



# SALT & LIGHT

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## OUR FAITH

Hope Church is called by God and equipped by the Holy Spirit to be a witness to the unity, reconciliation, and justice given in the saving grace of Jesus Christ. These touchstones drawn from the Belhar Confession give voice to the historic Christian faith in our time and place.



See how you can join us at  
[HopeChurchRCA.org](https://www.HopeChurchRCA.org)

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# Gathered in Promise

The theme with which the Worship Ministry is enfolding this Advent season is: *Gathered in Promise*. Gathered in Community, Justice, Joy, and Life are the touchstones of Promise that will guide us through the weeks of Advent worship and activities.

Right about now being “gathered” sounds very good to me. I’m reflecting on that word “gather” not as something we do but something that the Spirit of God does: gathers us. Being gathered speaks to me as maternal and strong, nourishing and safe, communal and renewing. “Gathered” strikes me as an opportunity to experience Advent as a time to tend to the truth that the Incarnation is God reaching out to the world. God in Christ is gathering to God’s self a world that has been scattered from its true home of Beloved Community.

Although it’s not written as an Advent hymn, I think many of you are familiar with “Gather Us In” that we’ve used in worship at Hope Church. This “Gathered” theme has brought to my heart the refrain portions of that hymn, as it is voiced as a prayer to God: “*Gather us in!*”

*Gather us in, the lost and forsaken; gather  
us in, all dwelling in shame;  
call to us now, and we shall awaken; we  
shall arise at the sound of our name.*

*Give us to drink the wine of compassion;  
give us to eat the bread that is you;  
Nourish us well, and teach us to fashion lives  
that are holy and lives that are true.*

*Gather us in and hold us forever; gather  
us in and make us your own;  
gather us in, all peoples together, fire of  
love in our flesh and our bone.*

- Haugen/altGSW

That sounds like a plea, like a demand, like a longing, all fitting in Advent. Perhaps it sounds most of all like a realization, a revelation, an expression of our need: “*we can’t do this on our own, God; we need You, your Spirit, your Presence among us in Jesus Christ, to gather us, to nourish us, to guide us.*” A prayer said more simply: “*Gather us, O God.*”

Such a prayer resonates in my heart in this world and for this Advent season. I invite you to join me in that prayer and in being gathered by God’s Spirit to receive God’s promises: the gifts of Community, Justice, Joy and Life for us and for God’s world. “*Gather us, O God.*”

In Christ’s Peace – Pastor Gordon





## Calendar

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### Sunday, November 27 First Sunday of Advent

#### *Gathered in Community*

- 9:40 a.m. Adult Education  
*The Female Ancestors of Jesus*
- 11:00 a.m. Worship
- 11:15 a.m. Children in Worship
- 5:00 p.m. Advent Activities & Organ Recital
- 5:45 p.m. Supper & Advent Candle Lighting

### Sunday, December 4 Second Sunday of Advent

#### *Gathered in Justice*

- 10:10 a.m. St Nicholas Breakfast & Celebration
- 11:00 a.m. Worship
- 11:15 a.m. Children in Worship

### Sunday, December 11 Third Sunday of Advent

#### *Gathered in Joy*

- 9:40 a.m. Adult Education  
*The Female Ancestors of Jesus*
- 11:00 a.m. Worship
- 11:15 a.m. Children in Worship

### Sunday, December 18 Fourth Sunday of Advent

#### *Gathered in Life*

- 9:40 a.m. Adult Education  
*The Female Ancestors of Jesus*
- 11:00 a.m. Worship
- 11:15 a.m. Children in Worship
- 12:15 a.m. Pizza Lunch
- 1:00 p.m. Christmas Caroling

### Saturday, December 24

- 5:30 p.m. Christmas Eve Worship  
Service and Children's Pageant
- 11:00 p.m. Candlelight Service,  
concluding outdoors

### Sunday, December 25

- 11:00 a.m. Christmas Worship Service  
via livestream and WHTC

### Sunday, January 1

- No church school or adult education
- 11:00 a.m. Epiphany Worship Service
- 11:15 a.m. Children in Worship
- 12:15 p.m. Epiphany Celebration

# Gathered in Promise (Cont'd)

## Advent in Adult Education: The Female Ancestors of Jesus



Title: *Rahab and the Spies*, Series/Portfolio: *Dalziels' Bible Gallery*, 1865–81, Wood engraving on India paper, mounted on thin card

**Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba** are named in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus. These women who had little social power nevertheless made decisive contributions to the life of the Israelite people at critical junctures, even as they found ways to secure lives of dignity and justice for themselves. This series intends to bring their stories forward so that we may get to know them and be empowered by their strong witness about the Lord's faithfulness and loving kindness.

**November 27 and December 11, Lynn Japinga**, Hope College professor of religion, will focus on the stories of Tamar and Rahab. On **December 4, the St. Nicholas celebration** will be held during the usual Adult Education hour. On **December 18, Pastor Jill** will continue our engagement of the stories surrounding the female ancestors of Jesus.

**Adult Education** will meet at **9:40 in the Commons**, with live-streaming available through **YouTube**.

Adult Education is on break December 25 and January 1. We resume **January 8** with a three-part series focusing on the **Season of Reconciliation season**, presented by the **Justice and Reconciliation Ministry**. On **January 29, Linda Walvoord deVelder** will present *Rosetta, Rosetta*, the story of Frederick Douglass's daughter. **Pastor Jill** will inform us about her fall 2022 **sabbatical** on February 5 and 12. The Elders have requested **February 19 and 26** to discuss **reproductive rights**.

## Advent Activities and Organ Recital

On the first **Sunday of Advent, November 27, at 5 p.m.**, there are a number of activities and events to choose from. People of all ages including preschool families can be creative and make Advent and Christmas crafts. All materials and directions supplied for both younger and older children, as well as spaces to provide distancing. Instructors will be available for anyone needing inspiration or encouragement. Fish Club and High Hopes will make cards for the holiday bags to be distributed during Christmas Caroling, as well as for recent high school grads away at college.

In a recital, **Rhonda Edgington** will feature **Advent and Christmas hymns** for organ, as well as time for congregational singing. If you enjoy singing Christmas and Advent hymns (both familiar and less-familiar), or if you just like sitting and listening, Rhonda's Advent concert will have something for you.

Rhonda will play **arrangements of favorite hymns** such as "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," "People Look East," and "The Angel Gabriel From Heaven Came," as well as the sturdy Martin Luther text and German hymn, "From Heaven Above to Earth I Come," with opportunities for congregational singing on some of these selections as well.

**Dan Griswold** will join Rhonda with his beautiful **viola** playing for a number of selections, and solo pieces will be by composers from Bach to living composers from the Twin Cities, Grand Rapids, and Pennsylvania.

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## St. Nicholas Celebration

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The second **Sunday of Advent, December 4**, brings a time to remember the traditions of St. Nicholas and his generosity, which reminds us of God's love and many good gifts. Our breakfast returns this year, so please sign up and plan to attend! The gathering will also include a story for the children. Each child should bring an extra shoe, or even a wooden shoe, to be filled with treats.

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## Christmas Caroling

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On the **fourth Sunday of Advent**, share the spirit of celebration and joy with those who find it difficult to join us in person. Poinsettias, gift bags, and cards will be shared as we carol. You don't have to have a great voice, just a smile to share.

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## Christmas Eve Services

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At the **5:30 p.m. service**, **Christmas carols** will be sung and the **Christmas Story** will be told as we worship the Christ child together. The pageant is a wonderful way for the whole community to celebrate the season as the children act out the events of the Gospel story. All children, toddlers through 5th grade are invited to be a part of the presentation of the Christmas story during this service. Children can pick up costumes on the mornings of December 11 and 18 and at 5:00 p.m. on December 24, or wear a costume from home. We are gathering angels, shepherds, magi and sheep. Costumes can be very simple and Hope Church has a lot of accessories to augment. Children and visiting family and friends are welcome.

At the conclusion of the **11:00 p.m. service in the sanctuary**, we will greet Christmas morning outdoors in the parking lot with candles to welcome the Christ child.

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# Opportunities for Giving

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## Christmas Poinsettias

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Order Poinsettias by **December 4** and pick up after worship on **December 18**. They're beautiful for yourself or as a gift for a homebound member or friend.

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## Tree of Light

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Our goal is **75 gift cards** for families within the church and community, and it's simple as 1-2-3-4:

1. Take your tag from the tree by **December 4**.
2. Purchase a **\$25.00 gift card** from Meijer, Walmart or Target.
3. Put the gift card into your own **greeting card** with your holiday greetings and blessings for the New Year and
4. **Return the unsealed envelope** containing your greeting card and the gift card by **Sunday, December 11**.

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## Christmas Cookies for Caroling

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Donate two dozen home-made or store-bought cookies for Christmas Caroling. Sign up in the Gathering Area, or online at [tinyurl.com/CookiesforChristmascaroling](https://tinyurl.com/CookiesforChristmascaroling) and bring them to church by **December 11**.

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## Christmas Cards for Our Members

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There are a number of members who will be visited by carolers on December 18. For each one, there is a decorated bag on the pegboards in the Gathering Area. Put your greeting cards in their bags before caroling begins.

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## White Gift Offering

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On Epiphany Sunday, January 1, bring a personal care product wrapped in white tissue paper. These gifts, intended for both individuals and households, will be brought forward during the offering and donated to Resilience, a local agency assisting individuals and households caught in abusive relationships and empowering a hopeful future for them.



# Fish Club and High Hopes: Naming Values

Phil Quinn, Interim Pastor of Discipleship



This fall, it has been an honor and a privilege for me to step into some of the spaces Pastor Beth has cultivated. Hope Church has provided a space for a rich community of young people to take root and be nurtured. I have so enjoyed stepping into that space with them and the adults that have made the commitment to walk alongside them this year, and it has been a delight to discover the ways this group knows how to care for one another well, to use their voices to advocate for their needs and the needs of others, and to do all of this without giving up permission to be themselves, to relax, and to play!

On this year's first evening gathering of Fish Club and High Hopes (the middle and high school youth groups), we took time to name our community values for our space and the time we spend together. I was deeply impressed and moved by the values these young people named, and what it revealed about their capacity for self-reflection, curious compassion, and their commitment to safety and justice. Here a few of these community values:

**"Be yourself."**

**"It's okay to not be okay."**

**"We openly embrace and affirm LGBTQ+ and human rights."**

**"We are an open space, but we ask consent to vent."**

**"Introverting is celebrated."**

**"Your voice is welcome, but don't invalidate others."**

**"Don't have malice in your words—we value kindness and respect."**

**"Be aware that we don't know what others are going through."**

I am so impressed by their declared values, and especially their willingness to live in the tension between them. It is evidence of their beautiful determination to be a community that is both open and boundaried, safe and challenging. And all of this is in a space that is also unapologetically playful:

**"Fun and games—we are a lively place!"**

**"We eat and drink!"**

**"We laugh!"**

**"Don't overwork—rest matters."**

While I am grateful to be trusted enough to be invited into this space as a pastor and teacher, I am even more grateful for how much I am obviously going to learn as I walk alongside this

group throughout the year. Also on their list is, "We value self-care." This ties into our intentions for our evenings together this school year. The last few years have been full of events that have been disorienting, isolating, painful, frightening, and tiring, and have impacted all of us in ways we likely do not recognize or understand. This is no less true for the young people in our community. For this reason, it seemed wise to focus this year on mental health and spiritual practices that we can engage in together and on our own.

While we are only a few weeks into the year, it has been a joy to begin exploring these things together.

Thank you to all that make the time to build relationships with the children and youth of our church and community. Thank you to each of those that share gifts of hospitality, whether by providing a meal or offering a welcoming smile. Thank you to those who pray.

Please continue to pray for the young people in

our midst, giving thanks for the wisdom and passion God has given them, their caring hearts, and the ways they care for one another and the rest of us. Pray that God's grace might pour out on them in the gifts of healing, of rest, community, belonging, hope, peace, and joy.





## Evangelicalism and Hope Church: A Summary of the Adult Education Series

*Judy Parr*

Planning for this autumn’s Adult Education series on “Evangelicalism and Hope Church” began about a year ago after several members of the Adult Education Ministry read an article titled “The Evangelical Church is Breaking Apart” in the October 24 issue of *The Atlantic*. The article’s author, conservative Peter Wehner, a Presbyterian, had worked for Presidents Reagan and both Bushes. Because of recent developments that have politicized the Christian faith of many Americans, Wehner is now urging Christians, especially those identifying as evangelical, to “reclaim the Gospel of Jesus.”

**David Myers** mentioned that he and **Peter Wehner** were corresponding friends and volunteered to invite him to speak to Hope Church’s Adult Ed class via Zoom to begin a fruitful discussion on evangelicalism, its history and theology, and its influences on our denomination and on our congregation. Wehner accepted Myers’ invitation, and **Robert Luidens** volunteered to lead the planning of a four-session class. Drawing from Hope Church’s and our community’s depth of expertise in religious topics, Luidens worked with Dan Griswold, Dennis Voskuil, Don Luidens, Lynn Japinga, Larry Schuyler, Lois Maassen, Dave Van Wylen, Phil Quinn, and Jim Brownson to provide a variety of perspectives on evangelicalism.

**Evangelical is derived from the Greek word euangelion**, meaning “gospel” or “good news.” Evangelical describes a person, church, or organization that is committed to the Christian gospel message that Jesus Christ is the savior of humanity. If that is the definition, most Christians

would without hesitation identify as evangelicals. As the definition of evangelical has changed in recent decades, however, many Christians are distancing themselves from that identity.

Yet, as we learned from **Wehner**, in the last six years the witness of Christ has been damaged and distorted by many claiming to be evangelicals because of the “wedding” of evangelicals to “a political movement that is in so many ways antithetical to Christ.” Wehner stated that he no longer calls himself an evangelical because the word has “accrued so many negative connotations.” Instead, he considers himself a “mere Christian” and “a follower of Jesus.”

Speaking about the history of evangelicalism in the second session of the course, **Dennis Voskuil** firmly held and recommended holding on to the identity of evangelical. It means “the Gospel,” and if we discard that, what do we have left, he asked. Instead he advocates abandoning the term’s negative connotations and restoring to evangelicalism its more positive characteristics.

Rather than engaging in disputes about what is “true evangelicalism,” **Dan Griswold** encouraged us to ask what kind of evangelical someone might be. This might be seen in an evangelical’s response to distinctly modern questions about scripture, salvation, a Christian’s role in culture, the interplay of faith and reason, and ethics. Is salvation entirely personal, or is there some community component as well? Should Christians withdraw from the world, engage with secular culture, or seek to dominate the world? How open



should we be to sources of insight besides the Bible, such as the sciences? What are acceptable sources of information for moral decision making? In short, because there are many varieties of evangelicals, we do well to try understanding them in a way that respects their variety.

**Don Luidens** began the third week’s exploration of evangelicalism and the Reformed Church in America in crisis by providing a sociologist’s perspective. He cited data indicating declines in church membership and attendance among the RCA as among other Protestants and among Roman Catholics. Fewer evangelicals believe the divinity and exclusivity of Jesus and the inerrancy of the Bible than in decades past. Luidens characterized the RCA as embodying “a generic form of American evangelicalism with a thin Calvinist overlay.” He concluded that the RCA is “slip slidin’ away. Crushing in on herself.”

**Lynn Japinga** added insights from researching RCA history of the last half of the twentieth century. She listed characteristics of what it means to be Reformed in contrast to being evangelical. Evangelicalism grew in influence when the RCA approved Fuller in addition to its Western and New Brunswick Seminaries for preparing ministers. An emphasis on church growth brought in pastors and members from denominations that did not value infant baptism nor appreciate Reformed polity. As an antidote to anxieties of diminishment, Japinga affirmed: “Salvation is not ultimately about our decisions or our beliefs or our efforts or our purity. Salvation is God’s work and God’s gift.” (Loyalty and Loss, page 303)

**Larry Schuyler** reported that not only the RCA, but also Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Methodists have all experienced the force of evangelicals battling for control and/or departing and starting their own denominations. Traditionally, the RCA has seen itself as a “Middle Ground Church” between polarities of eastern churches and western churches. But in recent

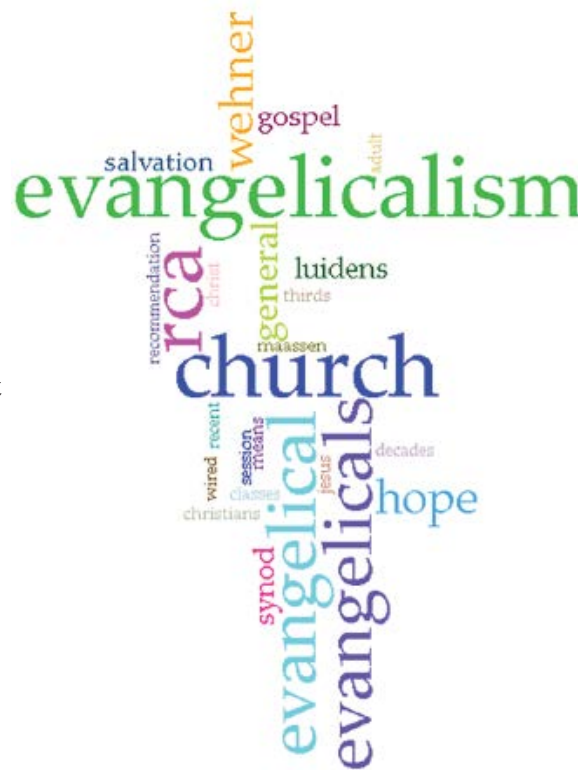
decades, he noted, “the rise of evangelicalism in the RCA has resulted in the breakdown of this middle ground posture.” This form of evangelicalism is evident in a segment of our denomination’s membership that came from an emergence of the fundamentalist, religious-right (within the RCA as well as most other church bodies). These evangelicals prefer decision-making by a strong leader rather than group-process decisions. They want General Synod to control classes and congregations. Salvation is by personal choice to follow Christ. Believer’s Baptism takes priority over Covenant Baptism of infants. Their view is that scripture is inerrant and to be read literally. For many “male leadership is the only accepted pattern.” Members of the

LGBTQ community are denied church leadership. Evangelicals wanted a law inserted into the Book of Church Order that “stated marriage was only between a man and a woman.” Whereas Wehner sees the evangelical church as breaking apart, Schuyler sees evangelicals as breaking denominations apart.

During the fourth session **Lois Maassen**, an elder and delegate to several General Synods, reported that she “grew up a preacher’s kid in the RCA” and has been a member of Hope Church for 30 years. To Maassen, evangelism, which decades ago meant “preaching at” people, has taken on new meaning. The related words

evangelical and evangelicalism “have come to be used to refer to a religious movement that is sometimes indistinguishable from a political movement.” If we could restore some of the earlier meanings related to gospel, we could then focus on questions like “Are we living the good news in a way that makes it evident to others? Does the evidence provided by our lives and actions attract others to—at minimum—curiosity?” Maassen proposed five elements of discipleship as an alternative to the diversion and division that evangelicalism threatens. See her article “Living the Good News” on page 9.

**Dave Van Wylen**, from his academic background in neurological science, explained that our





brains are wired to believe what we do. “I’m wired to demonize evangelicals, and evangelicals are wired to demonize me.” What fires you wires you. What you fire, you wire. We’re fired by reinforcements of what we already value. Anger fires wiring of revenge. Language means what you’re wired to think it means. Because of neural plasticity, however, at times we can change our minds.

**Phil Quinn**, a pastor and therapist, talked about anxiety about evangelicalism, sins as not only personal but also systemic, and the human need for belonging. He related responses from Hope Church youth who recently explored and listed what values they affirm. Their list gave the audience hope for a better future for the RCA (if we can retain their enthusiasm and membership).

General Synod Professor Emeritus **Jim Brownson** explained how change occurs in the RCA as governed not simply by votes on the floor of the General Synod but by a three-step process:

At a General Synod a majority approves a recommendation.

Two-thirds of the 46 classes must ratify this recommendation.

If two-thirds of a subsequent vote by classes also ratifies the recommendation, it becomes included in the RCA Book of Church Order.

When the General Synod recommendation for marriage to be defined as between a man and a woman failed to receive a two-thirds majority of classes in 2018, congregations that favored that definition began to leave the RCA.

## Listen in to the Discussion

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Following are links to videos of the four sessions:

### **Evangelicalism in Crisis**

<https://tinyurl.com/evanincrisis>

### **History and Theology of Evangelicalism**

<https://tinyurl.com/historytheology>

### **Evangelicalism and the RCA in Crisis**

<https://tinyurl.com/RCAcrisis>

### **Hope Church and Evangelicalism**

<https://tinyurl.com/HopeChurchEvan>



## Living the Good News

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*Lois Maassen*

We panelists were asked to consider how Hope Church might move into the future, modeling constructive discipleship both to the wider community and the wider evangelical church. I see our future discipleship building upon what we have learned and done together over the past decades, only three of which I can attest to. There are five elements I see as constant over the past 30 years, and that I believe will carry us into a future of discipleship.

We have been, and will continue to be, grounded in scripture and prayer. I appreciate the ways in which we wrestle, together, with biblical passages that are sometimes confounding.

We embrace learning, because we recognize that God is still at work and is present in all parts of life. We are Reformed and Reforming.

We welcome those who are seeking, or those who have doubts.

We recognize that doubts are a natural consequence of wrestling with the mysteries of our faith. We recognize God’s call to social justice, and see taking action as synonymous with living the good news. When I review what I’ve been involved in here at Hope Church, I see a solid foundation.

- Our mission shares—and in fact the tradition of RCA missions—have supported people who are living the good news through peacemaking, education, health care, and/or food security.
- When we’ve developed partnerships in the community, we’ve worked with organizations

doing good work in addressing housing, hunger, poverty, or education. We have not applied litmus tests. Many of these partnerships came about because you, members of Hope Church, were also individually living the good news; you made connections to further the work of social justice.

- Because we have continued to learn, we've recognized systemic issues of racism, economic inequality, and more. We formed the Justice and Reconciliation Ministry to help guide our efforts to make a difference at that systemic level, while still responding to needs for food and housing and transportation.

We have a strong sense of who we are as God's people. Sometimes we poke fun at ourselves: One long-time friend developed a short-hand way of describing Hope Church to people who weren't familiar: She said, "It's Hippie High Church." I think that's accurate in more ways than she may have intended: We are independent thinkers. We value the community we have made and continue to make together. We value sustainability and creation care. We are willing to be counter-cultural in ways that may sometimes be prophetic.

This matters more than we sometimes know. Being a delegate to General Synod is not an unalloyed blessing, but it is an opportunity to hear from other people within the RCA how much it means to them that Hope Church is the presence and the voice that it is. For some, we are, sometimes without knowing, a source of affirmation and encouragement. We've caused others to stop and think, with results that we can't always see. I think of a book by Jonathan Haidt from about a decade ago, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*. The first step, Haidt says, in shifting perceptions, is demonstrating that there are good and faithful people who believe differently. Seeing that alternatives exist is the first step in thinking differently.

And that leads me, in conclusion, to the cautions I'd voice—as much for myself as for Hope Church:

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**We are independent thinkers. We value the community we have made and continue to make together. We value sustainability and creation care. We are willing to be counter-cultural in ways that may sometimes be prophetic.**

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When there is so much to do, so many wrongs to right, we need to take time for breathing, for our own spiritual health. We need to continue to offer each other spaces to study, learn, and pray in community with each other.

It's wildly difficult to suspend judgment these days. It's even wildly difficult to know when suspending judgment is the right thing to do--and not a slide into complicity. We need courage to call the question, to have difficult discussions. We need to learn, together, how to navigate these extraordinarily divisive times in faithful ways.

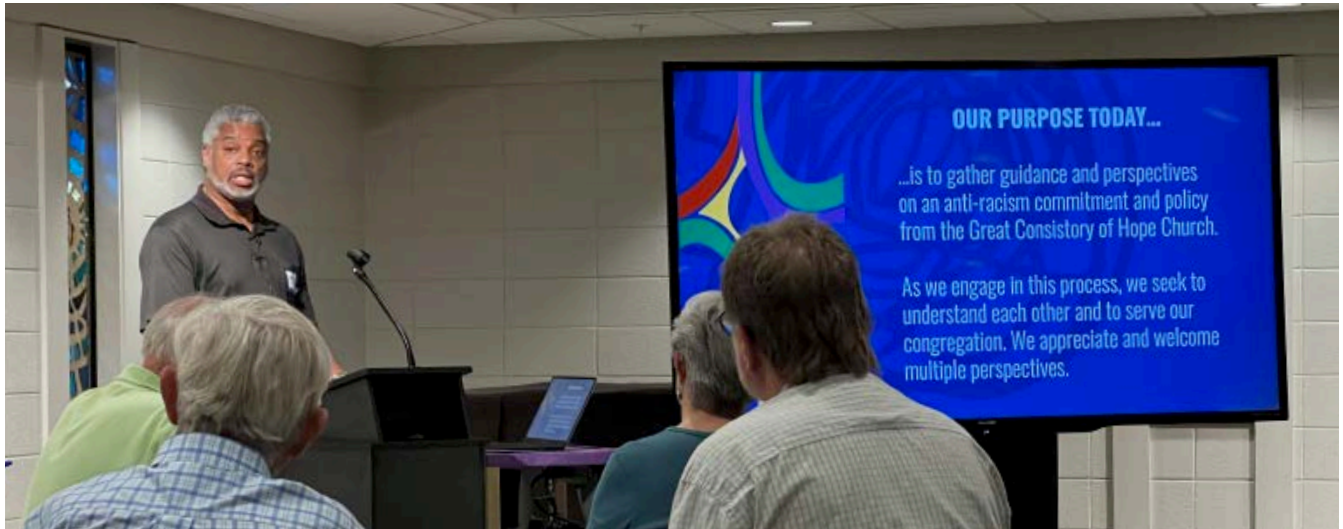
We need humility. We can't learn when we think we already know. We can't listen for God's voice when we're sure we know what God ought to be saying. I've been moved by reading the journals of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, which include perspectives from all over the world. They have often opened my eyes to the

ways in which our context shapes our vision for a faithful response to God's call. Here in our own community, we can continue to seek out those who are marginalized--motivated by a desire to hear them and respond, not because we require them to sign on as members.

We live the good news when we ask, "What does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"







## Courageous Conversations

*Dede Johnson, Ruth Stegeman, and Gordon Wiersma, Justice & Reconciliation Ministry*

We delight in the knowledge that Hope Church is a place where we can have courageous conversations about important and challenging issues. One wise group to tap into for such conversations is the Great Consistory, which includes all those who have held positions of elder and/or deacon at Hope Church over the years. In late August, the Justice and Reconciliation Ministry hosted a Great Consistory event, with over 60 people attending to explore a draft anti-racist statement for our congregation. At that event, we first heard from Rev. Dwayne Jackson, President of the RCA's General Synod, who shared three stories about overt racism in his life. Participants then convened around tables in small groups and engaged in rich dialogue about what Hope Church's response to racism should be.

Later, as the Justice and Reconciliation Ministry studied the participants' ideas and comments regarding the aspirational anti-racist statement for our congregation, we noted both affirmation and support along with questions and concerns, perspectives that are now helping to shape the Justice and Reconciliation Ministry's next steps as our congregation embarks on a journey of racial education and dialogue.

These next steps include a season of discernment and exploration in which we at Hope Church will commit to learning, growing, and praying about how the Christian church can support diversity, equity, and inclusion within our congregation, local community, and nation. An initial opportunity

was an October group conversation on the book *Fierce Love*, by Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis. In January, three weeks of Adult Education offerings facilitated by the Justice & Reconciliation Ministry will provide an opportunity for participants to explore what it might mean to be an anti-racist congregation, including dynamics that are present in our history, belief systems, and culture. Initially, we will look at myths we may hold about racism, particularly the idea that "racism is just a few people behaving badly." Though we may recognize a racist joke, an insensitive assumption, or a violent action, we have a more difficult time seeing how racism is embedded in our social institutions and practices. Through interactive exercises and dialogue, we will seek to increase our awareness of institutional and systemic processes that perpetuate racism in our society. On another Sunday, we will explore the elements of the anti-racist draft statement and its theological basis and share context and implications for each section. Finally, we will reflect together on a vision for Hope Church as an anti-racist congregation. How will our congregation be different as we live into this statement? What might we do together? How might we think and act? What might be outcomes for our community?

Please expect additional small group studies and educational sessions on this topic in 2023. We invite all to join with us in these offerings and to celebrate our shared commitments in Christ that unite us in our quest for justice.

## With Gratitude and Love

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Ginger Clark, Parish Nurse



As I ponder my retirement at the end of this year, I am overwhelmed with all the various thoughts and emotions that come with it. As I said to many of you, “This is okay in my mind but not yet in my heart.” How could it ever be any different? You all are in my heart and will always be there. It’s not “okay” to think of permanently leaving my heart’s connections with

Hope Church. I will forever be connected with you through the Spirit praying for you, wanting to encourage and surround you with my feelings of compassion and care. All this came to me over the last seven-and-a-half years as I served closely with wonderful pastors, church staff, and all of you.

I have learned much about community, room for all, helping our neighbor, and connecting on a deep level with you and your families. When I look back on my years at Hope Church, it’s not what I did, it’s not what I accomplished, but it’s the faces of you, your family members, and the little ones growing in Christ as you nurture them. My nursing career spanned many decades (I hate to admit it!) and many different roles—a critical care nurse, hospice nurse, home care nurse, dialysis nurse, and cardiac educator—in different hospitals and communities in a few states. Little did I know that the gifts God blessed me with would accumulate to give me the best Parish Nurse experience ever, here at Hope Church. I will continue to pray blessings on you and your families, as I know you will do the same for me. I have an idea what my retirement looks like, but I lay these coming years at God’s feet—to find the path he has for me. As you ponder your path, I pray good health and community for you.

Continue with your mission to grow in faith, to pioneer, to be open, and to lead in Christian action. Take care of yourselves and each other and remember my love and gratitude for you always.

Blessings, Ginger

*1 Corinthians 12:25-26 (MSG) “The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don’t, the parts we see and the parts we don’t. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance.”*

## Connecting with One Another

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Rhonda Edgington shares: We are excited this fall to welcome a Hope College student to be a regular singer in the choir through a new program we’ve started, a choral internship. We look forward to MJ’s support in the choir, and another way to welcome college students into our midst—through our music program. MJ introduces herself here to us—be sure to find her before or after a service, introduce yourself, and welcome her here to Hope Church!



My name is Micah (MJ) Cocking, and I am a sophomore at Hope College majoring in Psychology. I grew up in Chiang Mai, Thailand, starting at eight years old with my older sister Ellie, my oldest sister Bethany, and my parents, who were missionaries working with the Jesus Film (and who now work at a school in Germany). I recently decided to take a singing internship here at Hope Church because I sang in the choir as a visitor last Easter Sunday and I had a wonderful time. I wanted to come back and sing every Sunday.



# St. James, Mother Mary, and Us

Marlin Vis

*In September 2022, Bob and Susanne Jordan, along with Susanne's sister, Leanne Van Dyk, walked the Camino Frances trail in northern Spain with Marlin and Sally Vis. The Jordans provide this context for the reflections that follow: "The Vises are friends and neighbors of the Jordans and are well-known in RCA circles. Marlin is a retired RCA pastor, and both he and Sally worked for the RCA in Palestine to seek justice for Palestinians and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians. The Vises and Jordans/Van Dyk experienced both the joys and challenges of the Camino. Mutual support and encouragement, along with laughter, helped carry them through the days."*

## The Way

The Camino de Santiago is an ancient pilgrimage route to the Spanish city of Santiago de Compostela. Today there are numerous different routes that lead to the final point of Santiago, but the most famous is the Camino Frances or "French Way," which leads through northern Spain in 790 kilometers (491 miles) from France. Sally and I walked this route in 35 days.

Although the road probably served as a trade route for a long time, the pilgrimage route suddenly became immensely popular among pilgrims in the Middle Ages. This had everything to do with Saint James, an apostle whose body is said to be buried in Santiago.

## The Man

The photo shows what is probably the most famous of the St. James statues. Obviously it was raining and this was a selfie that had to include the gentleman holding out an umbrella for the good Saint. What makes this portrayal of St. James special is the pose. He is pressing against



wind and rain, the truly dedicated apostle come to Spain to bring the message of Jesus to the people.

Saint Jacob, James the Greater, Saint James, Santiago: he goes by many names. The biblical figure was, of course, a disciple of Jesus, oldest son of Zebedee and brother to John. But most important for this writing, James is the patron saint of Spain, and his image is everywhere.

## The Myth



According to legend, Saint James traveled to Spain to spread the word of Christ there. He is said to have spent about seven years here before returning to Jerusalem. Around Passover of C.E. 44, Saint James was the first of the apostles to die a martyr when he was beheaded under the command of Herod Agrippa, grandson of Herod the Great.

Saint James's head is said to be buried in Jerusalem's Armenian Quarter. A cathedral is dedicated to Saint James the Greater. The building is said to mark the spot where he was beheaded. His head is believed to be buried under the altar, outlined by a piece of red marble and surrounded by candles.



## And Us!



Our journey was mostly about being together doing something challenging. Neither of us thought much about a spiritual aspect to this adventure. And because I find it difficult to comprehend what constitutes "spiritual," I can't

say we had a spiritual journey. Others talk about meeting God on the Camino. I respect that. But honestly, I wasn't looking to meet God on the Way. I have the stubborn idea that through the workings of the Holy Spirit God is on the way with all of us and all of the time. And I don't think or talk about this "being with us" in supernatural terms. The possibility of the presence of God is enough for me.



However, two persons became very important to me. One was Mary, the mother of Jesus. I love Mary. Sally and I were introduced to Mary when we lived in Jerusalem. Before that she was simply the one who bore Jesus, a kind of a human

incubator, nothing much more. But in Jerusalem we experienced Mary as the woman who said yes to God, and who raised a son so dangerous to the authorities of the day that he (Jesus) had to be murdered. What kind of woman is that?

So we looked for Mary and found her everywhere. But the Mary we encountered was mostly the Mother of God Mary, now elevated to almost divine status. I prefer the young woman who was confused by the whole thing, but willing to go along anyway, and the grown woman who stayed with her son all the way to the end. With her, I can identify.

## The Pilgrim



All along the walk we met St James the Pilgrim. He was a statue in the town square or one standing alone out in the middle of nowhere. St James was in every church we stopped by and we stopped by dozens of churches. And the Saint was always portrayed wearing a distinctive hat, sandals and a long cloak. He carried a wooden walking stick, a book (the story of Jesus), and a gourd

for wine or water. The shell, which represents many paths to Santiago, (many paths to God, maybe?) was attached to both hat and cloak.

St James was a pilgrim, a walker with the "good news." He was one of us on the way. The image he portrayed to me was one that reminded me daily that you don't need much to move through life as a follower of Jesus—just the bare necessities. Everything on him and everything about him portrayed duty, steadfastness, and peace.

## Then This

Yes, that's James, but not James the Pilgrim, walking the way carrying the bare necessities. At



the end of the journey, high in the center of the cathedral in Santiago, is James on a white horse brandishing a sword.

I like the pilgrim better. With him, I can identify.

And then there is Jesus, isn't there? The teacher, the healer, the friend who somehow ends up the same as St James—riding a white horse while wielding a bloody sword.

I like the teacher better. With him too, I can identify.



# Creation Care—It's as Easy as Riding a Bike

Peter Boogaart

When you've been around for a while, you forget how you learned stuff. Test yourself: Do you have any memory of learning to ride a bicycle, or do you feel as if you always could?

You may not remember, but I suspect that those who love you the most remember it in vivid detail: the day the training wheels came off; running alongside you (and actually not holding on, even though you thought they were); the time you ran into the mailbox; the full-faced “I-can-do-it” smile.

There's more than one way to forget. Biologist, educator, and Biblical scholar Calvin B. DeWitt sees our obsession with the economy as one of those ways. The economy is actually a derivative of the natural world; which he calls the Great Economy. The economy is inclined toward a sterile listing of natural resources. The Great Economy sees an intricate and unknowable interplay of elements, microorganisms, plants, animals and solar cycles.

Prone to abuse, the disassociated perspective of economy tends to lose memory of the Creator. Still, there remains the One who loves you—running alongside. The One who says, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” Engaging in Creation Care is your invitation to remember. An invitation to recall what really is true.

Patty Brink and Molly Sherwood are two members of the Creation Care Ministry here at Hope Church. What follows are their words about remembering.

*As a young person growing up in Holland, I didn't appreciate the beauty around me as much as I do now, as an adult. I took for granted the complexity of the natural world and failed to see the detail of God's work. I studied geology in college, and through that study, began a journey of discovery that I continue today. I believe the planet and natural world are a splendid manifestation of God's creation that should be appreciated and protected. Nature is simply extraordinary. I participate in the Creation Care ministry because I want to help others to see the natural world around them and discover its beauty.*

- Molly Sherwood

*I moved from Wisconsin in November of 2019 and was part of the “Green Team” in my Presbyterian Church. We had Adult Education programs with opportunities for the congregation to be informed on climate issues. Our projects included the first community garden in town, a rain barrel, a butterfly garden with a Free Little Library, planting prairie grasses, as well as collaborating with other churches. We included “Green Tips” in our Sunday bulletins. I've learned the importance of caring for the earth. As a Christian, environmental stewardship is a priority! Let's all be aware of doing our part. Because of my Wisconsin experiences, it is a natural fit for me to be part of the Hope Church team. I am grateful to help where I can.*

-Patty Brink





## Poetry Corner

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*Hosted by Rhonda Edgington and Randy Smit*

As the editors of Poetry Corner, we find special delight in discovering poets in our midst whose presence has somehow escaped us. So it is with this month's Poet. Thanks to Kyle for reaching out to us with a treasure trove of her unique voice—using form, meter and sometimes even rhyme to structure her work, Kyle speaks here of longing, waiting, and transformation. Ideal themes for this Advent season. Peace to each of you.

### *The Violin*

At once a shape seductive and sublime  
Of molded curves and gleaming luster made,  
Seducing those who wish to play and yet  
Invites the very best to spend his time.

The instrument is ready, strings are tight.  
Then fingers gently pluck a tune, teasing  
Out a sigh – delicious premonitions;  
But only skillful players do it right.

The pegs are now adjusted, all is set.  
The bow is poised; the strokes begin, and all  
Is warm with liquid sound, crescendos reached  
With ease when string and bow at last have met.

How sad, an unused violin, waiting  
For her bow. Her idle curves suspending  
Silent strings, unplayed notes; and on her own  
She loosens strings and dreams of future mating.

- Kyle Vohlken

### *Silent Night*

What fevered frenzy drove  
Them that night  
To Earth's cold plain seeking  
Earthly heralds  
To speak the heavenly message.

Who on Earth first heard  
The fearful beat  
Of wings whose draft could kill  
A man,  
And whose visage stole the very breath  
From shepherds.

Who said, Let us go, when the sky was  
Black once more  
And the plain empty.  
Silent faces  
Turned and took the first step  
In a walk  
That changed them forever.

What is this power that drove them;  
Power so strong it sleeps in straw,  
Whose glory is shouted in tiny whispers,  
With a love that encompasses nations  
One shepherd at a time.

- Kyle Vohlken