

Blawenburg Beacon

Blawenburg Reformed Church

Serving God and the Community Since 1832



From Pastor Jeff

February 9, 2024

Greetings Friends,

As I write, we find ourselves in an interesting moment in the life of the Blawenburg Reformed Church.

We have certainly had our struggles and setbacks this winter. Right before Christmas we lost our furnaces in the sanctuary due to a flood. In January, we were made aware that the state of New Jersey no longer considers our well water safe for drinking. In addition to these properties' issues, many of us are facing health concerns, in our own personal lives, or in the lives of close loved ones.

All of this is taking place while the work of the Vision Team is unfolding. This team was commissioned in the fall to discern how our church can become more sustainable. While congregational giving has remained remarkably stable over the past few years, our expenses continue to increase. Our annual budget deficit threatens to deplete our endowments in three years' time. This winter we hosted some listening sessions to inquire into your perspective on our church and I want to thank everyone who took time to either come to a meeting or send in a written response. The Vision Team will continue to prayerfully discern what path God is calling us to walk together into the future.

While some of these happenings feel as dreary as the gray January skies, we have also been surprised by the warmth, communion, and joy of our new worship arrangement in Cook Hall.

The first experience of this warmth and joy came on Christmas Eve itself. For several years I have hosted a child-friendly Christmas Eve service in our sanctuary at 4:00pm. As I prepared for the service this year, I was feeling depressed that our sanctuary was without heat. I was not feeling too cheery. As families began to arrive, I found my heart swelling with gratitude and joy. Seven families came to the service, unfazed by the change in location.

Winter 2024

In this issue:

Pastor's Letter.....1

Special Interest....3

Worship.....5

Celebrations & Fellowship.....9

BVS.....10

Missions.....11

Events.....12

Campus Life.....14

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Pastor's Letter—continued

They expressed to me how much they have loved the 4:00pm service and told me, "We wouldn't miss it for the world." It was very touching to realize how our friends from the preschool appreciate our 4:00pm service, even in Cook Hall. It was wonderful to sing *Joy to the World* and *Go Tell it on the Mountain!* with that congregation of enthusiastic preschool singers. There was joy that day, even in the midst of the struggles.

On December 31 we had our first Sunday morning worship service in our new arrangement in Cook Hall. Chaplain and Elder Mark Smith led that service and when I arrived home from Christmas vacation, I began to hear whispers of how charming the service had been. In the weeks since, it seems like everyone agrees that it is nice to worship together, in a smaller space, where our closeness has fostered communion. In that space, our communication is more informal and intimate. You all can respond and participate more easily as I preach. When we sing, we hear one another's voices. We are hearing together. We are singing together. As our hearing and singing intermingle, our spirits are drawing closer together as well. In that space, worship melds into fellowship. I believe this is how it may have been in ancient Christian homes, which were the first places of Christian worship.

We have had our setbacks. We have our challenges. Through it all, we have found a deeper communion. God is with us. With God's love as our foundation, we are a beloved church family. For that I am grateful. May God continue to bless us with unexpected blessings in 2024.

Blessings,
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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A publication of
Blawenburg Reformed Church

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Tuesday - 8:00am - 1:00pm
Wednesday - 8:00am - 1:00pm
Thursday - 8:00am - 1:00pm
Friday - 8:00am - 12:00pm

Special Interest

News from Ben Van Haitsma

Hello Friends!

January was a busy month!

On January 10, we hosted a large group of high schoolers from Grand Rapids Christian. We were a little bit nervous going in, but they turned out to be a wonderful group! We only had a little bit of drama and the high schoolers were for the most part very respectful and curious about Omani culture. I had a lot of fun getting to know them and watching them grow as they experienced a culture very different from their own. Many of them talked about how impressed they were by how peaceful and hospitable Omanis are, which gave them a very different image of Arab culture than they see on the news.

Since they are high schoolers, we made sure to give them plenty of games and adventures to help keep their attention and get out their energy. I had a lot of fun helping lead them on hikes and swims along Oman's hills and wadis. I made a trivia quiz on the US and India for them to play with some local Indian high schoolers they met as part of the visit. We went to see nesting turtles along the Omani coast and rode on camels in the desert – two things I hadn't done before either. Overall, it was a lot of fun!



Two days after the high schoolers left, I took a six-hour road trip with Josh, one of my supervisors, to Dubai. There we set up for the Gulf Christian Fellowship (GCF) Annual Meeting. The GCF is an ecumenical gathering of Christian leaders in the Gulf to learn about each other and discuss shared issues. It consisted not only of Protestants and Catholics, as I am used to, but also priests and bishops from the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox traditions. It was fun seeing so many different traditions represented! Most of the conversation revolved around how to be a faithful Christian presence in a Muslim context and some of the struggles that come with that calling. I helped Josh with setting up and carrying out some administrative roles which gave me the perfect excuse to be a fly on the wall and listen in on some interesting conversations.



Special Interest—continued

Ben Haitsma, *continued*

The Gulf Christian Fellowship meeting lasted two days and was followed by another two-day conference entitled ‘Church and Migration’. This conference was similarly ecumenical but also involved Christian leaders from Egypt and the Levant (Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Israel/Palestine). People presented theological and sociological views on migration in the region and we all discussed how the church could be better equipped to deal with issues surrounding immigration and refugees. I helped take minutes for the conference, which gave me a nice way of staying engaged and a little bit of experience with a very practical skill.



February is looking to be much calmer than January which is both a relief, but also disappointing. The war in Gaza has made it harder to convince groups to come out, and currently there are no major groups planned for the month. There are plenty of small tasks to be done around the centre, however, and I think a couple day visits from various groups as well. I’m looking forward to traveling out to Budapest at the end of February where I’ll connect with my parents and girlfriend, as well as a mentor of mine from college whose doing ministry there.

My shoulders and sleep are doing much better than they were a month ago. I appreciate all your prayers.

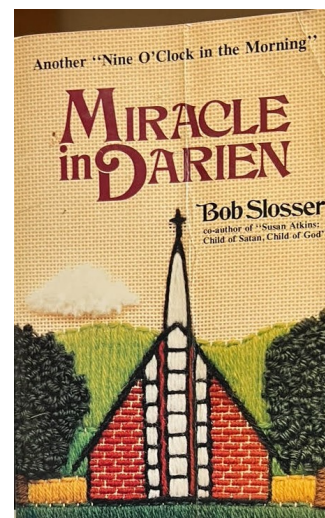
I hope all of you are doing well!

Ben



Mary & Martha Book Discussion

The women in the Mary and Martha book group have decided to read *Miracle in Darien* by Bob Slosser for the next few months. We will be reading about a church going through an evaluation process much like our church is at the present time. They asked, “Why are we here?” and “Who is in charge?” We might ask the same questions. The people of Darien, CT, answered the questions for themselves, then acted upon their answers. The outcome of their actions resulted in a huge renewal of a small church. What would our outcomes be if we suggested new ideas from our reading to our Vision Team and then acted upon them? The discussions are sure to be interesting. The book group is open to all ladies in the church. Even if you haven’t read the book, come to help us think through our purpose as a church (or are we a club?), and discern who is the head of our church. Let’s see how we can explore these confusing, yet challenging, ideas. Extra books will be available. We meet on the third Thursday of each month at 11:30 for prayer, discussion, and lunch at Bernice Van Nostrand’s home, 206 Sunset Road, Skillman. Call or text Bernice if you have questions—908-256-1115.



Worship

Fall Worship



Rita and Mark lighting a candle on All Saints' Day - November 5.



Classis Minister Dawn Alpaugh was in the pulpit on November 19.



Seminary intern Robbie Bendelius preached on December 3.



The Schwartz family lighting the Candle of Hope - Josh, Samantha, Abby & Melanie

Worship Schedule

February 18	John 2:13-25	Jesus Cleanses the Temple
February 25	John 3:1-21	Jesus' Conversation with Nicodemus
March 3	Selections from John 4	Jesus' Conversation with the Samaritan
March 10	John 10:1-21 (Robbie Preaching)	Jesus the Door and Good Shepherd
March 17	John 11:28-44 (Nancy Preaching)	Lazarus's Resurrection
March 24	John 12:12-19 (Palm Sunday)	Jesus' Triumphal Entry
March 28	John 13:3-5, 31-35 (Maundy Thursday)	Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet
March 31	John 20:1-18 (Easter)	The Resurrection

Worship—continued

December 10



The ladies from the Good News Home joined us in worship.



The Knol family lights the Candle of Peace - Pastor Jeff, Margot, Charlotte & Jamie.

Christmas Eve

A very cold sanctuary took us across the canal to the very warm and inviting Griggstown Reformed Church.



Bala is at the Zoom controls.



Barb and her sister, Karen, light the Christ Candle.



Shawn and Anika read scripture passages.



Worship—continued

Christmas Eve



Preetham reads from the Book of Luke.



Pastor Jeff delivers the Christmas message.



A small, but mighty choir sings *Night of Silence*.
Katie, Bernice, Sam, Barb



The congregation sings *Silent Night*
by candlelight.

Worship—continued

Worship in Fellowship Hall



We worship in warmth and comfort in fellowship hall. Charlotte *really* knows how to make the best of it!



Laura leads us in the seasonal response: *Listen, God is Calling*



At left, Katie leads us in worship through music on the piano. At right is a picture of her practicing at home on her beautiful Hauptwerk virtual organ.



Even without a pulpit, Pastor Jeff delivers a sermon.



Sam serves communion to our friend and neighbor, John George.

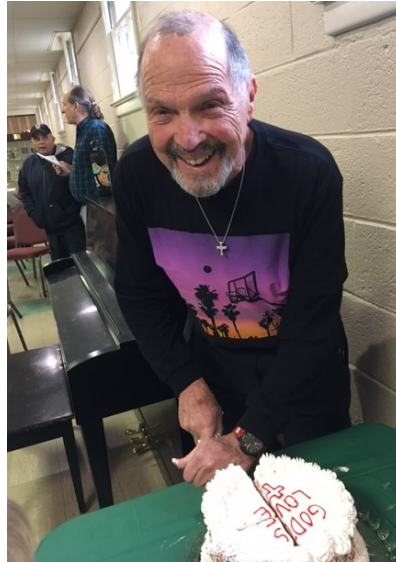


Alan serves Peggy.

Celebrations & Fellowship



The ladies from the Good News Home joined us for fellowship hour on December 10.



Alan celebrated #85 by sharing a cake with us on January 14.



Our first potluck of 2024. From left: Laura, Dave, Evelyn, Nancy, Sharon, Barb P, Bernice



Barb P, Sharon Prosinski, and Sonya celebrate Christmas with Diana.

Birthdays

February

- 2 Elaine Zeltner
- 6 Sonya Hunt
- 10 Lisa White
- 11 Emma Tufano
- 18 Gina Williams
- 22 Keith Sickafoose
- 28 Elmi Hill
Barb Reid

March

- 7 Tad Woolley
- 8 Katie Connolly
- 9 Reed Bekir
- 12 Colby White
- 13 Eleni Chatzidaki
- 14 Ava Bradsell
- 18 Clare Schmidt
- 19 Joe Pavlicek
- 20 Allison Clancy
- 24 Cheryl Soos
- 29 Dot Dorey

April

- 2 Doug Hill
- 27 Lori Bradsell

May

- 6 Bob Harrison
- 7 Irene Harrison
Princess Lewis
- 16 Barb Bradsell
- 22 Sharon Stevens
Ethel Terhune
- 26 Chip Parmele
Angie Rebert
- 27 Don Terhune
- 29 Angelina Han
Priya Krishnan
- 31 Eric Perkins

Blawenburg Village School

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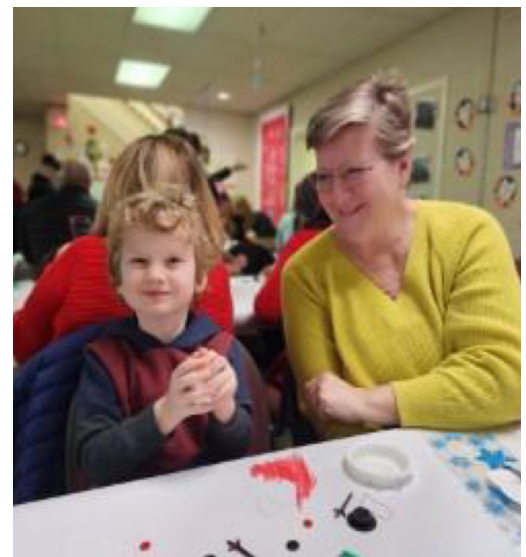
December was a very busy month at Blawenburg Village School. We started the month by learning about various holidays around the world. We visited Greece, Africa, Israel, Italy, and Germany. The Christmas season then officially began as we all traveled to Bethlehem, during our concerts. Due to the size of our enrollment, we had two separate Christmas pageants on December 15, which all BVS students participated in and were enjoyed by their family and friends. Our final week before Christmas break consisted of many fun activities. We wore ugly sweaters, jumped into the Christmas spirit, and had a cookie swap. This exciting week also included a school-wide pajama party and a visit from Santa Claus himself!

On January 29, our students had a winter fest celebration, where we watched a magic show, made a craft, and enjoyed some "winter s'mores". The week ended on a high note as we celebrated those that are near and dear to our hearts at Loved Ones' Day, on February 1 and 2.

Next, China will be at the forefront, as we learn about and engage in Chinese New Year festivities. What exciting activities we get to enjoy at BVS!

Enrollment for the 2024-2025 school year and summer camp is in full swing. Classes will be available for children ages two - six. If you know of anyone that may be interested in our school, please contact me for more information on our programs or to schedule a tour.

Angela Wright, Director



Missions



Four or five times a year we prepare bag lunches so that the folks at SHIP, (the Samaritan Homeless Interim Program, Somerville) can hand them out to those in need. Alan is pictured above making our delivery of January 30.



Sharon packaged food left over from our potluck lunch and took it to the food bank in Montgomery.



We regularly collect for the Montgomery Food Pantry.

Events

Sinterklaas



Dave gives last minute instructions.



Pastor Jeff prays with the workers.



Nancy, Barb B, and Evelyn show off the baked treats.



Barb P chats with a guest at the Missions table.



Workers at the craft table - Anne, Emma, Katherine & Bernice



The Soup Crew was busy all day. Jessie Thompson, Barb A, the Soup Guy, & Pete A.

Events—continued



Elmi (cheerfully, as always) works White Elephant.



Hilde gives a warm welcome to Yuri's mother-in-law, Carole.



Pastor Jeff in conversation with Rita and another guest.



Lisa and Jean catch their breath while packing White Elephant.



Cheryl and Barb R help out at a very busy jewelry table.



You never know what White Elephant might bring in!

The Furnace Surprise

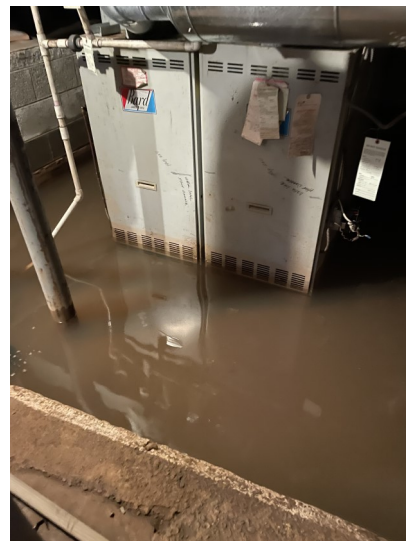
By David Cochran

The week before Christmas Eve plans were in place for the two services that celebrate the birth of Jesus. The music was prepared, bulletins were ready to print, and Pastor Jeff was polishing up his notes for the services. All things seemed in order until we had a very heavy rain on December 18. Then the unpredicted and very disrupting occurred. The basement flooded, the sump pump failed, and the heaters were underwater.

An ad hoc team of Preservation and Properties Team members acted quickly. The basement was pumped, a new sump pump was installed, and Valley Oil, the service company, pronounced the heaters inoperable. This meant that the Christmas Eve services would have to be relocated. Plan B, which had not been thought of yet, would have to be enacted fast. The family service was moved to Cook Hall, no problem. But what about the more heavily attended traditional service? Where could these worshipers be accommodated? Large portable heaters were considered, but deemed to be too expensive. Pastor Jeff reached out to our sister church, Griggstown Reformed, and they graciously accepted us. Whew! A fast communication plan assured good attendance at Griggstown.

But what was to come next? The Properties Team met to figure out what to do and how to pay for it. They want to have an environmentally friendly solution, so they quickly ruled out getting new oil burners. They are now seeking quotes on geothermal heat, which would be very expensive. Gas furnaces are less expensive to purchase and operate than oil. In addition, they are seeking quotes to replace the air conditioning system that hasn't worked for some time. They will be making a decision in the near future.

Financially, this problem occurred at a time when BRC is experiencing a \$150,000 budget deficit. We received \$17,000 from our insurance company, and there is some money available for other preservation projects that could be shifted to this one. As it stands now, the church does not have sufficient funds for this project. Please pray that we can find a means to complete this project. Thank God that we have Cook Hall as a meeting place. It's serving us well as an interim place to worship.



Have You Seen the Light?

Our steeple has been dark for some time. The Communication Team sought to correct this, since light is a form of communication. Our church seeks to be a beacon in Blawenburg village to remind people of God's grace in helping us through life.

We have made progress on the illumination of the front of our church. Using funds donated by a community member and some of the proceeds from Sinterklaas, we hired Motto Electric of Flemington to do wire repairs and install new LED lights. At this writing, the job is not complete. The lights need to be re-positioned to better illuminate both the front of the church and the steeple.

Thanks to Lee Bekir, who headed this project.



News from the Cemetery Team

The Blawenburg Cemetery Team is working to keep our historical cemetery maintained and repaired. Our only source of income is from sales of plots to the public. As costs rise, keeping the grass mowed, the fence repaired, and the headstones maintained is becoming difficult.

The team is going to send out a mailing soon to start our preservation campaign. To complete our mailing we are in need of contact information for the families of those interred in the cemetery. The team would appreciate hearing from you. Please contact any team member or send your suggestions to Blawenburg Church, PO Box 266, Blawenburg, NJ. 08504.

Thank you

Eric & Sue Perkins, Elmi Hill, Don & Ethel Terhune, Grace Johnson,
Jean Beachell

