

SCRIPTURE | SACRAMENT | SONG | SERVICE

CENTRAL CONNECTIONS

A Season of Transformation

Winter 2023 - 2024





"Christmas waves a magic wand over this world,
and behold, everything is softer and more beautiful."

-Norman Vincent Peale



A Season of Hope

Steven D. Pierce
Senior Minister

Advent is a special time of the year when we revisit the great proclamation, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). We carefully watch and wait for God's presence to be born in us in new ways, and we cultivate our awareness of God's actions—past, present, and future—hearing the prophecies of the Messiah's coming as addressed to us, a people who wait for the second coming. These promises—when the wolf will lie down with the lamb, death will be swallowed up, and every tear will be wiped away—heighten our anticipation and reassure us of the larger story of God's redemptive plan. We are overwhelmed by God's limitless love for all, revealed in a stable, cross, and empty tomb.

Everything about this time of the year tells us we should be overflowing with joy and happiness. At company parties, or while out with friends, we hear, "Go ahead and indulge in all your desires... 'Tis the season!" The Christmas message, however, is counter to this cultural trend. Rather than slapping on fatuous smiles and overindulging, the season of Advent summons us to rediscover the importance of waiting and patience, of slowing down and meditating on the gospel that God comes to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

This stirring news has the power to move us from complacency to action. We go to those who suffer when "what's to come" is not yet here. While the rest of the world goes through the holiday motions, we make our way to those who feel alone or afraid, whose souls and homes are broken by violence, who are hungry, thirsty, and cold, and who long only to hear that they are loved. Like the author of Hebrews, we are "convinced of better things..." (Heb. 6:9), and so, we go as a light into those dark places, bringing hope to those in affliction.

Perhaps you are familiar with the artist George Frederic Watts. In a London art gallery hangs his painting, titled "Hope," as seen below. It presents a beautiful maiden seated upon a globe. She is blindfolded, and in her hand, she holds a harp, of which only one of the strings isn't broken. It's that string that she is touching, and her head is bent toward it, earnestly waiting to catch the note of it. Regarding this portrait, theologian T.A. Kantonen says, "All the strings on which we play the melody of life are indeed destined to break—health, peace, security, finally life itself. There remains only one string—Jesus Christ our hope who is the same yesterday, today, and forever."

May the hope of the season be yours in abundance.

Pastor Steven D. Pierce



Connecting to God this Advent

Advent Worship Schedule

Sundays at 10:00 a.m. | Pastor Steve Pierce preaching

December 3

First Sunday of Advent

Holy Communion

"As We Wait in Hope"

I Corinthians 1:1-9

(Advent Brunch to follow worship)

December 10

Second Sunday of Advent

Christmas Cantata

*Meditations, based on Isaiah 40:1-10,
will be given by our pastors*

December 17

Third Sunday of Advent

"As We Worship in Joy"

I Thessalonians 5:16-24

December 24

Christmas Eve

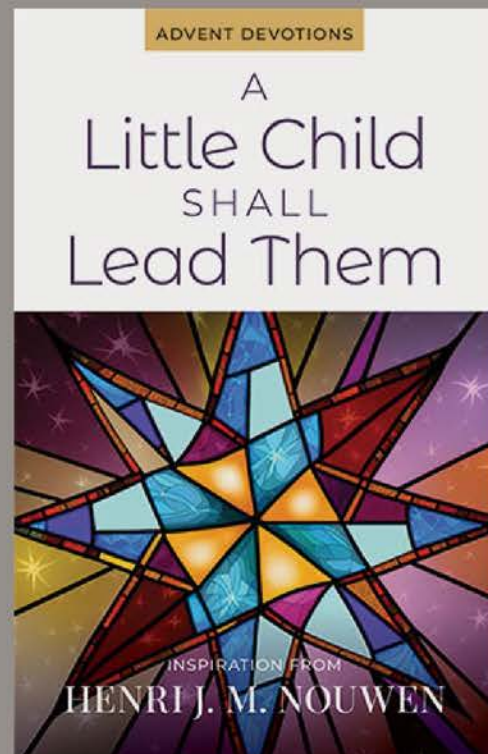
10:00 am - Worship

*(Festive hot chocolate hour with fire and carol
singing in the courtyard immediately after worship)*

7:00 pm - Traditional Candlelight Worship



Advent Devotionals Available



In this Advent devotional, popular author, blogger, and editor Elizabeth Scalia offers daily reflections on both Scripture and selected works of Henri J.M. Nouwen. With depth and clarity, this booklet prayerfully unpacks how God's divine love is best revealed through Jesus. Let this Advent season be one where the Child Jesus reveals the Father's love for you. Copies are available in the atrium.



Connecting with the Central Community this Advent and in the New Year



December

Dec 3

Advent Brunch

Dec 10

Christmas Cantata

Christmas Card Delivery

2nd Hour: **Prepare Him Room:**

Songs of the Season

(also meets on Dec 17)

Dec 19

Faye's Diner

Dec 31

Organ Concert

January

Jan 7

2nd Hour: **What it Means to Be Reformed**

(also meets Jan 14, 21, 28)

Jan 16

Faye's Diner

Jan 17

Red Cross Blood Drive

Jan 21

Prayers for Healing

Caregiver Support Group

February

Feb 4

Brunch

Feb 11

2nd Hour: **Sports and**

Faith (Dr. Chad Colson, Hope College)

Feb 18

2nd Hour: **The Future of Christian Higher Edu.**

(Matthew Scogin, President, Hope College)

Feb 20 | **Faye's Diner**

Gratitude During Advent

by Chris Bailey



Our history with Central Reformed Church started twenty-two years ago on Christmas Eve when Heidi and I were looking out our window at Central from our apartment across the street. We were trying to decide if we were going to attend a Christmas Service.

We grew up attending different denominations with different worship styles; a church with mutual appeal was proving difficult to find. We are grateful that Central was there when we were looking for a Christmas Eve service. We are grateful that someone invited me that same day to attend the men's fellowship group.

We are grateful for the warm welcome we received from the church and for the friends we have made over the years. We are grateful that Heidi's parents felt a strong connection to the people and the preaching--strong enough to become members themselves.

We are thankful for the Sunday school program, the youth group, and the volunteer opportunities that have made a lasting, positive impact on our kids. We are grateful for all the sermons that have carried us through the many ups and downs in our personal and professional lives.

Twenty-two years have gone by fast, and we are grateful Central has been a constant foundation for our family. Foundations like Central are important; they take decades to build and take financial support, leadership, member involvement and prayer to keep them going. As you reflect on your experience at Central, we pray that you will feel as supported, challenged, and encouraged as we have during our time in this community. In this season of gratitude, we are grateful for our church, and we are grateful for you.



Waiting, In Transformation

Matt Shults

Minister for Congregational Care

During this season of promise, we remember how Christ came to us over 2000 years ago in the stable in Bethlehem to fulfill the promises of the Old Testament; we also wait for the fulfillment of the promise of Christ's return. Advent is a season of waiting, of waiting in anxious anticipation of what is to come when Christ returns. Advent is also a season of hope because we have seen what Jesus did in his short time on this earth and we hope for the fulfillment of the kingdom of God on earth. We know the way he transformed lives through his teaching and miracles, through his loving presence and grace. We know that Jesus' death and resurrection defeated the power of death. We know Jesus and we love him, and we saw how he transformed the world, and so we wait with such great anticipation and why we will celebrate him at Christmas.

As we read at the end of the book of Revelation, we know that what is to come will be even better. God promises to "move into the neighborhood," to be with us. God will be with us even more fully than God is now, and there will be no more crying, no more pain, no more death, there will be no night, and all will be made right. The beauty that we will be surrounded by is beyond our comprehension. All will be transformed, and we long for that day.

In the meantime, as we live our lives in the "already but not yet," we are to go about living out the promise, the hope, and the anticipation of coming Christ that we remember each Advent. We do this through words of hope, acts of service, and sharing God's love, in order to transform this world to look more like God's kingdom. During this Advent season what transforming work will you do? Will you provide warmth to those who may not have a coat or boots? Perhaps provide a meal or two for the hungry? Are you going to invite that friend to the Christmas Eve service who might just need to know they are beloved children of God? Will you mentor that neighbor kid who needs a positive role model in their life? As we wait for Christmas and the return of Christ during this Advent season, take some time to ponder how can you join in the Spirit's transformational work. And may the promises of Triune God and the hope of the return of Christ embolden you to go about the work of God's kingdom.



Join us for our Longest Night Communion Service

Thursday, December 21

Dykstra Chapel | 5:30 p.m.

Our worship will be a time of community prayer, healing, and peace, encouraging reflection on what we need to let go of and what the Spirit invites us to hold onto in the New Year. This contemplative service will appeal to a wide audience. Please invite friends and family to join you.





Music Ministry

Taemin Han

Minister of Music Ministries

The end of each year (from Thanksgiving to Christmas) is a time of reflection, in gratitude and giving—a time to show our appreciation to God for the good, and even the challenging, times. During Advent we are called not just to reflect and give thanks, but also to wait patiently for God's promises to finally be fulfilled. We find hope of that in Christmas, when we celebrate Jesus' birth, God's willingness to share his life with us through Christ, and to save us from our sins. Following these high seasons in the year, we hope to return to our lives, bringing the values of appreciation, patience, and hope with us.

With the many changes we experienced with the COVID pandemic, I have observed one trend in people's lives: a desire to truly enjoy the present without worrying too much about our future. We find something like this in the Bible, in Matthew 6:34 ("Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own"). In our Advent waiting we are called to be more attentive to the moment and to give thanks. And even in our challenging moments, we are reminded that, "Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them" (Psalm 126:5-6). In our music ministries, and when we are planning, participating in, and evaluating all our ministries in and through the church, I pray we will hold onto these values: to be grateful, to be patient, and to hope as we listen to and follow our Savior to create a stronger community within Central that reflects love, welcome, and trust in God.

Taemin Han

Musical Events to Lift Your Spirits

December 10 | Christmas Cantata with guest soloists and instrumentalists.

Saturday morning rehearsal will be held on December 9 (10:00 a.m. to Noon)

December 24 | Family service at 10:00 a.m. with Children's Choir, Joyful Noise.

Traditional Candlelight Service at 7:00 p.m. (pre-service music begins at 6:40 p.m.) with Chancel Choir, Celebration Ringers, and instrumentalists.



New Year's Eve Organ Concert with Isabella Demers

Sunday, December 31 | 7:30 p.m.

With playing described as having "bracing virtuosity" (Chicago Classical Review) and being "fearless and extraordinary" (Amarillo-Globe News), Isabelle Demers has enraptured critics, presenters, and audience members around the globe. Mrs. Demers is in continual high demand by her colleagues as witnessed by performances for numerous regional and national conventions of the American Guild of Organists, the Institute of Organ Builders and International Society of Organbuilders, the Royal Canadian College of Organists, and the Organ Historical Society. She has released multiple CD recordings on the Acis and Pro Organo labels. Her latest CD, recorded at Chicago's Rockefeller Chapel, was released in January 2020, and includes works of Reger, Laurin, Dupré, Mendelssohn, Tchaikovsky, and Macmillan.



Relational Interconnection

Jesse Munroe
Youth Leader

Youth ministry is one of Central Reformed Church's most important, foundational, and effective missions. It intersects generations, communities, and the world. Our ministry has activities and events throughout the year, such as retreats, Sabbath education hour, mission trips, and more. These events are all with their own merits and they all pivot around the most important piece, Sunday night 'youth group'.

In YoungLife we called it club - it's a time each week throughout the school year when our students, leaders, and volunteers have the opportunity to play games, talk, learn, worship, snack, and otherwise interact in fellowship.

Let me ask you to think of the last time you got to play charades. Kickball? Capture the flag dodgeball? Empire? Mafia?? Group games are special opportunities that we can provide every week. Petty concerns about teachers and homework, our coworkers and classmates, deadlines, and job responsibilities are left at the door and for ninety minutes we catch a glimpse of what a community looks like when we center around our identities in Christ. It's joyful.

I was in a Zoom meeting with other leaders of our ministry recently. Someone mentioned that "it takes over 40 hours to build a relationship". Our Sunday Night Youth Group is where those hours are found. Make it a point to participate, encourage, and support our mission. If you're a student, show up. As an adult, continue to pray and walk alongside. Your time and talent are being called.

Consider serving on an upcoming mission trip or volunteering at the next fundraiser. Idioms exist for a reason; this is why 'it takes a village.'

December

Dec 15

Christmas Party | 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.

January

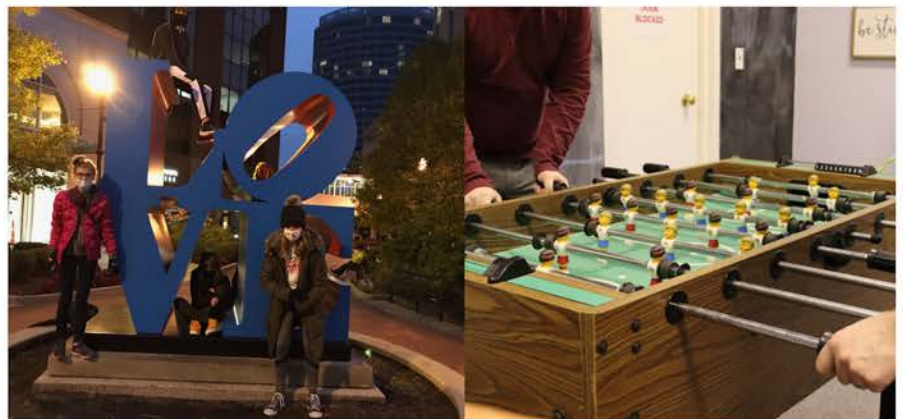
Jan 26

Griffin's Game | 6:30 p.m.

February

Feb 9-11

Portage Lake High School Retreat



Youth group takes place every Sunday from **6 to 7:30 p.m.**
If you're curious about connecting more with our youth, reach out to Ava Koebel, office coordinator.



In 2024, the youth group will go on a mission trip to Big Falls Belize. Want to join? Consider being a chaperone on the trip or supporting the youth through donating.

Children & Youth Ministry

Why I am grateful for my church

"Something that I really enjoy about Central is the community here. Everyone here is like one big family and even though we all come from different backgrounds, we all have Jesus Christ in common. And for me, I think that's a beautiful thing. I also really enjoy Central's Youth Group every Sunday night. We laugh together, play games together, and grow closer to God. It's always one of the highlights of my week, being able to see friends and make memories together while learning about our faith at the same time."

- Brooke TerMaat



Upcoming Children's Ministry Events

December

Dec 10 | **Prayer Partner Cookie Delivery**

January

Jan 16 | **Faye's Diner**

February

Feb 24 | **Sledding** at Manhattan Park

March

March 9 | **Bowling** at Northfield Lanes



Central is committed to our children

Our children are a vital part of our community. As Pastor Steve has often said they are our "walking parables" and the future of our church. They teach us what true faith looks like and how to be better followers of Jesus. It is our hope that every child feel welcomed and loved.



Christian Action Team

Update

IN THE IMAGE COAT DRIVE

Thanks to the generosity of the congregation, your Christian Action Team delivered **95 coats** to In The Image for distribution in their Free Store.



Addie's Pantry By the Numbers

In a single month (October 2023)

The current adult poverty rate is 12.6%

89
Households served



105
Children served



261
Individuals served.

502% increase

in how many the pantry has served (compared to October 2022)



A Story of Transformation from Addie's Pantry

Sue, a long-term neighbor, recently stopped by Central Reformed Church with a belated thank you. As a realtor, during the 2008 recession, her income plummeted. With fear, embarrassment and some shame, she darkened our door to request food from Addie's Pantry.

She recounts how warm and helpful those working at Addie's were. While the food was helpful, the acceptance and understanding that we all have ups and downs in life was just as important.

She says it warms her heart every Tuesday as she sees the signs on Fulton and College that Addie's Pantry is still serving those in our neighborhood and is grateful for the blessing it was to her.



Property Committee Update

The Property Committee thanks you for your support in maintaining our beautiful but aging facility. Here is a listing of some of the items recently acted upon as well as areas Property is addressing:

- New glass doors and sidelights were recently added to replace the deteriorated wood panel doors in the atrium. Wood panel doors were more than twice the cost so glass doors were chosen.
- The cracks that developed in our parking lot pavement have been repaired and filled to prevent further moisture and frost damage. Property opted not to seal the pavement since this process does not affect the longevity of the asphalt pavement and would have added significant cost.
- Property investigated and has hired a local professional cleaning service with experience in church cleaning. This company began working for us on October 2nd and will be cleaning 3 days each week.
- Property is investigating improvements and the associated costs to the two elevators serving our member's needs. This includes adding emergency phones and, in the east elevator, an elevator modernization with filtering of the 40 year old hydraulic oil.
- Property is working with our Security Committee to improve exterior lighting and add security cameras which would be monitored.

Columbarium Updates

- A programmable lock has been added at the west courtyard gate which will allow visitation to the columbarium through this entrance on weekends when church staff is not always present.
- The Columbarium Committee has also been authorized by consistory to raise the price on cremains niche space in the columbarium to \$1,750 for one and \$2,000 for two, effective January 1, 2024. Please contact Carol Bergman at 616-881-2935 or clstaff67@gmail.com if you have further questions.

The Property Committee would also like to recognize the following individuals/groups who have contributed so much time, effort and resources to the improvement of our facility and grounds:

- Carol Schaab and our Earth Angels for their work in beautifying our grounds.
- Mark Bulthuis, Don Keegstra, Tom and Elise Roe, and Lynn Andersen for the prep work and painting of the exterior courtyard windows.
- Tom Roe for building a new glass sash to be installed in the hallway window at the church administrator's office.
- Two anonymous member donors who provided the automatic door openers now serving the two atrium bathrooms.

Property has other concerns which are being addressed and we will continue to report to you as we progress through these. Please feel free to contact Property members with any of your questions or concerns as they arise.

To the glory of our Lord!

Your Property Committee: Mark Bulthuis, Rick VanDellen, Stu and Kathy Stewart, Stan Sterk, Rick Overway, Jim Brink





Connecting all people to God and to one another
through scripture, sacrament, song, and service.

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