

First Reformed Church

Thank you for your generous offering for the White Gift project. We were able to bless Destiny Youth Ranch with \$454.00.

Next week our special offering will be for Autumn's Center! Autumn's Center and Camp Autumn are named in honor and memory of three-year-old Autumn Elgersma, of Orange City, Iowa, who died on October 31, 2013, two days after being hospitalized for injuries she received from her daycare provider. Since her passing, Autumn's light has continued to shine through her story and the impact it has made on northwest Iowa. Autumn's mother, Jennifer, along with her husband Phil, and children Faith and Jared, are dedicated to creating awareness on child abuse and serving as an ambassador to help protect our community's children.

At Camp Autumn, we provide a unique blend of therapy, skill development and fun for those who need it most. Located on a beautiful property near Sutherland, Iowa, we serve children in week-long day camps through the summer and after-school, weekend, and during schools breaks throughout the year. Each camper has a customized treatment plan to address the therapeutic and skill development needs of each child. By weaving together, the therapeutic aspects of nature, trauma-informed care, and evidence-based practices, our campers experience a safe space that promotes health, healing, hope, and fun! Camp Autumn is an extension of the services we provide at Autumn's Center and serves to care for and support children in a unique, therapeutic way.

Reflections for January 3, 2021

2021 is here! 2020 has been a memorable year! Some would like to forget the memory; others thrived and grew during the hard thing of COVID-19 and all the ramifications. It has changed the way we look at so many things. I know for my own work, I never dreamed I would be preaching to an empty church. I had fears and nightmares at times through the years that nobody would show, simply because I was not enough, but not because the Governor recommended no in person worship. Also, pastoral calls by telephone have become the norm and wearing a mask at times is an issue. 2020 was also the year I decided to stay at First Reformed instead of taking a new assignment as Transitional Minister in another congregation. Some have suggested, when I was in the waiting time of deciding, why go when you can take it easy here and somewhat slide toward retirement. I am not sure I know what retirement is nor do I really comprehend "take it easy." Both of those sound quite frankly unpleasing. I know my guiding principle is rest deeper not work harder, but that does not mean slide out. Resting deeper for me means living wholeheartedly for Jesus, not resting on my own abilities or strength.

So here we are...2021. One of the reasons I was led to stay is the ongoing work of embedding grace and health in the life of a congregation. I long for and envision a place where grace is the atmosphere we breathe and is so embedded in the life of the congregation that it literally is our DNA. Grace...not shame, or a critical spirit, or judgmentalism, or condemning attitude, or wardens of a prison of the soul, joyless no laughter environment. Grace breathes life...freedom...joy...laughter...encouragement...hope. Grace is embedded by becoming emotionally mature which ironically comes through grace filled living. This sounds like a circular argument but it so true: when grace is experienced in our souls, we make healthy strides towards emotional maturity, which then begins to embed itself not only in individual lives but then spreads into a group such as a church.

The first series of sermons for 2021 is titled, "Defining Moments of Grace." By looking at the life and teaching of Jesus we are going to explore together what it means to be self-defined in a healthy way that leads to emotionally healthy living. Using Jesus as our guide, teacher, and source of power, we are going to think about defining moments in our lives that offer the opportunity for grace filled growth. Notice I said opportunity. We have a choice. We can choose emotional immaturity. Quite frankly growth is hard work, but so satisfying.

We are going to begin by looking at the story of Jesus as a 12-year-old boy in the temple. He defines himself separate from his parents by saying "I." When we believe that there is nothing that we can do to make God love us more or less and that God loves us in this moment as much as it is possible for an infinite God to love we become emotionally capable of saying "I." This is who I am. This is who I am not. This is what I believe God is calling and gifting me to do. This is what I will do. This is what I will not do. Then allowing others the freedom to do the same thing. This is going to be fun! Some passages to read for this week: [Luke 2:41-52](#); [John 5:19-30](#).

Grace upon Grace,
Verlyn

NURSING HOME & ASSISTED LIVING RESIDENTS:

Whispering Heights: **Verna Boer, Adriana Dykstra, Faye Gort, Marilyn Van Holland**. The Legacy Living, Gillette, WY: **Mary Boer**; Pleasant Acres, Hull: **Cornie & Ann Jansen**; Bethany Home, Brandon, SD: **Bill & Alma Landegent**.

CHURCH SUPPORTED MISSIONARIES:

Brian and Elizabeth Bruxvoort in AK; **Amy and Seung Kim** in Bangladesh; **Tom and Aichatou Johnson** in Pella, IA; **Brian and Donna Renes** in Sioux Center; **John & Lynn Hubers** in Ethiopia.

If you or a family member have a prayer concern and would like to have either the elders or the whole church to pray with you or for you, please contact your calling elder or a member of the consistory.

Announcements

Coffee Break Bible Study for women of the community will resume after the new year, studying 1 & 2 Peter. We will have *re-registration* and study guide pickup on January 5 from 9:45 – 11:00 am at Frist CRC. We will begin with the first lesson on January 12. Contact Noemi 712- 441-2515 if you have questions. A schedule of the meetings is available on the Opportunities Table.

Shepherd's Table: We will have a Food Share on January 11 at Justice For All's south parking lot from 5:00-6:00pm. If you or someone you know would be blessed by some additional food, please come and pick some up. We look forward to seeing you!

A new *Love & Learn* class session is starting on Tuesday, January 19th at 6:45 to 8:15 PM at Trinity CRC in Rock Valley. Classes available this winter are:

- **Boundaries (NEW!)** – learn how to set healthy boundaries in all your relationships including yourself.
- **Faith & Finances** – a common sense approach to managing day to day finances. Gain knowledge and learn skills of good financial practices and systems.
- **GriefShare** – led by caring people who've experienced their own journey of grief, this support group will offer biblical concepts for healing.
- **"Have a New Kid by Friday"** – practical tips and tools in parenting to create a loving, God-centered environment for life's greatest blessing: your children
- **Affirming Potential** – evaluate the physical, emotional, relational and spiritual areas of your life.
- **Redemptive Compassion** – interactive Bible study that explores HOW to love serve effectively as God's people.

To learn more about these classes or register call Love INC at 712-476-5990 or email loveinc3@premieronline.net

Self-Defined Luke 2:41-52

- Defining Moments of Grace
- Self-definition

Jesus' Story

- Jesus is leaving his childhood (Luke 2:41-45)
- Jesus astounding the teachers (Luke 2:46-48)
- Jesus takes an "I" position with his parents (Luke 2:49-50)
- Jesus grew in wisdom and stature (Luke 2:51-52)

Good News Truths

#1: Through grace we can leave our childhood

#2: By grace we can take "I" positions

#3: Through grace we can grow in wisdom