



SALT & LIGHT

a hope church publication

ADVENT 2023



NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
HOLLAND, MI 49423
PERMIT NO. 607

Hope Church
77 West 11th Street
Holland MI 49423



CONTENTS

Introducing the Advent Season: Listen	2
Advent Activities	3
Christmas Offering Designated for Community Carbon Fund	4
Opportunities for Giving	5
Accessible Churches Check Their Attitudes	6
Hope Church as an Anti-Racist Congregation	8
Tending the Community of Hope Church	11
Iona Travelers Share Reflections	13

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)

CONTACT US

Hope Church, RCA
77 West 11th Street
[616] 392 . 7947
[HopeChurchRCA.org](https://www.HopeChurchRCA.org)

Introducing the Advent Season: Listen

Dear Hope Church Friends,

Advent planning with the Worship Ministry is an... interesting... process (I am fond of using “interesting” with nebulous meaning). This year we started in June (!) and continued in October, with communication and conversation continuing along the way. One thing that is consistent each season is that we start with Scripture, the lectionary texts for Advent and Christmas. But although that is the case, the meetings and emails and conversations are never linear or predictable. As individuals and a group, we go down all sorts of inquisitive wondering paths, sometimes to what feels like a dead end and sometimes opening into new unexpected directions. It is collaborative, creative (messy!), sometimes daunting, open to Spirit direction, and time-consuming—it is... interesting. Perhaps you’d like to join us sometime; let me know.

What emerges from this process year by year are themes for the Sundays and season of Advent to help guide the Advent liturgy, preaching, and art. Except not this year! In the Advent information for this season you won’t find a weekly or seasonal theme. But that doesn’t mean our Advent planning was a failure! Instead, on behalf of the Worship Ministry, I would say that we found for this particular time of reflecting on the texts of Advent and Christmas, that we didn’t feel led to narrow down the many scriptural images and themes. Instead we invite you to do what we’re doing for this Advent season, which is to be open in an intentional, expectant way to the diverse rich images of Advent scripture, as we listen for God’s Word calling us down wondering paths and calling us sometimes in unexpected directions.

Listen along with us...

- for the multitude of creation images along the way. And as you do so, you could wonder about the meaning of a Christmas Offering designated toward care for God’s creation.
- for the multitude of images of creating, forming, breaking down and building up, shaping. And as you do so, you could reflect on the art that you’ll see in our sanctuary and gathering area, and wonder about what God the Artist is shaping in you.
- for the themes of God’s reign embodied in the goodness of relationship and faithfulness and love. And as you do so, you could pray for direction in how God will use you/us as an embodiment of God’s reign of peace.
- for the images, words, themes, that open you to the Advent of Christ for us and our world.

So if you really do need an Advent theme after all, let's just call the unofficial theme: "Listen."

*Let us hear what God the LORD will speak,
for God will speak peace to God's people,*

*to those who turn to God in
their hearts.*

Psalm 85.8; Second Sunday of Advent

And since we do not control God's Spirit, it could be an... interesting... season.

Advent Peace – Pastor Gordon

Activities during the Season of Advent

On the first Sunday of Advent, **December 3**, during Adult Education, the Accessibility Ministry will host guests Har Ye Kahn and Nicholas Rolinski to present on "Aging in Place." This is not an Advent theme, of course, but it's a valuable one.

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 with Advent and Christmas crafts. All materials and directions are supplied for both younger and older children. 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 graduates who are 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.

St. Nicholas Breakfast Celebration

The **second Sunday of Advent, December 10**, brings a time to remember the traditions of St. Nicholas and his generosity, which reminds us of God's love and many good gifts. This event is **breakfast at 10 a.m.** in the Commons and all are invited to attend. Please sign up to attend



this fun event, which will include a story for the children. Each child should **bring an extra shoe**, or even a wooden shoe, to be filled with treats.

Christmas Music and Caroling

On the **third Sunday of Advent, December 17**, during the education hour, Rhonda Edgington and the choir will present "Advent Music and Carols" in the Chapel (to make use of the excellent piano). That afternoon, you can share the spirit of celebration and joy with those who find it difficult to join us in person. The caroling will commence at **12:45 p.m.** following Pizza Sunday lunch. Poinsettia, gift bags, and cards will be shared as we carol. You don't need a great voice, just a warm smile to share.

Christmas Eve Services

Christmas Eve falls on a Sunday this year, so we will be offering **three services throughout the day!** Join us at **11 a.m.** to celebrate the fourth Sunday of Advent.

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 fifth grade, are invited to be a part of the presentation of the Christmas story during the service. Children can pick costumes on the mornings of December 10 and 17, 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 p.m. Candlelight service in the sanctuary**, we will greet Christmas morning outdoors in the parking lot with candles to welcome the Christ child.

Christmas Offering Designated for Community Carbon Fund



Hope Church is committed to caring for God's creation. Recognizing that this moment in history is bringing an opportunity to impact creation in a helpful way, the deacons have designated this year's Christmas offering for West Michigan's new Community Carbon Fund. The fund accepts donations from those who want to offset their own carbon footprint. In turn, the CCF will provide grants to local nonprofits so that they can initiate carbon reduction projects of their own.

Hope Church member and advisor to the fund David VanWylen offers this explanation of the need and the approach.

We have a carbon conundrum. Our lifestyle—the way we move, eat, work, and shelter—produces carbon in some form as a byproduct. But carbon, and the resulting climate change that it produces, threatens this very lifestyle, with warming temperatures, sea level rise, weather disasters, ocean warming, and more. So as we live, we endanger our very existence.

This year, the Deacons have designated the Christmas offering for the Community Carbon Fund, an effort to address this conundrum locally here in Western Michigan. Launched this past spring by the Outdoor Discovery Center Network and the Community Foundation of the Holland/Zeeland Area, the Community

Carbon Fund “offsets” the carbon we produce during our daily activities via initiatives that either remove existing carbon from the atmosphere (sequestration) or reduce new carbon added to the atmosphere (mitigation).

Why is the Community Carbon Fund worthy of our Christmas offering? Here are three considerations:

- It addresses one of the most significant global challenges of our time (climate change).
- It is a tangible expression of our Christian faith and Hope Church's commitment to creation care.
- It offers the Western Michigan community local and visible options for carbon offset.

How does the Community Carbon Fund work? As shown in the graphic at top (from thecommunitycarbonfund.org/), a donation to the Community Carbon Fund supports local carbon-offsetting activities where experts within the Outdoor Discovery Center Network, along with an Advisory Board, use science to estimate how much carbon each project will sequester or mitigate. By matching this to how much carbon individuals, households, or businesses produce, the Community Carbon Fund offsets the carbon produced by our activities with a comparable reduction in the amount of atmospheric carbon.

An internet search for “carbon offset programs” yields an abundance of carbon offsetting businesses as well as many third-part reviews of these various businesses. While there are credible carbon offsetting businesses that tout activities from around the world, one disadvantage of these programs is that their particular carbon offsetting initiative is out of view to those who pay for the offsets. The Community Carbon Fund only supports local projects, giving the investor the opportunity to see their carbon offset investment realized locally here in Western Michigan. The Community Carbon Fund website maintains descriptions of current local impact projects (thecommunitycarbonfund.org/local-impact-projects/) as well as an explanation of how the projects are selected.

Carbon offsetting, while conceptually simple, is full of nuance and crucial considerations. The Community Carbon Fund website nicely describes their approach, including a list of frequently asked questions. The Board of Deacons and Creation Care Ministry are grateful that our Christmas offering will support a local organization doing work that enables us to see our commitment to creation care realized here in Western Michigan.

Learn more at <https://thecommunitycarbonfund.org/about-the-fund/>



Opportunities for Giving

Christmas Poinsettias

Order Poinsettias by **December 3** and pick up after worship on **December 17**. They're beautiful for yourself or as a gift for a homebound member or friend.

Take a tag from the Tree of Light

Our goal is **100 gift cards** to distribute within the church and community, and it's simple as 1-2-3-4:

1. Take your tag from the tree by **December 3**.
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 10**.

Cookies and Cards for Caroling

Donate two dozen home-made or store-bought **cookies for Christmas Caroling**. Sign up in the Gathering Area, or online at tinyurl.com/CookiesforChristmasCaroling and bring them to church by **December 10**.

Provide **Christmas Cards for members** who will be visited by carolers on **December 17**. 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.

Give to the Christmas offering.

The deacons have designated this year's Christmas offering for **West Michigan's new Community Carbon Fund**, reflecting our shared commitment to care for creation. See page 4 for more information.

Participate in the White Gift Offering on Epiphany Sunday, January 7.

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.



Accessible Churches Check Their Attitudes

Terry DeYoung

Third in a series on accessibility

I should have kept track of the most annoying inspirational sayings about disability I've come across over the years, the ones that tend to show up on sentimental posters picturing cuddly animals or athletic types doing the impossible by heroically "overcoming" an obvious physical impairment.

At the top of a related category, most cringe worthy, American ice skater Scott Hamilton famously claimed, "The only disability in life is a bad attitude." I couldn't disagree more. If Hamilton had said, "The biggest barrier disabled people face is the attitudes of other people," I'd completely agree with him. Attitudes are the most challenging barrier I encounter and the most difficult to change—within ourselves and particularly in others. Attitudes may remain

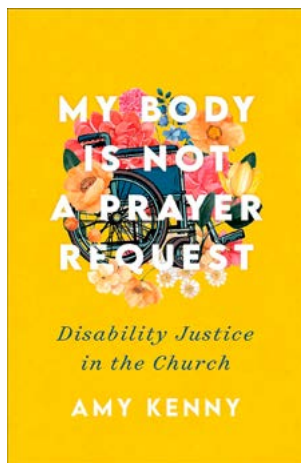
unexamined or hidden in our subconscious, or they're too embarrassing to admit or say out loud.

Last year, to articulate what tangible steps churches could take to become more welcoming to people with disabilities, the RCA-CRC Disability Concerns ministry met with disability advocates across the United States and Canada and assembled a list of "30 indicators of an anti-ableist, fully accessible church." After presenting that list to Hope Church's Accessibility Ministry, I was invited to share them in *Salt & Light*.

For the purposes of this series, I've divided the list into four basic categories. Here's the category I'm calling "attitudes," including a few of my own comments describing how I have experienced some of them personally:

Strangers do not ask what's wrong with me or pray for my healing without my asking for it. The key phrase is “without my asking for it,” and it's shocking how often this happens, particularly for people with physical or otherwise apparent disabilities. It's also one of the reasons cited most often by disabled people who don't attend a church or want anything to do with the church. When a stranger says they want to pray for you, it's easy to feel insulted and assaulted, and to wonder what's wrong with me the way I am. Ten years ago, visiting a church for the first time, two young men greeted me shortly after worship, asked my name, and then said, “So, what's up with you?” I assumed they were referring to my disability. After a brief exchange, they said they'd like to pray for me. Although immediately suspicious, I allowed them to proceed, partly because it's awkward to

say to someone, “No, I don't want you to pray for me.” A minute or two after they finished, they followed up some small talk by asking if I was “feeling anything yet.” What came to my mind was, “Yes, a strong desire to leave!” To learn more about this harmful attitude, read *My Body Is Not a Prayer Request*, by Amy Kenny.



Strangers do not steer clear of me because of the way I walk, communicate, or look. If I notice this kind of isolating experience playing out, I'll usually summon the courage to approach the person, introduce myself, and extend a warm welcome.

People do not touch my body, mobility device, or service animal without asking.

If I disclose that I have a mental health challenge or disability, people won't question, challenge, or doubt me.

My church always asks attendees about their accessibility needs prior to an event. This can be easily accomplished by providing a name and contact information so an accommodation can be requested.

People do not assume what I need without checking with me first. The premise here is that I know what accommodations I might need better than anyone else does, particularly someone who doesn't even know me. Years ago, I had an awful experience of receiving the Lord's Supper

in a church we were visiting. Because I knew the mode of distribution was going to be difficult for me, I did not go forward to receive the elements. When an elder and pastor noticed this, they brought the elements to serve me in the pew. I quietly said to them that I did not want to receive communion. Undeterred, the pastor asked, “Why not?” The commotion of this exchange caused many in the sanctuary to turn around and watch this unfolding spectacle. Without going into more detail, I'll just say it didn't end well.

People do not assume that I can't answer for myself because I use a walker, wheelchair, service animal, or aide. When I'm alone this usually isn't an issue. If I'm with Cindi, my wife, she knows this annoys me and either doesn't respond or politely looks to me to speak for myself.

People look at me and not my companion, interpreter, or communication device during conversation.

I won't be asked to find another church or not return because of my disability, a family member's disability, or disruptive behavior. Believe it or not, roughly one-third of parents who have attended a church with their disabled child have been told that “we have nothing here for your child,” or they've been asked not to return. Many of these parents have given up trying to find a church to attend.

People do not assume my speech difference means that I am unable to understand them.

My gifts and contributions are welcomed and affirmed, and I am expected to participate and serve along with others. This approach counters the attitude—and erroneous theological assumption—that people with disabilities only have needs and have nothing to offer that builds up the body of Christ.

I am encouraged to attend Sunday school, youth programs, a small group, or adult education, and will have individualized support or accommodations if I need them.

For a helpful perspective on changing disability attitudes, see the “5 Stages of Changing Attitudes” (online at the5stages.com).

In the next issue of *Salt & Light*, I'll conclude this series by looking at indicators connected to technology and physical access.



Hope Church as an Anti-Racist Congregation

Ruth Stegeman, Chair of the Justice and Reconciliation Ministry

Three touchstones for our work as a congregation include our commitments to Room for All, Accessibility, and Caring for Creation. At the January 2024 congregational meeting, the Justice & Reconciliation Ministry (JRM) will ask our members to approve an anti-racism commitment and policy that will affirm racial justice as a fourth touchstone and core part of our identity. In preparation for this event, we ask our readers to review the draft policy that follows, and consider why this is important along with how it might shift our behavior.

Why are we considering an anti-racism commitment?

In 2022, the RCA General Synod adopted a recommendation that congregations in our denomination implement an anti-racism policy, providing language that we have now shaped and edited in our own draft. Our pastors asked JRM to guide the journey to become an anti-racist congregation, employing a process similar to that of Room for All—sharing draft documents with a broad variety of groups, talking about implications, and moving toward full approval

as a congregation. Since August 2022, we have gathered feedback from Adult Education sessions, members of active ministries and committees, and the Great Consistory—a group of over 60 of our members who have at one time been either deacon or elder at Hope Church. As a result, the initial document has gone through many edits. And, over the past year, we've all felt the blow of the Ottawa County DEI office's elimination and other aspects of Ottawa Impact's white Christian nationalism, making our declaration and action even more critical.

What might be different as a result?

In listening to the voices of trusted leaders and allies of color, JRM believes that an anti-racism path for an historically white congregation is primarily a commitment to being a faithful ally in pursuing racial justice, more than it is about ethnic and cultural diversity within our congregation. The legacy of racism in church and culture has created a continuing need for communities of color to have places of worship in which they are the majority in both membership and leadership. For a congregation such as Hope Church, an

anti-racism commitment calls us primarily to be allies for racial justice who connect with, learn from, listen to, and are led by our partners. Such ally-ship carries within it a gratitude for and celebration of diversity, through creating opportunities for diverse relationships and community partnerships, and through congregational education and programs.

Jemar Tisby, a Christian historian and theologian who wrote *How to Fight Racism*, suggests three categories of action. This ARC of racial justice—awareness, relationships, and commitment—can help us generate practices that look inward at our own complicity and outward toward structures in our congregation, community, and world.

AWARENESS means increasing our familiarity with racist strategies, the history of racism, and our own personal narratives regarding race. In addition to simply being aware of the legacy and existence of racism in our society, awareness requires that we acknowledge our personal and communal complicity in systems that perpetuate racism, such as exploring our local and institutional history related to racism.

RELATIONSHIPS refers to developing authentic personal connections with people of color and others who are different from us. As an example, we welcome preachers who are people of color to our pulpit and invite them to share their stories in worship. In addition, we could consider replacing a monthly Pizza Sunday with food from a restaurant owned by a local person of color.

COMMITMENT refers to addressing the structural aspects of racism by changing

“One resource that we should not overlook, but often do, is the Black Church. It is a religious institution expressly founded because of racism and white supremacy, and for generations has been combatting what we are labeling ‘White Christian Nationalism’ but to Black people has always been racial discrimination. And so this is the time, if we really want to see change, it’s time to start learning from different voices than we’re typically accustomed to learning from... so we have to seek them out.”

–Jemar Tisby

policies, practices, and resource distribution through advocacy and action. Our commitments currently include stewarding our annual Community Partners budget to support justice organizations led by and supporting people of color and our new commitment to make reparations for the use of Black Spirituals (whose enslaved creators and their heirs receive no royalties) in our hymnals and in our worship to designate a portion of the Community Partners budget to Black music organizations.

Following action of the congregation and Consistory in January on affirmation of the Anti-Racism Statement, JRM intends to support Hope Church in engaging each of these priorities in order to keep them in a creative interplay in the life of our congregation. Please watch for additional information in advance of the Annual Congregational Meeting on Sunday, January 28, as action on the Anti-Racism Statement will be part of the agenda for that day.

Anti-Racist Congregation, Cont'd

HOPE CHURCH DRAFT STATEMENT: ANTI-RACISM COMMITMENT AND POLICY

Vision statement: Hope Church is committed to racial justice as a core expression of our faith as followers of Jesus Christ. In a world of racial inequity and injustice, we seek a faithful path that resists complicity and strives toward justice. We are partners for racial justice as we pursue Beloved Community for all people.

Commitment: As part of the Body of Christ which is the Church, Hope Church believes that God in Christ has brought near the Shalom of Beloved Community: the good news of abundant life given by God for all people (Isaiah 61; Luke 4). We believe it is through a commitment to justice, including racial justice, that God's Spirit creates Beloved Community in our congregation, community, and world.

Since its founding in 1862, Hope Church RCA has sought to be a pioneer for social action, and we are grateful for those among us who have witnessed to racial justice through the generations. But we also acknowledge that Hope Church is heir to an historic legacy of racism and racial injustice in both its church and civic context. As an historically majority white congregation, Hope Church has been complicit with the preponderance of white churches in the U.S. in not always speaking out clearly against racism. We have at times unconsciously or covertly promoted racist attitudes and perpetuated racist structures. We confess that we have been complicit in perpetuating racial/ethnic division along religious, cultural, economic, and political lines. These divisions have often marginalized people of color and have fostered separation and inequity, distorting the gifts of race and ethnicity that are meant to enrich individual and communal life. In Hope Church's context of community, state, and nation, we have benefited individually and corporately from the systemic privilege of whiteness, but we have not clearly committed ourselves to anti-racism as a central expression of our faith in Christ and our calling as a congregation.

Anti-racism is an expression of justice carried out individually and corporately through challenging and changing church and civic policies, processes, behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs that perpetuate racist ideas and actions. In our current church and civic context, Hope Church commits itself to be an antiracist congregation, holding this commitment as central to our Christian identity and ministry. This commitment is grounded in the Belhar Confession (South Africa 1986) to which the Reformed Church in America adheres. The Belhar Confession declares racism as sin that has no place in Christ's Church. It prophetically expresses racial justice as God's call for the Church.

We commit Hope Church to seek out, listen to, and respect the voices of people of color as we hear experiences of past and present racial injustice and discrimination. Together we will discern faithful voices of leaders in communities of color that will teach and guide us in identifying power dynamics and practices that Hope Church must address in order to be an actively antiracist community of faith.

In both religious and civic settings, Hope Church will intentionally seek out and support leaders who are people of color who are creating paths to racial justice. Along with other allies, we will be partners in racial justice, engaging with power in religious, economic, educational, and political realms to move toward Beloved Community and into the abundance of God's goodness for all.



Tending the Community of Hope Church

Lois Maassen, member of Discerning Our Future

The Great Consistory closed the summer season with a gathering focused on how we can nurture, and strengthen the web of connections that bind Hope Church community in fellowship, service, and care. The Great Consistory, in RCA polity, comprises all who have served a congregation as Deacon or Elder. At Hope Church, the Consistory began in 2017 to call annual gatherings of the Great Consistory to share wisdom as we planned for the future of both Hope Church and the RCA, and as we explored commitments on issues of justice and mercy.

Coming out of the disruptions of the COVID pandemic, it was clear to Discerning Our Future, which planned the gathering, that reconnection is vitally important, and that we would be wise to assess what's changed even as we look to reinstitute meaningful traditions. A comfortable interplay between the polarity Individual AND Community also emerged from last fall's survey of the congregation. One comment that particularly stood out in that survey was that "figuring out how to foster community is a big part of the church of the future."

The Great Consistory reviewed data describing the shared experience we've just come through in the pandemic, acknowledging the drop in the percentage of adults who believe they are "thriving," the increase in signs of clinical anxiety or depression, the global rise of unhappiness,

and, concurrent but not necessarily related, the decrease in church attendance over the last three decades. That review ended with the U.S. Surgeon General's *Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community*, which called out "our epidemic of loneliness and isolation." In that report, Vivek Murthy, the Surgeon General, said that "We are called to build a movement to mend the social fabric of our nation.... As we emerge from this [pandemic] era, rebuilding social connection and community offers us a promising and hopeful way forward.... Each of us can start now, in our own lives, by strengthening our connections and relationships."

What better call to a church community, responding to God's call to love one another?

Members of the Great Consistory were asked to think about and share the experiences that stood out to them as meaningful connections at Hope Church. They could have been 50 years ago or last week, and with one individual or a group. The stories were many and varied, reflecting the personalities and histories of the storytellers:

- Many reflected on participation with groups, from Fish Club and High Hopes to Consistory or Gentlemen of a Certain Age.
- Music played a part for many, whether the actual singing or performing of music or the socializing that came with being part of a choir.

- One woman recalls being asked to hold a baby for a young mother, and how it communicated trust and care even though they'd been only pew mates until then.
- Several recalled receiving handwritten notes and cards from people they may not have known deeply—including one who received notes from someone over a five-year illness.
- Sports (basketball, specifically), outdoor activities, and travel were key for a number of people in forming new relationships.

The discussion turned to what all of those memories had in common. One group coined an equation: Notice + Action = Connection. The story version of that math problem is that the first step is to notice that someone is new (to the noticer, not necessarily the church), that someone is alone, that someone is celebrating or struggling with a life event. The next step is to take action: to start a conversation, send a note, issue an invitation, or assist with finding a seat at Pizza Sunday. It's that easy to make a connection, and a connection once made can grow.

Some things make it easier to make connections, people reflected: like a defined, shared task or goal; food; a facilitator or leader (depending on the activity). Some confessed the awkwardness they feel about starting conversations in the Gathering Area after church, while others recounted how meaningful it had been when someone had

taken the initiative in getting to know them. Being known by name, sharing laughter, being vulnerable and real, and sharing a burden were elements of connection that had lasting value.

To conclude the evening, Great Consistory members were asked to commit to one beyond-the-ordinary thing they might do to make new or strengthen existing connections at Hope Church. As Pastor Gordon said in the last issue of *Salt & Light*, "This is important for the 'Great Congregation' of Hope Church also—which is all of you!—and you are indeed a great congregation. ...I encourage and challenge you to listen for how God is inspiring you to strengthen the web of Hope Church connections, in ways that are new or tried-and-true."

Need inspiration? Here are some of the commitments made that evening:

- Start a solar panel project and engage those interested.
- Make a point of initiating conversations over coffee after church.
- Send a handwritten note or make a phone call.
- Respond to the call of outdoor adventures.
- Join Creation Care or Unifying Hope.
- Host a potluck gathering.





Iona Travelers Share Reflections

In October, fourteen members of the Hope Church community traveled to Scotland's Isle of Iona, led by Dede Johnston and Gordon Wiersma. This was the result of long planning, beginning in September 2021. During this pilgrimage, the travelers were able to learn about and experience the Iona Community's history, mission, and current activities. Salt & Light received these reflections from participants.

What stands out to you as most emblematic of your time at Iona?

The liturgy that states: "Do not give gifts that cost us nothing." [And] the wind. We had lots and lots and lots of wind. "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8) —*Dede Johnston*

My experiences in worship, conversations, walks around the island, times of reflection instilled in me a deepening sense of the oneness and interconnection of the divine presence in all created beings. —*Larry Terlouw*

The richness of worship practices at Iona that are so enhanced by the environment of an ancient building. Iona definitely has a spirit of deep reflection and listening for the voice of God. —*Kari Miller*

The Sunday morning worship was the highlight for me; the songs and carefully articulated liturgy were very meaningful and made me appreciate such attentiveness to the words used and the rhythm of their service. I remember watching one of the leaders of the Iona community swaying and smiling so joyfully during the closing song, "in work and in worship God is with us." It's their sending song, and obviously deeply ingrained in the community.

A second visual highlight was watching people come from the town to the Abbey Church for worship. They walked the path to the church from the road, and seemed to converge like one of John August Swanson's paintings—everyone coming together. What was particularly striking was that they walk this path despite fiercely blowing winds and rain: their hardiness and heartiness. —*Cindi Veldheer DeYoung*



The word “community” keeps coming to mind. From the moment we walked into the Refectory for our first meal, we were surrounded by caring Christians from around the globe. Food (that was thoughtfully prepared) was placed on each table, and we took turns serving each other. Every morning our place in community was emphasized as we did our small tasks for the good of all (mine was cleaning three toilets—not bad). We met other “pilgrims” and shared stories and laughter. And, we worshiped together—twice daily, which cemented our community. As we left Iona, the staff stood on the dock waving us off, and we waved back until they were out of view. —Ann Sneller

In what ways was your faith nurtured, challenged, or expanded? What has stayed with you?

The Iona Community’s historical and current belief in and practice of actively following Jesus’ teaching and living example of working for justice and peace acceptance for all created beings (human, animal and nature) has challenged me to look deeply into how I can respond in this season of my life. —Larry Terlouw

There is something about worshiping by candlelight, as an ecumenical community, in the fifteenth-century Abbey church, in the place where tens of thousands of Christian pilgrims have gathered for over 1500 years, that helps me connect the historic Christian faith and contemporary Christian practice. The justice and healing liturgies of the Iona Community are particularly moving; these liturgies have words and concepts that rock me out of my complacency and help me to think about my faith in new ways. —Dede Johnston

What nurtured me most were the simple yet meaningful prayers that were offered before each

meal. It was a reminder to stop and center oneself three times a day on what is truly important. I came home with a book of these prayers, and I hope to carry on this practice. —Ann Sneller

To get to Iona required several hours on a train from Edinburgh to Oban, 90 minutes on a ferry from Oban to the Isle of Mull, a 60-minute bus ride from one end of Mull to the other, and then a 15-minute ferry ride to the Isle of Iona. I found our bus ride across Mull to be a fascinating demonstration of mutual hospitality and respectful negotiation in driving!

Because you travel a one-lane road on Mull with small pull-offs on either side of the road every tenth of a mile or so, drivers are constantly giving way to oncoming vehicles. Space is tight, and even more so riding in a double-decker coach; our group of 16 was with about 60 people and their luggage.

Cindi and I had a bird’s-eye view of everything because we grabbed the front seats opposite the driver, a 65-year-old named George. We engaged him in friendly conversation, and George’s driving was a study in anticipation and precision. The road was winding, hilly, and narrow, with no shoulder to speak of. Sometimes vehicles would back up to pull into the cut-out and make way.



Driving on Mull is very much a matter of give-and-take, trust, hospitality, courtesy, respect, and even shared covenantal responsibility with the traffic. I didn’t notice a single driver texting or using a cell phone. When they passed, drivers *always* waved to each other when making way—a model of courtesy. —Terry DeYoung



What did you learn from the experience of meeting other pilgrims at Iona and from interactions with Iona staff and volunteers?

The whole world is under a lot of pressure and facing sorrow and grief based on the global pandemic but also prejudice, economic concerns, and the environmental crisis. It was good to meet people from many places and to hear their stories. I was particularly affected by two younger women from Australia who had a baby daughter with them and their struggles to confront racism and prejudice regarding their marriage. We also met a playwright who shared his story as a transgender artist which was very revealing. We were cared for on so many levels and the opportunity to show our love to strangers was a joy. Hiking was a place of communion with God on Iona. —Kari Miller

Because it is a dispersed community, I “read between the lines” on how very much work it is to “make community” every week. It takes a lot of effort to engage new people. Some of the volunteers were incredibly diligent in making this a hospitable space—especially a volunteer named Susie, who so clearly looked for ways to keep the place in order—picking up dishes, doing laundry. She was diligent! —Cindi Veldheer DeYoung

Chance conversations with other guests and Iona Community Members yielded so much learning and wisdom about Celtic Christianity, international online prayer groups with Ukraine, and new ways to serve social justice needs.

My “must-read book list” grew and I have so many new ideas to process. —Dede Johnston

During our group’s orientation session on the first day, Benedicte (Abbey operations manager) said to us that “community is *created* every week; you’re not *joining* a community,” which is one of the most compelling and most challenging aspects of the Iona Community. Most visitors come to the Abbey alone, with another person, or perhaps with a few others. Our group of 16 was not the norm, so she encouraged us to disperse ourselves during meals and activities to get to know others.

- Mary is a retired therapist, Roman Catholic, lives in England, and returned to the Abbey after many years, this time with her brother Jim, who lives and works in a L’Arche Community home elsewhere in England. Mary completed the registration for both she and Jim and was surprised that the Abbey thought they were a couple, so the two of them were sharing a very small room for the week!
- Evelyn, from Inverness, Scotland, has visited many times; she and I had more than one conversation about my “sticks” (a common British substitute for canes) because her late husband took up making sticks for people in retirement.
- Courtney, who lives and works in an “urban monastery” connected to the Anglican Church of New Zealand, traveled to Iona with Gemma, a friend, monastery colleague, and mother of



Johannes, a baby who was held by many other visitors during the week. Courtney was new to Iona and was creating her own “monastery crawl” (think “pub crawl”); they were headed to the Taizé Community in France the following week. When I told Courtney Hope Church is part of the Reformed Church in America, she could not imagine what would draw any of us to Iona, mainly because she’d been raised in a very conservative Reformed church in New Zealand that had zero interest in considering topics like women in leadership, human sexuality, or social issues—unlike the Anglican Church of New Zealand.

Although name tags would have helped, we all found ways to remember each other’s names, which impressed me. —*Terry DeYoung*

I believe there were 18 pilgrims from the U.S. and 23 from around the world. That environment was very exciting for me. After the first day of being a little reserved (don’t laugh) I actively threw myself into the experience of meeting and learning from the other pilgrims. Every meal I sat with someone I did not know. I was eager to learn something about them and was surprised to learn that everyone outside of the U.S. knows more about U.S. history than I often did. Some brave pilgrims traveled alone and knew no one. Watching two moms create an experience with each other and their four-month-old son captured my heart. Spending time with a 32-year-old female attending for her first time after reading information regarding Iona gave me hope for the future. I listened to the story of a queer person’s journey and how the Iona community is a safe place. Many of the staff and volunteers were relatively new. Yet I found them to be passionate about the community and their commitment to it. —*Cindy Terlouw*

The Celtic spiritual tradition’s influence and impact continues today in diverse communities and individuals. —*Larry Terlouw*

What did you learn from the experience of traveling with others who are members of the Hope Church community?

I did not know several of the Hope Church community prior to the trip. Traveling for a day via train, boat, bus and then the final boat ride as a group to arrive at the island enabled time for significant meaningful conversations and shared exhaustion. We leaned on one another, cared for one another, and enjoyed celebrating life with one another. I am glad that I could share this experience with each of them. —*Cindy Terlouw*

I learned how blessed I am to be a member of a church where people are incredibly kind, open to the spirit, and curious about each other and the world. It was an incredible time of bonding together as we traveled and shared our time. This is a true gift to one another and therefore our community. —*Kari Miller*

It was wonderful to connect personally and in new ways with Hope Church members who I’ve known for decades. I also cherish the opportunities to meet such cool and interesting Hope Church members that I did not know before this trip. Sharing an adventure like this one is a great way to build connection. We often do this for our youth, but there are fewer opportunities for adults in the church to have a shared experience as a small group. —*Dede Johnston*

There is great diversity in Hope Church members’ experience and in the gifts and insights they offer to and through the community. —*Larry Terlouw*