



Sunday, December 11 | 6:00 PM

Join us this year as the children of Covenant (PreK-8th) will be telling the story of Jesus' birth through art, scripture, and song. Our Christmas program will be Sunday, December 11 at 6:00 PM.

Parents, practice will be held during the Sunday School hours on December 4 and 11. Please help your child practice his or her line(s) at home.

---

## What To Do When You Can't Legally Work? Volunteer! ...and Bake

The Riazantsevs came to Sioux Center via Poland, from Odessa, Ukraine, on August 10. At the earliest opportunity our Resettlement Committee applied for an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). As of this writing (November 14) the EAD has not come. Refugees are told to check back after waiting 5 months—that would be January of 2023.

Many in the same situation have worked for cash hoping to avoid scrutiny of the authorities. But Illia and Olga have taken a different approach. They are focusing their efforts on ESL training and have found several volunteer opportunities.

Both Olga and Illia spend the bulk of their Tuesdays at Hope Haven's wheelchair ministry in Rock Valley. They work alongside Wil Alberda and other volunteers from Sioux Center.

Illia works Wednesdays and Thursdays for Zestos, a food distribution ministry in Alton, Iowa. This match has providential overtones. Zestos' manager, Rob Hofmeyer, is incapacitated with back trouble and facing a 6-month recovery period after his surgery which is scheduled for the end of November. Illia is virtually doing the "heavy lifting" for Zestos until the EAD comes.

Olga has been volunteering on Wednesday afternoons at 2nd Chance Depot. She's been given the responsibility to sort and price donated items, help decorate and organize the store, and work at the cash register. The manager of the store is familiar with Google Translate, ( a phone app that helps you communicate with speakers of other languages,) and Olga's spoken English is improving. She

*(Continued on page 2)*

# Thanksgiving Then and Now

Four years ago, Tricia and I celebrated Thanksgiving at her mother's house. The next day we drove to Sioux Center to begin our lives at Covenant. This year, we will again celebrate Thanksgiving at Tricia's mother's house, and we will give thanks for our Lord leading us here to the Covenant parsonage. We feel grateful for our participation in the body of Christ at Covenant. We feel grateful for our home in Sioux Center.

In what I call my "Sioux Center Story," I recall that, a day or two after our arrival, I went to the gas station across the street and felt surprised that a worker at the gas station came

out to fill our gas tank. Then, as I stood there quietly, the attendant, whom I had never met, surprised me further by asking, "What do you plan to preach on Sunday?" In my previous settings, people I had not yet met didn't already know I served as a local pastor. The culture from which that question emerged has proved interesting and enriching in countless ways. To mention just one: many people here know how to play music and sing.

With thanksgiving, I look forward to future sermons and singing at Covenant. Tricia and I thank God for you.

*-Pastor Joel*

## *What to Do When You Can't Legally Work*

*(Continued from page 1)*

and her Spanish-speaking customers also use Google Translate to communicate. Olga joins other members of our congregation who also volunteer with Atlas.

While the Riazantsevs are eagerly awaiting the arrival of their EADs, they are busy helping out in the community, gaining experience, providing services, and expanding their circle of acquaintances. As was mentioned earlier, they are spending a good amount of time studying English with a number of members of our congregation.

One way the Riazantsevs can gain a small measure of self sufficiency is by selling Olga's baked goods. Olga uses the finest ingredients to bake whatever you desire, according to your taste and dietary needs. In addition to cakes and cupcakes, she also bakes holiday cookies. In fact, she will bring some of her cookies for you to sample with your coffee after church on Sunday. Think of Olga as

you plan baked treats for your holiday get-togethers. You can text her with questions and orders at 712 449-6722.

The Resettlement Committee is so grateful for all the assistance from the congregation. May God bless the Riazantsevs with all they need as they continue to adjust to life in the United States, and us as we seek to walk alongside them!

*-The Resettlement Committee*



*Olga's beautiful handiwork—a cupcake "bouquet"*

# Our Town—Once Again It Inspires

*This article was printed in the Sioux Center News, but we thought it might be nice to include it since Covenant was so well represented in this recent Dordt theater production. Covenant members Nico DeVries, Rowan Haan, Hannah Landman, Emilyn Smit, Elise Stiemsma, and some of our regularly attending Dordt students were in the show (along with Becky Donahue working on costumes behind the scenes!).*

When the lights went down on the final act of the recent Dordt College production of *Our Town*, I said to my wife, “This play is bewitching.”

What I meant was this: I have taught the play at least fifteen times. I directed productions of the play in two different high schools. I acted in the Sioux Center community theater production of the play that my wife directed several years ago. And yet, there I sat with tears in my eyes as Emily said her goodbyes to “clocks ticking and Mama’s sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new-ironed dresses and hot baths . . . and sleeping and waking up.”

What provoked the tears? I mean, I knew what was coming; in fact, I can still recite passages of the final act from memory. But who knows more than an 80-year-old guy about the brevity of life, the wonder of everyday events that we allow to become humdrum, the cruelty or indifference to pain we participate in without even realizing it. As another poet said, “It is yourself you grieve for.”

Thornton Wilder, the playwright of *Our Town*, said that the theme of the play is “an attempt to find a value above all price for the smallest events in our daily lives.” I don’t think he intends to say that every time we see a sunset

or drink a cup of coffee or kiss our wife or husband “good-bye,” we have to exclaim about how wonderful these events are. But it’s clear he wants us play-goers to recognize that we should savor the wonders of ordinary life.

“That’s all human beings are, just blind people,” Emily says from the land of the dead. And so, tears come as one feels her regret and realizes his/her failures to live with more awareness.

As you may know, in Act III we see about fifteen people sitting in chairs spaced evenly over the stage. It is a graveyard and they are “the dead.” At one time this scene was thought by some to be controversial. Was this how Thornton Wilder perceived of the after-life?

Board members at Western Christian High School were concerned about this back in the late 1960’s when I asked them to approve my production of the play. Thankfully several board members spoke out in support of my staging of *Our Town*, and the board approved our production of the play.

As far as I know, members of the community not only approved of the play, they were intrigued by it, and we had a fine production featuring, among others, a Covenant member, Verlyn De Wit.

That was 55 years ago, and as Emily Webb says in the play, “It goes so fast.”

*-Dave Schelhaas*

# December Birthdays & Anniversaries

4	Bernie De Wit	18	Kelly & April Crull	27	George & Jo Faber Dave & Jeri Schelhaas
6	Canaan Hawley Nico Ribbens	19	Shaun & Sarah Stiemsma	28	Thea Wyenberg Joel & Tricia Kok
7	Elia Eppinga	21	Ruth Clark Gianni & Georgina Gracia	29	Emily Kramer Jeff & Shirley Taylor Josh & Carlene Van Schouwen
8	Jason Wyenberg	22	Amelia Lappenga Shirley Matheis		
9	Lucas Stiemsma	23	Ryan & Val Zonnefeld		
11	Ryan DeKruyf	25	Betty Vander Plaats		
14	Megan Ribbens	26	Ken Matheis Dennis Vander Plaats		
16	Kathy De Wit				
17	Nico DeVries Lily Wyenberg				



## Thank You, Covenant!

Dear Covenant Family,

Wow! We are so overwhelmed by your out-pouring of love and support as we welcomed



Isaac into our family! Thank you for bringing gifts, sending cards, attending the shower, delivering meals, and sewing (and signing!) a quilt. Thank you for your many, many prayers as well as your promises at

his baptism. Isaac is a happy, healthy little guy, and we couldn't be more grateful to be his parents.

*-Dane, Rachel, & Isaac Hilma*

We want to thank our Covenant family for remembering us with cards, prayers and loving thoughts after the deaths of our family members. We rejoice that they are now in their eternal home with our Lord.

*-Dallas & Carol Apol*

We would like to thank the congregation for all the prayers and support shown our family after Kristi's accident and surgery. We are grateful for your kindness and for God's healing.

*-The Hummel Family*

# December Scheduling



## Greeters

Tom C, Rob H, Lila S



## Nursery

### December 4

AM James & Courtney R, Andy & Rachel L

### December 11

AM Alejandro & Isabel C, Tricia K

### December 18

AM Laremy & Becca DV, Daryl & Deb H

### December 25—Christmas Day

AM John & Linda V, Ross & Lisa F

### January 1

AM Ethan & Donna B, Laura J



## Ushers

Joan MC, Kris VP, Kurt V



## Coffee Servers

Alejandro C, Terry F, Lee R,  
Jason W

## Substitutes

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

Lisa C, Ruth Clo, Marge DB,  
Rin G, Mark H, Joni V

**\*\*\*Do you consider yourself a snowbird?\*\*\***  
Are you planning on taking off for a month or two or for most of the winter? Please notify the office with the dates you'll be gone and I will avoid scheduling you during that time!

## 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 19** for the January issue.

## Formation Sunday Evenings

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

**December 4:** Vespers

**December 11:** Children's Christmas Program

**December 18:** Blue Christmas Service

**December 25:** No evening gathering

# Notes from the Deacons

The deacons would like to invite all Covenant members to our congregational meeting on Monday night, **December 12**, where, among other things, we will review and hopefully approve our budget for 2023. In preparation for this meeting, we thought it would be good to give you a peek at what we have been doing behind the scenes on your behalf in preparation for this meeting.

As you know, our budget reflects what we hope to accomplish collectively in the upcoming year and, as such, reflects the intersection of our (and therefore our church's) priorities and capabilities. We view our capabilities as a church, including the time, talents, financial and other resources we have been given, as a gift from God. This is a wonderful blessing to the deacons; this means we don't need to view the budget with anxiety, but as an opportunity for stewardship and participating in what God is doing among us. We remember Philippians 4:6 which reminds us "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Then the next verse gives us the assurance that "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." It helps, too, that we are able to look back on how God has en-

bled us for nearly 50 years to do the things for which we have been budgeting!

In preparation for 2023, the deacons have examined each line item in the budget, checking with committee chairs and church employees to determine if what we are doing is what we want to continue doing, or what we might need to do differently. We look at historical trends and economic data to see what we might have been neglecting. We look at what is needed to support regular faithful worship. We examine what our classical and denominational "ministry shares" are accomplishing and what kind of continuing commitment we want to make to these efforts. We review what is needed to maintain and improve our facility or improve our stewardship. We look at inflation rates and salary and wage information for people in our area who are engaged similar tasks as our church employees, in the hope that we can balance our desire to do things effectively and efficiently with our desire to be fair and generous. We're not so much interested in minimizing the budget as having a budget that realistically reflects what we feel called and are committed to accomplish, one that enables us to do what needs to be done in a way that reflects who we are called to be. God has blessed us with an 8% increase in "active adult professing members" in 2022, and we are eagerly anticipating how these folks will be involved

*(Continued on page 7)*

## Giving Graph

Fund	Budgeted	Received	Difference
General	(1/1/22-11/13/22) \$279,405	\$269,206	-\$10,199
Christian Education	(8/1/22-11/13/22) \$54,896	\$61,816	+\$6,920

## Notes from the Deacons

*(Continued from page 6)*

in both shaping and contributing to our mission. Praise the Lord for this additional blessing and opportunity!

It not unusual for our annual congregational meeting to start by celebrating and we hope this will again be the case for our December 12th get-together. In addition, this is a once-a-year opportunity to reflect collectively on how finances can advance the mission of our church and signal to our community and world how God is moving in and through Covenant. The deacons believe Covenant has an important mission both in Sioux Center and the world. Some of our uniqueness has been highlighted in recent Covenant Sunday Morning discussions. And our desire to be both Biblically faithful and welcoming and inclusive in a bitterly divided society has been the focus of our Colossian Forums and many of Pastor Joel's sermons. If our budget needs to be tweaked to better reflect these priorities or others, we welcome this. What else do you want us to focus on? Where and how do you want Covenant to bless others with our gifts and resources? Please take some time at the beginning of this fiscal year to reflect on this.

In addition to the faithfulness, uniqueness, and "oneness" that our church has been focusing on, our willingness to both sacrifice and be generous is central to our mission and signals the transforming power of Christ to those outside the church. Thankfully God continues to provide, even in inflationary and/or economically difficult times. As noted in Malachi 3:10, just after reminding the Israelites of the importance of "bringing the tithe into the storehouse," God reminds the people to "Test me in this and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out

so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it." So, even though Covenant does not ask "pledges" for the upcoming year, we believe this is a great time of the year for each professing member and for each family unit to prayerfully reflect on the time, talent, and finances they hope to contribute to Covenant's mission in 2023. Thanks very much for doing this!

*-For the deacons, John Visser*

## Serving at Covenant

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



This holiday season, our church will again participate in Mid-Sioux Opportunity's Holiday Gift Program. The program provides support to Sioux County residents in need during the Christmas season. Last year, the program helped 18 families in Sioux Center, and more than 85 families in the rest of Sioux County.

This year, Covenant will sponsor six families and three elderly/disabled individuals. We encourage you to participate by taking tags from our Christmas tree in the fellowship hall, purchasing and wrapping the gifts, and attaching the tags to the gifts. Please put the tagged gifts under the Christmas tree by December 8. Thanks so much for your participation in sharing the love of Jesus to those in need.

If you have any questions, contact Mary Wielard or Marcy Holwerda.

*-Mary Wielard*



# Piano/Cello Concert



For the second year, pianist Dr. Thomas Van Soelen and cellist Meghan McGuire will perform together at 2 PM on December 17 here at Covenant. The concert will feature music from a variety of traditions, including

special arrangements of Christmas carols. McGuire and Van Soelen have been partnering in concerts since 2013, mostly in Atlanta, Georgia. Their weekend in the Midwest will also include a Saturday night concert at 7 PM on December 18 at First CRC in Edgerton, MN. Both concerts are free to the public. The Sioux Center concert will feature a freewill offering supporting the domestic violence efforts at The Family Crisis Center.

If you're interested in reading a bit more about both of the performers, check out our Courier article about their concert at Covenant last December (on page 8):

<https://covenantcrc.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/December2021.pdf>

And for more information, contact Thomas Van Soelen at [tmvansoelen@gmail.com](mailto:tmvansoelen@gmail.com) or (678) 793-5246.



## Advent Photo Project

What do Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace look like to you? Snap some pictures and send them to Rebecca De Vries (712-578-9475, [rebecca.ann.devries@gmail.com](mailto:rebecca.ann.devries@gmail.com)). Send them anytime, but here are the deadlines:

Hope: November 25

Love: December 1

Joy: December 8

Peace: December 15

Would you rather show us with words what hope, love, joy, and peace look like to you? Tell us in one sentence and we'll share that too. Thanks for helping!



*The Salad Supper was enjoyed by the ladies of the church. They also watched napkin folding and winter scarf tying demos. A lovely evening!*