

Operation Christmas Child

Each year at Christmas, girls from the Northstar GEMS Club—girls from Covenant, Faith, and Bridge of Hope churches—use some of the money they raise to go on a shopping spree in the name of Jesus. It's called Operation Christmas Child, a ministry of Samaritan's Purse International Relief Organization. Two weeks ago, Becky Donahue and I, along with other counselors and GEMS, had the joy of participating.

"Operation Christmas Child delivers great joy and the Good News of Jesus Christ to children in need around the world through gift-filled shoeboxes."

Have you ever been shopping with a group of 6th grade girls? Imagine the excitement and the challenge! After a fitting opening devotions on sharing our gifts and our joy in Christ, we grab our red and green Operation Christmas Child shoebox, jump into cars and vans, and are off to Walmart. On the way, we need to decide if our gift should be for a boy or a girl and which age category the gift will fit: 2-4, 5-9, or 10-14. After some good arguments for each, we decide on a girl aged 10-14, "just like us," one girl says. We've got \$20-40 to spend on toys, school supplies, personal care items, and a "wow" item. We have an hour to shop and it's all got to fit in a shoebox. Let's go.

Shopping with me are Auden Mellema, Faith Van Schouwen, Cora Donahue, and our friend Taiya from

Faith CRC. I've got the cart, we're weaving up and down rows, each of us (me included) with perfect gift ideas, reasons for and against different suggestions, oohs and aahs, and a whole lot of enthusiasm. The girls are asking what would bring this girl joy? What would be useful? And we're trying to picture this girl who will soon receive this gift. Some girl, somewhere, will open this box some day.

Well, the box is filled to overflowing as we head to the self-checkout. There is much enthusiasm about scanning the items, each girl wanting a turn, and so we accidentally scan a few things twice, and then forget what needs to be scanned yet, so we call the Walmart employee over—Jacquelin—to lend us a hand. After she cancels the order and we begin again, she says to me, "can I ask you about your box?" So I tell her about what we are doing, where we are from, and why we're doing this.

"I know this box," she says. "My family is Christian, and when we lived in Mexico, we used to get these boxes at Christmas." I couldn't believe it. We're trying to imagine the girl on the other end of our giving, and in a way, here she is.

"Really?" I say. "Do you remember what you

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Sweet Deceptions

After news of former member Janna Van Driel's death made its way to Covenant, Jim Schaap passed along this story that Covenant old-timers might enjoy.

If I'm not mistaken, on the first day of class of my second year of teaching at Dordt, I handed out, as usual, little slips of paper and asked students to give me some basic info—name, address, major, etc. When handed in, I read them and tried to tease some twaddle from the kids.

“Janna De Groot?” I read from a slip in the middle of pile. “Sioux Center, Iowa?—you must somehow be related to Professor De Groot?”

Janna shook her head and smiled, and said, “No, not really.” I shuffled through more slips.

Later, some time at morning coffee, I said to Professor Henry that I had a Janna in class, wondered if she was relation. “Said she’s from right here,” I said.

“That’s my daughter,” Professor Henry told me. “She told me she wants to be anonymous.” Then he chuckled.

Our own kids were tiny. I had a lot to learn.

As I remember, Janna didn't normally practice deceptions. She was blessedly sweet. I'm sure her family and friends will miss her greatly.

-Jim Schaap

Disability Concerns

The Covenant community desires to be very welcoming to all members, including those with disabilities. The deacons have identified this as an area that should receive additional focus in the coming year to ensure that we are meeting this goal. To that end, a small committee of church members has been tasked with exploring strengths and needs in this area. Currently, this committee includes Sara Ho and Kathleen VanTol. The deacon overseeing this committee is Pam DeJong.

Disability is a topic that can sometimes make us feel uncomfortable. How do we make sure that our churches, schools, and society in general are truly accessible to all? More specifically, how do we ensure that Covenant is a welcoming and inclusive community for all members and visitors?

The Miriam Webster dictionary definition of accessible is ‘capable of being reached’. According to 2024 numbers from the CDC, more than 1 in 4 people living in America have some type of disability—whether that be mobility, cognitive, or sensory struggles (www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html).

The committee has already completed a brief evaluation of the physical accessibility of the church building, but inclusion goes well beyond physical accessibility. To help us think more deeply about all the elements that make a church community fully inclusive, we would like to invite those interested in this topic to join us in a book study of Amy Kenney's book entitled *My Body is not a Prayer Request: Disability Justice in the Church*.

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Disability Concerns

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“If you are looking for a book that will make you feel good about your church’s ministry to people with disabilities, this is almost certainly not the book for you. Instead, this is a book that will likely make you feel uncomfortable and troubled, but that will also convict you that we need to do better” (VanTol, 2022). You can find the full review that Kathleen wrote on this book here inallthings.org/the-church-and-disability-justice-a-review-of-my-body-is-not-a-prayer-request/

We hope to begin this book study in January. Our goal is to find a meeting day/time that works for as many who are interested as possible. Following the book study, we would like to conduct a congregational survey on what accessibility needs are present in the congregation, and how these are (or are not) being

met. We hope that the book study will lead us to ask better questions on the survey. If you are interested in joining, please reach out to Kathleen (kathleen.vantol@dordt.edu) or Sara (saranoelho@gmail.com) with some general days/times that work for you. If you are interested in joining our committee, please let us know as well!

-Sara Ho & Kathleen Van Tol





**CONGREGATIONAL
MEETING**

**Monday, December 9
7:00 PM**

Plan to join us for our annual congregational meeting. We'll hear updates from the Council and vote on our annual budget.

Join us before the meeting for the **Youth Group Lasagna Dinner**.
Let the youth group feed your family that evening with lasagna, salad and garlic bread!
(Freewill donation)

Covenant Library

Looking for a book to read? Did you know that Covenant has a small library of fiction and non-fiction books? You will find books for a range of ages and interests in the southeast corner of the west foyer. Check it out!

-Pat Crull

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 Lucas & Molly Stiemsma
8	Jason Wyenberg	22	Shirley Matheis		Jeff & Shirley Taylor Josh & Carlene Van Schouwen
9	Lucas Stiemsma	23	Ryan & Val Zonnefeld		
14	Megan Ribbens	25	Betty Vander Plaats	30	Micah Schreurs
16	Kathy De Wit	26	Ken Matheis Dennis Vander Plaats Erika Ver Steeg		
17	Nico DeVries Lily Wyenberg				

Operation Christmas Child

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would get in your box?" She remembered pencils and toothbrushes and soap. I get the girls' attention and ask what else she can tell us.

"My little siblings and I were always so excited. It was the best day," she smiles as she remembers. "The best day." We all smile too, and thank her for her help and for telling us her story.

We are all filled with joy as we drive back to church, processing this experience. I wonder aloud if the Holy Spirit was at work just now, allowing us to meet Jaqueline. One girl shares that it makes her want to give more. What a gift.

The next Sunday, as we prayed our evening collect prayer at our Vespers service and



asked God to "shield the joyous," I thought of Auden, Faith, Cora, and Taiya, and the joy they found in giving this gift. And I prayed for Jaqueline and girls like her opening shoeboxes this Christmas. We were all "delivered great joy" through this ministry.

-Rebecca DeVries

December Scheduling



Greeters

Jenni B, Pat C, Mary D



Ushers

Rock MC, Len R, Beth VB



Coffee Servers

Alejandro C, Rebecca DV,
Merrill MC, Daniel VS, Jason W

Substitutes

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

Doug DB, Cheri H, Les S,
Lois VZ, Channon V, Sharon V

Are you traveling this winter?

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 16** for the January issue. (Note the early deadline!)



Nursery

Nursery Monitor: Jenni M

December 1

AM Dave & Emily K, Steve & Pat C

December 8

AM Dave & Jeri S, Kyle & Andrea D

December 15

AM Bob & Rebecca DS, James & Courtney R

December 22

AM Kurt & Sharon V, Ethan & Donna B

December 25—Christmas Day

AM Nick & Jenni B, Mark & Lisa C

December 29

AM Andy & Rachel L, Laura J

January 5

AM Jason & Sara H, Alejandro & Isabel C

Formation Sunday Evenings

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

December 1: Prayer Gathering

December 8: Vespers

December 15: Sunday School Christmas Program

December 22: Blue Christmas Service

December 29: No evening gathering

Notes from the Deacons

The deacons thank the congregation for using the "where most needed" designation when giving. At the start of 2024, we set an 80/20% split for undesignated gifts with 80% going towards the General Fund and 20% to the Christian Education Fund. This was set without knowing what our commitment to the local Christian schools would be in the fall, given the changing landscape of ESAs. We are truly in a time of abundance for our Christian Education Fund as we finished the 2023-2024 academic year with a surplus of \$8,156.45 and we continue to outpace our commitment in the current year. The deacons also anticipate that we will meet our 2024-2025 Christian education commitment early this year and in future years as ESAs will be fully implemented in 2025-26.

Given these factors, we desire a clear and compelling vision for the financial blessings that the ESA program has brought. Key tenets:

1. We believe that it is important that we not become complacent in our giving but continue to give generously.
2. We want Covenant to be in a strong financial position if the blessing of ESAs were to be revoked. This underlines the im-

portance of continuing to give and raise funds at current rates so that a change to the ESAs can be absorbed.

3. We want to continue with a high support of Christian education. This blessing allows us to support Christian education beyond our local schools.

To achieve these goals, we plan to continue with the 80% General Fund/20% Christian Education Fund split until the commitments for the current year are met. At that point, we will move to an 80%/10%/10% split in which 10% is redirected to the Refresh building project. Decreasing our debt load during a time of plenty puts us in a stronger financial position if changes are made to the ESA. The remaining 10% will continue to support Christian education in communities outside of ours. God is doing amazing things in Christian schools around the world, and we have an opportunity to be a blessing.

-Val Zonnefeld
(for the deacons)

Giving Graph

Fund	Budgeted	Received	Difference
General	(1/1/24-11/17/24) \$301,363	\$298,791	-\$2,572
Christian Education	(8/1/24-11/17/24) \$15,566	\$28,550	+\$12,984
Refresh Building	(1/1/24-10/20/24) \$65,815	\$73,999	+\$8,184

Serving at Covenant

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

Look for the Christmas Giving Tree in the Fellowship Hall again this year. This gift drive is sponsored by Mid-Sioux Opportunities. Each year they provide Christmas gifts to under-privileged families, elderly people with limited resources, and disabled persons in Sioux County. Please take a tag off the tree, purchase the requested item(s), tape the tag to the outside of your wrapped gift, and return it by December 11. Last year Mid-Sioux was able to bless over 130 families through this program because of the generosity of many. Please consider blessing others in our community with a Christmas gift.



-Marcy Holwerda

Sound Advice: Tips for Using the Livestream

Did you know our Sunday worship services typically receive 200 views within a month of being posted and often accumulate 300-500 views over time? Our most-viewed service, the 50th-anniversary celebration on April 28, 2024, has over 1,200 views (as of now)—more than double the seating capacity of our building. These are strong viewership statistics for any church in our denomination, and especially for our size. While not all views represent full participation, this level of engagement shows that the livestream has extended our community presence.

Every stream has been archived, all the way back to the start of the pandemic when we began streaming. We also archive other events that were streamed, like weddings, funerals, and even pinewood derbies. (Some

events are not streamed at the request of the host of the event.) To find our streams, go to Facebook and enter “Covenant CRC Sioux Center” in Facebook’s search box. Once you find any Covenant stream, click or tap on the text, “Covenant CRC,” at the top left just above the video’s image. That will take you to Covenant’s Facebook home page. From there, click on “Videos” (or on “More | Videos” or “More | Live”—it depends on the device you are using). Then you will be able to scroll through past archives.

Music is important to our worship, and correspondingly, we provide the livestream with high-fidelity stereo audio, designed to be compatible with surround-sound systems. For

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Sound Advice: Hearing Assistance

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the best experience, watch on a large-screen TV paired with a sound bar or a surround-sound audio system. If your audio system offers various settings, try them and see what sounds best. If you have settings such as “multichannel stereo” or “Dolby Pro-Logic” or “DTS” or similar, be sure to try those. Select that which sounds best in your system and room. A good pair of earbuds or headphones can also enhance your experience when watching on a smartphone.



Covenant's streams are suitable for high-fidelity stereo large-screen streaming.

(photo credit: AI generated by Canva.com)

Three Ways to Watch the Livestream on Your TV

1. Cast from a Smartphone

The most popular method involves streaming on your smartphone and casting the content to your TV. (Casting may also be called mirroring, screen mirroring, “Miracast,” or other trade names.) Setting up for casting varies by brand. Casting works best when your phone and TV are within the same ecosystem (e.g., cast from an Android phone to a Chromecast TV—both by Google). But, with the right apps and/or settings, you can usually cast between any brands. Check your equipment manuals or

search online for brand-specific instructions, such as “Cast from my Apple iPhone to my Samsung TV.” Once set up, connecting the devices for future streams takes only a few clicks.

2. Use a Web Browser on Your TV

This method only requires one device—the TV—and leaves your other devices free for their normal uses. Many smart TVs include a built-in browser or allow the installation of one. This enables direct streaming from Facebook or any website. Certain brands (e.g., LG, Samsung, Sony) often support this feature. Other brands (Roku comes to mind) deliberately limit browsing capabilities to simplify the user interface. If your TV does not have a built-in web browser or allow the installation of one, an Amazon Fire TV Stick is a simple way to add web browsing to any TV with an HDMI port. Fire Sticks are affordable (around \$30 new, often less on sale) and include the Silk browser, which works without a subscription. Other devices, like Onn streaming sticks from Walmart, often also support web browsing. (If you purchase a streaming device used, be sure to get the original remote control that came with it.)

3. Connect via HDMI

The simplest-to-configure solution is to connect your TV to a computer or smartphone using an HDMI cable. The TV then functions like a second screen. USB-to-HDMI adapters are available for most smartphones. You might even dedicate an older computer or smartphone to this purpose. (By using Wi-Fi, a smartphone does not have to be active on a cellular network for this to work.) This method requires no special apps and offers a familiar user experience.

-Doug DeBoer