



# IN TOUCH WITH HOPE

Monthly newsletter of Hope Church, Spencer, IA

DECEMBER, 2020

BY PASTOR RUSSELL MUILENBURG

## SABBATICAL

Sabbatical. The word comes from “sabbath,” the day of rest. A sabbatical is a period of time off from work. Sometimes a sabbatical lasts a few months, sometimes an entire year. Sometimes those periods of time are paid, sometimes they are unpaid. One website I visited said, “People who are taking advantage of sabbaticals today aren’t taking time off from work for the sake of relaxation, they’re engaged in another type of personal or professional pursuit.” Sabbaticals are common among professors and academics, as well as pastors and other religious workers. Often, they are granted every seven years.

Next June will mark my 14<sup>th</sup> anniversary at Hope Church. It will also be my 23<sup>rd</sup> anniversary as a pastor. In that time, I have never taken a sabbatical. And so, with the encouragement of the Consistory I have been making plans to take a two-month sabbatical in mid-May through mid-July of 2021. Plans for that time have centered around two trips: 1) a tour of the seven Churches of Revelation sites in Turkey, and 2) a two-week leadership retreat at a pastoral counseling center in Colorado.

However, 2020 has not been a normal year. I, like all of you, have experienced additional stress and frustration throughout this year. Eddy Aleman, General Secretary of the RCA, says this about pastors right now:

“They’re exhausted, anxious, and run-down from pivoting over and over during the last nine months, from trying to stay connected with their congregation in a totally different way, from navigating the politics of reopening, from suddenly spending the vast majority of their time in entirely different ways, and sometimes without any of the parts of their job that normally bring energy and life”.

I feel this description deeply. And so, with the support of the Consistory and staff, I have decided to move a portion of my sabbatical plans up. The leadership retreat I had been planning for next July will now take place in December. In addition, I will be using the balance of my vacation days to take the rest of December off. Lord willing, I will still take the rest of the planned sabbatical next summer for the trip to Turkey.

I know that I am not unique in experiencing stress in this trying year. In fact, many of you have been affected much more profoundly and with much more significant consequences than I have. And yet, not everyone has the option of taking a break. I realize how blessed I am by the Consistory in offering me this opportunity. I am grateful for it. I do not take it lightly. But, if you are struggling with the circumstances of this year, let me encourage you to seek out the rest and the support that you need. Many of us are hurting right now. It’s okay to ask for help.

It is also with a heavy heart that I step aside from our Christmas celebration this year. Christmas Eve is one of my favorite services on our calendar, and it is weird to think of missing it. Yet, we have a talented and capable church staff. They have graciously volunteered to step into the gap created by my absence, and I am sure that our Christmas services—whether you participate online or in-person—will be meaningful and memorable.

John 1:5 says that the light shines in the darkness. 2020 has brought more than its fair share of darkness. Yet, Jesus’ light is shining as brightly as ever, maybe even more brightly. We may not be moving through this year on our normal path, but as long as we keep our eyes fixed on the light of Jesus, we are sure to end up exactly where we need to be. I ask for your prayers that this time off will be refreshing for me. I will also be praying for you during this time apart.

PASTOR JAY VAN GELDER

Youth News



I want to let you know that I just got out of a 14 day quarantine with a negative result in the covid test. I was hoping with the loss of taste and smell and the congestion that it would be positive so I would be done with this, but did not have such luck. Just to let you know I am not very good at just sitting in my basement.

Here is the update on Sr. High Youth Group & 6th,7th,8th Youth Group. After listening to Governor Reynolds' announcement that she is encouraging people not to meet in groups of 15 people or more. She also addressed middle school student activities and said middle school extra-curricular activities are cancelled for the time being. With this announcement and a few of our youth being on quarantine lately, we feel it is best that with 60+ students and 10 adult leaders in middle school youth group each week, and around 40 youth and adults in high school youth group, both groups are way above Governor Reynolds' recommendation to help slow down the spread of the virus. With the rise of Covid cases in our community and the youth that need to quarantine we want to do our part to slow down the spread.

So at this time, I am recommending that the youth groups do not meet in person until the beginning of January when we come back from Christmas break. I want to make this clear that we are not cancelling youth groups all together, but we are going to do different things like Zoom meetings and phone calls, and we are going to try small group teams with our Sr. High Youth. This is our way of trying to keep youth connected. We will continue brainstorming other ways as well. We want to continue to minister with our students.

**Sr. High Youth Group:** We will be meeting on Sundays from 5:00-7:00 p.m. and 7:00-9:00 p.m. roughly in small group teams of less than 15 people. Each student signed up for a team at the beginning of the year, and the teams include Administration, Tech & Sound, Drama, Social Media, and Hands and Feet. We will be letting them know by text the times and day they will be meeting.

**6,7,8<sup>th</sup> Youth Group:** We will be meeting on Zoom as a large group on Wednesday nights at 6:30 p.m. with a possible visit from a staff person after Zoom bringing you a shake from Arby's.

We started to put this in place last week on our youth group nights. Keep watching for communication if things need to change on what we will be doing each week. Communication will come to youth and parents through our database texting, and Trent will be posting it on our social media platforms.

We wanted to let you know that Trent and I have been talking about the situation with Covid and want to do our part in the community to lessen the spread of the virus that is increasing throughout the community.

Thanks for your partnership as youth, parents, and the congregation as we walk through this together. If there are any questions please contact me at 712-363-0885 or Trent at 402-982-9653.

★  
*Christmas Eve  
Worship Service*

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24

*5:00 p.m. \* 7:00 p.m. \* 11:00 p.m.*

# SARAH KERNS

## Children & Family News

### ADVENT ACTIVITY PACKS

Advent Season is here, and we have put together activity packets for children ages 3 through 5th grade. Please follow [this link](#) to claim yours through December 3. The link is also available on the [Hope Kids Facebook](#) page. You can pick up your Advent packets in the church lobby through Sunday, December 6.



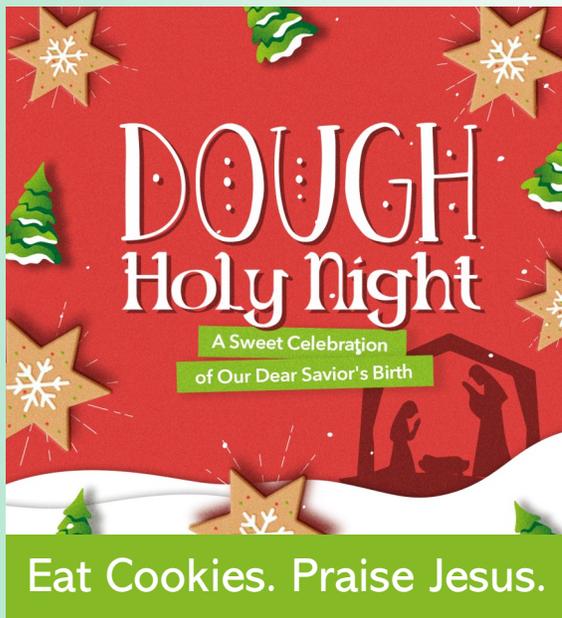
## Advent Kids Activity Pack

VISIT HOPE KIDS FACEBOOK PAGE TO SIGN UP FOR YOURS TODAY!

**SIGN UP BY DECEMBER 3RD**

<u>Younger Kids</u> 3 years old through Kindergarten		<u>Older Kids</u> 1st grade through 5th grade
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**PICK UP IN CHURCH LOBBY**  
Nov 25 - Dec 6 (closed Thanksgiving Day)



## DOUGH Holy Night

A Sweet Celebration  
of Our Dear Savior's Birth

**Eat Cookies. Praise Jesus.**

### DOUGH HOLY NIGHT

"Dough Holy Night" is a deliciously-fun family experience with the true meaning of Christmas baked in. With the help of David and Casey (a.k.a The Cookie Crew), families will bake cookies while discovering the ingredients that made the first ever Christmas so sweet. It's so simple!

Gather together in your kitchen at your convenience, then press play on the "Dough Holy Night" video. The Cookie Crew will walk you through the entire baby Jesus baking experience. You provide the simple baking ingredients, we provide the rest. With minimal preparation, easy to follow instructions, and a video that leads families step-by-step through the entire experience, "Dough Holy Night" is a truly unique way to celebrate the birth of Jesus. When it's all done and the last cookie has been eaten, everyone's heart will be as full as their stomach!

Sign up through [this link](#) to receive access to the free, online video code (the link is also on our [Hope Kids Facebook](#) page). This experience is designed for everyone of all ages to enjoy this sweet celebration!

### STORY TIME WITH SARAH

Do you know that Christmas was a rescue mission so that people could be friends with God? Through this Advent storybook filled with colorful pictures I will share with your little ones the loving God, the Savior of mankind, and the meaning of His birth.

Beginning December 1 join me each evening at 7:00 p.m. on [Hope Kids FaceBook Live](#) for a quick, short bedtime story. This is perfect for busy families to take a moment to hear the whole Christmas story - how Jesus was promised from the garden and everything we learn after that just points us to Him.



## CHRISTMAS!

the whole story  
of the God  
who loves

WRITTEN BY  
NATASHA MEZLER

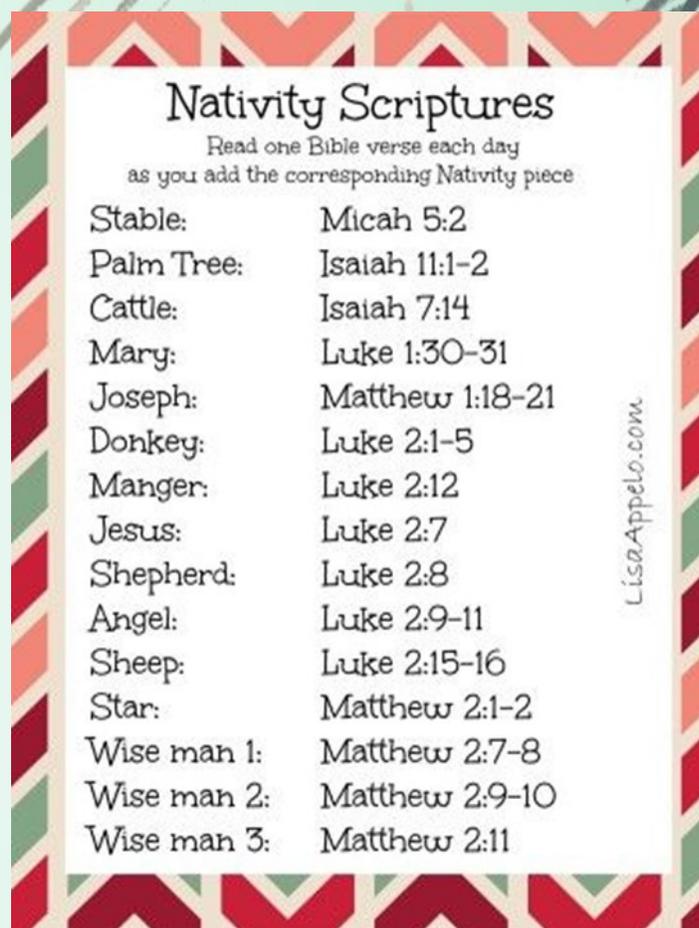
ILLUSTRATED BY  
BRIANNA STEGRIST

BETH MUILENBURG

Discipleship & Care

## CONDOLENCES TO:

- Joyce & Alan Lemke on the passing of Joyce's mother, Phyllis Kruse of Phoenix, AZ, from time to eternity on November 2.
- Angie & John Hameister and family on the passing of Angie's mother, Lois Johnson of Spencer, from time to eternity on November 9.
- Tom & Char Maertens on the passing of their four-month-old grandson, Griffin Stenger of Grimes, from time to eternity on November 10.
- Paul & Joyce Flaharty and Larry & Linda Flaharty on the passing of Paul's sister (Larry's aunt), Irene Tirevold of Estherville, from time to eternity on November 15.
- Chris & Jane Gude on the passing of Chris' mother, Madeline Gude of Iowa Falls, from time to eternity on November 15.
- the family of Curt Paulsen on his passing from time to eternity on November 18.



**Nativity Scriptures**  
Read one Bible verse each day  
as you add the corresponding Nativity piece

Stable:	Micah 5:2
Palm Tree:	Isaiah 11:1-2
Cattle:	Isaiah 7:14
Mary:	Luke 1:30-31
Joseph:	Matthew 1:18-21
Donkey:	Luke 2:1-5
Manger:	Luke 2:12
Jesus:	Luke 2:7
Shepherd:	Luke 2:8
Angel:	Luke 2:9-11
Sheep:	Luke 2:15-16
Star:	Matthew 2:1-2
Wise man 1:	Matthew 2:7-8
Wise man 2:	Matthew 2:9-10
Wise man 3:	Matthew 2:11

LisaAppelo.com

May God bless you this Christmas and always!



MERRY + BRIGHT

# CONSISTORY NEWS

The regular meeting of the Hope Reformed Consistory met at 7:00 p.m. in the Well. Present: Deacons Derek Bailey, Kyle Mechler, Bob Graham, Levi Morris, Craig Van Drunen. Elders Dean Mechler, Brad Olson, Darrell Todd, Kurt Weeks, Cedric Winterboer, Gary Zeutenhorst. Pastors Russell Muilenburg, Jay Van Gelder. Absent: Deacon John Haak.

Pastor Russell led devotions by reading from Psalm 40:1-3 and closed with prayer.

## ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AND DECISION

- **MMSC** to approve the October 8, 2020 minutes.
- **MMSC** to approve the October financials as presented by the Deacons.
- Pastor Jay reviewed the line items for the proposed 2021 budget and discussed the changes as proposed by the Deacons.
- Craig Van Drunen reviewed the proposed staff salary recommendations for 2021 as recommended by the Staff Management committee.
- **MMSC** to approve the 2021 budget and staff salary recommendations as presented by the Deacons and Staff Management.
- Pastor Russell requested that we consider giving a donation to St. Luke's to assist with them filling a vacant Chaplain position. Pastor Jay stated that he would talk to the missions committee to see if they could utilize some of their budget towards this request.
- Pastor Russell discussed the need to look at our current policies related to COVID 19 because of the Governor's proclamation on November 10. He indicated that the City of Spencer was going to have a televised meeting to address the increase in COVID 19 numbers in Clay County. After some discussion, **MMSC** to require masks being required for both services for the rest of November and then review this issue again in December. Pastor Russell stated he would write an email to send out to the congregation.
- Pastor Russell discussed the December plans with him being gone for part of his sabbatical. Jay reported that he has all the Sundays filled for pulpit supply except December 27. Pastor Jay indicated that he would be doing the Christmas Eve services. At this point we will have the 5:00 p.m., 7:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. services. He will be checking with Craig about live-streaming into the Harbor if we need this due to overflow. We will not be having a children's program this year.
- Pastor Russell indicated that we would be doing Communion on December 6 and we would follow the same format as last time. We would need four Elders to be available to do Communion for the two services. Pastor Jay will be preaching and leading the Communion service.
- Discussed the Congregational Meeting on December 13. It was decided to hold the Congregational Meeting in between the two worship services.
- Pastor Russell reported that we are waiting for four individuals to let us know if they are willing to accept nominations for Consistory positions.
- Pastor Russell closed this portion of the meeting with prayer.

## ELDERS MEETING

- Constitutional question was asked and answered in the negative.
- Congregational concerns were discussed.
- The meeting was closed with prayer.

## DEACONS MEETING

The Deacons did not meet separately.

## COVID NEWS

We are voluntarily honoring Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds' proclamation and requiring masks for all Hope Church gatherings through December 10. This means that masks will be required at our 8:30 a.m. and 10:45 a.m. Sunday morning services. If the Governor's proclamation is not extended beyond December 10, we will return to our previous policies. If additional restrictions are suggested in Iowa, the Consistory will consider them in turn. Throughout this pandemic, the analogy of a dimmer switch has seemed apt. In that sense, all of our policies remain "Lord Willing" and "subject to change."

## CONGREGATIONAL CELEBRATION

All confessing members of Hope Church are invited to our annual Congregational Celebration on Sunday, December 13 at 9:45 a.m. (in between the two worship services) in the Harbor. We will be celebrating what God has done in 2020, look ahead at 2021, and participate in the selection of new church officers by the drawing of lots.

## YEAR-END TITHING

Year-end financial donations to the church will be received through noon on Thursday, December 31.



919 Grand Avenue  
 Spencer, IA 51301  
 (712)262-3016  
[www.spencerhope.com](http://www.spencerhope.com)

## WORSHIP SERVICES

### Sundays

8:30 a.m. (masks required)

10:45 a.m. (masks required until further notice)

Sanctuary

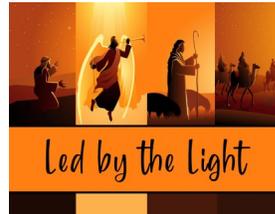
10:45 a.m.

Live-streamed online

### December 24

5:00 p.m. / 7:00 p.m. / 11:00 p.m.

## SERMONS



### *Led by the Light*

November 29: Prophets

December 6: Angels

December 13: Shepherds

December 20: Magi

## HOPE CHURCH STAFF:

Russell Muilenburg: *Lead Pastor*

Craig Cannon: *Worship/Music*

Sarah Kerns: *Children/Families*

Lori Swanson: *Office Manager*

Josh Hamrick: *Facilities Manager*

Jay Van Gelder: *Pastor of Student Ministries*

Beth Muilenburg: *Congregational Care*

Trenten Hansen: *Student Ministries Asst./  
Communications*

MAY THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS BRING YOU PEACE,

THE GLADNESS OF CHRISTMAS GIVE YOU HOPE,

THE WARMTH OF CHRISTMAS GRANT YOU LOVE.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

