stump, and even that the tree stump gives as a place to sit and rest. I was taken back a bit by these attacks on a fond childhood story of mine. I read the arguments they made against the story, and to some extent they had good points. And yet I find they missed the whole point. Yes, serving is difficult. It is inconvenient. It takes a lot of effort. And you have to give of yourself—sometimes even when you

are already spent.

At our last meeting, the Deacons began to wonder how we can encourage the Covenant family to give, not financially (but yes, also financially), but of your time. What committee could you join? Could you help with the worship service? Could you teach kids or lead a youth group? We know that taking time out of your lives is a challenge. I want to encourage you to not think of the things you are giving up by volunteering your time and energy to our Church. I want to encourage you all to open your minds, hearts, and hands to the opportunities to serve in our church and that those acts of service can bring about joys that would otherwise be kept from you. We all have things that demand a lot of our time and energy. Please prayerfully consider how God can use you, your hands and your feet, in service to your sisters and brothers at Covenant.

-Deacon Dane Hibma

Serving at Covenant

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

A handful of members of the SAM (Service And Missions) committee, at the invitation of Wil

Alberda, went to Hope Haven's facility in Rock Valley on July 27 to box up refurbished wheel chairs so they could be shipped out to where they are needed all over the world. After getting a short tour of the wheelchair building and refurbishing area we got to work measuring chairs and matching them with foot rests and new cushions before folding them

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Giving Graph

Fund	Budgeted	Received	Difference
General	(1/1/21-8/21/22) \$206,517	\$199,704	-\$6,813
Christian Education	(8/1/21-8/21/22) \$9,319	\$4,685	-\$4,634

* Please note that the Christian Education Fund total on the graph is our commitment from last year. We haven't confirmed an updated total for this fiscal year. It also does not include funds carried over from last year's budget. Hopefully next month's numbers will be more accurate!

Serving at Covenant

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up, stapling them into large boxes, and palletizing them. It took us about an hour and a half to fill four pallets. This is an ongoing opportunity for our congregation and if you would like to participate in boxing up wheel chairs for Hope Haven in the future, please leave your contact info with Dwight VanTol. Wil also mentioned that there was opportunity to participate in a local Habitat for Humanity building project. If that is something that interests you, please contact Wil Alberda directly (722.0372)

Also, on the evening of September 21, the SAM committee will be hosting a reception for teachers from the Nicaraguan special needs

school Tesoros de Dios. This will be a time for them to showcase how they have been able to minister to the needs of families in communities all around their country.

Related to this, it has been quite a while since Covenant, as a church, has sponsored a mission trip. The SAM committee is starting to explore the possibility of a trip to Nicaragua to assist Tesoros de Dios in setting up a vocational training school for young adults with disabilities. Details and dates are yet to be worked out, but add this to your prayer list, not only that the opportunity becomes a reality but also whether you might be willing to participate.

-Dwight Van Tol

Thank You, Covenant!

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thrift store shopping?) They still do not have a car, so invitations to go places are appropriate. It is easy to entertain them in your home, and communication is surprisingly workable.



George is enjoying some books at the library with some new friends.

-The Resettlement Committee



Wasps at the Riazantsevs' house have met their match when a Landman arrives in a bee suit! Thanks, Hannah, for going above and beyond to make sure the house was safe!

A Posture of Grace

Oddly enough, *The Posture of Grace* began years ago, when I mentioned to President B.J. Haan, first president of Dordt College, that I thought he should put together some sermons, publish them for people who had loved his ministry. He declined and explained he believed sermons were stamped indelibly by time and place. They were written for a specific congregation, at a specific time—anything he preached from the pulpit of this church (which used to be First CRC) would be dated and meant specifically for the congregation.

To me, that sounded right.

Pastor Herm and I have been friends for many years, long before he accepted a call to Covenant. We remain friends. We retired the same year—Herm from this church, and Barbara and I from Dordt. About a year ago, I gave Pastor Herm the same suggestion—how about we gather some sermons and put them in a book? Pastor Herm wasn't convinced, but Dee encouraged him—so did we.

But how would we do it? I told him he should be the one to pick out sermons he liked, sermons he remembers particularly for whatever reason. Then, he should send them to me. I've put a few books together in my retirement and told him I was familiar with the process.

Slowly the sermons began to show up in my inbox. Pastor Herm never typed up sermons or even sermon notes; his personal way of punctuating a text was something Microsoft Word was not anxious to format. He ended up typing up the ones he chose, which made my job easier.

Soon, we had 12, then 15, then 18. Almost arbitrarily, I suggested twenty was a nice, round number, so that's the number included. We decided to add a funeral sermon since so many of us remember his abilities at funerals. He chose the sermon he gave at the funeral of Dr. Russell Maatman, who some years ago now taught chemistry at Dordt.

I have been through these sermons at least a half-dozen times, and I continue to believe this collection is, well, beautiful. Even though all the sermons were preached from our pulpit, they are not stamped particularly with time and place. Whether a reader has heard these sermons or not, I'm sure many will love reading through them.

The special blessing Covenant people have is having heard Pastor Herm's voice. What I have tried to do is format the sermons to read as we heard them delivered. You will most certainly find the way they appear on the page to be unique, but the way they are punctuated is meant to create something he believes and practiced—that some silence here and there helps a congregation savor significant ideas.

Mary Dengler helped with editing, and Rob Haan created a wonderful cover with a design we decided should illustrate the central idea of all of the sermons Pastor Herm chose—the importance, the central biblical truth, of grace itself, specifically the “posture of grace.”

The Posture of Grace is bargain-priced at \$10 and available on Amazon. Soon, here at Covenant, we'll find a way to make getting a copy yourself easier. Talk to me for more information.

—Jim Schaap