

Warm Winter Wednesdays

Plans are in the works for a Warm Winter Wednesday event this February, but aren't quite in place yet. So tentatively save February 19 for an event at church to warm our hearts and souls in this cold, dark season and look for more information to come.

But as we wait for more specific plans to take shape, it seems like a good opportunity to look to our church family for suggestions and ideas. Many of the people who are planning these events don't have long history at Covenant—and because of the disruptions these last 5 years with Covid and construction, they haven't been around long enough to know the history of Warm Winter Wednesdays or what people have loved about these events. I have wonderful memories of sitting at the table with many different people sharing a meal, of the Covenant kids racing Ron Oostra's pinewood derby cars with excitement, of two little girls (who will remain nameless) streaking shirtless through the fellowship hall full of people on a very cold night—because they were hot. (Not my proudest moment.) And does anyone remember the bowtie contest or Bunco night? How about Family Feud Fiesta?

So that brings us to you... Do any of you know when this tradition started? I looked through old issues of the Courier and found information about events going back to 2006. (By

the way, that year we had a Hobby Fair Night, a night of conversations about different stages of life, and a "Service Celebration" night. Anyone remember these events?) But past 2006 I started to run stuck (and I was running out of time). Anyone remember who came up with the idea of Warm Winter Wednesdays? What was your favorite event over the years? What would you like to see us do in years to come? What have you loved about these February gatherings?

We'd love to see this tradition to continue, but maybe it needs a little input from the congregation—a few ideas to keep it going strong in the future. Drop a quick note to the church office if you have memories about www@Cov or if you have ideas for the future!

-Sara Ploegstra



www@Cov game night in 2018

Beauty & The Beast

January! It was a delight to watch them speak, sing, dance, and roar (?) their way around the stage. Congratulations to all of them for a great production!

Hopefully many of you were able to catch our Covenant kids in Sioux Center Christian School's production of *Beauty and the Beast* in



Pictured from left to right: Sophie Visscher (Old Woman/Enchantress), Nola Jewett (Statue), Benjamin Hummel (Prince/Beast), Adam Kramer (Fishmonger), Nico DeVries (Gaston), Aidan Vos (Lumiere), Logan Hannigan (Shepherd Boy), Sophia Bailey (Babette)



Here are some ways to pray for some of our missionary partners around the world.

Benjamin & Tricia Groenewold-Van Dyk Answers to Prayer:

- We thank God for a semester full of good things: meaningful interactions with students, good times together as a family, the practice of some healthy habits, and so much more.
- We praise God for the way we have seen him working in the lives of several of our students. We thank God for the transformation that he brings in situations where transformation seemed impossible.

- Likewise, we are thankful that several students who didn't seem like they were going to make it managed to pull through the semester and pass their classes.

Prayer Requests:

- Please pray for two of our students who lost their fathers this month in the Ukrainian military defense against the Russian invasion of their country. Please continue to pray for peace and for hope for the future for the Ukrainian people.
- Pray for peace in the region (and in our hearts) as Russian sabotage incidents in the Baltics have increased, and for LCC to be an effective voice for peace.

(Continued on page 3)

Last Year, Around This Time

Remember last year around this time?

We so quickly get used to a new normal, but if you can think back to life at Covenant a year ago, you'll remember an out-of-the-ordinary time for Covenant. The space was full of ladders and lifts and tools and wires. There were construction workers, electricians, painters, floor finishers, and sound engineers making their way in and out of our building, working together to finish our sanctuary before Easter Sunday. We were worshiping at the SCCS gym, trying to figure out how to set it up and how to do Sunday School. And we were making use of our fellowship hall for our evening gatherings and a few social events here and there.

We have so much to be thankful for a year later as we enjoy the benefits of all that hard work and a completed sanctuary refresh project!



Missionary News

(Continued from page 2)

- Pray for our students and classes this coming semester (classes start on January 13): Tricia will be teaching two sections of Ethics and one of Introduction to Philosophy, as usual in the spring, and Benjamin will be teaching a philosophy elective called Perspectives on the Environment.

You can read more about their work in Lithuania in their latest newsletter:

<https://mailchi.mp/9c4c2825dfee/december-2024-prayer-letter-taking-time-to-reflect>

Sos & Kara Maletoungou

Thanksgiving and Prayer Items:

- Give thanks to the Lord for a meaningful ministry time with the Heartland team

from Iowa.

- Pray for the anointing of the Spirit for all participants in the Teacher's Garden training to be fruitful with what they learned.
- Pray for God's providence and increased resources needed for the Teacher's Garden to meet growing demands for its ministries in Guinea and in Central Africa.
- Pray for God's healing for a local family friends whose 10-yr-old daughter has been having a health issue.

Read more about the Maletoungous in their latest newsletter:

https://covenantcrc.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2024.12_Prayer-Letter_Educators-Blessing-Others.pdf

February Birthdays & Anniversaries

1	Phil Postma	13	Dale Brands Mimi Kamp	19	Dennis DeJong
3	Micah Moss	14	Marilyn Mouw	24	June DeWit Micah & Jayden Dykstra
7	Wil Alberda	15	Sanneke Kok	27	Marcy Holwerda
9	Jane Taylor	17	Jim Schaap Josh Van Schouwen	28	Lila Janssen
12	Robbin Eppinga Les Sybesma	18	Ryan Smit	29	Sarah Moss

Thank you for supporting World Renew to bring bold hope and unrelenting love to families and communities worldwide. This past year, your generosity empowered thousands of people across the globe to take steps toward brighter futures. Every number tells a story of resilience, hope, and opportunity—stories made possible because of your partnership. Here’s what we accomplished together in 2024:



559,987 participants worldwide were equipped to make change through our community development and disaster response initiatives.



305,218 people received critical humanitarian aid in 21 countries, including Ukraine, Syria, Lebanon, South Sudan, and Madagascar. Your support brought bold hope and unrelenting love to communities experiencing crisis.



156,224 farmers enhanced their families’ food security with tools, training, and support to help them grow more nutritious food. When farmers thrive, entire communities flourish.



123,710 community members improved their health and nutrition through our health programs. Families are gaining the knowledge and resources they need to thrive.



135,309 participants accessed economic opportunities through savings and loans groups, skills training, and small business programs. Together we’re helping families build lasting financial stability.



154,567 people engaged in peace and justice programs, working toward reconciliation and advocating for fairness in their communities. Your support is fostering unity and healing in places that need it most.

Together we are building a world renewed in God’s hope.

February Scheduling



Greeters

Marge DB, Daryl H, Jeri S



Ushers

Jo A, Jan B, Kris VP



Coffee Servers

Natalie B, Paul C, Dennis DJ,
Jason H, Tricia K

Substitutes

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

Donna B, Luke H, Kristi H,
Del VZ, Kurt V, Dani W

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, **February 17** for the March issue.



Nursery

Nursery Monitor: Jenni M

February 2

AM Ryan & Val Z, Laremy & Becca DV

February 9

AM Daryl & Deb H, Jason & Dani W

February 16

AM Ron & Carol O, Lee & Jenni M

February 23

AM Marty & Kris VP, Chris & Rin G

March 2

AM Jeff & Sara P, Tom & Ruth C

Formation Sunday Evenings

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

February 5: Vespers

February 12: Vespers

February 19: Vespers

February 26: Vespers with Communion

Note from the Deacons

The deacons want to thank God for the blessing of congregation members who have both the resources and motivation to support God’s work through Covenant. Even though many Covenant members had a tough year, 2024 General Fund giving ended \$5,710.62 above budget, Christian Education Fund giving was \$15,953.32 above budget, and the Building Fund was \$13,915.97 above budget. As we had hoped, blessings related to ESAs and good gifts from God have spilled over into continued generous giving—as we had hoped they would.

Despite our usual high level of expenditures in December, as we paid all remaining budgeted obligations for 2024, including several months of missionary support and ministry shares, our General Fund expenditures ended up \$19,642.87 below our budget. We see God’s grace in this, and the blessing of leaders who continue to steward the funds in their individual budgets, and members who hold overall expenditures in check through a willingness to volunteer their time and talents. The major under-budget categories were pastor’s health insurance, church utilities, 50th Anniversary expenses, the absence of additional building-related “Special Projects” (beyond Refresh),

and lower-than-budgeted payments to our Young People’s Intern. This means our General Fund balance grew to approximately two months of budgeted expenditures which makes our Accountant and Treasurer’s jobs easier as we are able to pay bills without checking balances and take advantage of discounts related to prepayments.

Both the Compassion Fund and Building Fund balances were also healthy at year end, despite a busy year of expenditures. Because the Compassion Fund was replenished by spontaneous gifts after mid-year flood relief disbursements, we were able to commit to buying a serious quantity of wood in December so one of our members (whose initials just might be SC) could build new storage cabinets for Rock Valley Christian School’s art program. Refresh-related giving accelerated in each of the final four months of 2024, bringing us to a YTD total of \$88,315.97, \$13,915.97 (18.7%) above the budget of \$74,400 set by the Capital Campaign Committee/deacons for interest payments and debt liquidation. Although no loans were paid off in December (in anticipation of a full year of interest payments on January 15), we expect to pay off approximately \$20,000 in loans in late January which will take our outstanding

(Continued on page 7)

Giving Graph

Fund	Budgeted	Received	Difference
General	(1/1/25-1/19/25) \$19,946	\$28,119	+\$8,173
Christian Education	(8/1/24-1/19/25) \$24,322	\$42,858	+\$18,536
Refresh Building	(1/1/25-1/19/25) \$4,292	\$3,753	-\$539

Note from the Deacons

(Continued from page 6)

balance down to \$165,000. This bodes well for “burning the mortgage” in the spring of 2027.

The Missions Fund grew to \$3,053.74 and the Young People’s Fund balance grew to \$7,847.54 after the Lasagna Supper fundraiser before the congregational meeting earned more than a thousand dollars. Special offerings to the thirty not-for-profits organizations Covenant supports also increased approximately \$8,000 year-over-year, giving the deacons the end-of-the-year privilege, for example, of sending a total of \$5,000 to two Rock Valley organizations—one that suffered major losses during the flooding and another that expanded its mission to better aid the relief efforts.

Assuming generous giving continues in 2025, the deacons will remain in the enviable position of deciding what to do with the surplus. As noted at the Congregational Meeting, two of our top priorities will be supporting those desiring Christian Education who struggle to afford it and paying down our debt. One of the first things we plan to do is fund an expansion of the Teacher’s Garden started by Sos and Kara Maletougou to provide many valuable resources to Christian school teachers in West Africa. As we consider additional stewardship opportunities, please continue to feel free to share your thoughts with us.

Soli Deo Gloria!

John Visser

For the Covenant Deacons (Pam De Jong, Mark Horstman, Dave Kramer, Lee Mellema, Josh Van Schouwen, Dwight Van Tol, John Visser, Val Zonnefeld)



Grandma Alert! Grandpa Alert!

Mark & Lisa Christians welcomed a new granddaughter and Kathy DeWit is the proud great-grandma! Logan Noelle Smith, daughter of Zach and Emily Smith was born on December 19. Big brothers are Canon and Rhett. They live in Denver, CO.



Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged.



1 Corinthians
13:4-5

A Prayer for Sanctity of Human Life Sunday

This past Sunday, January 19th, Christian Reformed Churches and congregations across North America observed Sanctity of Human Life Sunday. On this day, we are reminded of the precious gift of life and the sacredness of every person, created in the image of God. We invite you to join in this prayer as we reflect on this truth, uniting our hearts in honoring and upholding the sanctity of life in all its stages. Together, let us bear witness to the God who gives and sustains life.

Creator God,

Our world indeed belongs to you. You who love us so deeply you made us in Your own image. You who value life so dearly you blessed us with this gift. You knit us with care and sustain us each day with your abounding grace and protection.

Lord, we lament that we have not always valued what you value.
we have not seen in one another Your image,
we have not treated one another with care.

We grieve the wanton and arbitrary destruction of life at all stages, and we repent of our disregard of a holistic ethic of life.

So Lord, we lift up in prayer to you those who need you the most:

For the unborn, grant strength, wisdom and compassion to women and men who face hard choices about ending pregnancies. Grant them the courage to choose life and inspire us all to be advocates who not only honor the sanctity of life, but are also loving, nurturing and enduring communities of support.

For the vulnerable, especially those with disabilities, let them know they are wonderfully made in Your image, and their lives a testament to Your Glory. Guide us to be allies, advocates and friends, always reflecting Your boundless love.

For those near the end of life, we ask for your peace and comfort, especially those vulnerable and in pain. Help us to advocate for compassionate care, offering support and love instead of choices that end life prematurely. Guide our society and medical community to uphold the sanctity of life and to seek life-affirming solutions for those in need.

God of grace,
hear our prayers.

In the name of Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you and the Spirit,
one God, now and forever.

Amen!