

*Covenant  
Turns...*



## *Thanksgiving for the Feasting*

We are so thankful for the great turnout and the wonderful food and fellowship enjoyed at our Thanksgiving meal on November 19. Thanks again to the food committee chaired by Kristi Hummel and the 50th Anniversary Committee chaired by Pat Crull. Thanks to Deb Hibma for making our tables festive, to Shirley Matheis, who ironed all the table clothes, and to Rin Goedhart, who will now wash them all. Thanks to the youth group who set up the tables and chairs and all who helped clean up (we think Lisa Christians and Laurey Zwart washed and dried almost 400 pieces of silverware BY HAND). Thanks to all those who prepared turkey, to those who brought sides (anyone try the neeps?), and to whoever brought that pretty seven-layer jello salad! Thanks to Jeri Schelhaas and the readers who got our hearts in the right place with devotions and to charter member Nancy Vanden Bosch who so beautifully and fittingly

opened in prayer. It was good to celebrate together with good food around beautiful tables.

## *Upcoming Events*

Our next 50th Anniversary event is our Candlelight Service on December 17. I'm not sure if anything gets one more in the Christmas spirit than singing "Silent Night/Peace, Peace" in a dark sanctuary lit by a hundred little candles. If you've never experienced it, this is the year! Service is at 6 PM.

And our January event will be held on Sunday, January 28, when we will gather for a WE service—an intergenerational worship gathering after our morning worship that will include a meal, fellowship, and learning together around tables. (Location to be determined since we will be worshipping at SCCS in January.) At this gathering we will learn about the Faith Practice of Celebrating. And we'll practice it too. Another party! More info to come.

And lastly—don't forget to send your short story/reflection (230 to 330 words) to be included in the 50th Anniversary Book. We'd like them all sent in to your Pastoral Group elders by November 27! We will have a skilled editor review your submissions.

*-The 50th Anniversary Planning Team*

*Courier*

*December 2023*

**COVENANT**  
CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

# Note from the Pastor

## The Prayer Practices

C.S. Lewis encourages us to offer the Lord's Prayer early in our daily lives. In that way, we can listen first and foremost to the voice of our Father relating us as his beloved children and discipling us into people who can follow Jesus. W. David O. Taylor encourages us to conclude our days with a prayer practice called "Examen." In that way, we can also conclude our days by listening primarily to our loving Savior God in a way that prepares us to follow Jesus the next day.

Most readers of this piece have heard often about and from C.S. Lewis and the Lord's Prayer. W. David O. Taylor and the Examen practice are less familiar, so I will pass on a brief introduction to them. You may remember that I referred to them in a recent sermon from Matthew 25, in which Jesus calls us to live as people prepared for his arrivals in their various forms. A few people asked for a review and some further information regarding Taylor and Examen, so here they are.

Taylor guides us toward Examen in a fruitful book he wrote about the Psalms called *Open and Unafraid: The Psalms as a Guide to Life*. Eugene Peterson describes the book as a combination of stories and Scriptural studies that help us pray honestly in ways through which God makes us more whole and holy. (p. xvii) With that and related goals in mind, we can note that Taylor gives the name "Honesty" to the first chapter in his book about the Psalms, and, in conclusion to that chapter, he provides several prayer practices, which include the exercise called "Examen."

Having learned this prayer practice from a group called "The Society of Jesus," Taylor

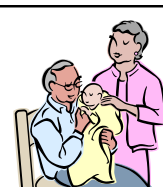
passes on the five steps in the practice, which I have slightly adapted and can be summarized as follows:

### Examen Steps:

1. Presence: seek increased awareness of God's presence.
2. Gratitude: review the day in the light of God's faithful presence and give thanks.
3. Feelings: pay attention to your feelings, trusting God to speak to you through them.
4. Spirit and specificity: focus on a strong feeling or event and ask for the Spirit's illumination.
5. Prepare: look ahead to tomorrow and trust our Good Shepherd Lord to prepare and provide.

Although I have not yet come to practice Examen in as daily a way as I offer the Lord's Prayer, I do find it a good and even godly way

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## Grandma Alert! Grandpa Alert!



Isaac David Van Weerdhuizen was born to Emily and TJ Van Weerdhuizen on November 15. He is 7 lbs, 1 oz and 20 inches long. Both Isaac and Emily are doing well! Grandpa and Grandma Friend are thrilled!

*-Terry & Jill Friend*



As we prepare to celebrate our 50th anniversary, let's see what you know about Covenant's history!

This month is a little different—we're wondering if you can make some guesses about the demographics of the Covenant congregation—both in the past and now. The comparisons are interesting and sometimes surprising!

How Many???	1974	1999	2023
Dordt employees	%	%	%
Farmers	%	%	%
Business Owners/ Employees	%	%	%
Retired	%	%	%
Single	%	%	%
NW Iowa Natives	%	%	%
Grade School Students	#	#	#
High School Students	#	#	#

Answers to this month's questions will be in the January *Courier*!

### Note from the Pastor

(Continued from page 2)

to end a day. As I focus on "a strong feeling or event" in the day that is coming to conclusion, I can discern the Holy Spirit bringing truths to my attention that can call me to

And here are the answers to the questions that were printed in last month's *Courier*:

**Q:** Which three pastors were serving churches in Canada when they accepted calls to come to Covenant?

**A:** Gilbert Kamps, Herman Van Niejenhuis, and Joel Kok.

**Q:** After leaving Covenant, which pastor became the Executive Secretary of an area service ministry and also often did long haul truck driving?

**A:** Dan DeGroot

**Q:** Which pastor was a very active member of Covenant's slow pitch softball team and a long distance runner?

**A:** Gil Kamps

**Q:** Which pastor died in a tragic car/truck accident on the Dan Ryan Expressway in Chicago on his way to a CRC Classis meeting?

**A:** Franklin Steen

**Q:** Which pastor really enjoyed preaching and sometimes would "practice" by preaching his whole sermon to an empty church early on Sunday mornings? He is retired but some Covenant members still hear him preach in Arizona in the winter.

**A:** Harry Weidenaar

**Q:** Which pastor is presently Executive Director of Movement West Michigan?

**A:** Kory Plockmeyer

repentance or gratitude or other messages from God that help me to experience Christ Jesus as Immanuel, God With Us. So, I encourage the practice, and, if you would like to reflect on it further with me, let me know.

-Pastor Joel

# December Birthdays & Anniversaries

2	Hugo Postma	19	Shaun & Sarah Stiemsma	27	George & Jo Faber Dave & Jeri Schelhaas
4	Bernie De Wit				
6	Canaan Hawley Nico Ribbens	21	Ruth Clark Gianni & Georgina Gracia Micah & Shannon Schreurs	28	Thea Wyenberg Joel & Tricia Kok
7	Elia Eppinga			29	Emily Kramer Jeff & Shirley Taylor Josh & Carlene Van Schouwen
8	Jason Wyenberg	22	Shirley Matheis		
9	Lucas Stiemsma	23	Ryan & Val Zonnefeld	30	Micah Schreurs
14	Megan Ribbens	25	Betty Vander Plaats		
16	Kathy De Wit	26	Ken Matheis Dennis Vander Plaats Erika Ver Steeg		
17	Nico DeVries Lily Wyenberg				



## The Auction Is Coming in 2024!

The Christian Education Committee is excited to announce the return of our church auction on Friday, February 23, 2024. There is no doubt in my mind that we will once again have a night filled with laughter, outrageous bidding, amazing items, and delightful fellowship. It's not too early to begin thinking of items to put on the auction! Some of our more popular items over the years have been themed dinner parties, artwork, and hand crafted items. Kids and young adults—don't be afraid to offer babysitting, plant watering, or pet sitting services. Or maybe you have a great recipe to share! Some baked goods auctioned off over the years have included bread, cinnamon rolls, and cakes. Perhaps you have a skill you can offer to teach someone? We would love to have a wide variety of auction items that will allow for people to give as they are able. At the beginning of January we will have both a google doc and a physical sign up sheet in the back of the church for you to indicate what you will be contributing to the auction. Thanks for all the ways you give to Christian Education!



*Anyone remember these fantastic auctioneers from the auction in 2022???*

*-Emily Kramer and the Christian Education Committee*

# December Scheduling



## Greeters

Rebecca DS, Rin G, Kurt V



## Ushers

Pat C, Tim K, Lee R



## Coffee Servers

Paul C, Mary D, Jill F,  
Courtney R, Marv W

## Substitutes

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

Donna B, Sarah H, Joan MC,  
Ron O, Stan VB, Joni V



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, December 18 for the January issue.



## Nursery

Nursery Monitor: Courtney R

### December 3

AM Bob & Rebecca DS, Lee R

### December 10

AM Steve & Pat C, Jeremy & Kristi H

### December 17

AM Nick & Jenni B, Duane & Jan B

### December 24

AM Doug & Marge DB, Tricia K

### December 25—Christmas Day

AM Andy & Rachel L, James & Courtney R

### December 31

AM Daryl & Deb H, Dennis & Pam DJ

### January 7

AM Jason & Sara H, Ethan & Donna B

## Formation Sunday Evenings

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

December 3: Vespers

December 10: Sunday School Christmas Program

December 17: Service of Lessons & Carols

December 24: No Service

December 31: New Year's Eve Worship

## Notes from the Deacons

The deacons would like to invite you to join us for the annual congregational meeting to be held on Monday, December 11. The budget for 2024 will be coming to your church mailboxes soon for you to review. Having each and every one of you there is an important way for us as deacons to know the desires of Covenant CRC for the coming year and years. Come, eat lasagna, enjoy fellowship, and let us know how you would like to see Covenant use its resources as we discuss and vote on next year's budget.

*-The Covenant Deacons*

Ruth Clark, Pam DeJong, Dane Hibma, Kristi Hummel, Lee Mellema, Josh Van Schouwen, Dwight VanTol, John Visser

# CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

MONDAY, DECEMBER 11

6 PM LASAGNA DINNER | 7 PM MEETING

Let the youth group feed you before the meeting! On the menu: lasagna, salad, and garlic bread. Serving will start at 6:00 PM. Freewill donation.

On the agenda for the meeting:

- Update on the Sanctuary Refresh project
- Update on Church Education during the construction project
- Voting on the annual church budget

## Advent Worship

Our worship theme for Advent this year comes from a ministry called *A Sanctified Art*—a team of artists in ministry who create multimedia resources for worshiping communities. They work collaboratively to bring scripture and theological themes to life through visual art, poetry, liturgy, coloring pages, graphic

design, and more. Our custom as worship planners at Covenant is to look through the chosen sermon texts, lectionary texts, and other available resources and seek out a relevant, memorable and meaningful theme for the short season of Advent. *A Sanctified Art's* theme for 2023 caught our attention and frankly, we felt grateful that someone else had done the good hard work for us.

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## Giving Graph

Fund	Budgeted	Received	Difference
General	(1/1/23-11/19/23) \$290,561	\$268,901	-\$21,661
Christian Education	(8/1/23-11/19/23) \$29,502	\$38,460	+\$8,958

## Advent Worship

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So this Advent and Christmas season as we gather for worship, we will be asking ourselves “How does a weary world rejoice?” Read on for an introduction from *A Sanctified Art*:

Christ was born into a weary world. King Herod ruled the land with a legacy of ruthlessness. The Romans treated the people of Israel with contempt, imposing harsh taxes and land seizures that forced many into subsistence farming. Poverty and destitution were pervasive. And yet, Christ was born, bringing good news of great joy for all people.

As Advent comes again to a weary world, we ask, “How does a weary world rejoice?” From the opening chapters of Luke’s Gospel, we have found a few answers: we acknowledge our weariness, we find joy in

connection, we allow ourselves to be amazed, we sing stories of hope, we make room, we root ourselves in ritual, and most importantly, we trust our belovedness. In the parallel birth stories of Jesus and John, joy arrives—despite trepidation, fear, or grief. In these stories, we find rhythms for rejoicing. As we move through our series, we hope to create space for acknowledging the weariness of our world while celebrating God’s closeness with great joy.

And so, this Advent, we will hold space for our weariness and our joy. We will seek a “thrill of hope” in our hurting world. We will welcome joy—even if, like the prophet Isaiah, we cry out for comfort (Isaiah 40:1). In this weary world, may we find many ways to rejoice.

We look forward to worshipping together this Advent season!

*-Rebecca DeVries*

## Serving at Covenant

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

The Missions and Outreach Committee wants to thank the congregation for so generously contributing to the Mid-Sioux Opportunity food drive. On Monday morning, Kathleen and I filled our SUV to the ceiling with your offerings and drove them over to the Mid-Sioux offices to stock their food pantry. We unloaded enough groceries to fill up seven shopping carts. The staff there were very grateful for your generosity as they will now be able to continue assisting low-income families in our county with nutritional and hygiene needs.

Soon the Giving Tree will again make an appearance in our fellowship hall, laden with tags that have suggested Christmas gifts for eight different local households. This year our church has elected to bring holiday cheer to four families with young children and four single elderly or disabled individuals. If you choose to be a part of this Christmas giving program, please grab one or more tags from the tree and follow the instructions on wrapping and labeling the gifts before returning them to the base of the tree by Sunday, December 10. Last year the Christmas Giving Program was able to provide an extra measure of Holiday cheer and an example of God’s love to 97 families in Sioux County because of the generosity and love from people like you.

*-Dwight, Marcy, Mary, Terry, & Joni*

# *Love Came Down at Christmas, But Love...*

This morning I was working with a group of women at the elementary school preparing materials for teachers. We are known as the Tuesday ladies. The teachers consider this a great gift of love to them. We cut and paste and organize, and we enjoy doing it around a big table while we settle a lot of world problems. It's a gift of love to us too. Today I asked the others to give me the first thought that popped into their head if I said the word love. This month's topic is all about love.

This afternoon my friend Marilyn, called me. She lives in Florida and calls me a couple of times a week. Sometimes she is lonely. Sometimes she has important things to tell me. She has lived with and cared for both of her parents in their last years. Recently her mother died. Now Marilyn lives alone. I have grown to love Marilyn in the tenderest of ways. Several years ago it seemed important for Marilyn to tell me that she has Asperger's. The conversation that followed was a long, interesting discussion about her symptoms and actions. I had known this about her but we never talked about it—and we have never talked about it again. However, she recently called to ask me if I thought she was smart! I was shocked by the question because Marilyn is brilliant in many ways and has an incredible memory for events, details, dates, and her past. I affirmed her and gave her many reasons why I thought this was true. I decided to ask her what came to mind if I said the word love. Without hesitation, she said, "Well, I think of a person who sees a need and takes care of it. She doesn't wait for someone else to do it but just goes for it." She then proceeded to tell me a story about a man she knew who was evicted from his home and had no people and nowhere to go. She and her mother helped him find a travel trailer converted into a

small home. They were able to get him into it, even loading up her car to move his belongings. Within a year, he had a stroke and had to go to a nursing home. For the next six years until he died, Marilyn visited him several times a week, bringing him little gifts and, occasionally, McDonald's meals.

What a perfect expression of extravagant but humble love.

Immanuel, God is with us. Yes, love came down at Christmas, but Love was always here. God Himself, in the form of the babe Jesus came so He could dwell among us and demonstrate His unconditional love. He wept with His friends and He weeps with us. He healed strangers and outcasts. He taught us how to pray. He showed people how to get along with one another as the Church and how to care for the poor and the widows and orphans. He performed miracles by feeding thousands of hungry people. It demonstrated His power which He wants us to depend on today. He helped us realize and understand what has always been—and that is God's unconditional love for us from the beginning of time. He died a crucifixion death to pay for our sins so we could be with him eternally. He created us to love us and for us to return love to Him and others.

Micah 6:8 asks, "And what does God require of us?" The answer is to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.

This Christmas I am again thankful that love came down to show us the way and remind us of what has always been, the unconditional and eternal love of God the Father toward us, His children.

*-Mary Ploegstra*