

FIRST COVENANT LAMPLIGHTER

*First Covenant Church
Virginia, Minnesota
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A Valentine's Day Angel



Valentine's Day was around the corner. For my daughter that meant a party for the kindergarten class she taught. "They're really looking forward to it," she told me over the phone one evening. "Especially the valentines exchange. The kids are filling their cards out all by themselves."

Becky's words might have sounded casual, but she knew they were important for me to hear. She knew the story all too well. The story of another Valentine exchange long ago.

My mind drifted back. I was a student not much older than Becky's kindergarteners. In the 1940s at a public school in Chicago, Illinois, my teacher announced a party. "On Valentine's Day we give cards to those we care about." She placed a big wooden box on the corner of her desk.

My friends and I sat up in our chairs for a better look. The box was decorated with paper hearts and lace, and there was a narrow slit in the top, kind of like a mailbox. "You can put valentines for your friends in the box," the teacher said. "As many as you want. I knew we'd have lots so I got a big box to hold them. At the party we'll open up the box and deliver the cards. Doesn't that sound fun?"

All week the box took up space on the teacher's desk, a reminder of its importance. Students dropped envelopes inside here and there. The girls liked to make a big deal of it when they dropped in a fat pile, one card at a time to make sure the event was noticed by the whole class. I dropped a couple in for my friends. Why not? It was Valentine's Day.

The party, when the day finally arrived, did not disappoint. There was punch and heart-shaped cookies. I was feeling pretty good about this Valentine's Day stuff as I sat at my desk and enjoyed the snacks. At her desk, our teacher opened the box and started passing out the little envelopes inside. I waited at my desk, wondering who had sent one to me.

The teacher moved toward me, her hands full of envelopes. I sat up straight, ready to accept her delivery, but she handed a card to the boy behind me. I took a gulp of my punch, hoping no one had noticed. As I chatted with friends, I kept one eye on the teacher, checking on her progress. The box was now empty, and there were only a couple of cards left in her hand. Just let me get at least one, I thought. The teacher went back to her desk. She put the box away for next year.

I hadn't gotten a single valentine. Nobody wanted to give me a card? I thought. Not one person? "Hey, Ken, didn't get any!" one of my friends called out. I waved him away. "A good thing too. Nobody better be giving me some lacy heart card! Valentines are strictly for girls."

My friends laughed as I crunched into my cookie. What did I need with a card, after all? I had friends. I didn't need a valentine to tell me so. It didn't matter. I just put on my tough face and wore it the rest of the

day. What else could I do? I wasn't about to cry at school. But years later memories of that party did bring tears to my eyes.

"You know, Becky," I said. "I've had over sixty Valentine's Days since then, and that's still probably the one I remember most." No matter how many years went by, that tiny wound in my heart always stung a little. I guess part of me would always be waiting for that valentine. Just let me get at least one.

"I always tell my class that story, Dad," Becky said. "They're surprised that someone your age can still feel hurt about something that happened when he was a kid."

"I wouldn't have believed it either, back then," I said. "I knew nobody was trying to hurt my feelings, especially my friends. I just got overlooked. Maybe they thought a boy like me didn't want a valentine. After all, even I didn't seem to know just how much I wanted one!"

"That's what I explained to them, Dad. It's an important lesson for them to learn, how we can hurt people by things we don't do as much as with the things we do."

I hung up the phone more proud of Becky than ever. Maybe that awful Valentine's Day party was worth it if she could use it to teach so many children about kindness and keep other kids from feeling the way I did that day so many years ago.

On the fourteenth Becky called me when she got home from school. "The party was a great success," she reported. "I got some good cards this year. And I even put a surprise in the mail for you."

"For me?" I said. "Becky, you didn't have to send me a valentine."

"I didn't," she said. "When I told your story to the class, I wanted them to think about their classmates' feelings. But for one student that was just the beginning. I won't say any more right now, Dad. I don't want to ruin the surprise. Just keep an eye on your mailbox."

A couple days later a tiny envelope arrived addressed to me. Inside was a funny little card, the kind kids

give to each other these days. Not the homemade kind we used to pass out. This one was clearly store-bought. But the careful printing by a child's own hand made the card unique. This card was meant for one person and one person only, to make him feel special. "To Mrs. Hallstrom's Dad. Love, Olivia."

Now this would be the Valentine's Day I'd remember forever. Thanks, Olivia, for the best valentine ever.

—Ken Rokusek

FIRST COVENANT CHURCH PURPOSE STATEMENT

**The mission of First Covenant Church is
to worship God,
equip people to live in faith,
share God's love,
and serve the community around us.**

SERVING CHRIST IN HIS CHURCH

Ushers:

Feb. 5—Ken & Linda Pogorelec
Feb. 12—Roger & Gail Johnston
Feb. 19—Shirley Koski & Darlene Reindahl
Feb. 26—Linda Skogman
Mar. 5—Roger & Judy Linden

BULLETIN, CALENDAR, AND NEWSLETTER DEADLINES

Items for the March calendar need to be e-mailed or in the church office by Sunday, February 19th. Weekly bulletin items should be e-mailed or brought to the church office by 9:00 a.m. Wednesday. E-mailed items need to have either "calendar" or "bulletin" in the subject line.

Items for the February issue of the **Lamplighter** should be turned in by Sunday, February 19th. Items may be submitted by e-mail to wbchris@q.com. Remember that we are always looking for news of interest for the “Among Us” column

MONTHLY FINANCIAL REPORT

12/1/16-12/31/16

Checking account balance as Dec.. 1st: **\$5964.62**

General Fund income for current period: **\$8220.00**

Other income: **\$56.78**

Rental income: **\$425.00**

Total expenses for current period: **\$4906.59**

Checking account balance as of Nov. 30th: **\$9728.03**

COVENANT WOMEN MINISTRIES

We will meet for lunch at 12:30 on the 7th at Ranger Rock in the Mt. Iron High School. Enter the main door and get a visitor pass.

Project Day will meet on the 14th. We have lap robes to tie and others to sew.

On **Sunday**, the 12th, you are invited to a ham roll dinner following the Christian Education hour. Since we are no longer making pasties, we wanted to find a way to continue to send funds to the Northwest Conference Women Ministries to help bring a missionary and a lay person to the next Triennial. We will be taking donations at the dinner that we will bring to the Women Ministry Renewal event in March.

The registration forms have arrived for the 2017 Renewal Conference. It will begin at 5:30 on **Friday, March 17**, and end on Saturday at 4:00 p.m. conference will be held at the New London Covenant Church.

The theme is: Shine: be refreshed, be renewed, be transformed. Marnie Swedberg, a recent retreat speaker at Covenant Park—will be the speaker. The outreach program is collecting baby items for Hope Pregnancy Center in Willmar. Registrations are due by Monday, **March 13th**.

VITALITY IS VITAL

[Editor’s note: Have you been challenged lately in your spiritual walk? Have you read something that has especially spoken to you? If so, please share it with the rest of us through this column. You may hand it to me, place it in my box by the church office, or e-mail it to wbchris@q.com. We would like to feature something from a member of our church family each month.]

Our small group recently completed a six-session study based on Max Lucado’s book *You’ll Get Through This*, based on the experiences of Joseph being sold as a slave in Egypt as his life there, The author compares the story of Joseph with difficult situations which we may face and assures us that we, too, with God’s help will survive those difficulties. Through the study He refers repeatedly to these words of encouragement: “You’ll get through this. It won’t be painless. It won’t be quick. But God will use this mess for good. Don’t be foolish or naive. But don’t despair either. With God’s help, you’ll get through this.” Our group found the study to be very practical and most helpful. I would encourage you to read the book. —Wayne Christiansen

UPDATE ON CINDY HOOVER

This is to inform you that Dr. Cindy Hoover, Covenant missionary to Oaxaca, Mexico, from 2000 until December 2016 is stepping away from active missionary service due to health concerns. During her service in Oaxaca, Cindy provided healthcare screening to hundreds of individuals—primarily children—and founded *Semillas de Salud*, (Seeds of Health), a ministry focused on public and preventative health. Much of her ministry was done on the isthmus of Oaxaca, traveling to remote locations to provide healthcare support to folks with little economic resources or access to the health system. Two

of our church's mission teams to Oaxaca had the privilege of getting to know Cindy.

In a recent gathering of missionary and *Semillas de Salud* staff and volunteers, Cindy turned over the leadership of that organization to a Mexican doctor, with whom she has partnered for many years. Though it was a bittersweet moment, it is significant that there are capable individuals who will carry on the mission.

Although Cindy's partnership and ministry in Mexico will be greatly missed, we know that her passionate desire to serve others will continue to inform her activities and service for many years to come. Please pray for Cindy in this time of transition.

COVENANT KIDS CONGO

Together, Covenant churches and local partners are helping to build a brighter future for children living in the city of Gemena in northwest Congo. This community is called Ledia, which means "a new thing is happening in the village." It is located in the same area where the Evangelical Covenant Church and the Covenant Church of Congo (CEUM) have been active for the past 80 years.

Amazing stories are being made through Covenant Kids Congo. Clean water springs from new wells. Children are going to school and studying to pursue their dreams. Parents are learning to fight malnutrition and prepare the best food for their kids. And yet this is only the beginning! Covenant Kids Congo powered by World Vision is a 12 to 18-year community development program. There is still much work to be done.

Thanks to those of you who are sponsoring a child or giving monthly as the coconut is passed during our offering time to help with the church's sponsorships of our child, Bienvenue.

COVENANT TRUST COMPANY

Because we work in the world of finance, we are constantly dealing with money and numbers. But we know that the work that we do is much more than that. We don't just deal with account balances and market values. There are real people behind the account numbers in our system. And the accounts that we manage are much more than dollars and cents: they are an accumulation of years of hard work and planning; a meaningful gift that will bless others for years to come; a financial means to accomplish goals and make dreams a reality.

It comes down to perspective. We work hard not just because it's our job but because we know there are people depending on us to help them achieve their goals. So we don't just see money and numbers. We see families and ministries. We see opportunities to fulfill needs. And because we see these things, we understand the value in investing. We know the importance of saving for retirement. We see the effect of gift giving. We recognize the need for estate planning.

We want all of you to do the same if you don't already. So in 2017, we challenge all of you to have a similar perspective on your money. Don't just look at it in terms of dollars and cents. Instead, see it as a valuable tool that can help you achieve goals for you, your family, and the causes you believe in.

We're not just waxing poetic. We know that for every penny that is entrusted in our care, there is a plan, a goal, and a hope attached to it. Whatever those plans, goals, and hopes may be, we know that our clients don't just see dollars and cents when they discuss their finances with us, and neither do we. We may be in the world of finance, but we are in the business of serving people and helping them realize their hopes and dreams.

Feel free to contact me to talk about your goals and the causes you believe in. And let's discuss how investing, saving for retirement, gift giving, and estate planning can play a role in achieving those goals and supporting those causes in 2017.

—Steve Allison

sralison@covenanttrust.com

THANK YOU NOTES

Thank you very much for your contribution of \$25, 107 pounds of food, and three new toys to the FooF Shelf Project. Your support is appreciated.

—Jean Collins
Quad City Food Shelf

Thank you so much for your partnership! You are giving YFC the ability to go out and spread the Good News. Your contribution allows us to continue to be missionaries, rescuers, and bridges to area youth. Last school year alone we were able to reach more than 500 students with the message of Jesus. That's a pretty big deal, and we want to say thank you for your part in this ministry.

—Katie Dane, Administrative Assistant
Mesabi Range Youth For Christ

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

Karla Sturdy	13th
Roger Johnston	16th
Steve Skogman	16th
Stephanie Carlson	25th
Lois Johnson	25th

AMONG US

At the beginning of January, **Wayne & Bernie Christiansen** spent a week in Nevada visiting Elizabeth and Efraín and Soren and Laila and helping the twins celebrate an early tenth birthday. While they were there, the Reno area dealt with snow, rain, and flooding.

Mike and Kathy Hannay are spending six weeks enjoying the warm climate of Alabama.

ON THE LIGHTER SIDE

For Super Bowl Sunday

Quarterback Sneak—Church members quietly leaving during the last hymn

Draw Play—What many children do with their bulletins during worship

Halftime—The period between worship and Sunday school when many choose to leave

Two-minute Warning—The point at which you realize the service is almost over and begin to gather up your belongings

Instant Replay—The preacher misplaces his notes and falls back on last Sunday's illustrations

Sudden Death—What happens to the congregation's attention span if the preacher goes overtime

End Run—Getting out of church fast by skirting around behind the pastor at the door

Flex Defense—The ability to allow absolutely nothing during the sermon to affect your life

Blitz—The rush for restaurants after Sunday school