



SALT & LIGHT

a hope church publication

ADVENT 2025



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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.

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Hope Among Us



Hello Hope Church friends,

“Hope” Church: such a lovely and engaging name for a church! Over many years, I’ve been intrigued by and enjoyed pondering and playing with the meaning of “hope,” both in our day-to-day lives and in Scripture. In

our daily use, “hope” often means something like a wish or an earnestly desired outcome or a supportive encouragement. And that’s good!—I do “hope” that the Lions win the Super Bowl (I could also say something about the University of Michigan football team, but I’m trying to bring us together!).

But “hope” in Scripture has a very different meaning than “wishful thinking” or “shared rooting.” “Hope” in scripture is something of a time-warping, perspective-shifting reality. “Hope” in scripture takes what we know about God in the past and what we trust about God in the future and uses those past and future realities about God to define, direct, and nourish our present reality. “Hope” as a present reality runs counter to our typical use of hope as being only about the future. And although that future meaning of hope is a good thing, both in our daily lives and in our faith, for this Advent we’re invited to engage with hope as a *present* reality.

As the Worship Ministry reflected together on the passages for this Advent and Christmas season, what emerged was an embracing of hope in Christ as a present reality. We put that into words as an Advent theme: **Hope Among Us**. Our shared engagement with scripture received hope as a present reality of God’s presence among us, received in the gifts of Christ’s Spirit in and among us as a community of faith. This present reality

of hope is expressed profoundly in the Advent lectionary passage from Romans 15.13:

*May the God of hope fill you with
all joy and peace in believing,*

*so that you may abound in hope by
the power of the Holy Spirit.*

God is the God of hope. We are people of hope through the Spirit. Both of these definitions have to do with the future belonging to God, but they are just as much claims on the present. Advent is a rich season to explore these themes, as the lectionary passages weave together past and future into a message of hope for present-day

followers of Jesus Christ then and now. As the Advent season guides us to look expectantly forward, we also feel a call to look expectantly among us for what is hope-full in this time. What gifts from God do we see among us? What opportunities for Beloved Community are we nurturing around us? How can we abide in the “living hope” (1 Peter 1.3) that Christ gives to us?

I invite you into an Advent season that receives the promise of God with us as a lens for our lives and circumstances. And in that reality of God with us in Jesus Christ, it will be an Advent season of **Hope Among Us**.

– Pastor Gordon

Activities during the Season of Advent

First Sunday of Advent | November 30

“Teach us God’s ways.” ~Isaiah 2:3



Dr. Barry Bandstra

The History of God as Exposed in Divine Names is the subject for **Adult Ed at 9:40 a.m.** You’ve heard it said that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. True as this may be in some sense, it is also true that God has a history, revealed in the names used for deity in Israel. It is our detective work on Hebrew names,

iconography, and mythic and epic texts reveals the surprises of the Israelite God-concept and lays the groundwork for the emergence of the new version of deity of the Christian movement. This presentation will be led by **Dr. Barry Bandstra**, Hope College emeritus professor of Hebrew Bible and Hebrew Language, who received his professional education at Calvin Theological Seminary and Yale University.

At **5:00 p.m.**, families can be creative together, making Advent/Christmas crafts with all

materials provided. Youth grades 6 to 12 will participate in the creation of a community art piece, themed around the light of Advent and celebration of the Creation Care Ministry’s solar installation. In the sanctuary, Rhonda Edginton will feature, in an organ recital, Advent and Christmas music with congregational singing.

At **5:45 p.m.**, we will share supper and the lighting of the Advent candles.

Second Sunday of Advent | December 7

“That we might have hope.” ~Romans 15:4



At **10:00 a.m.**, the **St. Nicholas Breakfast and Celebration** is a time to remember the traditions of St. Nicholas and his generosity, which reminds us of God’s love. Each child should bring an extra shoe to be filled with treats. Sign up in the Gathering Area or [online](#).

Third Sunday of Advent | December 14

"Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God."
~Isaiah 35:4



At **9:40 a.m.**, Adult Ed will offer part two of Barry Bandstra's history of God: The Hebrew Bible, Advent, and Angels. We will explore how the Old Testament God-concept and its biblical cosmology indelibly shaped the presentation of the birth narrative of Jesus of Nazareth in Matthew and Luke. From stars in heaven to announcing angels to virgin birth, we will see how these storied elements tie the birth of Jesus to the expectations and images of the Hebrew Bible.

After Pizza Lunch, you can 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; all ages are welcome to participate. **Caroling will begin at 12:45 p.m.**

Fourth Sunday of Advent | December 21

"...They shall name him Emmanuel... God is with us"
~Luke 1:41

There is no Adult Ed on December 21 or 28 or January 4. Join us for worship at **11:00 a.m.**, including Children in Worship at **11:15 a.m.**

Christmas Eve | December 24

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy." ~Romans 15:13

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 unrehearsed 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 part of the pageant.

At **11:00 p.m.**, we'll gather for a Candlelight Service, during which communion will be celebrated. At the conclusion of the service, we will greet Christmas morning outdoors in the parking lot to welcome the Christ child.

A Spirit of Giving

There are many opportunities to give throughout the Advent season. See the weekly email newsletters and Sunday bulletin for more information as you plan to:

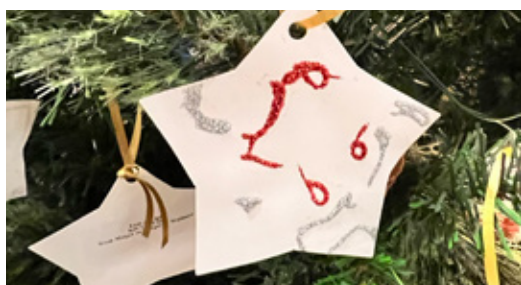
- Order a **Christmas poinsettia by December 7**, either to be shared with an at-home member or taken to your own celebrations.
- Take a tag from the **Tree of Light** as a commitment to purchase a gift card to Meijer, Walmart, or Target by **December 7**, and return with the gift card and your own greeting card to be shared with families in our church and community.
- Donate **Christmas cookies**—home-made or store-bought—by **December 11** to be delivered during the caroling.
- Deliver **holiday greeting cards** to the gift bags in the Gathering Area by **December 14**. The bags will be delivered during caroling to at-home members.
- Provide for the tables of neighbors in our community and around the world by giving to the **Christmas Offering**, which will support both **Community Action House** locally and **World Central Kitchen** in its Middle East Crisis Response.
- Bring a personal care product wrapped in white tissue paper on **Epiphany Sunday, January 4**. These gifts will be shared with Resilience to assist individuals caught in abusive relationships, empowering them for a hopeful future.



Order poinsettias by December 7.



Provide for tables near and far with the Christmas offering.



Provide gift cards by December 11.



White gifts for Resilience on January 4.



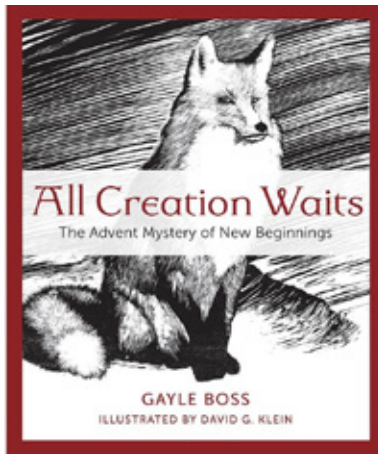
Share cards for our at-home friends by December 14.



Sign up for one or all!

All Creation Waits: Attention in Advent

Pastor Gretchen Schoon Tanis and Pastor Jackson Nickolay



Dwell in the Season

Pastor Gretchen

Perspective and a posture of paying attention can be a tricky beast. And, as they say on Broadway, timing is everything! After having participated in studying Travis West's *The Sabbath Way* this autumn, I have found myself paying closer attention to what is around me—to those things that capture my attention—and how that impacts my senses and experiences of the world. Over the last number of weeks, I have noticed the juxtaposition of both Halloween decorations and Christmas decorations side by side in the stores! We had autumnal decorations on Eighth Street here in Holland alongside shop windows shifting towards Christmas. But that helped me recognize my experience—the previous ten years of living in Germany where they take the season of Advent very seriously, and, of course, last year I was in the process of discerning a call here to Hope Church. By paying closer attention to the shift towards Christmas here in

the United States, I have found a deep resistance to moving to Christmas too quickly! We are all aware of the deeply embedded consumerism of Christmas. What I have found within myself is a resistance to moving too quickly through Advent—to skipping right to Christmas morning when gifts are opened.

One of the traditions we implemented while living in Germany was the Scandinavian tradition of giving books on Christmas Eve. This year we are doing the same thing at Hope Church! Our Advent devotional, *All Creation Waits*, is a lovingly crafted book (both a children's book and an all-ages book) that invites us to pay closer attention to the natural world around us as we, too, journey through the season of Advent in expectation of the birth of the Christ child. I was reminded of the quote of Walter Bruegemann, who said the most anti-empire thing we could do is resist—in essence, Sabbath as resistance. Our

Advent devotional helps us to resist the commercialism of the Christmas season here in North America by ushering us into a posture of paying attention—paying attention to the created world and in so doing paying attention to our experiences and the feelings they evoke.

I invite you to enjoy not only the words of our Advent devotional but the lovely woodcut prints that accompany each day. If you are using the children's version, I highly encourage you to read the questions for each day, which are printed at the back of the book. There you are encouraged not only to pay attention, but to do so in community with one another as you answer various questions related to the Advent season. Our hope is that this book will help you remain centered through the Advent season, that it will encourage all of us not to rush right past to Christmas morning, but to dwell in the beautiful season of Advent ahead of us.

Resilience, Patience, and Preservation

Pastor Jackson

In some ways, having the chance to dwell in the stories of the woodland creatures found in the pages of *All Creation Waits* is the ideal next step from having spent time in *The Sabbath Way* this fall. It could have very easily found its way onto the syllabus for some class at Dr. West's fictional "Sabbath Institute of Grateful Living," perhaps particularly his 301 class "Training for Wonder."

It really is a gift to marvel at and delight in the stories of resilience, patience, and preservation found within *All Creation Waits*. Its structure—one story of one creature for each day of Advent—is ideal for a short two-page reading practice at the start or the end of the day. The stories themselves are highly impactful, full of sacramental meaning, and aglow with Advent richness.

The themes in *All Creation Waits* will be a good next step if you've been reflecting on *The Sabbath Way*, but will also be a source of delight in their own right as they tell impactful stories of very familiar creatures. I'm particularly grateful for the children's book version (new to me), which is just as full of sacramental stories of creation, while being even more accessible and full of its own beautiful renderings and art.

The stories have a way of traveling with you once you read them, popping up throughout your life as you are reminded of

them. I will not soon forget the story of how the turtle holds its one breath through the whole winter while waiting for spring warmth. Or the immensity of the regional map that the chickadee holds in its head.

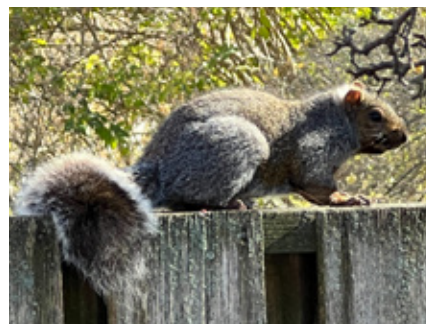
In addition to stories of creation's own journey through the Advent season, this book has also helped illuminate for me my own connectedness and belonging within nature. This has filled my previous Advent seasons with heightened meaning and connection as I run across these fellow creatures in nature.

By telling stories of creatures that we are likely to see here in the upper Midwest, the author, Gayle Boss, invites us to engage in sacramental presence with the world around us as we go through our days. Every time we see a chickadee land on the bird feeder or see the glowing eyes of a fox scurry into the ditch on our drive through the now-much-too-early-dark, we are invited to also reflect on the season of Advent, on waiting, and on the wonder of our own waiting joining with the anticipation of all creation.

After re-reading the chapter on the squirrel the other day in preparation for this article, I glanced out the window and saw a sight that has been filling me with indignation recently. One of the backyard squirrels (who I will henceforth refer to as Squirrely)

had climbed all the way up to our birdfeeder and was face first into the wild bird seed meant to attract and preserve my little airborne friends. Squirrely had done this despite a myriad of efforts, including meticulous placement of the feeder, particular selection of the birdfeeder itself, and even—when all else failed—the application of Vaseline to the post on which the birdfeeder rests to try to make the mission even more impossible. Despite all these efforts, there Squirrely was, face stuffed with sunflower seeds, and I imagine quite proud of herself for all her efforts.

While I'm sure my journey of resistance to these clever tricksters will continue, I was grateful in this instance that what came first was not angry mutterings, but rather a resigned chuckle and a shared moment of anticipation with another member of creation. It was a moment of delight amidst a season of waiting. A delight which this book opened me up to. I hope it can do something similar for you in the Advent season to come.



Music throughout the Season

Rhonda Edgington, Music Director



Image: Kolk Creative

On the first Sunday of Advent, **November 30**, Rhonda Edgington will present her annual **Advent organ recital at 5 p.m.**, as one of the evening activities. She'll be joined by Hope Church and Holland Symphony member **Dan Griswold** on viola, as well as Holland Symphony member **Amanda Dykhouse** on violin. You will hear and sing familiar Advent music, as well as music by J.S.Bach.

Also on the first Sunday of Advent, you're invited to bring your family or household's **creche manger scene** to share with Hope Church and help decorate our sanctuary! If you'd like to share with fellow worshipers the manger scene that you set up in your home, please box it and bring it to church on **November 30**. This will work best with medium to large-sized manger scenes, appropriate for placing in the window wells of the sanctuary. We will collect and catalog the sets in the Gathering Area, decorate the space later in Advent, and then have them ready to be collected back by you in January. We look forward to a new way to celebrate the season together.

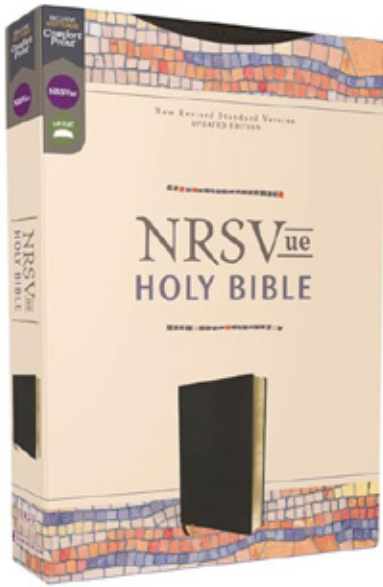
During Advent worship services, we will again be joined by **Ciara Glass** (daughter-in-law of Hope Church member Kari Miller) and dancers from **Haus of Glass dance studio** in Grand Rapids, incorporating Advent Dance with music as part of our liturgy. Throughout the season, you can also look forward to hearing the handbell choir, instrumentalists, and special choir and organ music.

If you're looking for more organ music from Rhonda around West Michigan this Advent and Christmas season, here are some suggestions:

- **Tuesday, November 25** at 12:15 p.m. at **Park Church Congregational** in Grand Rapids, Thunder & Wind (organ and percussion with Carolyn Koebel) will play music of Christmas on the Music at MidDay Concert series. Lunch is offered in the basement afterwards for just \$7.00!
- **Rhonda** will accompany the **Zeeland Civic Chorus** in their annual performance of the complete **Handel's Messiah**. This year's performances will be Thursday, **December 4** at 7 p.m. at **Trinity Protestant Reformed Church** in Hudsonville and **Tuesday, December 9** at 7p.m. at **Central Ave Christian Reformed Church** in Holland.
- **Rhonda** will play for the annual **Lessons and Carols** service that **Calvin University choirs** sing at **LaGrave Christian Reformed Church** in Grand Rapids. On **Sunday, December 7** at both **3 p.m. and 6 p.m.**, this concert will include an extended organ prelude and postlude.
- Both members and guests are welcome to a free program at **Hope Church** on **Thursday, December 16** at **1 p.m.** **Rhonda** will perform chamber music with a few members of the **Holland Symphony** for the **Women's Literary Club**.

A Tune-Up for the NRSV

By Carol M. Bechtel



Even Bible translations need a tune-up every few decades or so. The New Revised Standard Version is no exception. Although it will be a while before we see our pew Bibles swapped out for the New Revised Standard Version Updated

Edition, Hope Church members may detect small changes in what we hear read from the Bible in worship. This is a good thing, and in this brief article, I'd like to explain why.

Let's start with an example. Imagine the congregation's reactions to an Old Testament reading for the day from Habakkuk 2:7 which warns, "Then you will become *booty* for them." The grandparents gasp, the parents smile, and the young people laugh out loud. When the NRSV was published in 1989, "booty" was another word for "plunder." My students have informed me that this is no longer the case. So, in the updated edition, the verse reads, "Then you will be *plunder* for them." Congregational confusion averted—though those under 50 miss out on a good laugh.

John Kutsco, former executive director of the Society of Biblical Literature, was one of the people who led the team for the update. He explains, "We approached this project as if it were regularly scheduled maintenance in light of new texts and understandings." His colleague Joseph Crockett from the National Council of Churches adds, "As owner and steward of the RSV and NRSV translations, the NCC recognized the need to review and update the NRSV. God deserves the best each generation can render, and the growth of information in the past 30-plus years makes Bible research, interpretation, and understanding

an ever-changing enterprise." (Quotes are from a February 2023 interview in *The Christian Century* by Annelise Burns, "[An Even Better Bible](#).")

No translation is perfect. In my opinion, however, the NRSV—and now the NRSVue—is very good. (Is anyone else grateful they didn't call it the New New Revised Standard Version?) One of its strengths is that it adheres to a translational approach that attempts to stay as close to the original Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic as possible without being "wooden." The technical term for this approach is "formal correspondence." It differs from a paraphrase, which while readable, often strays far from the actual text (e.g., *The Living Bible*). It also differs from a "dynamic equivalence" translation, which stays closer to the original than a paraphrase, but may still not be close enough to be useful for serious preaching and teaching (e.g., *The Good News Bible*). The committee that translated the NRSV, on the other hand, attempted to be "as literal as possible and as free as necessary." It's clear that the committee in charge of the updated edition adhered to this approach as well.

Another thing that makes the NRSV (and now NRSVue) such a strong translation is that it was done by ecumenical committees of scholars. Unlike translations that are aimed at a marketing niche (like the NIV, which is targeted at a conservative evangelical audience), the NRSV/NRSVue tends to be less susceptible to particular biases. Not that any translation can be free from bias, of course. But at least no one translator or set of translators gets to "win" every time.

People get attached to whatever translation they are used to. That's just human nature. So, when a new translation comes along, it's sometimes hard to embrace it. I get this. As someone who was raised on the King James Version of 1611, I still hear "Thou makest me to lie down in green pastures" when someone reads Psalm 23. But even I know it's time to move on to a new translation when the King James has the author of the letter to the Philippians expressing his longing for the saints at Philippi "in the bowels of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:8, KJV).

Sometimes you've got to move with the times. Language changes, and so must we. With that in mind, enjoy getting to know the NRSVue!



Image: Kolk Creative

Reflections upon *The Sabbath Way*

Kathryn Van Rees

“Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.... Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you.”

That’s a good many words, and clearly they first were heard in a different time than our own. We don’t have slaves and the animals in our lives don’t work. But in my childhood I considered this fourth commandment to be one of the easiest of the big ten to obey. After all, it meant going to church to worship on a particular day and refraining from some activities. What have you thought that fourth commandment of the big ten means, either in years gone by or now?

In reading Travis West’s provocative book, *The Sabbath Way*, I came to understand keeping Sabbath as something far more life-giving than I had previously considered. When I first started reading, I found myself thinking, “There’s something I’m not quite getting here.” That was both disconcerting and captivating.

The book offers an extensive critique of life as we know it, and it helped me again attempt to come to grips with the countless everyday realities that affect us without our awareness. For instance how we are “trained in greed” (1 Peter 2:14 NLT) and may not recognize that we are. Time is distorted and becomes almost inextricably tied to money and tells us we have value based on 1) how fast we move, 2) how much we produce, and 3) how much we make (or as my late husband preferred to say,

“how much we accumulate.”—because do not actually make money.)

As I continued to read, I became less confused and more excited about what I was comprehending. I was beginning to understand that Sabbath-keeping was far more than slowing down, or not working, or certainly going to worship on a given day. There was something far more intentional about it, and it involved mindset and attitude as much as any activity or non-activity. I was being encouraged to see that practicing Sabbath (and there are countless ways to do this—each person finds their own way) meant posture as well as practice. And this posture has the ability to make the rest of our living more complete. We come rested and more open to the other aspects of our living when we practice Sabbath.

It became a running joke to the members of my reading group when we said that the task of carving out a 24-hour block of time to keep a Sabbath seemed almost insurmountable, but we would start by committing to *driving the speed limit* as we did our errands and running about town. And in reporting back to the group, more than one person reported that even that small exercise surprisingly changed their posture, their outlook.

As I came to the end of this book, I realized how important the subtitle is. The whole title is this: *The Sabbath Way: Making Room in Your Life for Rest, Connection, and Delight*. That’s it! Who doesn’t want more delight, more meaningful connections, and blessed rest in our lives? It’s what God really wants for us.





Image: Pikist.com

I Was a Stranger

Deb Genzink

Do you recall a time when you were a stranger? Perhaps it was the first day of college, after a move to a new city, or when you visited a new church. You might have had feelings of curiosity, excitement, hope, or even fear.

My mother came to the United States to recover from the devastation that five years of war had wreaked physically and emotionally on her family in England. She eventually met and married a young Dutch man and settled in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She never adjusted to American life. Although she spoke “proper” English, she never learned the Bible/church language spoken in West Michigan. She was always a stranger in a strange land.

Fast forward twenty years, and I, Deborah, a very Christian Reformed Michigander, went to work with husband Dave for the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee in Haiti. I had been taught, “To whom much has been given, much shall be required.” I was eager to use my education and talents to help the poor Haitians. I failed miserably. I didn’t take enough time to learn Haitian Creole beyond rudimentary housekeeping words. Three young women worked for me and tried to protect me from embarrassment. They didn’t want me to go to the market to shop without bargaining. Not surprisingly, I soon found myself at home with our two young sons—no phone, no electricity, and no one who would risk being friends with me, afraid they wouldn’t be able to understand my fumbling attempts at Creole. My experience as a stranger gave me deep empathy for those who find themselves as strangers in unfamiliar places.

In the early 80s, Dave was asked to work in Florida with Haitian refugees, known then as “boat people.” He visited camps where many young men lived, crowded together to live as cheaply as possible, so they could send money from their meager paychecks to their families in Haiti. Many Haitian women were also living isolated lives, raising children, and with no hope of returning home. Depression, impatience with the children, and no way to communicate with family in Haiti made their lives extremely difficult. I recall my mother’s legal pad filling daily with letters to my grandmother, as well as my own stream of letters home. The Haitian women could not write and had no phones. They were strangers in a strange land.

... and You Invited Me In

When we moved back to Holland, Dave was eager to help start a Habitat for Humanity chapter. Habitat has become a beacon of welcome in our community to a very diverse group of homeowners, supported by many businesses, volunteers, and more than 50 churches. Dave’s work with Habitat soon brought us deep into the Hispanic community in Holland.

Magda, a teacher with a master’s degree in psychology, together with her husband Jorge, a chemist, reluctantly left family and friends in Mexico in order to flee rampant crime and poverty. They wanted their three sons to have an opportunity to flourish in a safe place. The road to achieving a better life in Holland began with the entire family living in their car and working minimum wage jobs. The process of adjustment

was arduous, but they found community at Crossroad Chapel, a bilingual church sponsored by the Reformed Church in America. As with several families at Crossroad who had stable jobs, they were encouraged by pastor Fierro to apply for a home through Habitat for Humanity. They were the second family in the newly formed Lakeshore Habitat to help build and own a home. Magda studied English for many years with fierce determination and was eventually able to earn her teaching degree from GVSU. About that same time each of their three boys were ready to go to college, eventually becoming an engineer, a lawyer, and a teacher. A welcoming and supportive community means everything.

I have heard it said many times that immigrants are okay if they come legally and they learn English. One of our recent Habitat families had to flee the Congo and came to the United States “the right way,” by waiting in a refugee camp in Burundi for 16 years before they were finally able to immigrate. Sixteen years!! The father speaks fluent English but the mother has not yet found the time to learn English because she is caring for her seven children and working full time. She is an evangelist and proudly shows videos of herself singing and preaching in Swahili. The family’s oldest son is now attending Grand Rapids Community College part time and working full time. Again, a small investment in welcoming a family is paying big dividends to our community.

Our friend, working with a new Afghan refugee, went to take her to a doctor’s appointment and found her pale and shaking, having just received news of her mother’s death in Afghanistan. Our friend tried to offer what little help she could with hugs and, using the slow process of Google Translate, to ask for pictures of the mother. My friend felt so helpless trying to comfort a refugee so far from home with no chance of returning.

Being a stranger is fraught with apprehension and fear. Welcoming and befriending the stranger is an act of love and enriches our community.

“When you welcomed them, you welcomed me.” –Jesus

Cultivating Hope in a Season of Challenge

Scott Rumpsa, CEO of Community Action House and Hope Church member



This year, many of the systems that our food insecure neighbors count on have been shaken. Significant shifts and disruptions have caused uncertainty and brought challenges—but also an opportunity for community solidarity, advocacy, and action.

My work at Community Action House gives me a unique frontline perspective. Every day, our team works closely with neighbors and families who are struggling to make ends meet. We see the many ways food insecurity touches almost every part of life—physical and mental health, housing, education, work, and the stability of families. And I’ve seen our community respond with generosity, compassion, and creativity in ways that are deeply encouraging.



For too many of our neighbors, food security is not guaranteed. Programs like SNAP—the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance

Program—help millions of families in Michigan put food on the table. Locally, over 29,000 of our neighbors across Ottawa and Allegan counties count on SNAP each month to bridge the gap between the food their paychecks can cover and what their families need. This fall, we faced a stark reminder of how fragile this support can be. SNAP benefits were frozen in November, leaving families scrambling to cover a vital part of their household budget. Seniors and children were at particular risk, and families who were working hard, but



Image CommunityActionHouse.org

living paycheck to paycheck, were facing a future of impossible choices: groceries or rent, medicine, or heat. The uncertainty and fear were real.

This was not the only disruption our country's food system has recently faced. Earlier in 2025, the



USDA's TEFAP program—the federal commodity food program that provides

food through pantries—was unexpectedly frozen and millions of dollars of shipments expected by food banks throughout the country were not delivered. Food pantries like ours were pushed to quickly find other sources of food to make sure neighbors didn't go hungry. Later in the year, the Department of Agriculture announced their decision to discontinue the nation's main annual source of food insecurity data. These reports provided the data that officials and advocates across the country use to measure need, shape responsive programs, and advocate for policies that prevent hunger before it starts.

Taken together, these disruptions are a reminder that hunger and nutritional insecurity are not just local issues or temporary problems—they're systemic challenges that require consistent attention, investment, and care. And yet, in every instance of challenge, our community's response has been remarkable. In times of crisis, impact is shaped by how communities speak up, show up, and act together.

During the SNAP freeze, the outpouring of local support was extraordinary. Volunteers stepped in to fill shifts, new donations of food and funds materialized, and local organizations and congregations mobilized to meet the immediate surge in need. Asking “*What can I do?*”, people across our community—including many from Hope Church—recruited friends to volunteer, made extra gifts, organized food drives, called officials to advocate for SNAP's reinstatement, and more. This response allowed us and many partners throughout our region to provide meals, groceries, and hope to families who would otherwise have gone without. It is a powerful reminder that while systemic challenges cannot be solved by



Image CommunityActionHouse.org

nonprofits alone, the generosity and compassion of neighbors can change the lives and stories of families in our community.

Programs like SNAP are essential—and work hand in hand with efforts like ours that help bridge gaps and empower progress for so many of our neighbors. These efforts do more than fill stomachs—they strengthen the fabric of our community. Families with access to nutritious food and stable support are better able to focus on work, school, and health. Children who know they will have meals at home are more likely to succeed in school. Seniors and people with disabilities are able to maintain their independence with dignity. By meeting these basic needs, we create the foundation on which families can build thriving lives—and a stronger, more resilient community.

Thankfully, as I write this, the government shutdown has ended, and SNAP benefits are resuming. Yet we know our work with our community is not over. Neighbors who count on SNAP feel uncertain and discouraged, and anxiety about the precarity of vital programs will remain. The deeper issue is that too many neighbors and families live one missed paycheck, one car repair, or one policy decision away from crisis. That's not inevitable. It's a reality we can change—through stronger systems, better coordination, and a shared belief that no one in a community like ours should go hungry.

Looking ahead, our work will continue on multiple fronts: responding to immediate needs, helping guests navigate forthcoming changes to SNAP

and Medicaid, building new partnerships, and advocating for change. We will continue to work with compassionate neighbors, volunteers, congregations, and other organizations to ensure that no neighbor falls through the cracks—or faces challenges alone. And we will continue to lift up the values that unite us as a community: compassion, dignity, and a pragmatic, collaborative approach to solving real problems.

Over 56 years ago, Hope Church was a core part of our founding story. We were called into being as a part of our community's belief that everyone should have a place to turn, especially in moments of challenge and crisis. In a time of shifting systems and complex challenges, being there for our neighbors is deeply purposeful. **We were built for times like these.** *We were shaped with love and hope. Across decades. By Hope Church, and countless others in our community who believe that by taking action together, we can create the community we want, for everyone in it.*

At Community Action House, we believe that access to healthy food is foundational—not just for surviving, but for thriving. **We've seen time and again that when neighbors come together, families find their footing and hope follows.** Together, we can carry that same energy and empathy forward, sustaining both local nonprofit efforts across our community—and vital governmental programs—that both show up for our neighbors.

Contact Scott at srumpsa@communityactionhouse.org.

A New Partnership for Creation Care

Steven Hoogerwerf, Creation Care Ministry



Hope Church's Creation Care Ministry will partner with around ten other congregations and faith communities in the Holland/Grand Rapids area to participate in a year-long "Churches of Restoration" (CoR) cohort. This year-long collaborative undertaking is hosted and supported by A Rocha, a "global family of conservation organizations working together to live out God's calling to care for creation and equip others to do likewise." (You can learn more about A Rocha at arocha.org/en/.)

What will this mean for Hope Church and the Creation Care Ministry? Each church in the cohort will identify two new creation care projects: a "spiritual formation pathway" and a "practical action pathway." Our Creation Care Ministry will identify and develop these pathways in conversation with members of the congregation. We'll undertake new creation care activities that are home grown and that move beyond the many initiatives that Hope Church has already undertaken.

There's an exciting new dimension to being part of the Churches of Restoration cohort. One of the things we've already experienced at a day-long retreat is that it's both encouraging and energizing to be part of a larger group of Christians in our region who share our commitment to care for creation and who have knowledge, experience, and expertise to share with each other. For example, we have experience working together as a congregation to plan and implement solar panel installation. We can share what we have learned with other churches that are exploring

this possibility. Other churches in our cohort have done work on celebrating creation through art, establishing pollinator gardens, or implementing worship practices around the ecumenical liturgical season of creation. So there will be many opportunities to provide mutual support!

Caring for creation is a large, complex, and important challenge. Environmental degradation is occurring at alarming rates around the world. Closer to home, national environmental protection efforts are being dismantled. The changing climate is introducing new challenges that are already affecting us and our neighbors around the world. It sometimes seems that there is little we can do to make a difference. But one place we have considerable power to make a difference is locally—in our own communities.

Hope Church has already been part of these local efforts, both on our church property, at the homes of our members, and through advocacy in the wider community. It's likely that new undertakings that are part of our Churches of Restoration commitment will increase and enhance these local efforts. The phrase "Think globally, act locally" captures an important insight. Especially in the realm of ecology, everything is connected. Taking action in our own community to be good stewards of the amazing natural world can have an important connection and impact well beyond Hope Church and Holland! We look forward to seeing this impact continue through our partnership with the Churches of Restoration Cohort and fellow advocates for creation care in our neighborhood.

Coloring Corner - Saint Nicholas

