

In His *Creed for Optimists*,  
Christian D. Larsen tells you how you can be somebody.

- Be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind.
- Talk health, happiness, and prosperity to every person you meet.
- Make all your friends feel there is something special in them.
- Look at the sunny side of everything.
- Think only of the best, work only for the best, and expect only the best.
- Be as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own.
- Forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future.
- Give everyone a smile. 😊
- Spend so much time improving yourself that you have no time to criticize others.
- Be too big for worry and too noble for anger.

This is the first year in four when we won't be with you at year end. Vacation this year prevents us from doing our normal reflecting. Still let's acknowledge that God has blessed us throughout another year. We have experienced joys and sorrows together. We have grown personally and corporately. We have seen God at work in many lives including our own.

It's good when you can get to the year end and be thankful. It's even better when you can kick off another one with anticipation. Robyn and I feel this way about this congregation. We look forward to God's provision and guidance in the year ahead. We're hoping you feel that way as well. As is often said, "We don't know what the future holds, but we do know who holds the future."

May God bless all of us in 2026.

- Pastor Gary and Robyn

**First Reformed Church, Volga, SD**

**January 2026**

## Glad Tidings

***"I bring you glad tidings of great joy..."***  
**Luke 2:10**

### **Let's begin the New Year with God!**

- **January 4**— The praise team will begin the service leading the congregation in singing praise songs. Jason Hove and Michelle Vander Wal will be ordained and installed as elder and Allen Van Hoepen will be ordained and installed as deacon, all for a 3-year term.
- **January 11**— A mixed quartet will lead in singing some hymns at the beginning of the service. A group will be going to Dakota Sun to present a short service there and fellowship with the residents.
- **January 18**— To begin the service, a men's group will lead the congregation in singing some hymns. We will be welcoming new members, hearing two professions of faith as well as baptism of a young child. The bell choir will provide praise ministry.
- **January 25** The praise band will begin the service by leading the congregation in some praise songs.





Your ongoing prayers for those in need of healing and those taking treatments would be appreciated: Gloria Egeberg, Danelyn Greene, Whitney Goetsch, Lois Kleinjan, Jodi Koerner, Bernita Kooima, Dawn Lucas, Joel Schonewill, Carolyn Tucker, Lee Vande Weerd, Harold Van Hoepen, Amy Vandermeer

- Larry Dyer has had two procedures to improve his heart condition
- Danelyn Greene had surgery to repair a torn ACL and a torn meniscus
- Marilyn Kleinjan roke her left wrist
- Bill Van Beek had surgery to repair two broken legs and an arm
- Joel Schonewill had a PET scan and revealed a new hot spot on his adrenal gland of his kidney
- Kayleen Bleeker had shoulder replacement reversal surgery.

**Congratulations to:**



Erika Cotton on the birth of her daughter, Alonna Lana on December 16. She joins a brother Rocko.

*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it. Proverbs 22:6*

Congratulations also to grandparents John Cotton, Penny Cotton and great grandmother, Carolyn Cotton.

**Upcoming Task Force Meetings**

- January 5 —Education Team
- January 20—MESA Team
- January 24—Consistory Visioning Session

ALL TEAMS are asked to meet before January 12 to get organized for the 2026 church year. Please get your names and officers to Susan by January 21. THANK YOU!

**Looking Back Ten Years..... 2016!**

- Installed Keith Van Duyn as elder and Wayne Mans and Kelly Vander Wal as deacons. Consistory Vice President is Keith Van Duyn while Al Kooima will serve as clerk.
- Consistory members assigned to the following task forces (now called teams) Worship—Scott Vander Wal, Education—Al Kooima and Roberta Volkers, Congregational Care—Keith Van Duyn and Howard Lindberg; MESA—Vern Lathrop and Kelly Vander Wal; Buildings and Grounds—Wayne Mans
- Received Maxine Bloker as a new member

**Highlights of Last Month**

- At the annual congregational meeting on December 7, the congregation voted unanimously to approve the 2026 budget. Jason Hove and Michelle Vander Wal were chosen as elders while Allen Van Hoepen was chosen as deacon.
- Celebrated the sacrament of Holy Communion on December 14
- Hosted the Volga Christian School Christmas Program on December 12
- Proceeds from the bake sale held at the Beta Psi Gallery of Gifts amounted to \$796. MESA Team named Teen Challenge of Brookings as the recipient
- Pastor Gary preached a series of messages based on *The Unhurried Christmas*. The Advent devotions were also based on the theme.
- The preschool through 5th grade presented the Christmas program during the December 21 morning worship service.

**Hy-Vee Receipts**

If you turn in Hy-Vee (Brookings only) receipts to the basket along the north wall in the fellowship hall, you can be a part of a MESA fund-raiser. When we reach **\$200,000** in receipts, Hy-Vee will donate \$1,000 toward a MESA project yet to be determined. As of December 19, Dori has tabulated \$35,726.23 in total receipts. A REMINDER: Please bring in your gas receipts also. Keep eating, stay healthy and make every bite count.

**Back Pews**

As our church continues to grow, we want to remind you that the back pews are reserved for families with small children.

Greetings from Nellie (One of our Compassion children)

Hello dear friends, Let me greet you with the peace of the Lord, hoping that you are doing well.

I am writing a bit about myself. In my studies, I am doing well. I am learning a lot, and every day, I try to strive more. My classes are about to finish; they end at the beginning of December, and then the summer break begins. I am not taking art classes for now, but I continue to be interested in learning new things. Also, I want to tell you that it is good that our children take Bible study classes in the fall. It is a very beautiful and important time because we learn more about God and how to apply His teachings in our daily lives.

I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the gift you sent me. With the gift, I got some clothes and some sneakers. I want to thank you very much.

I also want to tell you that I have good friends with whom I share very beautiful moments; they always support me and make me laugh.

That’s all for now. Let me say goodbye to you with much affection, wishing you and the church many blessings. I ask you to pray for me, for my family, so that God gives us health and wisdom every day.

Sincerely, Nelly.

Missionary Letters

There are letters posted on the bulletin board in the fellowship hall from the missionaries that we support. Be sure to stop and read them and support them in prayer.

A note of encouragement to them is always appreciated.

- JUST FOR TODAY**—I will live through the next 12 hours and not try to tackle all life’s problems,

**JUST FOR TODAY**—I will improve my mind. I will learn something useful. I will read something that requires effort, thought and concentration.

**JUST FOR TODAY**— I will do two things I don’t want to do, just for the exercise.

**JUST FOR TODAY**—I will reveal to others the peace Christ has given me.

2025 Team Reports

WORSHIP TEAM - Ron Koerner, Chair

**Members:** Susan Vander Wal (ex-officio—secy.) Charles Sapp (consistory rep) Pastor Gary, Kayleen Bleeker, Bev Cotton, Karen Knutson, Bill Van Beek

**Team Scope:** Worship Team coordinates worship services by assisting Pastor Gary, seasonal decorating, music, ushers, nursery and overall flow of services

High level activities:

- Karen and Bill joined
- Coordinating weekly pre-praise singing and special music
- Maintain and clean nursery
- Advent: decorated with help from others
- Crops & Industry: incorporated in morning worship service
- Lenten Services: Rotated between Calvary Orthodox Presbyterian, Christian Reformed and First Reformed
- Ash Wednesday: service including medallions
- Palm Sunday: Children’s processional and special music
- Maundy Thursday and Good Friday: Pastor Gary led a Tenebrae service at Faith Reformed in Brookings, Pastor Rick led Good Friday service at First Reformed
- Easter Sunday: Decorated and provided Sunrise service and breakfast
- Old Timer’s Weekend: Community hymn sing with cookies and drinks for fellowship
- Outdoor Service: was held, set up chairs and tables
- Appreciation gifts provided to musicians as a thank you
- Fall Community Hymn sing: Darwin Husby provided songs along with some congregational hymns
- Thanksgiving Eve service followed with pie fellowship
- Ron and Bev agreed to an additional two-years

CONGREGATIONAL CARE TEAM - Bruce Lucas, Chair

Team members were: Bruce Lucas, Dawn Lucas, Laura Hove, Robyn Mulder, Jason Volkers, Roberta Volkers and Jake Volkers (same for 2026)

1. Provided partial payment for men of the congregation and their guest to attend RESGEN in Sioux Falls in February.
2. Honored mothers/fathers of the congregation with muffins on Mother’s Day and cookies on Father’s Day in May and June respectively
3. Served a catered meal after the outdoor worship service in August
4. On February 18, we provided a meal after our missionaries, the Rodriquez family spoke about their work in Peru
5. Organized 2 potluck meals: One in June to commemorate the new kitchen remodel, and a second for New Member/Pastor Appreciation in November.
6. Gift cards were sent to our college students in late November wishing them well as they finish their semester letting them know we are praying for them as they continue their education.
7. Cards and boxes of chocolates were distributed to the widows/widowers letting them know that we are thinking of them during the holiday season.

BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS, submitted by Ron Koerner, Chair

**Members:** Jerry Heier (Secy), Cody Knapp, Bryon Mullett (consistory rep), Harold Jefferis (consistory rep)

**Team scope:** Plan and maintain both the church and parsonage buildings and grounds

High level activities:

1. General maintenance—furnace filters, water filters, sprinklers, mower service, contracts, etc.
2. Review list of concern items including fellowship hall insulation and church shingles
3. Closed bid on remaining kitchen items
4. Parsonage radon system installed
5. Evaluated and received quote on fellowship area additional insulation—plan for fall/winter
6. Repaired two AC units
7. Replaced west women’s bathroom water heater
8. Repaired thermostat in custodial room water heater
9. Combination lock on room for bells
10. Quote, consistory approval, member meeting approval and installation of new shingles on all of the church building
11. Cody agreed to additional 2-year service

EDUCATION TEAM - Heidi Ostrem, Chair

Members: Chair Heidi Ostrem, Secretary Nicole Vande Weerd, Sunday School Superintendent Michelle Vande Weerd, Elder Scott Vander Wal, Pastor Gary Mulder, Paisley Raml, Megan Sinner and Laci Volkers

The 24-25 Sunday School year was completed in May with the K-1st grade through middle school classes showcasing their memorization pieces during two different church services. Soon after school ended for the year, we co-hosted “Road Trip” Community Vacation Bible School with the Christian Reformed Church.

In the summer, we had 18 middle schoolers and chaperones attend Power Connection in Minnesota. We also had one middle schooler attend a summer Bible camp, who received reimbursement funds through the Education Team budget. We pray they all had a meaningful and faith-building time at these two events.

Our Sunday School kick-off for the 25-26 Sunday School year included a dunk tank where church members of all ages dunked Pastor Gary, Michelle Vande Weerd and Nicole Vande Weerd. Members also made bracelets, using UV-activated beads. Members were encouraged to make enough to share with community members. Supplies for the beads were purchased in conjunction with MESA.

We finished 2025 with a Christmas program on December 19th. This was held during the traditional Sunday morning service and Sunday School members were active in multiple portions of the service including prelude, Advent candle lighting, leading of the worship songs and sharing Christmas-themes readings.

We appreciate all the help and support given to the Education Team, especially our Sunday School teachers, music leaders and youth group volunteers.

MESA (Mission, Evangelism and Social Action) submitted by Tim Goetsch, Chair

As we close out 2025, I am grateful for the faithful service and generosity of the MESA Team and the entire congregation. Through our collective efforts, we have supported local ministries, international missions, and community outreach in meaningful ways, all while fostering fellowship and spiritual growth. Below is a summary of our key activities and accomplishments this year.

**Support for Local Ministries and Community Needs**

- **The Harvest Table Soup Kitchen**—collected \$520 through our February “Souper Bowl” offering to purchase food for meals. Served meals twice during the year (spring and fall), each time feeding approximately 80 people. Donated remaining funds of \$210.25 directly to The Harvest Table.
- **Option One Pregnancy Center**—collected and delivered needed items in the spring. Organized a successful pie sale at Old Timer’s Day, raising \$1,218, which was donated to Option One.
- **Center of Hope**—conducted two collection drives (spring and fall) for essential items and clothing, with deliveries made shortly after each drive.
- **The Family Back to School Project**—submitted Hy-Vee receipts throughout the year, receiving a \$1,000 check that was donated to support back-to-school needs.
- **Volga Christian School**—collected and delivered school supplies to help students prepare for the new school year.
- **Freedom’s Gate Church**—served a meal to more than 70 people and joined them for a Sunday service, strengthening our partnership.
- **Teen Challenge of the Dakotas**—held a bake sale at the Beta Psi Gallery of Gifts craft show in December, raising nearly \$800, which was donated to support their mission.

**Global and Mission Support**

- **Casa Del Maestro (Cusco, Peru– Sandy and Albino Rodriguez)** - hosted the Rodriguez family during their US visit. They shared an update on their mission work with the congregation. MESA provided a meal (served by the Congregational Care Team) and contributed \$150 toward their travel expenses.
- **Words of Hope**—hosted a speaker who shared about their ministry, accompanied by a special offering to support their work.
- **Operation Christmas Child**—collected more than 40 filled boxes, which were delivered for distribution to children around the world.

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MESA Report (continued from previous page)

### **Fellowship and Community Outreach**

- **Ark Encounter Bus Trip**—Partnering with Bill Van Beek, MESA organized a bus trip to the Ark Encounter and Creation Museum. Over 50 people attended, enjoyed a meaningful time of fellowship and spiritual encouragement.
- **Community Prayer Walk**—Organized a prayer walk in August, receiving enthusiastic positive feedback and forming valuable new community connections.
- **Sunday School Support**—Purchased supplies and assisted students in making bracelets during the Sunday School Kickoff event.

### **Financial Summary of Key Donations**

- The Harvest Table: \$210.25
- Option One: \$1,218
- The Family Back to School Project—\$1,000
- Teen Challenge of the Dakotas: ~\$800
- Rodriguez family travel support: \$150
- Additional impact through in-kind donations of meals, supplies and collection.

### **Highlights and Impact**

Through these efforts, MESA touched hundreds of lives with practical help, financial support, and the love of Christ. Our hands-on service projects, mission partnerships, and fellowship events strengthened both our church family and the broader community.

### **Gratitude**

Thank you to the MESA Team, volunteers (including Bill Van Beek and the Congregational Care Team), and the entire congregation for your prayers, time, and generosity. Special appreciation to those who organized events, cooked, drove and gave so freely.

### **Looking Ahead**

As we step into 2026, may we continue to seek opportunities to serve faithfully and love boldly.

In His service, Tim Goetsch, MESA Chair



**Kaleb and Erika Schelhaas and sons Nash and Krue** joined the FRC family in November. Krue received the sacrament of baptism. Thank you for treating the congregation to cupcakes (made by Erika's mother) after the service.

Kaleb is from Worthington, MN. He obtained a degree in construction management from SDSU. Kaleb works for Artaic Group based out of Denver, CO. Erika is from Brookings. She has a BSN in nursing from SMSU (Southwest Minnesota State University.) She works part-time for Avera Research and stays home with their boys full-time.

Their hobbies and interests are family time, fishing, traveling, golfing, and enjoy spending with their two Boxers, Lola and Mya.

The family resides in Volga with their two sons, Nash (3 years old) and Krue (18 months old.)

## **ALPHA AND OMEGA**

The alpha (A) and the omega (Ω) are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. The Alpha and Omega (AΩ) is an early Christian inscription, found in the Roman catacombs, signifying God's eternal being and reminding us of our limited understanding of a God who is without beginning or end. This God is the eternal One whom we worship and praise as we gather together.

Scripture References:

Isaiah 44:6, Revelation 1:8, and Psalm 86:8-10

