March Madness: Hymn Version

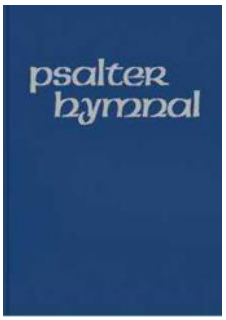
While we often spend time filling out basketball brackets each March, this past year a few of us found ourselves in a different kind of debate: what might a bracket of our favorite hymns look like? And not just any hymns, but those of the venerable blue *Psalter Hymnal*. In the spirit of March Madness, this was an opportunity to explore the pages of the blue and vote for our favorite hymns. The first challenge was selecting and then assigning seeds to each hymn, conducted by a simple 2-step approach based on a selection of 64 hymns (omitting traditional Advent and Easter hymns):

1. A 1-5 star rating by me (based upon my feelings about each song during a layover), followed by
2. A ranking scheme based upon how many hymnals each song appears in, according to hymnary.org.

Recognizing the first metric is likely biased by the selection of hymns used in the 1980s Christian Reformed Church in Platte, SD, and the latter is likely biased by the wide array of Baptist and Methodist hymnals. The hymns were then arranged in seeds of #1-16 in four regions for head-to-head voting matchups. Starting on March 16 the 64 initial hymns were voted round-by-round down to a single favorite, announced Easter morning.

The top four #1 seeds? “Abide with Me” (470), “Holy, Holy, Holy” (318), “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow” (493), and “By the Sea of Crystal” (469). Most controversial seeding? “A Mighty Fortress is our God” (444) as a #12 seed, which some of our Lutheran friends felt was an injustice (“A Mighty Fortress” would go on to make a deep run in the bracket, taking out “By the Sea of Crystal” along the way, until finally defeated by “Great is Thy Faithfulness” (408) with eight hymns remaining). By March 31, the Final Four had been selected: #10 “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” (350), #4 “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing” (314), #6 “When Peace Like a

(Continued on page 3)



The Christian Reformed Church, from its American beginnings in 1857, used the Dutch language in worship. The Synod of 1914 authorized the use of an English-language Psalter which was produced by a committee drawn largely from the United Presbyterian Church. Twenty years later, another Synod approved the first *Psalter Hymnal* (1934) otherwise known as the "red" hymnal. The Synod of 1951 set in motion the work to revise and improve the *Psalter Hymnal*. Given the denomination's approaching one hundredth birthday, the new *Psalter Hymnal* (1959) was officially known as the Centennial Edition, but both the 1959 edition and the 1976 reprinting would eventually derive its name from its blue cover.

Courier May 2026
COVENANT
CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and light unto my path

Tares among Wheat

[24]Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. [25] But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. [26] But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. [27] The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' [28] And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' [29] But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. [30] Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn." (Matthew 13:24-30)



This is a challenging passage. Understanding it is difficult and relating it to our present-day context can feel even more complex. As believers, we are reminded not to judge, yet we are also called to be discerning and wise. This parable does not primarily address the condition of the church; rather, it explains how God's kingdom can be present in the world without immediately removing all opposition. That final separation is reserved for the harvest. The focus here is on eschatological hope, not ecclesiological decline.

We live in an increasingly complex world, intertwined complicatedly—one marked by diverse beliefs, cultures, relations, and perspectives. In our daily lives, we interact with people who may not share our faith. Often, we seek common ground and choose to overlook differences. The same dynamic exists within organizations and corporations, where cooperation is built on mutual interests. Even nations engage with one another despite profound differences in belief systems.

I have worked for and alongside many organizations rooted in faith traditions different from my own. In contexts where believers were a minority, we lived and worked among people of other faiths. As believers within these organizations, we regularly conducted prayer walks and set aside time to pray—for the well-being of the organization, its leaders, and its managers. If such organizations were to be abruptly uprooted, many believers would suffer as a result. Instead, these environments can become opportunities to witness to the truth through faithful presence.

Our calling, then, is to collaborate and coexist without allowing faith to become a

(Continued on page 3)

Thy Word Is a Lamp...

(Continued from page 2)

barrier—while continually relying on God's guidance to remain faithful to Him. In this way, our circumstances may resemble that of Daniel under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar. What was Daniel's job description? Daniel was required to learn and excel in the Chaldean culture and religious practices. He served as an advisor to their leaders as a subject matter expert on their religion and culture and became one of the most trusted individuals in the kingdom. Yet through it all, Daniel remained steadfast in his devotion to the one true and living God.

We are reminded of that powerful declaration: *"O king, we do not need to answer you in this matter. Our God is able to deliver us from the furnace, and He will deliver us. But even if He does not, He still is our God."* Daniel's faith was not dependent on outcomes, but on unwavering trust in God.

We can infer from Romans 3:23 and from the parable that the world today has two groups of people, "sinners" and "saved sinners". Are we the hope for those who are still away from truth?

The ultimate victory has already been won, yet our daily struggles continue. We must remain equipped to face these smaller, ongoing battles—relying on God's strength to overcome them. When we dwell among fellow believers, we have even greater responsibility: to encourage one another, to strengthen one another, and to continually raise the standard of faithful service. Our actions should give substance to our prayers as we long for and hasten the coming of His kingdom.

Let's pray: Father, we thank you for the living word and for instilling the truth in us through our Savior. Give us the strength and wisdom to deal with our situations in a way that will bring glory to your name. Amen.

-Atul Shinde

March Madness: Hymn Version

(Continued from page 1)

River" (445), #7 "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" (408).

What started as a playful activity quickly became something more. Each matchup carried a bit more weight, asking us to choose not just between favorite tunes, but between the memories and meanings tied to them, and the ways these songs have shaped us over the years. It grew harder to make each decision, and to leave hymns behind. But it also became a chance to remember and revisit together, some of the beloved songs that have long been part of our shared faith.

The victor in the end? #6 "When Peace Like a River" (445).

Here's to hoping "By the Sea of Crystal" (469) can complete its run next year…

A website hosting the hymnal bracket can be found and bluepsalterbracket.fun.

-Channon Visscher

Pentecost WE Service

Please plan to stay after our morning service on Pentecost Sunday, May 24, for a potluck meal and a WE service celebrating and learning about the Holy Spirit's work in our lives and our world. Keep an eye out for more details to come about the potluck meal.

May Birthdays & Anniversaries

2	Julian Addink	17	Meghan Vos	26	Lewis Clark Quinn Jewett
7	Shannon Schreurs	18	John-Patrick McCarthy Ethan & Donna Brue	27	Sevriena Postma
9	Lisa Christians Len Rhoda	19	Mark & Barb Tazelaar	29	Sam Janssen Steve & Pat Crull
11	John & Becky Stevenson	21	Thomas & Elena McCoullough	30	Emily Eppinga Levi & Kaitlyn Landman
12	Rob & Megan Haan	22	Rowan Haan		
13	Matt Jewett Ella Visscher		Jean Maletoungou	31	Joan McCarthy
14	Carol Oostra Daniel Tazelaar	23	Hendrik Dieleman Theissen Dieleman Kurt Vos		
15	Will Breems	25	Mark & Lisa Christians		



Remember in Prayer

Please remember in prayer and visits Covenant members who are often unable to worship with us because of health concerns and those living in care facilities: Carol Apol, Ed Dengler, George Faber, Deb Hibma, Rachel Hibma, Joan McCarthy, Marilyn Mouw, Lee Plasier.



Congratulations to Jonathan and Lillia on their engagement! Lillia and I are excited to announce that we are engaged. We are thrilled to see the Lord working in our relationship, and look forward to the future with anticipation.



Congratulations to Sevriena Postma! The series of paintings she created as bulletin covers for our "Make a Way" Advent series this past December were selected for Dordt University's 4th Annual High School Art Showcase, and she was awarded Best of Show for her work!

May Scheduling



Valet

Mark H



Greeters

Rachel L, Matt J, Dave S



Ushers

Wil A, Len R, Laurey Z



Coffee Servers

Jenni B, Sharon D, Cheri H,
Faith VS, Linda V, Dani W

Substitutes

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

Lisa C, Sarah H, Jason H,
Sherri TN, Beth VB, Lois VZ

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, **May25** for the June issue.



Nursery

Nursery Monitor: Jenni M

May 3
AM Lee & Jenni M, Juliet J

May 10
AM Mark & Lisa C, Marcy H

May 17
AM Daryl & Deb H, Laremy & Rebecca DV

May 24
AM Duane & Jan B, Jeremy & Kristi H

May 31
AM Michael & Adi VP, Jake & Trena VW

June 7
AM Jeff & Sara P, Rob & Megan H

Worship Schedule

During the month of May, we will be experimenting with some different rhythms for our evening gatherings.

May 3 AM: Kyle Dieleman

May 10 AM: Gayle Doornbos
6:00 PM: Vespers

May 17 AM: Kyle Dieleman

May 24 AM: Classical Appointment from Cornerstone Prison Church
11:30 AM: WE Service and Meal

May 31 AM: Justin Bailey

Note from the Deacons

A New Addition to Missions Giving: The Quick Response Fund

At the December congregational meeting, the budget for 2026 included a new line item for Missions: the Quick Response Fund, or QRF. With the new year underway, the Deacons want to explain what it is and how it works.

Why We Created It: Our missionaries, others connected to our church in the missions field, and mission-focused organizations occasionally bring non-recurring needs that fall outside regular committed support. Historically, the Deacons have not had a clean or appropriate place to draw from for those requests. The QRF was created specifically to fill that gap.

A Need That Helped Shape This Fund: Last year, a missionary in South Africa affiliated with Resonate Global Mission came to our attention through a connection with our pastor and our regional Resonate liaison. She was not part of our regular missionary support, but the need was clear: without reliable transportation, she was dependent on ride services that limited her ability to serve effectively. Purchasing a vehicle would give her greater independence and sustainability in her work. The Deacons wanted to help but had no good mechanism to do so. This experience reinforced the need for creating the QRF so the deacons have a source of funds to pull from if approved.

How It Works: The QRF is not a separate giving account. It is a budgeted amount that the church contributes to the Missions Fund out of the General Fund each year. For 2026, the congregation approved $10,000 for the QRF. You do not give directly to the QRF. When you support the church budget through your regular giving, you are already supporting it.

As noted in our earlier article on Missions giving, the Missions Fund carries a balance year to year. The Deacons will maintain a working balance rather than clearing the fund entirely, so resources are available when a need surfaces. Distributions remain at the Deacons' discretion and will be directed toward needs with a clear missions focus or in support of mission-focused individuals and organizations.

Aware of a Need? If you are aware of a need that you believe fits the purpose of the QRF, please reach out to any one of the Deacons directly and share as much information as you can. The Deacons will review and prayerfully consider each request.

Thank you for your continued generosity and for making this kind of responsive stewardship possible.

-Josh Van Schouwen

For the Covenant Deacons

Giving Graph

Fund	Budgeted	Received	Difference
General	(1/1/26-4/19/26) $116,190	$118,657	+$2,467
Christian Education	(8/1/25-4/19/26) $92,442	$112,207	+$19,765
Refresh Building	(1/1/26-4/19/26) $22,892	$18,908	-$3,984

Spring Mid-Sioux Food Drive

Nothing reminds Kathleen and me more strongly that we have traveled back to Nicaragua than our first meal of Gallo Pinto, roughly translated as "spotted rooster," the staple dish of the country. Gallo Pinto, rice with red beans, is eaten every day for breakfast and perhaps all other meals, by Nicaraguans and many other people who live in Central America, sometimes with a fried egg, fresh farmers cheese, or fried plantains, but often it is all there is. It is counted on to fill their bellies because it is inexpensive and widely available. In many other areas of the world, similar staple foods are common and relied upon to stave off hunger.

This spring we once again are asked to help stock the food pantry shelves at Mid-Sioux Opportunity, and as we do so, we should remind ourselves that access to well-stocked grocery stores is a privilege not everyone has. During the month of May, we ask you to bring as a food offering a world staple: bags of rice, dried beans, Massa/corn meal or wheat flour and perhaps a bottle of vegetable oil.



I am also including a recipe for Gallo Pinto should you wish to prepare it as a meal for your family so you can experience in a small way a part of Nica culture.

Thanks for participating in this food drive!

Cooking beans in Nicaragua. Many make one big batch a week and portion it out for daily meals.

Gallo Pinto (Nicaraguan Rice and Beans)

Prep 35 mins — Cook 2 hrs 30 mins
Active 45 mins — Chilling Time 24 hrs
Total 27 hrs 5 min
Serves 8

Ingredients

For the Rice:

- 1/4 cup (60ml) vegetable oil, divided
- 1 medium yellow onion, finely chopped (about 1 cup; 200g), divided
- 1 1/2 cups (10 ounces; 300g) long-grain white rice
- 3 cups (710ml) water or homemade or store-bought chicken stock
- 1 1/2 teaspoons (5 g) kosher salt; for table salt, use half as much by volume or the same weight
- 1/2 green bell pepper (3 ounces; 85g), cored, seeded and diced

For the Beans:

- 1/2 pound (225g) dried small red kidney beans or black beans
- 1teaspoon (3 g) kosher salt
- 4 medium garlic cloves (20g), peeled

Directions

For the Rice:

In a large heavy-bottomed saucepan, heat 2 tablespoons oil over medium heat until shimmering. Add two-thirds of onion and cook, stirring, until softened and translucent, about 5 minutes. Add rice and cook, stirring, until grains are shiny and evenly coated with oil, 2 to 3 minutes. Add water or stock and salt, increase heat to high and bring to a boil. Place bell pepper on top of rice. Boil rice

(Continued on page 8)

Spring Mid-Sioux Food Drive

(Continued from page 7)

without stirring until most of the liquid has evaporated and you can see small bubbles bursting on the surface of the rice. Immediately reduce the heat to the lowest setting, cover, and cook for 15 minutes. Fluff rice with fork, then let cool. Transfer to an airtight container and refrigerate for 24 hours.

For the Beans:
Spread beans out in a rimmed baking sheet. Pick out any debris and broken beans. Transfer beans to colander and rinse under cold running water. Place rinsed beans in a large pot and cover with cold water; water should cover beans about 3 inches. Let soak for 30 minutes. Bring beans to a boil over high heat. Reduce heat to maintain a simmer and cook beans for 30 minutes. Turn off heat, cover beans, and let rest 1 hour. Bring beans back up to boil over high heat. Add salt and garlic, reduce heat to maintain a simmer, and cook until beans are tender, 30 to 60 minutes. Drain beans or, if desired, strain over a bowl and retain liquid for another use. You should have about 3 cups of cooked beans; measure out 2 cups of beans and reserve the rest for another use.

For the Gallo pinto:
In large saucepan, heat remaining 2 tablespoons oil over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add remaining onion and cook, stirring, until softened and translucent, about 5 minutes. Add rice and beans, and cook, stirring, until rice is evenly coated. Continue to cook, stirring, to allow flavors to meld and gallo pinto to become slightly crisp, about 10 minutes. Serve immediately with scrambled or fried eggs, a side of corn tortillas, and queso fresco. If desired, for a crispier texture cover and cook over low heat for an additional 10 minutes.

Notes:

- Sometimes the back of the spoon is used to smash some of the beans into the rice.
- Goya sells "Central American Beans," which are the small red kidney beans that are standard issue in Nicaragua. If you can't find them, use small black beans.
- Gallo pinto is served either soft or crisp—cook according to preference.
- This recipe is from Serious Eats website.

-Dwight Van Tol

International Dinner

Remember the International Dinner that was auctioned off at the Christian Education Auction in February? Pictured is the French dessert round of a 4-home, 4-country international dinner enjoyed by the lucky bidders. Dishes from Mexico, Lebanon, and Germany were also featured.

