



Covenant Turns 50!



The council of Covenant has approved the formation of a 5-person team to provide direction for the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Covenant as we give praise and thanks to God for His blessings to us. The team is in the process of being formed, and volunteers are encouraged to put their name forward as a team member.

The team has been asked by the council to:

- establish date or dates for activities for 2023/2024
- invite all former pastors to attend in a special manner if possible
- have someone write a written history that adds to our 25th anniversary document
- develop plans and a budget of the planned activities for Council approval
- report monthly to the Council via the Council representative on the team

Do you have to be a team member to propose ideas and do something for the celebration? Anyone can volunteer to do things! The team will assist in coordinating the volunteer ideas and activities.

Ideas and activities? Someone can develop an email list of former members who can be invited to future activities, a person or group could work at planting a commemorative tree

as was done by Bethel CRC, make a banner or develop some other artwork for the occasion, do some special landscaping for the church, the young people may have a creative idea (they are a creative bunch!) for doing something special for the celebration, some people may want to form a singing trio or quartet to contribute to the activities, have some founding members write what they hope Covenant will be in the future based on our past history and the challenges of the present, people who grew up in the church and moved away can be contacted to invite them to write a letter to Covenant about what Covenant meant to them as they were growing up, a series of Courier articles could be developed by different individuals who presented memories of Covenant at Covenant Sunday morning this fall, and the list goes on.

There will be a lot of ideas, and it is to be determined by the team what ideas can be implemented based on who wants to volunteer to do what activity. Start thinking about ideas. More information will be forthcoming.

Concluding with an adapted saying from a former U.S. president applied to our celebration at Covenant, "Ask not what Covenant can do for you, ask what you can do for Covenant."

-Duane Bajema

Courier

January 2023

COVENANT
CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

A Pastoral Letter to the CRC

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings in Christ's name. In my prayers for you I find myself echoing the Apostle Paul, "I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way" (1 Cor. 1:4). Though these are challenging times, there is much to be thankful for. The Holy Spirit is at work in our churches and members. This fall I've heard many stories of churches growing through outreach, of faithfulness in difficult conversations, and of community engagement in Christ's name.

I admit, however, that one task in which I have felt the considerable weight of my responsibility is the decision of Synod 2022, directing me "to instruct the churches and classes to seek and to keep the unity of the church and the denomination in ways that are consistent with biblical principles, our Reformed confessions, and our Ecumenical Charter" (Acts of Synod 2022, p. 858). I cherish what the Spirit has accomplished through the single mindedness of our congregations on matters of mission, acts of mercy, education, and many others. I also grieve because I see so many examples of brokenness between and within our congregations and classes. There have been conflicts between councils and pastors, disagreements about ministry, and frustration regarding our denomination's position on human sexuality. Denominations are fracturing around us, and most poignant are the experiences of our sister denomination, the Reformed Church in America. How can those who value the unity of the Christian Reformed Church respond to this reality?

Borrowing from synod's direction (Acts of Syn-

od 2022, p. 858), I would like to make three pastoral observations to guide our response:

- First, we know that our unity is both commanded by and secured through Jesus Christ himself. We have *one Savior, one Spirit, one hope, one God, and one faith* (Eph. 4:1-6). Christ died for all of us and, therefore, all of us have died in Christ. Regardless of how we feel about the positions and practices of others, if they claim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, then our calling is "to be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." Therefore, at a core level, our Christian faith calls us to *be Christ* with those we disagree with—listening, loving, respecting, engaging. This unity is not something we can achieve simply based on our own fallible efforts. Instead, we are called to the spiritual discipline of working towards unity. This is something we can do only if we let Christ, through his Spirit, live through us.
- Second, our unity is "grounded in biblical principles and shaped by our Reformed confessions." As a person who joined the CRCNA as an adult, I admit to being enthralled and a bit overwhelmed by the profundity of our Reformed confessions and the biblical principles they summarize. They provide a deep and rich foundation for ministry and mission at a time when both personal and congregational individualism holds sway in our North American societies. While these are time-bound human summaries of inspired Scripture, I found (and continue to find) comfort in

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A Pastoral Letter to the CRC

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submitting to our Reformed confessions, surrendering the driver's seat of my faith to the Holy Spirit and trusting in the Spirit's guidance of the church. I realize that today there are some who feel beset by the confessions, particularly with our denomination's interpretation of Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 regarding same-sex sexual relationships. In this life, faith exists alongside doubt and difficulties, and sometimes those are deeply personal. Yet, our unity depends on our submission to the biblical and confessional principles we share. I am concerned about a future in which our denomination remains organizationally connected, but in which churches and leaders moving in opposite directions attack one another, withhold mutual support and care for ministry, and damage our witness to the world. God calls us to a better covenant where we are bound together by one baptism and fellowship together at one table.

- Finally, I want to observe that you, members and leaders of the CRCNA, are already stewards of spiritual wisdom that will lead us forward together. Why? Because Christ is *in you* and *you are in Christ*. I know that many of you, like Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:28, are deeply concerned for the well-being of all the churches. You are praying and pleading that God would make your congregation and the denomination one for the sake of our witness and mission. Synod 2022 directed me "to gather best practices on pursuing unity from the various classes [and congregations] and share these with the broader church." Please share the lessons you have learned about unity in this fraught time with me by emailing your re-

flections (including any effective practices you're doing) to general-secretary@crcna.org. Also, give special attention to our unity around God's big mission as congregations and as a denomination. God calls us to holy living and right teaching so that we, through the Spirit, might offer his gospel humbly and graciously to the world for which Christ died.

One final note: I know for some of you, even broaching a conversation about *unity* could lead to further *disunity*. I leave this matter to your wisdom and will be thankful for whatever responses you are willing and able to share.

Now may he who is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine according to his power that is at work within us, bless you with every good thing needed for doing his will together, and may you sense his presence this Advent.

-Zachary King

General Secretary of the CRCNA



The Christmas Program prelude was full of beautiful music from our youth (including this duet by Lydia and Auden).

January Birthdays & Anniversaries

1	Jenni Mellema	14	Becky Donahue Pastor Joel Kok Michael Vander Plaats	30	Amie Smit Jeff Taylor
2	Dallas Apol				
3	Jo Alberda Penny Donahue Paola Gracia	16	Peregrine Groenewold Rog Vanden Hoek	31	Sos & Kara Maletoungou
5	Andy & Rachel Landman	20	Jenni Breems Tricia Kok Dave Kramer		
9	Lois Vander Zee	26	Jonathan Breems		
10	Bryanna Castelan	29	Don Ten Napel Trena Van Wyk		
12	Terry Friend				



Our bell-ringers brought joy to all as they rang out the good news at the Christmas Program.

January Scheduling



Greeters

Dennis DJ, Kathy DW, Marty VP



Ushers

Rebecca DS, Deb H, Dennis VP



Coffee Servers

Wil A, Mary D, Mark MC,
Courtney R, Marv W

Substitutes

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

Dan A, Steve C, Doug DB,
Luke H, Lois VZ, Dani W

*****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, **January 23** for the February issue.



Nursery

Nursery Monitor: Jenni M

January 1

AM Ethan & Donna B, Laura J

January 8

AM Mark & Lisa C, Jason & Sara H

January 15

AM Channon & Joni V, Barb T

January 22

AM Mark & Cheri H, Luke & Sarah H

January 29

AM Marty & Kris VP, Ron & Carol O

February 5

AM Ryan & Val Z, Dennis & Pam DJ

Formation Sunday Evenings

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

January 1: No evening gathering

January 8: Vespers

January 15: Vespers

January 22: Cadet Sunday service
(at Covenant)

January 29: Vespers with Communion

Notes from the Deacons

Happy New Year! We want to express to our entire congregation our gratefulness for your cheerful financial giving in 2022. We celebrate how your giving provides love in a variety of ways within our church family, in our community, and around our world. As we see costs rising, we encourage you to consider ways that your tithes can track wage increases. We are truly stewards of all that God has entrusted to us. As we look forward to 2023, we appreciate your continued prayers, service, and financial gifts. Let us know if you have any questions for us.

The Covenant Deacons:

*Ruth Clark, Pam DeLong, Ross Feikema, Dane Hilma,
Mike Janssen, Les Sylesma, Dwight VanTol, John Visser*



Thanks to the Sunday School kids who led us in scripture and song at the Christmas Program!

Giving Graph

Fund	Budgeted	Received	Difference
General	(1/1/22-12/18/22) \$309,775	\$295,798	-\$13,977
Christian Education	(8/1/22-12/18/22) \$73,194	\$73,879	+\$685



The Maletoungous sent out some great news in early December!

Greetings to all! I am writing on behalf of Kara and my family to say thank you for your committed prayer for my trip and the defense of my PhD dissertation in Oxford (UK). It went well and the outcomes were successful beyond expectations. In their deliberation, the examiners congratulated me and gave me the title of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in education, saying that my doctoral dissertation was a powerful and exemplary piece of work. In the concluding remarks of the dissertation, I also briefly documented the concept and ministry process of the Teacher's Garden in relation to my research findings and discussed the way forward for a rethinking in Teacher education paradigm and practices. The examiners loved it and strongly encouraged me to consider replicating that model and making it available on a wider scale in Africa. They warranted minor corrections which is expected by almost all doctoral candidates. Above all, they strongly invited me to work at publishing the dissertation in order to make it available to scholars, researchers, and educators.

Looking back when I began this research in 2017, my prayers to God and longing throughout the journey was for him to give me fresh revelations so I would not just bring something new to the table, but also and most importantly, I would be a humble prophetic voice for his glory in academia about godly educational practices. Through the defense of my work in Oxford as shared above, I was very humbled to sense that wish was favored by

God. All the glory be to God!

I flew back home safely and we have been doing well pursuing the celebration with our ministry constituency in Iowa.

Many blessings,
-Sosthene Maletoungou

Serving at Covenant

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

Thanks to all who participated in the Mid-Sioux Christmas gift project. Mid-Sioux personnel were most grateful for your generous donations. May the gifts bring much joy to each recipient as they celebrate the Lord's birth. Thanks for your kindness.

-The SAM Committee





We will once again be a remote site for Calvin University's January Series. As stated on their website, "The January Series is a free 15-day lecture series that takes place each year at Calvin University and aims to cultivate deep thought and conversations about important issues of the day in order to inspire cultural renewal and make us better global citizens in God's world." As we host, we hope this is a place to watch and listen, and to discuss and wrestle with the important issues of our day. We invite you to attend each weekday from January 9-27 from 11:30 AM to 12:30 PM.

Here is the line up this year:

Monday, January 9

Dr. Sara Hendren: *What Can a Body Do?*

Tuesday, January 10

Monica Guzman: *Reclaiming Curiosity in Divided Times*

Wednesday, January 11

Nate Mook: *The Urgent Pursuit to Nourish the World*

Thursday, January 12

Rev. Kyle Meyaard-Schaap: *Following Jesus in a Warming World*

Friday, January 13

Dr. Amy Kenny: *My Body Is Not a Prayer Request*

Monday, January 16

Dr. Gregory Thompson: *To Stick with Love: King's Vision for Today's Movement*

Tuesday, January 17

Kaia Kater: *Song Selections*

Wednesday, January 18

Dr. Noah Toly: *Learning Together, Living Together: What the World Needs from Christian Liberal Arts Education*

Thursday, January 19

Kerri Arsenault: *Family and Environmental Legacies*

Friday, January 20

Dr. Moo Cooper: *Diversity in STEAM from a Real Life Guardian of the Galaxy*

Monday, January 23

Ken Jennings: *And the Answer Is: Why Is It Better to Be a Generalist*

Tuesday, January 24

Peter Wehner: *How Christianity Can Be a Healing Force in American Society*

Wednesday, January 25

Dr. Esau McCaulley: *What Is African American Biblical Interpretation and Why Does the Whole Church Need It*

Thursday, January 26

Efosa Ojomo: *The Prosperity Paradox and the Power of Market-Creating Innovation*

Friday, January 27

Kate Bowler: *Life After Perfect*

We hope you will find time as you are able to attend! You can find more information about the lecture series and the speakers at calvin.edu/january-series/.