Covenant Roof/Sanctuary Refresh Update

In July of 2022 the Covenant Council began discussing the need for a new roof and renovations to the sanctuary that had been suggested by the Worship Committee. Changes in cost structures for replacing and safely disposing of Covenant's leak-plagued 100-year-old asbestos-tile shingles had presented the possibility of replacing the roof and gutters for approximately $165,000. In March of 2023, estimates for roof repair, a sanctuary refresh, lighting/controls, and projection/sound in the range of $375,000 to $409,000 for the "50th Anniversary Building and Sanctuary Refresh" project were passed by the Council, followed shortly thereafter by congregational approval.

The Covenant Capital Campaign Committee (CCCC) was formed at this time and decided to try to raise enough funds to pay for the roof by the end of 2023, deferring plans for the rest of the project until early 2024, depending on how the first-year giving went. We also decided to initiate a fundraising campaign that included soliciting loans from congregation members to fund project-related expenditures that might exceed donations over the life of the project. This allowed us to pay a fair rate of 5% to our congregant lenders while saving Covenant the extra 3-4% that banks would likely have charged. Thanks to the Holy Spirit's prompting, pledges to the roof project in 2023 exceeded the cost of the roof. By the end of 2023, overall giving had allowed us to meet our entire General Fund and Christian Education budgets AND pay for the new steel (architectural-shingle-design) roof—which promised to keep us dry for another 75 years. The timing of the receipts and expenditures was such that Covenant's outstanding debt never exceeding $50,000 in 2023. (This in spite of some unexpected expenses related to organ damage—caused by a

(Continued on page 2)



Eat & Meet

On Monday, December 7, Covenant will gather for a Lasagna Dinner prepared by our Youth Group (freewill donation to cover costs and support Youth Group activities). Following the meal, with serving beginning at 6:00 PM, we will hold a Congregational Meeting. That meeting will begin promptly at 7:00. The main item on the agenda is the budget for 2027. Council will distribute copies of the proposed budget before the meeting. It will also include a review of 2026 and a Search Committee update. Hope to see you all there!

-Bob DeSmith

Courier
December 2026
COVENANT
CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

Covenant Roof/Sanctuary Refresh Update

(Continued from page 1)

major snow melt that required us to (also) replace the flat roof above the organ with a new sloped roof, and (later) a history-making ten-inch rain that required us to repair flooding damage around and make some upgrades to our elevator.)

The success of the Roof Project allowed us to start the 2nd phase, the sanctuary refresh, as scheduled in the spring of 2024. But after a financially-demanding 2023, the CCCC chose not to solicit large one-time gifts to pay the approximately $280,000 then needed for the (Phase II) Refresh portion of the project. Instead, we set a goal of fully paying for the Refresh Project, including interest on debt, over a period of four years ending in the spring of 2028. This would require Building Fund giving of approximately $6,200/month.

ESAs became Iowa law and were phased in for the 2023 school year, greatly benefiting Covenant families with children in our Christian schools. It also significantly reduced our congregation's financial burden in support for tuition assistance. This change allowed increased giving to the Building Fund which, combined with some lower General Fund expenses related to a period without a pastor, allowed us to accelerate our debt repayments.

This in turn led to the good news we are sharing with you today—that our congregation is again debt-free approximately 1 & 1/4 years ahead of schedule. Hopefully we can celebrate an official "mortgage burning" at our congregational meeting!

Thanks to all for your contributions to the completion of this endeavor. We look forward to future Kingdom work that reaching this milestone makes possible!

-The Covenant Capital Campaign Committee

(Paul Clousing, Verlyn De Wit, Terry Friend, Daryl Hibma, Ron Oostra, John Visser, and Val Zonnefeld)

Christmas Cantata



All are invited to celebrate Christ's birth with an evening of music and worship on Sunday, December 13 at 6:00 PM in the BJ Haan Auditorium at Dordt. A community choir, accompanied by an orchestra, is preparing the cantata "Journey of Promises" and will share it as part of this service of worship.

The foreword in the cantata says this:

> Engraved in the sands of time is a golden path of promise, traced by the finger of the Ancient of Days. It is a winding road that stretches from darkness to light and from despair to hope. It is a journey which began in the hearts of devout prophets and culminates in the glorious celebration of Christmas, a royal highway paved with grace and lined with the signposts of a faithful and loving God. Joining the sojourn of countless pilgrims through the ages, we travel the time-worn path in adventurous obedience. May the words and songs of the prophets and saints spur us onward and may the music of our lives invite the world to follow on this Journey of Promises. (Joseph & Pamela Martin)

We hope you join us for this worship event!



This Month in Pictures









Artists in Training

The youth group spent an evening at Jake Van Wyk's art studio in November. The kids got to try their hand at oil pastels on rag cloth paper with a trip wash and pencil.

Thank you, Jake, for spending time with our youth, sharing your expertise with them, and helping them to develop their artistic abilities!

December Birthdays & Anniversaries

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





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, Daryl Hibma, Rachel Hibma, Marilyn Mouw, Lee Plasier.

Blessing Our College Students this Christmas



We have been blessed to have so many college students attending Covenant this fall. We would like to encourage them with handwritten notes and gift cards as they finish up their fall semester. If you would like to participate in this, please write an encouraging note and include a $10 gift card to a coffee shop, restaurant, bakery, etc. in Sioux Center. You can put the notes and cards in Lisa Christians' mailbox by December 7, and they will be distributed to the college students on December 13.

December Scheduling



Valet

Paul/Avonda F



Greeters

Ethan B, Pam DJ, Lee R



Ushers

Mark C, Cal J, Verlyn DW



Coffee Servers

Pam A, Isabel C, Steve C,
Kristi H, Sadie L, Mark MC

Substitutes

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

Chris G, Rachel L, Ron O
Len R, Dave S, Kurt V

*****Are you traveling this winter?*****
Are you planning to be away for part of the winter? Please notify the office with 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 Friday, **December 18** for the January issue.



Nursery

Nursery Monitor: Sara H

December 6
AM Jason & Dani W, Mark & Cheri H

December 13
AM Chris & Rin G, Juliet Jewett

December 20
AM Laremy & Rebecca DV, Duane & Jan B

December 25 (Christmas Day)
AM Ron & Carol O, Rob & Megan H

December 27
AM Mark & Lisa C, Kurt & Sharon V

January 3
AM Jeremy & Kristi H, Jake & Trena VW

Worship Schedule

Here's what's coming up on Sundays in the month of December:

December 6 AM: Dr. Justin Bailey

December 13 AM: Dr. Kyle Dieleman
6:00 PM: Community Christmas Cantata

December 20 AM: Dr. Jason Lief
6:00 PM: Candlelight Service

December 25 AM: Dr. Jason Lief

December 27 AM: Rev. Rylan Brue

Note from the Deacons

What Farming Can Teach Us
About God's Providence in all Areas of Life

It has been a year since I took on a full-time position on my family's dairy farm, and it would be an understatement to say I've learned a lot. Beyond just the mundane tasks of planting and harvesting, raising calves and milking cows, this job has taught me about God and how He relates to His creation.

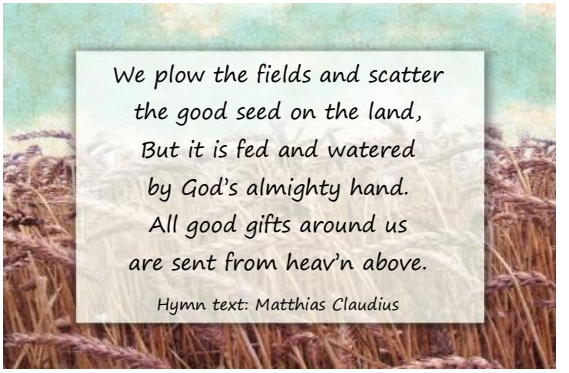
One of the most sobering realities of farming is realizing how little is in our control. Living in a farming community, how many times have we heard farmers praying for rain? Water, one of the essentials of life, is not a guarantee. But it's bigger than that. This truth about rain is easy for us to understand, but God's providence extends to all of creation. Colossians 1:17 tells us, "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together," and Acts 17:28 tells us, "In him we live, and move, and have our being." The breath in our lungs, the sun and its light; they are gifts handed to us by God.

So, since everything in the universe is a gift from God, are we simply recipients? If not, what is our role within God's world? As a farmer, one of the answers to this question is something I am compelled to think about every day: stewardship. Scripture shows us that stewardship has been a task entrusted to every human from the very beginning; Genesis 1:28 tells of God's mandate for mankind to rule over all of creation.

The question we can all ask ourselves is this: What has God made us the steward of? God has given me the opportunity to cultivate land and care for animals. For the many teachers in our congregation, God gives the opportunity to cultivate minds and care for souls. Whatever God has placed in our hands, let us remember to be gracious and merciful, generous and just, and to walk humbly with our God.

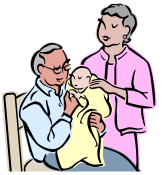
-Micah Dykstra

On behalf of the Deacons:
(Jan Bajema, Kyle Dieleman, Micah Dykstra, Mark Horstman, Micah Schreurs, Atul Shinde, Michael Vander Plaats, Val Zonnefeld)



Giving Graph

Fund	Budgeted	Received	Difference
General	(1/1/26-11/22/26) $341,309	$282,374	-$58,935
Christian Education	(8/1/26-11/22/26) $35,798	$41,742	+$5,944
Refresh Building	(1/1/26-11/22/26) $67,246	$97,387	+$30,141



Grandma Alert! Grandpa Alert!

On August 21 Dave and Jeri Schelhaas welcomed their second great granddaughter—Marly Jean—to Paige and Tanner Hilbrands. First great-grand is Marly's big sister Hattie. We rejoice in this new life!

-Dave & Jeri Schelhaas



Bob and Rebecca De Smith are excited to announce the birth of their grandson, Samuel Cassian De Smith. Sammy was born on October 5 to Bob and Chara De Smith in Milwaukee, WI. After spending 5 weeks in the NICU, he was welcomed home by his big brother, Bobby. We are thrilled to welcome this sweet little boy into our family!

-Bob & Rebecca DeSmith



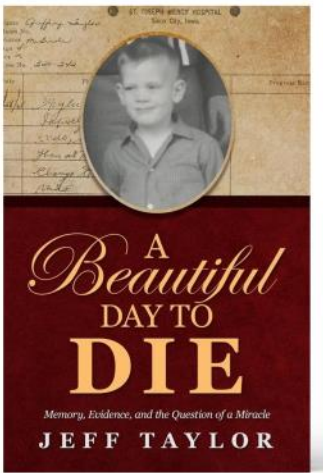
A Prayer for Advent

Lord Jesus,
Master of both the light and the darkness,
send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas.
We who have so much to do and seek quiet spaces to hear your voice each day,
we who are anxious over many things look forward to your coming among us.
We who are blessed in so many ways long for the complete joy of your kingdom.
We whose hearts are heavy seek the joy of your presence.
We are your people, walking in darkness, yet seeking the light.
To you we say, "Come Lord Jesus!"
Amen.

-Henri J.M. Nouwen

A Beautiful Day to Die

The Banner *recently included a book review by Pastor Joel about a book Jeff Taylor has recently published entitled* A Beautiful Day to Die. *Here's Pastor Joel's article:*



Jeff Taylor's book has an unusual title because in it he tells an unusual story. At age 4, Taylor died in an ambulance and came back to life about 30-45 minutes later. He knows this story will seem uncertain or impossible to many people, so he researches his book with a faith in God that seeks understanding. Drawing on his experience as a scholar at Dordt University, Taylor investigates what happened, examining medical records and tracking down witnesses as he asks what can be known about the events of that day. His research and reflections lead to a life story that can help readers connect their life stories to the story of life in Christ.

In his preface, Taylor writes, "Sixty years ago, I died. But I did not stay dead." He describes it as "a story of unexpected loss and unexpected miracle," and then he asks, "Is it possible? Is it true?" With such questions in mind, Taylor goes on to reflect not only on his experience of death and life but also on how faith can include wrestling with questions and seeking complicated truths.

In his opening chapters, Taylor describes his intensifying illness at age 4; his entry into the Spencer Hospital in his hometown of Spencer, Iowa; the medical decision to transfer him to St. Joseph Mercy Hospital in Sioux City, Iowa; and his death in the ambulance. These chapters show how the experiences of those around Taylor shaped the care he received. He recalls, for example, a nurse named Lorraine, whose compassionate heart was informed by the near loss of her own young son.

Taylor shows that our life stories affect how we live and treat others, most notably in the story of his mother, Judy Taylor. Jeff describes his mother riding in the ambulance with him, desperate and angry. When he died in the ambulance, "Mom heard a voice." It was a voice different from anything she had heard before, and still, "She knew it was God." That voice from God gave Judy encouragement flowing from Psalm 23; it led Judy to speak out loud to her Lord, and when the ambulance driver and nurse asked her what had happened, Judy was able to testify to God's words to her. The driver and nurse said they also had experienced a presence that brought peace.

Taylor makes a good case for trusting his mother's testimony in a chapter called "Judy Taylor's Memory." He also considers why the Sioux City doctor described his return to life as a miracle when speaking with his parents, but did not use that word in the medical report.

Taylor's final chapter, "Life and Death," leads readers to both hope for life after death in a new creation and to pray for "God's will to be done on earth, as it is in heaven." The book helps readers consider the three concerns raised by Taylor's subtitle: Memory, Evidence, and the Question of a Miracle. And in the end, the book invites each reader to grow in faith and in the confidence of the larger Christian testimony that life is found in Jesus Christ.