

DECEMBER 2023

COVENANT NEWS

A publication of Covenant Presbyterian Church • Charlotte, North Carolina



Celebrate the Holidays with Covenant!



From Bob Henderson



Dear friends:

As I sit down at my keyboard, I do so fresh off the glow of a deeply inspiring Covenant Impacts Charlotte/ Stewardship Commitment weekend. I've rarely seen the campus so alive, and the congregation so deeply engaged. Thank you to all who served, sang, pledged, and participated. It is a strong testimony to the breadth and depth of this faith family.



I've long wondered whether such vitality incentivizes giving or inadvertently discourages it, signaling somehow that we don't need more people or more giving. I've wondered this before and again this year largely because (as has been our practice though I wish it were not!) we still have quite a ways to go — precisely \$1,285,454 — toward meeting our \$3,520,400 dollar pledge goal for 2024. Let me reiterate that every person and every pledge matters. Our vitality is highly dependent upon your involvement.

Speaking of vitality, our mission will move forward as we anticipate your support. We will have a rich worship life during Advent. We invite you to embrace this year's Advent devotional, an especially rich resource that will help ground us in faith during this busy time. We'll also have our annual Lessons and Carols Service, a Healing and Wholeness service, various Christmas Eve services, and (rumor has it) a visit by Santa. We invite you to embrace it all.

In the meantime, please know how grateful I am for each and all of you and for the privilege of serving this fine body of faith.

Warmly,

Bob

Note from Our Stewardship Leaders

The 2023 holiday season is upon us, and if we look just past December, we see tiny sprouts growing from the strong roots of the 2024 Stewardship Campaign!



Rooted in Love

Thank you to all who participated in "Covenant Impacts Charlotte" (CIC) as we had another amazing day, rooted in love, and letting our actions show our collective love and care across the city. Collectively, we completed 49 projects with 376 volunteers, truly living our faith through action.

Turning to Stewardship, pledges are extremely important to the church and its ability to make commitments to our mission partners and families. As of press time, we have received pledges adding up to 63% of our 2024 goal.

A big "thank you" to everyone who has pledged and those of you still reading this update!

We encourage members and steady visitors who are in a position to give to pledge before the end of the year, knowing your financial contribution to Covenant directly impacts what we will achieve in 2024. Thank you!

Jeff & Katie Stewart
2024 Stewardship Campaign Chairs





Advent & Christmas Highlights

Christmas is a celebration that grounds our faith. Morning worship services throughout Advent will feature intergenerational choirs, brass, handbells and strings joining forces with Covenant Choir and the Congregational Choir to sing familiar carols.

December 10 Traditional Services

Sing some favorite carols with brass accompaniment as we welcome Brass Charlotte in both the 8:45 a.m. Chapel and 11:00 a.m. Sanctuary services

December 10 at 10:30-11:00 a.m. Handbells on the Circle

Between services enjoy the sounds of Christmas provided by Covenant Ringers On-the-Green.

December 10 at 5:00 p.m. Lessons and Carols

We'll hear and sing carols old and new from around the world. Instruments and singers of all ages lead the congregation in this celebration of Jesus' birth.

December 13 at 7:00 p.m. Wholeness and Healing Service

Candlelight service in the Chapel featuring music, prayer, scripture, and meditation is open to all.

December 17 at 11:00 a.m. Bells of Christmas

In the sanctuary service, Covenant Ringers share a familiar Advent tune and accompany Covenant Choir and the congregational choir in joyful singing.

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Sunday, December 24 Christmas Eve Services

9:30 a.m. Children's Christmas Eve Service in the Sanctuary
Kindergarten Class Performs the Nativity Story. Chorister Choir and Jubilate will sing.

9:35 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. Live Nativity Animals & Petting Zoo

11:00 a.m. Traditional Worship in the Sanctuary

3:00 p.m. Candlelight and Communion in the Sanctuary
with Contemporary Music and Angel Ornaments

5:00 p.m. Candlelight and Communion in the Sanctuary
with Traditional Music and Angel Ornaments

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Sunday December 31 New Year's Eve

11:00 a.m. Appalachian Music in the Sanctuary



Where Does the “Alternative Market” Come From?

BY ANNE GILDEA



In June of this year, I had the privilege of traveling to the Yucatan region of Mexico with a small group of Covenant members that included my daughter, Katie Estridge. It was our first mission trip together, and I was thrilled to have this opportunity. I was also grateful to be the “Granny” on this trip, surrounded by fabulous young people

with a heart for mission. Upon our arrival in the town of Yaxche, we moved into the bedrooms of our host families and hung our hammocks. I couldn’t help but wonder if I could sleep in that thing, but I hoped so. It was a stark contrast to the city of Charlotte we had left behind, and I felt like we had entered a very different world.

As I explored the area where we would work, gather for devotions, prepare meals, and engage in crafts and athletic activities with the women and children of the town, it was eerily quiet. I felt like I was looking at a paint-by-number canvas with outlines but no color. I wondered if we could bring vibrant colors and emotion to this seemingly blank canvas and if we would be able to successfully connect with the local families and with each other. I should not have worried. Within hours, the canvas of our mission trip sprang to life. We met our host families who welcomed us with pure joy and gratitude despite having given up their homes to accommodate us. The next few days were magical. We worked. We laughed. We sweated. We connected. We felt an incredible bond and affection for one another and our hosts.

Later in the week, we had the opportunity to purchase locally made crafts and gifts that will be sold at this year’s Alternative Gift Market. Some of these items include hand painted ceramic crosses, vibrant rattan handbags, and dainty handmade jewelry. Should you be able to snag one of these items at AGM, all the proceeds of your purchase go toward supporting our nonprofit partner in the Yucatan, Friends of Accion. I hope that when you purchase these items, you will experience some of the beauty, joy, and loving kindness we encountered during our time in the Yucatan. So don’t miss this year’s Alternative Gift Market and the opportunity to purchase Christmas gifts for your loved ones. There will be olive oil from Palestine, vanilla from Mexico, nativities from Kenya, and much, much more.



Alternative Gift Market Sunday, December 10

The market will open in the Welcome Center at 9:00 a.m. and will stay open until 1:00 p.m. It will close for the afternoon before opening again at 4:00 p.m., one hour before the Lessons and Carols service.

Holiday Events and Upcoming Gatherings

DECEMBER 2023

Advent Calendar

We have an exciting calendar of events and services scheduled for the holidays.

covenantpresby.org/advent



Advent Daily Devotionals

Journey through Advent with Covenant by taking on a spiritual practice of daily devotional readings. Each day, you will be offered both scripture and reflection to consider, in addition to a prayer and an invitation to “go deeper” through a spiritual practice. **Visit our Advent Calendar online to sign up at any time:** covenantpresby.org/advent

Advent devotional books are available around campus while supplies last.

Outdoor Ministry: Solstice Hike

5:00 p.m. Thursday, December 21

Pavilion Shelter, James Boyce Park, 300 Boyce Road, Charlotte.

Sign up: covenantpresby.org/outdoor-ministry

S.O.S. (Surviving Our Spouses)

Memory Tree Service and Ribbon-Tying

1:00 p.m. Saturday, December 23

between the Chapel and Fellowship Hall

The Memory Tree is an annual gift to the congregation from Covenant’s “Surviving Our Spouses” group. All those who have lost a life partner are invited to a brief ceremony with Katherine Kerr and others in SOS to tie on the first ribbons. (Gold, white, and silver ribbons will be provided.) On Christmas Eve, the congregation is invited to tie a ribbon on the tree in remembrance of loved ones who are with us in spirit but no longer in person.



Room in the Inn (RITI) begins December 5

Everyone in the congregation is invited to help host Room in the Inn at Covenant. We need van drivers, overnight hosts and other volunteers to serve and visit with our guests.

Contact Lynn Morrow at lynnmorrow46@gmail.com

Prime Timers Holiday Gathering and Luncheon

11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. December 12

Lovely holiday music and program for those 80 years old and older in the Fellowship Hall. RSVP to Michelle Williamson at michelle.williamson@covenantpresby.org



Open Table Returns January 10

December 6 through January 3, Open Table is on hiatus. Dinner and regular programming, along with new book and video studies, will resume January 10, 2024.

Ready, Set, Worship: First Graders Prep for Communion



Volunteers Tell Why They Support this Ministry — and You Should, Too!



Carla Haughton

“We are the church.” Those words come to mind when reflecting on this year’s Ready Set Worship experience. I see the beautiful faces of Covenant’s 26 first graders sitting around me in the Chapel. It is impossible to contain the joy I experienced with our youngest members, their families, our ministers, and my co-leaders as we learned about

our church and the sacrament of communion. During the first week we crafted chalices from clay while crafting new friendships and relationships. I cherished the opportunity to share the chalices made years ago by my own children — chalices that held memories, meaning and the promise of our faith.



Robin Goodson

Why did I say “YES!” to this opportunity, with my own kids nearly a decade out of this program? First, Claire Brown asked me! I’ve shared both Bible study and volunteer time with her and enjoy serving with her. Second — and most important — our Covenant kids and their parents are awesome! I cherish being present when children are baptized in our services, but earlier this year I

realized that fulfilling that baptismal promise wasn’t going to happen in the sanctuary but by spending time in the Education Wing with those kids, and investing time in getting to know them and their families by name. These families make my heart smile and my belly laugh, and for an hour on Sunday mornings in September, they made me younger than my years. I have treasured this time to share our faith journeys and to encourage one another.



Mary Chapman

Exploring the “What, When, Why, Who, How & Where of Worship” with Pastor Nikki, Pastor Grace, and Pastor Mary Kate, then hearing the questions and responses from Covenant’s first graders was inspiring to parents and helpers. Seeing these excited first graders hold their unique chalices (on World Communion Day) for their first communion filled our hearts with joy. Parents circling their children in love and support on Sunday mornings for Ready Set Worship made God’s love feel real. On this, our first Covenant family communion together, we said “Thanks to God for each of you.”



Lou Watson

Envision: *Note of Thanks*



Thirty facilitators, twenty six listening sessions, dozens of emails and over 160 pages of input notes. These numbers just begin to illustrate the abundance and generosity of spirit that has gone into our envisioning process thus far. Our team is deeply grateful for everyone who has shared their voice as we discern how we can continue to live into our shared vision. We heard stories of expansive welcoming that initially

brought people to Covenant, stories of how faith has been shaped through being in community learning and serving together and stories of experiencing the love of God through each other. We also heard hopes and ideas for ways we can be even more consistent and expansive in living out our aspirations and God's call for us. This input is an incredible gift that will help shape a vibrant and faithful future for Covenant.

In addition to generating valuable input, we observed the Holy Spirit move in many ways among us as we gathered to share our experiences and perspectives. We watched people learn more about each other, deepen relationships and be inspired by each others' stories and ideas.

Our team is now reading and reflecting on the input notes and working toward our charge of preparing a report to share with Session at their January retreat. That report will include recommendations for how to share our findings and next step plans throughout our congregation and staff. Stay tuned!

We would like to extend a special thank you to the 22 individuals who joined our team to serve as listening session facilitators over the past three months. Their time, care, presence and deep listening have had immeasurable positive impact on this work and our community of faith.

Suggestions can be sent to envision@covenantpresby.org until December 15.

Safety on Campus

Preparation Can Save Lives

No one wants to plan for a disaster or crisis, but when lives are at stake preparation is our best hope for the positive outcome of a worst-case scenario. In October, Covenant's staff, teachers, and most frequent volunteers gathered in Fellowship Hall to receive Active Survival Training from Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department's Officer Jonathan Frisk.

During this two-hour class, staff listened to emergency response phone calls and the details of several active-shooting locations such as Sandy Hook, Virginia Tech, and even our own UNCC. Officer Frisk described how these tragic events have influenced the evolution of law enforcement response and how the actions of survivors can help us make life-saving decisions.

Other discussions included what to do (and not do) if encountering an active shooter, basic first aid for injuries, and how to react when law enforcement arrives.

In addition to this class, our Director of Operations, William Lucas, is implementing a phone app to provide an immediate emergency alert to all staff phones with a single press of a button. We pray we'll never need to use these tools but appreciate the care and foresight of crisis preparation.



Get to Know Our Pet Ministry

BY ALEX MCKINNON



The Pet Ministry came together as a vision based on faith and passion from two pet-loving members to address the needs of both our two-legged and four-legged Covenant members. Nancy Williams was already visiting members with her Border Terrier Austin, and Alex McKinnon works in the pet care services industry (with his company

Kinn, Inc.), along with their Terrier Mixes Skye and Erin. Laura Capranica, Covenant's Faith Community Nurse, joined up with Nancy, Alex, and their dogs to found the Pet Ministry.

At that time, no one was providing any organized ministry to help strengthen the bonds between people and pets. Seventy percent of American households have a pet, and eighty percent consider pets as members of the family. Here are Pet Ministry's beliefs in their mission and goals:

WHY: Pets are all about unconditional love. This is why we founded the Pet Ministry.

WHO: We believe that pets are family, who are loving gifts from God for us and our communities.

HOW: Love by design describes how we do what we do.

WHAT: We create experiences that strengthen the relationships and love between pets, people, and God.

Our Blessing of the Animals event in 2022, led by Grace Lindvall, drew many members and dozens of pets. The blessings, along with the fellowship, made it a very special event. Our 2023 Blessing of the Animals was led by Serenity Taylor and Mary Kate Sykes, who blessed over 50 pets, and the camaraderie was again very special.

The Pet Ministry has also been successful in expanding its community impact by hosting pet therapy sessions during exam week at Queens University this and last year. We introduced a new event this fall where a renowned Veterinarian spoke on how to prepare your pet and your family better for their senior years.

The Pet Ministry meets and sponsors events quarterly. To join contact Laura.Capranica@covenantpresby.org



Young Adults Retreat for Rest and Fellowship

BY KATIE SHIVERS



The Young Adult Retreat at Covenant has become very important to me. Last year, I attended without knowing anyone, and left feeling like I had made connections at my new church for the first time. I finally had names to call out on Sundays and receive a warm smile in return.

Serving on the Young Adult Council this year gave me the opportunity to help build a retreat weekend that would serve those in my position last year as well as seasoned Covenant members. After months of planning, I believe we accomplished just that.

Our theme for the weekend was being grounded in rest, community, and gratitude. Some of us needed rest from the busy lives we lead, some were searching for community in a life stage that often hinders forming new friendships, and some of us needed something, anything, to be grateful for. Maybe a few needed all three.

Rest looked different for each of us. When given free time, I chose to stay behind for a few hours to journal and read while others played disc golf, walked together, and more. Some people are like me, finding rest in silence and slow work. For others, human connection and time in nature was an abundant source of rest, and I'm so glad the retreat created space for both of these options to exist.

The weekend was full to bursting of community, being led through powerful programming, sharing meals, resting, cooking, and worshipping together. There was singing and dancing and laughter. We played games and swapped stories. Bonds were formed and plans were made to continue to come together in the future.

By the time Sunday came, there was no shortage of gratitude to reflect upon. I was so blessed and glad to have had time to speak to every single person on the trip, to get to know their face, name, and voice. Now I am the one to return a warm smile to those who call out my name on Sundays, and that will never get old.

If you're a young adult and would like to join this group, email Mary Kate Sykes at marykate.sykes@covenantpresby.org



Missions & Outreach

Covenant Impact(ed) Charlotte

Our congregation rallied the weekend of November 9-12 to live into our mission and spread our love (and two truckloads of mulch) in the Charlotte community.

Members of all ages took part in this beloved Covenant tradition – children packed toiletry bags for Room in the Inn, Middle School Youth made holiday cards and decorated cookies at Moore Place, High School Youth installed shade sails over the playground at Highland Renaissance Academy, and residents at The Sharon (Sharon Towers) wrapped cutlery for Thanksgiving dinners at two of Roof Above's permanent housing sites. We painted a mural at McCreesh Place, and we painted the fingernails of women who live at The Center for Community Transitions. We sorted goods at Crisis Assistance and the Habitat ReStore, and we celebrated with our neighbors at The Mezzanine and The Havens.

TOTAL CIC PROJECTS:

5 supply drives
49 projects
50 gallons of chili
376 volunteers
852 volunteer hours

Most importantly, we came together as a community of faith and served our mission partners who are bravely working towards a whole and just world.



Joys and Concerns of Our Members and Friends

OUR SYMPATHY AND LOVE TO

Lecia Shockley and family on the death of her father Jerry Dennis Stemler, October 28
Ingles Adams and family on the death of her father John Apperson, October 30
Adam Fiorenza and family on the death of his father August Fiorenza, November 7
Liza Christy and family on the death of her mother Nancy Quinn, November 16
Erin Nixon and family on the death of her father Mark Schroeder, November 25

IN LOVING MEMORY

John Samuel Apperson IV, August 18, 1944 - October 30, 2023

MARRIAGES

Rachel Palmero and **Colby Moore**, November 4

BIRTHS

Chelsea Keegan, child of Lexi and Mike Keegan, August 18
Henry Thompson, child of Hillary and Chris Thompson, September 20
Grant Robert Arnold, child of Mary Catherine and Chris Arnold, September 21
Fletcher Noel Wombwell, child of Allie and Coleman Wombwell, October 26
Paige Catherine Kelly, child of Heather and Greg Kelly, November 21

BAPTISMS

Rowan Kent McCready, child of Laura and Dan McCready, October 29
Rilla Rose Kvanvig, child of Alex Zsoldos and Jordan Kvanvig, October 29
Phoebe Elizabeth Brown, child of Katie and Barrett Brown, November 12
Spencer Elizabeth Jakubicki, child of Deborah and Paul Jakubicki, November 12
Richmond Luke Williams, child of Sarah and Dean Williams, November 12
Eleanor James Neubauer, child of Christen and Nick Neubauer, November 12
Jacob Olufemi Williams and **Clark Buckley Williams**, children of Kate and Kunle Williams, November 19
Olivia Joy Andrews, child of Nicole and Doug Andrews, November 19
Ava Lynn Shreve, **Leo Joseph Shreve**, and **Raeya Elizabeth Shreve**,
children of Mallory Navin and Joe Shreve, November 19
Connor Hansen Thimons and **Claire Elizabeth Thimons**,
children of Stephanie and Colin Thimons, November 19
Beckett Leo Barner, **Brooklyn Elizabeth Barner**, and **Bryce William Barner**,
children of Kara and Russ Barner, November 19
Ellison Anne Seippel, child of McKenzie and Cris Seippel, November 26

Welcome Our New Members



Hailey Arico



Russ & Kara Barner
Beckett, Brooklyn, Bryce



Kary Beaman



Carla DuPuy



David & Allison Evans
Broughton, Ansley, Crawford



Calvin Hamilton



Jason & Elizabeth
Rankin



Becky Rizzo



Lauren Russell



Laura & PJ Stark
Sutton



Mary & Jon Sutton



Kate Williams
Clark & Jake



1000 East Morehead Street, Charlotte, NC 28204

SUNDAY WORSHIP

8:45 a.m. Traditional Service
in the Chapel

9:30 a.m. Contemporary Service
in the Sanctuary

11:00 a.m. Family Service
in Fellowship Hall

11:00 a.m. Traditional Service
in the Sanctuary

www.covenantpresby.org
[@covenantpresbyclt](https://facebook.com/CovenantPresby)

Convocation Sunday January 7 at 9:30 a.m. Fellowship Hall

Finding Common Ground

*Descendants of the enslaved and their
enslavers build a friendship.*

Michael Mines and Ann Morris will tell their story
of how Michael's and Ann's ancestral connection
has shaped their lives.

Join us in a conversation about the broader
implications for racial justice on a national and
global scale.

