



**GOD &
NEIGHBOR**

20/21 ANNUAL REPORT



**FIRST COVENANT
CHURCH** *of Omaha*

201 N. 90th St., Omaha, NE 68114
www.fccomaha.org

LEAD PASTOR *Greg Applequist*



Even in the difficulties of this past year I continue to be grateful for the opportunity to serve as Lead Pastor here at First Covenant. I am honored to be a part of the staff that serves all of you. Thank you for this amazing experience.

I write this annual report as some things are coming to a close, and other things are beginning. I am excited that the process of our building renovation is almost done and I am excited to see what God invites us to as we again occupy our full building in July. I am grateful for the work of our lead team and foundational teams to re-vision how we are structured and I am looking forward to the work each of those teams will do in helping us better Love God and Love Neighbor. On a personal note, I am almost done with my 5 year term on the Covenant's Board of Ordered Ministry. Serving in this way has been an incredible joy as well as being exhausting and at times immensely frustrating.

I am coming up on my fifth anniversary at First Covenant and I am very proud of all that we have done in that time. I find myself in this season of life tired and, like many of you I am sure, in need of recharging. I have discussed with the Lead Team the possibility of a sabbatical for the summer of 2022. We applied for a grant that would provide funds to the church for me to take that sabbatical (we find out if we receive the funds in August of 2021). The Lead Team is prayerfully discerning if this is the right time for me to be away, fully aware that a sabbatical might need to wait until a future time. It is easy as a pastor to spend so much time doing things for God that we forget to actually stop and be with God. My sabbatical would be an extended and intentional time for me to reconnect with God and deepen my identity in Him. I have been trying to do this work for a number of years now. It feels like this is potentially the right season to dig deeper into this so that I might grow deeper in my own spiritual health and maturity.

I am thankful for the people in my life who continue to support and encourage me. Many of you do that in a variety of ways, and I continue to give thanks for my spiritual director, my mentor and an accountability group that helps draw me near to God. I am also thankful for Brandi Kejr and David Hemphill, two people who are completing their terms on the Lead Team. It has been a great joy to work with both of them and we will greatly miss their wisdom and leadership. I am also sad that Pastor Lyle is retiring (again!). I will miss his wisdom, his grace and even some of his jokes. He has been a tremendous gift to me, our staff and our church and there will be a big hole in our family as Lyle steps away from ministry. We are excited to see what God does with he and Diane in this next season of their lives.

I am excited to see what God does in this next year. I am excited to have us join together again, welcome new people, connect increasing depth and authenticity, serve our city and learn from all who live here, and engage the Kingdom of God in all that we do. Thanks for the continued support and the ongoing opportunity to serve here as pastor.

Peace - Greg

ASSOCIATE PASTOR *Mary Peterson*



Throughout this past year, we have experienced many new realities both in our church and in our world. I have been grateful for each moment I have been able to interact with you whether it has been outside, through Zoom or six feet apart with masks. This year has reminded me of God's constant presence with us and the depth of God's great love for us. Many of us have walked through the loss of a loved one, mental health problems, grief, uncertainty and fear. Through all of these dark times, I have been reminded that God is faithful to walk with us through the dark places and carry us to places to rest beside still water. Soong Chan Rah says, "Hope is dependent on who God is rather than what we can do for ourselves." God has been faithful and present to us this past year and will continue to be faithful and present, even when we are confused or scared or full of doubts. We can remember that our hope is in God, not our own capabilities. As we look ahead to the our building reopening and more people being able to gather, my prayer is that we remember that it is God who will be doing the work through us. We will not be the church that God has called us to be if we rely on our own efforts. We must rely on God to carry us through this next chapter at First Covenant Church as we seek to Love God and Love Neighbor.

Here are the highlights of what I have been up to at First Covenant this past year:

- Working with the CCFT to deliver resources to families during the pandemic
- Developing our ministry plan with pastoral staff and lead team to help FCC love God and love our neighbors
- Leading a parenting group through Zoom
- Praying with and for many of you throughout the year
- Writing 30 pages of devotionals for the One Call messages
- Completing my application to begin a Doctorate of Ministry through Fuller Seminary
- Completing a preaching class with Backstory Preaching
- Participating in a cohort of women pastors in our conference
- Serving on Biblical Gender Equality Commission, Committee on Ministerial Standing and Nebraska Church Planting Team for the Midwest Conference
- Continue to develop relationships with Iglesia del Pacto Mana to partner with the church in Pedernales, Ecuador
- Many hours of conversation with the amazing people of FCC Omaha on porches and Zoom

*Mary Peterson,
Associate Pastor*



YOUTH PASTOR *Coby Fisher*



Greetings Church Family,

This past year has certainly been unique and presented several challenges to overcome. I continue to be grateful for all of you and your willingness to continually adapt as we strive to Love God and Neighbors well even in the strangest of times!

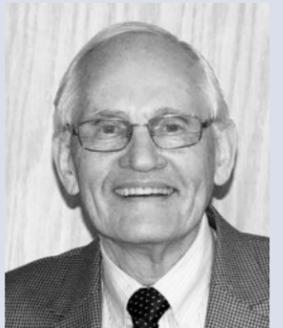
Although its form may have shifted a few times throughout the year, I am grateful that our Student Ministries were able to continue gathering regularly. Our volunteers have been faithful to making sure space is provided for our students to connect and grow as we remain committed to providing opportunities for them to Engage in relationship with Jesus Christ and others; Equip themselves through prayer, scripture, and discipleship; and Embark on an outward mission and lives of invitation. Our students have remained resilient amid the ups and downs this past year and I have loved seeing the ways that they continue to invest in one another and the ways in which God continues to move in their lives. It is a joy for me to walk alongside each of them as they continue to be formed in new and powerful ways. I am looking forward to the year ahead as restrictions are loosened and opportunities for our students expand!

Over this past year, I have continued to make progress on my master's degree from North Park Theological Seminary. In partnership with the Midwest Conference, the EQUIP Cohort began this year, providing an opportunity for NPTS Students to take courses locally, alongside peers and colleagues in the Midwest Conference. I have been grateful for this Cohort program and the opportunity for me to build relationships with other Covenant pastors in the Midwest. I am excited to continue my education in the year ahead and I remain grateful to First Covenant Church for your generous support.

As we move into this next season, I am excited for opportunities to re-connect and engage with so many of you. It has brought me joy these past few weeks to see the sanctuary filling again with so many familiar faces as we move forward together. Additionally, I am encouraged by the building progress and so look forward to all of the opportunities the new space will provide us as we continue to live into our vision and mission together!

*With gratitude,
Pastor Coby Fisher*

PASTOR OF ADULT CARE *Lyle Person*



It has been my privilege to serve you at FCC as Pastor of Adult Care for more than 3½ years. I have come to realize that it is finally time to really retire. I have said over the years that when the time that I had forgotten how to tie my own necktie, it would be time to climb my own Mount Nebo (see Deuteronomy 34:1-4) and see what God has in mind for the future. And so the time has come.

I have told some of you that the first sermon I ever preached was in our chapel in 1964, and now to conclude my active service here brings my ministry full circle. I have been blessed by all of you and it has been an awesome journey.

We were asked in these reports to look to what we hope to accomplish this coming year and what excites us. I pray to be able to continue to serve to the best of my abilities, wherever I am. We were also asked how the church can pray for us. Probably everyone should pray for my loving and longsuffering wife, as she will have me under foot 24/7 now.

My life desire has been summarized in Matthew 6:33 "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you as well". I've tried to hold up my part of the bargain, and I know we have been blessed beyond our deserving. Now my one desire is to hear the words whenever the time comes by the Master "Well done good and faithful servant".

*Lyle Person,
Pastor of Adult Care*



Pastor Greg Applequist

Books I have finished this past year:

Rediscovering the White Church – David Swanson
The Divine Conspiracy – Dallas Willard
Welcoming the Stranger – Jenny Yang and Matthew Soerens
The Mary's of the Bible – Boaz Johnson
Welcome to Adulthood – Jonathon Pokluda
The Heart of it All – Samuel Wells
Rethinking Incarceration – Dominique Gilliard
White Lies – Daniel Hill
How Then Shall we Live – Samuel Wells
After Whiteness – Willie James Jennings
A Testament of Devotion – Thomas Kelly
The Color of Compromise – Jemar Tisby
Learning to Dream Again – Samuel Wells
Strengthening the Soul of your Leadership – Ruth Haley Barton

Pastor Mary Peterson

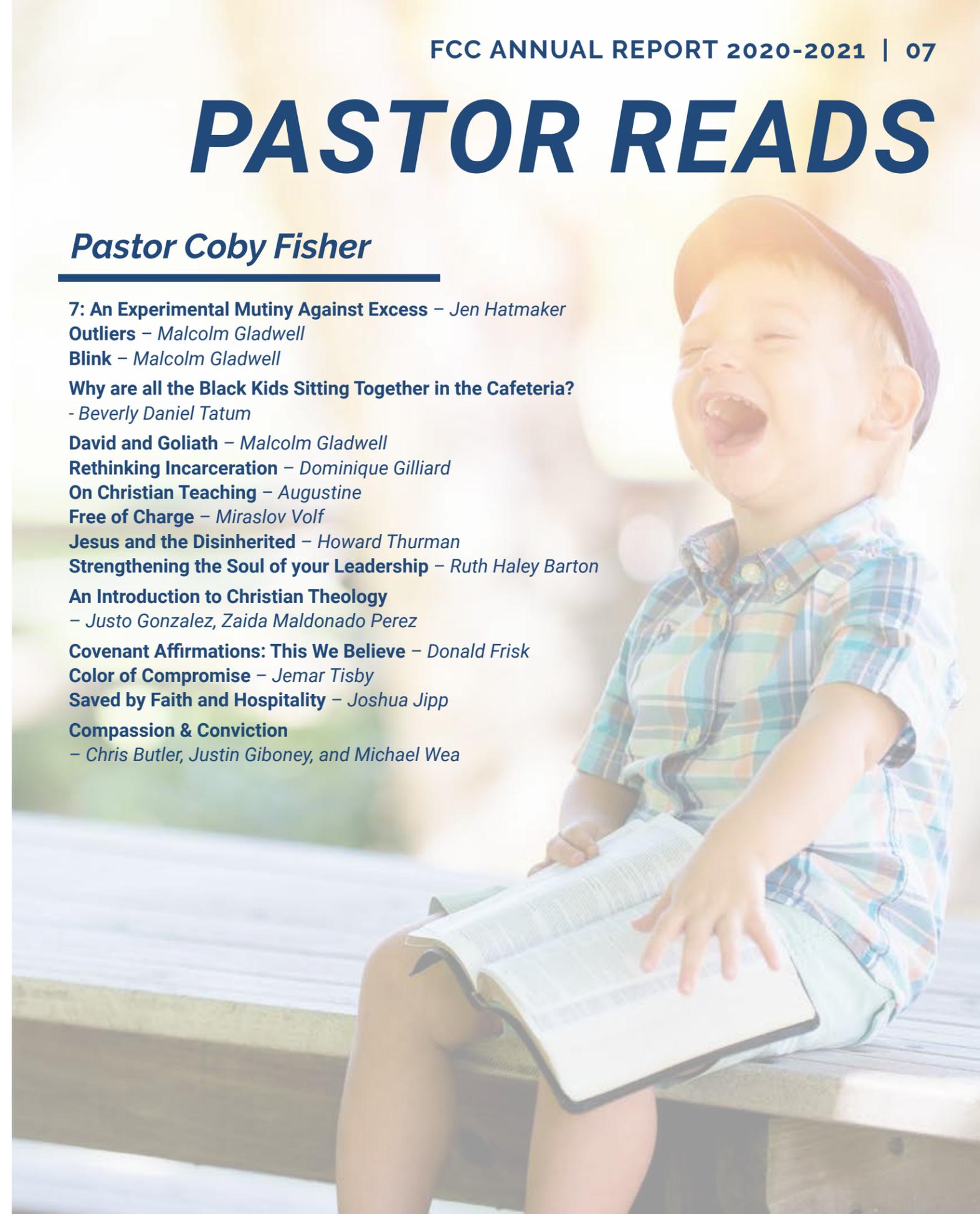
Books continue to be an important way that I connect with God and continue to learn, here are some that I have read since last fall:

The Wisdom of the Beguines: The Forgotten Story of a Medieval Women's Movement – Laura Swan
Prayer in the Night – Tish Harrison Warren
Everywhere You Look – Tim Soerens
Deeply Formed Life – Rich Villodas
Emotionally Healthy Discipleship – Pete Scazzero
Spiritual Conversations with Children – Lacy Finn Borgo
To Bless the Space Between Us – John O'Donohue
Invitation to Retreat – Ruth Haley Barton
The Liturgical Year – Joan Chittister
Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership – Ruth Haley Barton
How to Fight Racism – Jemar Tisby
The Interior Castle – St Theresa of Avila
Acts – Willie James Jennings
Paul and Gender – Cynthia Westfall
The Making of Biblical Womanhood – Beth Allison Barr
After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging – Willie James Jennings
The End of Religion – Bruy Cavay
Eight Dates – Gottman
Short Stories – Jesus by Amy Jill Levine
The Liturgy of Politics – Kaitlyn Scheiss
Prophetic Imagination – Walter Brueggemann
And a few random fiction books as well!

PASTOR READS

Pastor Coby Fisher

7: An Experimental Mutiny Against Excess – Jen Hatmaker
Outliers – Malcolm Gladwell
Blink – Malcolm Gladwell
Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?
 – Beverly Daniel Tatum
David and Goliath – Malcolm Gladwell
Rethinking Incarceration – Dominique Gilliard
On Christian Teaching – Augustine
Free of Charge – Miraslov Volf
Jesus and the Disinherited – Howard Thurman
Strengthening the Soul of your Leadership – Ruth Haley Barton
An Introduction to Christian Theology
 – Justo Gonzalez, Zaida Maldonado Perez
Covenant Affirmations: This We Believe – Donald Frisk
Color of Compromise – Jemar Tisby
Saved by Faith and Hospitality – Joshua Jipp
Compassion & Conviction
 – Chris Butler, Justin Giboney, and Michael Wea



LEAD TEAM

*Lukas Rathjen, David Hemphill, Bob Drake, Marcia Weber,
Pastor Greg Applequist, Scott Lickteig, Dorine Nordstrom, Brandi Kejr*

I trust that this report finds you well and safe as we continue to navigate our way through this ongoing pandemic. Many of you have had vaccinations and are finding yourself more at ease and willing to return to church services. As a Lead Team we are making every effort to recognize that each person that comes to our church has a position regarding “to mask” or “not to mask” and their comfort level with being in and around larger numbers of people. As we look at our vision statement, To Love God and Our Neighbor, we need to put our own viewpoints aside and realize that what we should be doing is meeting each person where they are and not pushing our own position upon those around us. This goes for those that feel we should wear masks as well as those that don't feel we need them. We will continue to follow the city mask mandate until it expires on May 25th or further directives mandated by the city. I truly believe that God will take you anyway you come to church....masked or unmasked! I am pretty sure he is not interested in your face but rather your soul!

I can honestly say that being part of the Lead Team this past year has been one of the more challenging leadership roles I have ever taken on. I am so thankful for the great people serving on the Lead Team. We all have our own thoughts and positions regarding how to proceed with things during the pandemic and as you might have guessed they are not the same positions. I believe that we have modeled the kind of discussions and decision makings that are needed to be effective leaders for our church. Even with all the challenges and our unfortunate time of not being able to worship together in person, I am excited about the happenings at First Covenant Church and look forward to what God will do with our facility and His congregation. I cannot thank our pastoral staff enough for their tireless work on keeping us engaged during this crazy season. We are so blessed to have wonderful ministers to shepherd the flock!

I am wrapping up my fourth and final year in this position and I feel rewarded in this spiritual journey I started four years ago. My how time flies! I am not sure what God has for me next but I am in prayer about it and would ask for your prayers as well. I do know that my faith has grown greatly over these years as I have served in this role.

As I have done in my past reports, I want to remind you about who we are and what we stand for as laid out in our Vision, Mission and Action statements. These items are at the heart of each decision the Lead Team and Foundational Teams make. We are so blessed by the tremendous love and support both spiritually and financially that FCC shows over and over again.

Vision: To Love God and Our Neighbors – Luke 10:27

Mission:

**Walk Humbly with God, To Love Mercy and Act Justly – Micah 6:8
Share the Good News of Jesus – Matthew 28: 19-20**

Actions Statements:

**We equip disciples for Jesus.
We invest in our youth and growing their relationship with Christ.
We have loving, caring, and connected intergenerational relationships.
We reach the lost and help the hurting.
We are adaptable for God's purpose.
We give generously of our lives and resources.
Prayer is at the heart of who we are and all we do.**

Now, let me look ahead with you toward the next year in the life of FCC.

- The Lead Team along with the pastoral staff will continue to shape these new teams to carry out our vision and mission.
- Continued monitoring of the construction process, capital campaign resources, general budget funds, and general church ministry during this time of construction and ongoing pandemic.
- We are hopeful that by Fall we can be all systems go! A return to normal is our goal. Complete with Cov Groups, choir and maybe even donuts!
- We plan to resume our Family Camp at Covenant Cedars this Labor Day weekend - Let's celebrate our church and our Lord and Savior together at Camp.
- As we wrap up the third year of our Building on a Faithful Heritage Campaign we will need to decide if we take on another campaign to pay down our debt.
- We will need to find our way in our new space. I am hopeful that we find ways to have it become a Christian gathering place for all kinds of groups, here at the heart of Omaha.

As this year comes to a close, one thing that I reflect back on was the Lent study with Pastor Greg. We read the book Learning to Dream Again by Sam Wells and I had a couple of thoughts from the book I wanted to share.

1. There is no hope outside of God! God is limitless hope!
 2. In light of an election this past year, which had many people feeling very angry or elated over the results, this spoke volumes to me. “If you're obsessed with how much tax Caesar is taking from you, you are giving Caesar too much power over you. You're worshipping the wrong God. It isn't about politics, it is about God....see my #1.
 3. God's currency is grace! When we understand that, we will realize that we are hopelessly and catastrophically in debt. Only one person can pay off that debt - Christ. Again see #1!
 4. Wells refers to 3 things that a church needs to do to be able to have the difficult discussions before our society today.
 - a) Life isn't about never making mistakes or having regrets, it's about what you do when you've made them or what you turn your regrets into. If you are floating along thinking you are living a flawless existence you're living a lie. Come down off the lofty place and get into the dust where mistakes are made.
 - b) You've heard it said, 'Make enough money, get enough qualifications, invest wisely, so you can always be dependent.' But Jesus says, "That's not the Gospel." The Gospel says to "bear one another's burdens." The heart of life is friendship and companionship, with one another and God. These things will survive long after the investments, qualifications, and money become useless.
 - c) You've heard it said, "Have a perfect body, a trophy spouse, and may all your children be poster children." But Christ says, "The body that matters is my body, not yours." We are all broken inside but we keep up our tidy appearances. One day we will be given new bodies. Discipleship lies not in proudly saying "My body is not broken," but in finding people to whom you can truly say, "My body is broken for you.
- Those three things are not easy, in fact they are incredibly difficult...I admit I struggle greatly with all of them, just remember (and I need reminders)... #1 There is no hope outside of God!

***God's Grace and Peace to You,
David C. Hemphill, Ed.D.
Lead Team Chair***



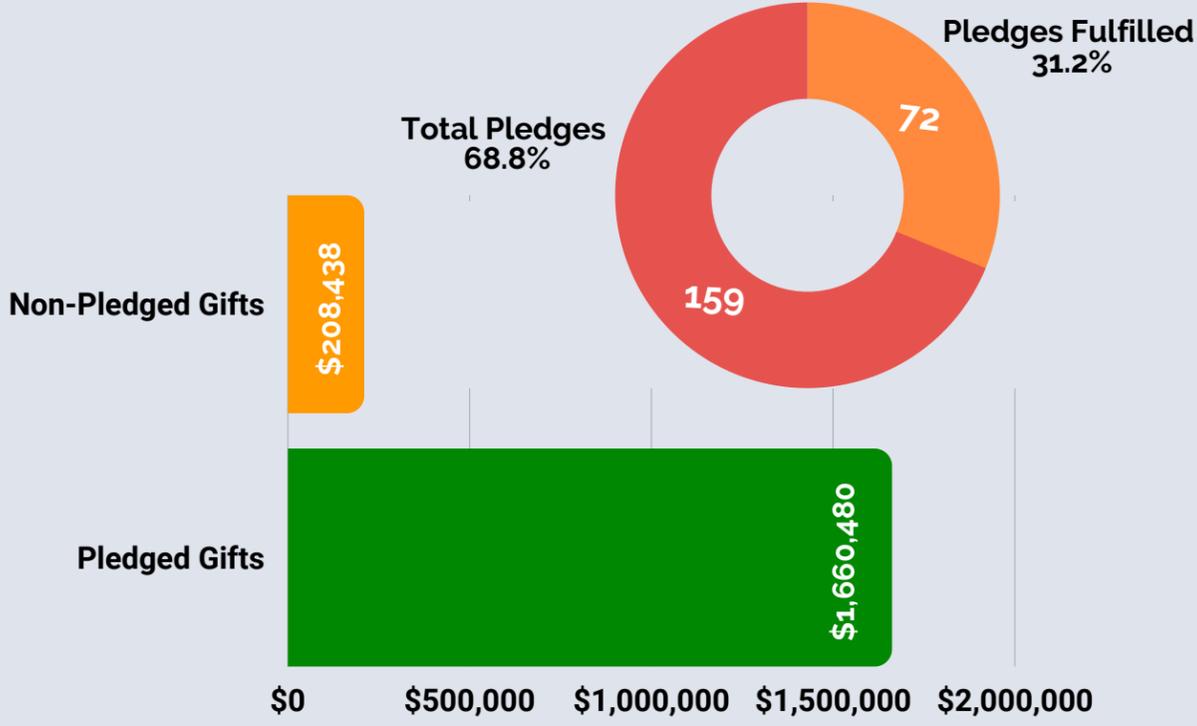
BUILDING TEAM

We continue to be excited for the progress of our building project. The completion date is projected for July of 2021 and we are ready to be back in the building! We are grateful that our workers have been safe and there have been no injuries or accidents. At the writing of this report, dry wall is being hung, the bathrooms are being finished, furniture is being ordered, paint and carpet are almost ready to be installed, and the parking lot is a week or so away from being redone. It is an exciting time.

We are also grateful for the people at First Covenant Church and their generosity. From our youngest to our oldest friends, everyone has been generous and faithful to the pledges that have been made. So far we have had 72 out of 159 pledges completed. We have received \$1,660,480 in pledges out of \$1,878,841, and an additional \$208,438 of non-pledged gifts. Please continue in your generosity so we can see the project through to completion.

As exciting as the completed building is, the real excitement begins shortly. Now we begin to see how God is inviting us to use our building. Who is God inviting us to bring into First Covenant Church? What groups is God nudging us to share the use of our building? What would it look like to have our building in use every day of the week, a wonderful tool for the proclamation of the good news of Jesus? Be praying with our leaders as we think about these questions, and as we use our building as a light to our neighborhood.

\$1.88M PLEDGED



CHILDREN'S CHRISTIAN FORMATION TEAM

This past year our kids and their families have engaged with the Shine at Home curriculum and read All of Us. Through the stories of the Old Testament (like Sarah, Abraham, Joseph, the midwives, and more!) we remembered the ways God is at work among the people of God. Then we engaged with the stories of Jesus found in the New Testament to learn more about how God wants us to live. We provided Lent and Advent at Home opportunities for families to engage in prayer and practice their faith together.



Formation

As we look ahead to the end of the summer, we are excited to see the doors to our building open wide and for ministry to take place in the beautiful spaces we are preparing for your children. We are grateful for the ongoing work of Everett and the Retired Men to clean, touch up paint, move bulletin boards and help us dream about the spaces our children will grow in.

We are hoping to make some small, but significant improvements to the nursery, our children's rooms and our check in stations. Our hope is that every family will feel welcome, safe and excited to join in the children's ministry at FCC. All of our children will gather in one hallway creating a safer and more convenient place for families to drop off their kids.

Our team continues to focus on the importance of families growing in their faith together. Look for opportunities to learn more about God Moments, reading the Bible together and learning about baptism and communion in the fall. Through intergenerational events at Advent and Lent, our church will learn from our children as they share how they sense God moving in their lives. We also want to continue to empower the children of First Covenant Church to Love God and Love Neighbor.

*Respectfully submitted,
Julie Lieben & Jacque Torson*



WORSHIP ARTS & TECHNOLOGY TEAM

A unique year for the life of the church.

June 2020 arrived in the midst of a Covid 19 Pandemic, where nearly all of the city was shut down and excessive sanitization and mask wearing became the norm. The pews were empty, services occurred on Zoom, and technology became an extremely important part of the worship component. Creativity was sparked to have the praise band combine from the speakers of their own home computers. A skeleton crew would arrive on Sundays and hold a service to what felt like no one, even though many church members were worshipping from their homes in their pajamas. Communion was created from morsels found in your pantry.



Worship

In August, a telephone dial in option was added to those without computers.

In October, a choir rehearsal was held with few people and quickly halted for safety reasons.

Old recordings of choir performances were streamed on Sundays after that.

Our first Worship Arts and Technology meeting held was again in February 2021 and we were introduced to the concept of two separate parts of the leadership in the church. Our role will be geared toward creating a welcoming environment. Since there was no power in the church in late February, the service was completely recorded. We met again in March and April to learn of our new role.

*Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Greufe*



CONGREGATIONAL CARE TEAM

The Covid Pandemic affected our ministry to those in our church as it probably did to every program and outreach at First Covenant.

But even though we were not able to actually visit our folks in person most of the time we could still use the telephone and the mail service to remember those who are usually unable to join with the church family for worship or special events.

However, we did have two in-person visits that were a real blessing: At Christmas time we took bags containing a Christmas card, a 2021 calendar, chocolates, and a pair of warm socks for each person on our visit/calling list. Then at Easter time we took Easter lilies to our friends.

I want to thank Sharon Peterson, Linda Lenser, Patti Boyer, Mary Palmberg, and Linda Chollett who, together, make up the best care team any church or group leader could hope to have. Thanks also to Karen who is my help-mate and honorary team member.

We have a list of additional folks in our congregation who need the special care offered by our group so our prayer is for some special folks within the congregation who feel led to join with us in order that no member of First Covenant Church feels estranged because they find it difficult to be with the congregation in person.

I want to thank Rev. Lyle Person for being our staff liaison and all around great guy. We are going to miss you Lyle! Be blessed in retirement!

*Respectfully submitted,
Jim Ressegieu*



ADULT CHRISTIAN FORMATION TEAM

The Adult Christian Formation Team (ACFT) persevered through the pandemic bringing a range of options to members and regular attenders. In 2020, the team primarily built on to the Home Base groups that had been active since the onset of COVID-19 lockdowns. A number of outdoor and Zoom based groups connected members in proximity and continued until the Advent season. At the same time, monthly ACFT Zoom meetings focused on growing our internal formation through reading and study of "The Deeply Formed Life" by Rich Villodas.



Formation

As the calendar turned, the ACFT promoted a New Year's resolution themed set of formation opportunities called Challenge 2021. ACFT members developed a day a week of focused activities, carried through a 5 week period in late January and February. The challenges included Scripture Memorization Mondays, Prayer Practice Tuesdays, Encouragement Wednesdays, Group Study (by Zoom) Thursdays, and Choose Your Own Adventure Fridays. At the culmination of Challenge 2021, the team coordinated with the pastoral staff to lead a book study by Sam Wells "Learning to Dream Again" and a couples study on "Eight Dates". May and June have thrust team activities into launching Buddies and Bible Questions (BBQ) groups to once again encourage both time in God's word and shared kingdom living. Groups will cover topics like "HeBrews A Better Blend" by Leah Adams, a study of Psalms, and a study of Christian life and modern literature.

Looking ahead to 2021-2022, (1) the ACFT hopes that God inspires all to spend time being formed whether that be by facilitating a group, joining groups, daily personal study and prayer, or in another manner. (2) Our team is most excited to see the opportunity to once again minister to families through partnership with children's ministry. We look forward to offering Sunday groups in fall where parents can reconnect with their children and discuss how both were shown God through their leaders, fellow group members, and curricula. (3) Our fall groups and the ACFT will function faithfully if all members and regular attenders join the conversation. Let us know where God is meeting you and how much you can engage with others in the church versus how much of your current need is in personal formation. We would also benefit from a couple friendly faces joining our team who would help us get the word out on great upcoming opportunities. (4) We could use the church's prayer for adult formation to craft opportunities for deep connection. Please pray that we can find a balance in offerings where our regulars can bring a neighbor or friend to a group for a season comfortably and also where we can form lifelong relationships.

1. *What do you hope God does through your area of ministry in the next year?*
2. *What are you most excited about in your area of ministry for the next year?*
3. *How can people help or your team function more faithfully?*
4. *How can the church pray for your ministry in the next year?*

*Respectfully submitted,
Jon Markt*



LOVE THE WORLD TEAM

A primary focus of the "Love the World" team is to foster an environment at FCC which allows the congregation to engage and connect with the world. A few ways we do this as a congregation is by being aware of global developments, partnering with organizations outside of FCC, and seeking to expand the scope of our relationships outside of Omaha, or even the United States. In the next year, our team will actively look for opportunities to broaden the exposure of those at FCC to others outside our borders.

Alongside our focus on international engagement, FCC supports the work of several missionary families in various parts of the world. Our team will maintain contact with the missionaries we currently support in South America, Mexico, and Asia and identify other possibilities for new connections. We will provide updates to FCC on how we can love our missionaries through financial support, prayer, and communication.

Having developed relationships with a sister church in Pedernales, Ecuador several years ago, our team will continue to identify opportunities for staying connected with various ministries in Ecuador. We will provide regular opportunities for FCC to interact with this church and community and, through these interactions, we will learn different ways of relating to those around us and experience new ways of seeing God at work in the world.

I am excited about the opportunities we have at FCC to engage with the world around us in the year ahead, especially when recognizing the relational challenges of the past year. It may take a while for us to return to a sense of normalcy in the way we interact with others, particularly as we engage with those far from home. I would encourage those who are connected to FCC to consider participating in opportunities at the church to broaden your interactions with people, places, and interests that may feel different or unfamiliar. Alongside our team, I encourage you to pray with, and for, those outside our borders and be regularly open to new relationships with people from various backgrounds or places.

Respectfully submitted,
Nate Kauffman



World



LOVE OMAHA TEAM

The Love Omaha team is looking forward to a wonderful year of service. We have been working to learn about and grow in our involvement with Together Inc, Assure, and Rise. There are a few projects we have in the works that we look forward to introducing to the congregation in the fall. These include packing pantry boxes and supporting prison inmates as they work toward release.

We would love for people to be praying for our team to help us meet needs in Omaha. We would also love for people to consider letting us know about service projects they are involved in. We would love to get people connected with ministries that meet their interests. Please share those with us!

Respectfully submitted,
Monica Fisher



Omaha



YOUTH CHRISTIAN FORMATION TEAM

Over the past year the Youth Christian Formation team has worked to offer regular gatherings in a variety of formats as we continued to navigate changing circumstances. We began gathering online, then moved to in-person outdoors, then to indoors with masks and distancing, and now somewhat back to “normal.” We are so grateful for the flexibility of our students and families as we navigated this past year, and the unwavering commitment to providing space for students to Engage with one another regularly! We are proud of the students of FCC for their resiliency and positive attitude over the course of this past year, as well as the ways they have grown closer to one another and to Jesus!



Formation

In the year ahead, we are excited to continue providing regular space for students to be together as we continue to live into our priorities to Engage in relationship with Jesus Christ and others, to Equip ourselves through prayer, scripture, and discipleship, and to Embark on an outward mission and lives of invitation. With lessening restrictions, we are hopeful that we can offer more excursion activities, effectively partner with the service opportunities our Love Omaha and Love the World teams offer, and even hope to have a summer trip ready for 2022!

We know now more than ever that the year ahead is unpredictable, but we are grateful to serve a God who knows and loves each one of us, regardless. We are excited to keep sharing what we know with our students and introducing them to the God who loves us all more than we know.

As a team we continue to be grateful for the congregation of FCC. Thank you for loving our students well and for believing the work of Youth Ministry is worth doing. Your prayers and support are appreciated by our leaders and our students!

*Respectfully submitted,
Bill Torson*



PROPERTIES TEAM

1. What do you hope God does through your area of ministry in the next year?

Going into the next year at First Covenant Church, I hope that God really shows us how we might best use the property at 201 N. 90 th Street. In both restarting current ministries and seeking to find a way to better utilize our newly updated space to truly love God and our neighbors.

2. What are you most excited about in your area of ministry for the next year?

What I’m most excited about for the next year is the opportunity to reimagine what the properties team really does. Yes, the maintenance and upkeep of the church is still going to be a focus, but we’re going to be emphasizing dreaming a little more about what our current space could be and what needs it could be fulfilling.

3. How can people help or your team function more faithfully?

There are two great ways that everyone can help us function and serve more faithfully. The first is to be observant and let us know about any problems that you’ve noticed with the property and grounds, like a door that doesn’t quite latch shut, or an icy spot on the sidewalk that might need attention. The second is to help us do a little dreaming, if there’s something that you think we could change to make the church a better place, let us know. A different approach to the way we use our spaces, another opportunity to utilize our beautiful building, we’re all ears.

4. How can the church pray for your ministry in the next year?

Pray for guidance for the Properties Team as well as the Stewardship Team, so that we might see the best way to use what God has given us to serve him best.

*Respectfully submitted,
Graham Person*



Stewardship



GENERAL CHURCH REPORT

It seems appropriate to start our look back at the past year with the same words everyone is using these days: It was a very strange year! There are lots of words we can use to describe the past year: strange, frustrating, disappointing, sad, difficult, pain-filled and so many more. I am grateful for the way we tried to do things differently, learning about new technology, trying to stay connected when we couldn't see each other face to face, and so much more.

In this year's annual report, we have asked each of our teams to look forward to what they are hoping for in the year ahead. In this section, we want to highlight many of the things that happened at First Covenant in the past year.

This past year our staff and Lead Team spent a good deal of time reorganizing our teams to focus more intentionally on our mission to: Love God and Love Neighbor. Our "Love God" teams now include Formation (Adult, Youth and Children), Worship and Stewardship (Properties and Finance). Our "Love Neighbor" teams include Love FCC, Love Omaha and Love the World. The changes to these teams are being implemented as we speak. This isn't a wholesale change to our team structures, rather a chance for us to rethink how we live out our mission and vision. It is up to all of us to live into our new teams, to participate in shared activity, and to pray for how we can faithfully Love God and Love Neighbor. We are grateful for our lead team and staff who walked us through this process.

Our children's team provided materials and resources for our families at various times so all could stay connected to God through the pandemic. We are grateful for the ways families have drawn closer to each other and to God in this season.

Our youth programs continued in a variety of ways, from meeting on Zoom, to meeting outside, to meeting inside while being distanced with masks. We are grateful for Pastor Coby and the Youth Formation Team who have worked hard keeping our students connected to God and to each other.

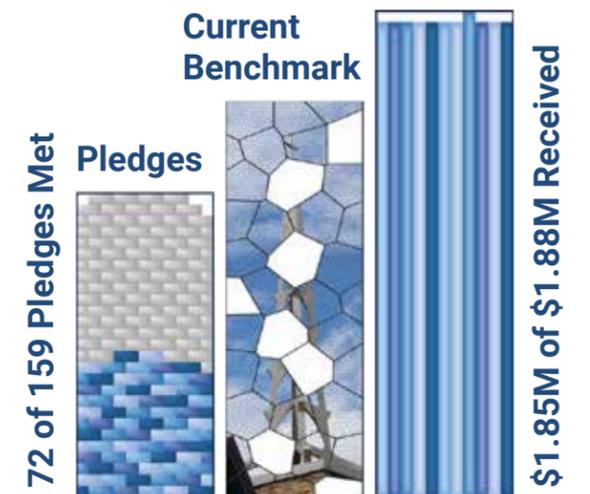
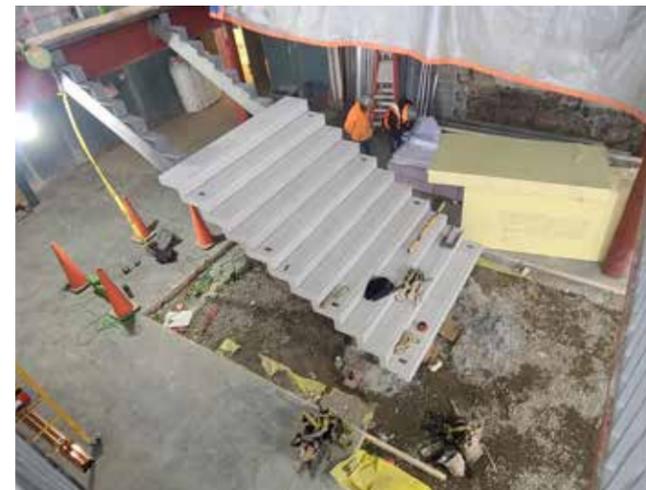
Our adult formation teams have offered a variety of in person and Zoom groups, from Bible studies to book discussion to times of prayer. Our pastors also guided us through a plan where we read the entire New Testament from June 1, 2020 through Easter of 2021. In addition the staff provided daily devotional calls on our New Testament readings. We are grateful for the creative ways our teams encouraged us to be formed into the likeness of Jesus.

Our worship team adapted over and over again from having as few as 10 people in the sanctuary to having as many as 150. We are grateful for all who have helped contribute to making worship happen at FCC this year.

The building project began in the fall of 2020 and should be finished in July of 2021. There have been challenges along the way, but ultimately we are thankful that everyone has remained safe and we are soon to have occupancy of the building. Now the dreaming begins! How will God invite us to use our building as a tool to share God's love with our neighbors?

As spring has come in 2021, we are grateful for the many activities that we have shared together. Our retired men and our knitters are meeting again. We participated in a 6k race to help bring clean water to Africa. We have begun a relationship with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship working with international students at Creighton and UNO. We partnered with Together Inc. to provide water and coffee for the homeless community in Omaha. We are very excited to see what God has in store for us as we continue in 2021 and beyond.

Thank you for sticking together through this most unusual year. We know First Covenant will look different in this next season of our life and we are excited to see what God has for us as we move forward together.



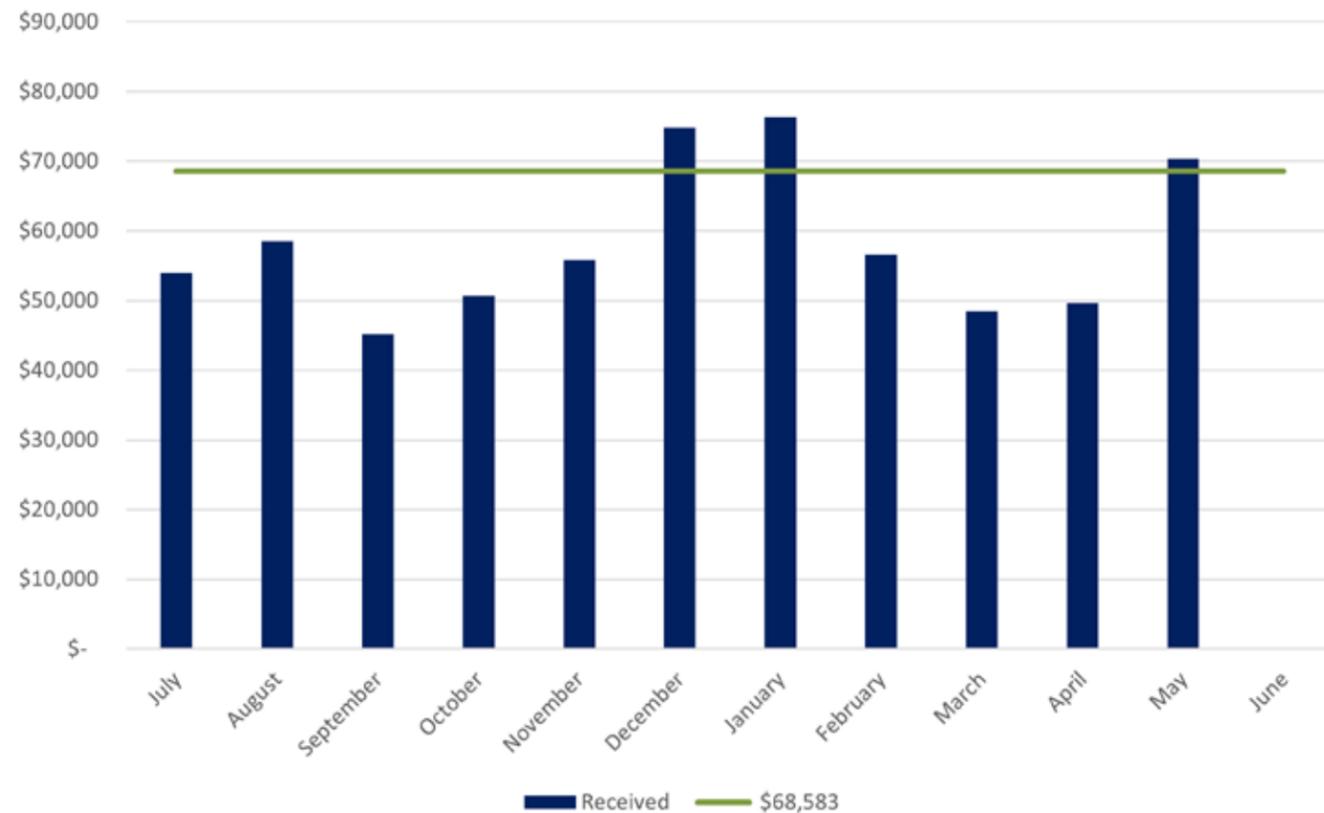
FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP TEAM

On the Financial Stewardship Team, we support the other Foundational Teams as they fulfill their callings. Most of these activities were put on hold for the past fifteen months, as we dealt with an unprecedented crisis. For the coming year, I hope that God inspires our teams to realize our church's vision to Love God and Love Neighbor in new and exciting ways. I would ask the members of First Covenant Church to pray for our team that we might effectively manage the resources given to us in furtherance of our church's mission. We express our faith in how we share the blessings God has given us, and none can doubt our faith abounds.



*Respectfully submitted,
Andrew Lieben*

MONTHLY GENERAL FUND OFFERING July 2020 - May 2021



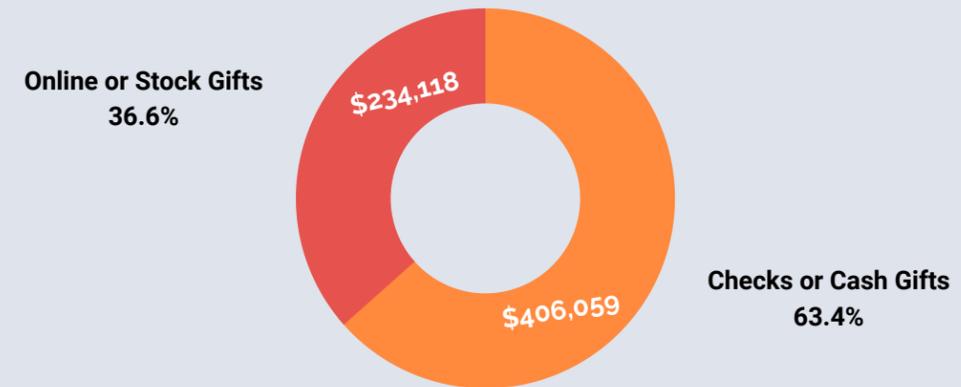
GENERAL FUND PLEDGES

50 households pledged \$389,455 to the general fund for the calendar year
January 1 - December 31, 2021



GENERAL FUND BUDGET

The budget for the general fund offering totals \$823,000 for fiscal year July 1, 2020-June 30, 2021. To date we have received \$640,177 (\$234,118 in online or stock gifts and \$406,059 in check or cash).



MEMBERSHIP STATS June 08, 2020 - June 15, 2021



BIRTHS

Josephine Lieben
Sutton Schmidt
Layla Rathjen
Lucille Person



BAPTISMS

Lucille Person

DEDICATION

Josephine Lieben



DECEASED

Milton Christensen
Lawrence Rundlett
Rudolph Horwath
Gladys Vermillion
Richard Landis
Patrick Bivens
Jim Harrel



MEMBERS ADDED

Bob Drake
Diane Drake
Naw Saung Kabya
Ja Hei Tha Bal

CONFIRMANDS

Micah Caverzagie
Alex Greuf

Mackenzie Wright
Sarah Yiel

Trent Krogman
Justice Frodermann

Aleena Pope
Theo Nordstrom

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear Midwest Conference Churches,

Grace and peace to you, and greetings from the Evangelical Covenant Church denominational offices. I pray for God's greatest blessings as you gather for your church's Annual Meeting and celebrations this year. Even amidst the difficult year we have had together, there is much to celebrate in God's goodness and faithfulness.

This winter we welcomed Grace Shim, Asia Regional Coordinator of Serve Globally, to speak at our staff chapel. Grace is a trained and licensed counselor and was able to share some insights with our Covenant staff as we walk through this challenging season. Her three takeaways were: Embrace the sorrow. Savor the good. Leverage your strengths.

As Covenanters across the United States, Canada, and serving in our global contexts, we have all faced feelings of grief and loss in this past year. It may have been a job loss, loss of financial stability, loss of the ability to travel and visit our loved ones, or loss of good health. We are reminded, daily, that we are in this together. We choose to walk alongside one another through times of grief and cast all our cares on our God who cares for each one of us.

While it's easy to see the challenges in this year, God invites us to turn and notice what the Holy Spirit is doing to further God's kingdom. This past year we have much to be thankful for when we look at what God has done through the Covenant. Local churches have participated in ministry-building and life-changing Covenant opportunities, such as the 30-day pivot, online gatherings for youth, pastoral cohorts to work toward racial righteousness, and webinars on peacemaking led by Covenant global partners from South Sudan and Israel/Palestine. I give thanks to God for our partnership together in the whole Gospel.

Heading into 2021, we look to build our resiliency and leverage our strengths - as individual churches and together as a denomination. Each of our 890 Covenant churches is uniquely positioned in its community to share the hope and love of Jesus in meaningful ways. I encourage you to lean into your strengths in the coming year and go boldly into the places where the Holy Spirit is leading you. We do this together as the Covenant denomination by continuing to Start and Strengthen Churches, Develop Leaders, Make and Deepen Disciples, Love Mercy Do Justice, and Serve Globally.

Most importantly, we know that our greatest strength comes when we take the time to sit with our Savior and remember who we are and whose we are.

Be encouraged that after a year of challenges, God's love still pursues us faithfully and the Holy Spirit continues to find new ways to inspire us to go deeper in Christ and further in mission, together.

"Love the Lord, all his faithful people! Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord." (Psalm 31:23a-24)

In Christ's love,

John S. Wenrich
President – Evangelical Covenant Church

LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT



Dear Friends,

The year 2020 has certainly been one we will not soon forget. Over the past 10 months, we have experienced a global pandemic, escalating racial tensions, a divisive election, wildfires, and more. Yet in addition to these challenges, we have also experienced great opportunity. We have learned new methods for connecting virtually and explored creative new ways to carry out ministry.

Leaders throughout the conference have engaged in book studies and Zoom seminars for meaningful engagement around discipleship, prayer, finances, justice issues, church health, exploring a call to ministry, and more. Our first Equip cohort gathered virtually this fall where 30 students began their seminary education. Churches have come together to care for vulnerable sisters and brothers that have experienced the economic impact of COVID-19.

In this time of great uncertainty and heightened emotions, we have witnessed excessive damage to relationships both inside and outside the Church. In the midst of cultural chaos and division, we have been given the great opportunity to show the world how to navigate differences with love and grace. John 17:22-23 emphasizes the importance of living in unity so that others will see Jesus and know that he is real. As we prepare to enter a new year, I pray that your church will navigate this difficult season of life and ministry in a way that allows others to see Christ's love at work as you move forward in unity.

I am excited to invite you to join us April 23-24, 2021, for our next Annual Ministry Celebration, which will be held virtually. We hope that this format will make participation more accessible for more people. This online gathering will still have all of the exciting elements that make it such a meaningful experience—worship, workshops, opportunities for dialogue, etc. While it may look a bit different, our time together will continue to be an incredible celebration of our ongoing ministry.

I know that your own congregation's Annual Meeting may look a bit different this year, as well. Regardless of the format, I pray that it will be a celebration of the many ways in which God has sustained your ministry in these challenging times. Thank you for the privilege of serving alongside you in ministry. We pray for you and give thanks to God for the impact you are making in the lives of those you serve.

To God be the glory!

Tammy Swanson-Draheim Superintendent



 **FIRST COVENANT**
CHURCH *of Omaha*

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