

Blawenburg Beacon

Blawenburg Reformed Church

Serving God and the Community Since 1832



From Pastor Jeff

October 20, 2023

Greetings friends at the Blawenburg Reformed Church. This fall I've struck out in a new direction with my ministry. It isn't a dramatic change, but one that seems faithful given our situation. Over the past few years our church hasn't had great success at attracting many new members. In consultation with colleagues, I have been reading and learning about an approach to ministry that might be new to many of us.

Typically, churches like ours seek to attract members to our offerings. Our work is to put on programs, like worship, Sunday school, youth group, and so on. We offer those programs, and then we expect people to come through our doors and participate. Christian leaders have realized that over the past few decades this "attractational" approach to ministry is largely no longer working. For that reason, people in ministry have been reviving practices that seek not to attract people to us, but to meet people where they are. If people aren't coming through our doors, it seems faithful to meet them on their walk of faith instead.

Earlier this year I led a book study on the book entitled *Surprise the World*, by Michael Frost. This book is one of many from this new-to-us school of thought. In the book the author suggests habits that can help to propel us into ministry. The habits are there to help us meet people where they are and help to open the door to encourage them to grow in their relationship with God.

The habits are threefold. First, there are habits that keep us connected to God. We are encouraged to have a weekly quiet time with God and study the example and words of Jesus in the Gospels. If we want to help others to know God, then we must know God ourselves. Second, the habits encourage us to get involved in peoples' lives. The habits include blessing three people each week and eating or sharing table

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Fall 2023

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From Pastor Jeff—continued

fellowship with three people each week. If we are blessing and eating with people then we are meeting them where they are. We are making a difference in their lives and they will notice. Finally, the habits encourage us to reflect on our work and stay accountable to our goals. We are encouraged to journal, to help notice how we are making an impact in peoples' lives. We are also encouraged to form an accountability group where we can share our accomplishments and struggles.

This fall, I've made some shifts. I've rethought how I spend my time in ministry. I have asked a few fellow church leaders to serve as my accountability group. I have started trying to live into the suggested habits. It has come with some joys and some struggles. It is hard to know where this path will lead, but for now, this feels like a faith direction to pursue.

If this new focus sounds interesting to you and you missed my book study earlier this year, let me know. I would be thrilled to tell you more about it. Until then, let's continue to pray for the work of our church. We have some challenges, and in the face of those challenges we are doing our best to find the faithful path forward.

God bless,
Pastor Jeff

Our Mission Statement

The Blawenburg Reformed Church is a covenant community of God's people united in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

We commit our gifts to worship, hospitality, life-long learning, serving those in need, and proclaiming the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

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Monday - 8:00am - 4:00pm
Tuesday - Office Closed
Wednesday - 8:00am - 2:00pm
Thursday - 8:00am - 2:00pm
Friday - 8:00am - 12:00pm

Special Interest

A Letter from Ben Van Haitsma

Here in Oman things happen slowly and then all at once.

That's a phrase I've been hearing often during my time here - whether in the context of the Omani bureaucracy, renovation projects, or even about life here at the Centre.

September has certainly been a slow month, but not in a bad way. I've spent most of my time adjusting to life in Oman, getting to know the other people at the centre and learning more about Islam and Omani culture. There's also been some exciting moments of exploration! I've managed to go on a couple of beautiful hikes, visit a few museums, and also see the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque. I've gotten to help welcome some fascinating visitors to the Centre including members of a leading Omani family as well as a small delegation from the Finnish embassy. Alongside this, I've taken care of some essential preparation work for my time here. I got my resident card processed a few weeks ago and also went through CPR training. This next week I'm hoping to get an Omani driver's license.

This October the second half of the saying *all at once* will start to come into effect. We're expecting a couple of different groups this month, including two short-term interns from Bangladesh and a group of Finnish Lutherans and Muslims. I'll also be helping out behind the scenes with an upcoming women's retreat here at the Centre for local Christian women.

I'm both excited and nervous for the upcoming work this month! I appreciate your continued support and prayers for my time here.

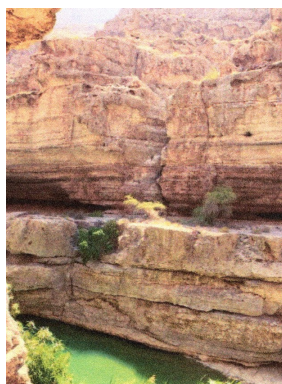
Thank you!

Ben



The Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque.

Because Omani Muslims pride themselves on unity and tolerance, the Mosque incorporates architecture from three major sects of Islam as well as elements from all of the major Islamic civilizations.



A beautiful canyon to hike in that also includes some places to swim



A falaj - a channel that people have been making here since ancient times to irrigate the land.

Pentecost Sunday - May 28



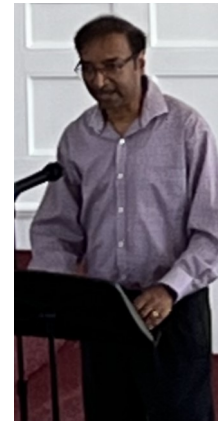
Pastor Jeff reads from the book of Acts. The paraments are red in celebration of the season.



Our scripture readers also read from Acts. Lee Bekir reads in Italian.



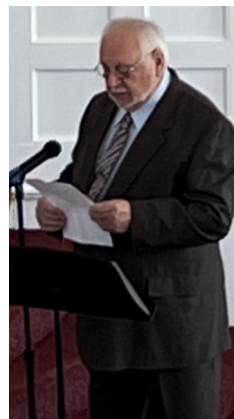
Yuri Pugliese reads in Spanish.



Sam Prince reads in Tamil.



Mark Smith reads in Ancient Greek.

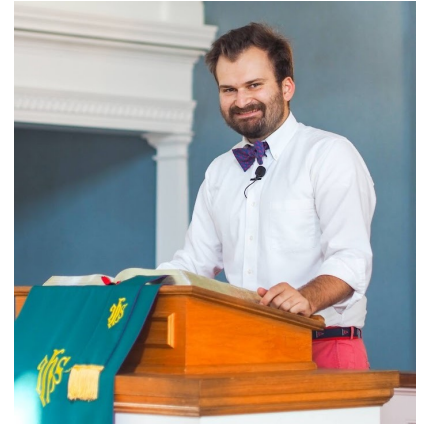


Joe Pavlicek reads in Croatian.

Worship—continued



We welcomed Nancy Curtis to the pulpit and Steven Russell to the organ on August 27.



Our seminary intern, Robbie Bendelius, preached on October 1.

Laying On of Hands Service—September 17

Pastor Jeff and Elders Mark Smith and Alan Taback prayed for those who participated.



Laura Warren



Chris Osander



Lee Bekir



Robbie Bendelius

Worship on October 15



Pastor Jeff preaches from the book of Romans on October 15. The beautiful fall arrangements are the work of Jean Beachell.

Worship—continued

Blessing of the Backpacks—September 24

On September 24, we warmly welcomed several of our BVS families to the Sunday morning service. The children came with their backpacks for a special ceremony of having them blessed by Pastor Jeff. After the blessing, the children, and many in the congregation, joined together to sing *Deep and Wide* illustrating with hand motions the depth and breadth of God's love. Like the song says of God's love, those packs, too, are deep and wide. They must be to carry their lunches, extra clothes, treasures, and myriad notices home to Mom and Dad.



Worship Schedule

Oct 22	Romans 5:12-21
Oct 29	Romans 6:1-12
Nov 5	Romans 7:14-25
Nov 12	Romans 8:1-17
Nov 19	Romans 8:18-30
Nov 26	Romans 8:31-39
Dec 3	Jeremiah 33:14-18, Mark 8:27-29
Dec 10	Isaiah 40:1-11, Mark 1:1-4
Dec 17	Ezra 1:1-4, 10-13, Luke 2:25-32
Dec 24	Psalms 113, Luke 1:57-80
Dec 24 Evening	Traditional

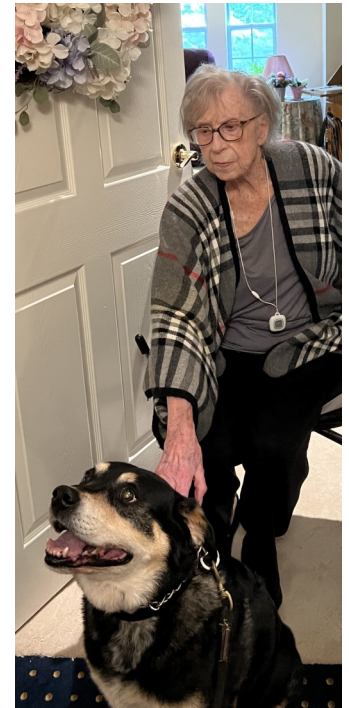
Happy 91st Birthday to Diana Pfannebecker—August 24



Celebrating at Cherry Valley Country Club



l to r: Barb Pavlicek, Cousin Arlene, Sharon Prosinski, Diana, Sonya Hunt, Carol McCollough, Gracie Johnson



Diana loves Raleigh Knol's visits.



The Cavanaugh family placed flowers in the pulpit in memory of their sons and brothers, James (left, on August 13) and Mark (right, on October 8.). Charlotte Malpeso did her brother Mark's beautiful arrangement, and the one for James is the signature handiwork of Jean Beachell.

Fellowship

Special Brunch

Nancy Curtis blessed us with one of her many talents by preparing a delicious brunch on Sunday, June 4.



Nancy checks in with Chris and Alan.



A room full of hungry people await their turn.

Outdoor Fellowship on June 18



Grandma and Grandpa Knol with their granddaughters, and Gracie Johnson



Katie Connolly and Bernice Van Nostrand.

A Shared Lunch with BVS Families



Birthdays

October

- 2 Maxwell Blodgett
- 3 Flora Blodgett
- 14 Mimi Coffey
- 23 Evelyn Cochran
- 25 Jeff Knol

November

- 2 Carolyn Smith
- 4 Vineetha Prince
Yuri Pugliese
- 8 Celeste Blodgett
Jim Corio
Shirley Wang
- 12 Jamie Knol
- 15 Anika Prince
Marie Pugliese
- 16 Margot Knol
- 22 Gracie Johnson
- 24 Wendy Herbert
- 25 Sam Prince
- 30 Charlotte Knol

December

- 2 Barb Antoniewicz
- 25 Christine Corio
Shawn Krishnan
Anne Woolley
- 28 Morgan VanLiew
- 29 Emma Murphy
- 31 Barb Pavlicek

Fellowship—continued

History of the Mary and Martha Group

by Bernice Van Nostrand

The group started with four women having breakfast and a Bible discussion on March 1, 2008, at 7:30am. The church had a couple of young families, and the mothers wanted a time with friends when their husbands would be home with the children.

The group grew and read *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World*; hence, we became the M and M's. Most, but not all, of the book choices we have read were written by women. The titles or themes discussed have been suggested by the women in the group.

By March of 2009 there were seven to nine women discussing *The Faith Club*, a story of three women who wanted to know more about each other's faith tradition, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. It was at this meeting that the women of BRC prepared their first Happy Basket which was for Peggy Querec, who was having cancer treatments. Since then, many Happy Baskets have been shared with the men and women in our congregation going through difficult times.

Eventually, the two young families moved and the remaining members decided to meet for dinner instead of breakfast. But in 2021, we decided lunch was an even better time to meet as we began researching *Women of the Bible*.

A variety of books have been shared over the years. Among them are *Mudhouse Sabbath* and *Rag-a-Muffin Gospel*. We recently finished *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson and are currently having thoughtful, animated, questioning, and deeper conversations about *The Shack* by William P. Young. As Kathie Lee Gifford commented in the opening of the book, "*The Shack will change the way you think about God forever.*"

All ladies of the church are welcome to join us for lunch at Bernice's. Please note announcements in the Friday eNews or the Sunday bulletin.



Bernice, Hilde, Angie



Gracie, Sonya, Emma, Katherine
(Barb P is behind the camera.)

Missions

S.H.I.P. Picnic Lunch

On August 29, we served a picnic lunch of sloppy joes and macaroni salad to the clients of SHIP at the headquarters in Somerville.



Evelyn, Alan, Dave, and Jeff serve up macaroni salad and sloppy joes.



Elmi hands out snacks and Peggy works the drinks.



Carolyn Arnesen of Griggstown serves desserts as Elmi hands out chips.



The clients enjoyed a beautiful day outside as they ate their lunches.

A Thank You from Missions

Since March, 2023, there have been 10 deliveries of food, household supplies, and school supplies to the Otto Kaufman Center for the Montgomery Food Pantry/Bank. In addition, many ShopRite gift certificates in various denominations have also been given. The Missions Team so appreciates your generosity toward and care of local families in need.

Our congregation not only gives as a group but several people make contributions individually and take their items directly to the Recreation Center and sign in on their own. Either way, your generosity is appreciated.

Missions—continued



A Review of 2022



Thanks to you, 2022 was a remarkable year for Setshabelo Family and Child Services (SFCS), South Africa’s first black-owned child adoption agency. Here’s a reflection from one of the social workers: “A mother came to Setshabelo Family and Child Services because she was concerned about her parenting skills. She became so enthused and engaged that she qualified to be a “temporary place of safety” home for abandoned babies. She now hopes to adopt a little guy who has been identified and temporarily placed in her home.”

SFCS at its conception offered housing for orphaned children at the Children Youth Care Center [CYCC]. Now that they are a child-placing agency, they work with the local churches to identify homes for children as an alternative to an isolated setting. The CYCC has been repurposed to provide temporary housing for children in need of therapeutic services. Seventeen children with intellectual disabilities and conduct disorders from all over the Free State Province found a home at the CYCC in 2022. This is the only facility in the Free State of this kind so parents are willing to travel many miles to visit their children and learn from the SFCS staff how to care for their children. **These families would be helpless without you.**



Our Challenges of 2022

Ms. M arrived at the police station in February 2022; here are the notes from the interview: “The complainant alleged she was sleeping at home when she woke up and saw someone entering the house through the window on February 5. She noticed it was Vungile, who had a knife. He overpowered the victim and raped her. At that stage, she was afraid of the suspect as he threatened to kill her and therefore decided not to report the case. On 2022-02-11, the suspect caught her fetching water outside, forced her again into her house, and raped her several times through the night. In the morning, the complainant managed to report the incidents to the police...” where she was greeted by SFCS Social workers who are stationed at the police station to offer psychosocial support to victims of rape.

Gender-based violence continues to bring challenges to the life of women and girls living in Botshabelo. SFCS collaborates with the two police station offices in Botshabelo, via their Victim Empowerment Centre, where our social workers meet and counsel victims of physical and sexual abuse. They aim to protect children in families where abuse is present and help heal the community so adopted children can find healthy loving families.



My greatest challenge as the mission liaison for this project was connected to the inability to travel to South Africa because of COVID risks. I haven't been on the ground in Botshabelo since February 2020. Communication with the staff at SFCS has been limited to Video Chat, email, and WhatsApp, which limits the free-flowing exchange of information and the intimate connection to the people and the work. I'm eager to return to Botshabelo in February 2023.



Please Pray

Please pray for me as I prepare to return to South Africa in February with General Synod President Rev. Dwayne Jackson and a group of other RCA pastors and leaders. In addition to spending quality time with partners in Botshabelo, we intend to also visit Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) Belhar in Cape Town to experience the source of the RCA Standard, [The Belhar Confession](#).

Please continue to pray for God to completely eradicate Gender-based violence in the world. Ask God to protect Kaybe and the entire staff's minds, bodies, and spirits as they navigate places of violence for the sake of vulnerable children.

Please pray for the churches, both in Botshabelo and in North America, to listen and respond to God's call to participate in the work of redemption and revealing God's Kingdom on Earth as in Heaven so that infertile parents find children and orphaned children find loving families.

Thank you,
Denise Kingdom Grier



Sinterklaas 23

Saturday, December 9

9am to 2pm

Blawenburg Reformed Church

Cook Hall (downstairs)

Homemade Soups & Baked Goods, Crafts, White Elephant

Help needed: booth workers, soup-makers/bakers, clean up

Sign up to help: office@blawenburgchurch.org,

davidc99@aol.com

Proceeds from Sinterklaas will benefit the sanctuary exterior lighting project (80%) and the Montgomery High Scholarship Fund for Blawenburg Village Preschool graduates (20%).



Sinterklaas Soup-Making 2023

Thank you for supporting our church by making soup. Your contribution is an important part of Sinterklaas. Here are some directions to help you.

1. TYPES OF SOUP

You may make any type of soup that you like to eat. Please be sensitive to allergies.

2. SOUP CONTAINERS - Pints Only

- Pick up soup containers in the kitchen of Cook Hall. We are only using pint containers this year. You **MUST** use our containers. Do not use previously used containers. Wash the new containers before adding your soup.
- **IMPORTANT:** Type a label and put it on the **LID** of the soup container. The label should include the **name of the soup** and its **ingredients**. If the soup is vegetarian or vegan, be sure to include the name of the stock. *If you need help preparing the label, please contact Evelyn.*

3. LOG IN YOUR SOUP AND PUT IN FREEZER

- **Log in:** Be sure to print your name and the name and quantities of your soups on the log-in sheet in the blue folder near the refrigerator.
- **Freezer:** Put your soup in the CHEST freezer in the kitchen in Cook Hall between November 1 and December 4.

4. DEADLINE

Be sure to log in and put your soup in the freezer by **Monday, December 4.**

That's it! When you've made your soup, sit down and relax knowing that you've helped the church raise money for God's work in our church and community.

Let me know if you have any questions.

Dave Cochran (aka The Soup Guy)

Around the Campus

Blawenburg Cemetery



Top: Doug Hill, on a John Deere tractor, is cutting very tall grass in the back section.

Left: Adrian Johnson trims around the headstones.

Right: Don and Ethel Terhune look on.



Fall Flowers on the Church
Campus

“God Winks” by Dave Cochran

"Sometimes we hope for things, and they never happen. At other times, however, our dreams do come true. Squire Rushnell in his book, *When God Winks: How the Power of Coincidence Guides Your Life*, calls the many unexpected things that happen in our lives God winks.

I had a couple of God winks over the past months that led to the fulfillment of a lifelong dream. We were planning a trip to Ireland and Northern Ireland. In his youth, my father spent seven years on the Cochran family farm in Donaghane, NI. He never told me much about it, so I only imagined what it must be like. I never thought I'd see the farm, let alone visit it.

I had met a distant cousin who lived near the farm on Ancestry, so I had a contact. She helped me find information about my family I never knew.

The first God wink occurred as we worked with the travel advisor. I asked if there was any way we could fit a visit to the farm into our trip. She said the only day on the 14-day trip when we had free time was when the group was going to be near Omagh, NI. I smiled. That's right next to Donaghane. God wink.

I contacted cousin Nichola and told her we had the time, but had no idea where the farm was or how we'd get there. She wrote back and said she and her husband Mal would pick us up at our resort (a one hour drive each way), drive us back to see the farm and the family graveyard, and to meet another Cochran descendant. God wink 2.

On September 14, Nichola and Mal picked us up and made the fulfillment of a lifelong dream possible. It was a wonderful day. For this unexpected turn of events, I will always be thankful. God was surely winking at me for this to happen.



Aerial view of the Cochran farm



Cochrane grave marker



Cochran distant cousins—Nichola Gibson, Hazel Short, Dave



Sheep fields near Cochran farm



Dave and Evelyn at the Titanic Museum