

# Western Times

*Newsletter of the Christian Reformed Church of Western Springs*

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## **CRCWS Pastoral Search Committee Report**

The Search Committee commissioned by our Council has been tasked with presenting the congregation with a nominee to be our next pastor. We have begun meeting to start the arduous task and wanted to give you some idea of the process.

The committee members are John DeYoung and Alan Bilthouse, co-chairmen, Liz Casseday, Jim Buitter, Lynn Veldman, Melissa Gardner and Adrian Breems. We will be assisted in this process by Sam Hamstra, a member of the Rukes Search Group, who the Council has elected to hire. Sam's job is to help us discover who our next pastor will be. He has had many years of experience in this field, first with the company he founded, and now as a member of the Rukes Search Group. He has written books on the subject, and we will be using one of them as a guide in our search. He possesses many resources and has the knowledge and experience that will enable us to do our best to find our next pastor.

First and foremost in the process will be the prayers of the congregation as we start this search process. We covet your prayers and will attempt to communicate with you specific prayer requests along the way.

Most likely, the entire process will take some time, and maybe up to one year before the nominee can be voted upon by the congregation. It is a long time to be without someone to lead us, but the Council has done a great job with giving us interim leadership and we want to make sure the candidate we present is the person God has chosen for us.

Before we begin the actual process of the search, there are some steps that we as a congregation and as a committee need to be taken:

- As stated before, we need to pray for wisdom to discern God's leading in the process;
- We will discover and embrace the identity of our church as a people of God, the bride of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit;
- We will be establishing a process for your pervasive prayers;
- We will be listening to you as a congregation and establish a process for clear, concise and compelling communication with you;
- We will be working with the Council as they review and possibly update our website, which is the first place a pastoral candidate will look for information on our church;
- We will be working with Council to develop a church profile to share with potential candidates;
- We will be working with the Council to develop a position description that excites the heart of our next pastor;
- We will devise a guide as to how our meetings are conducted and decisions are made;
- Lastly, we will claim God's promise with additional prayer.

As you can see, this is a formidable task, and we are humbled by the confidence that you have placed in us as a committee to present you with a nominee for our next pastor.

If you have any questions, concerns or comments along the way, please feel free to contact any one of the committee members, and we will attempt to address them with you. As the process goes forward, we will try to always give updates and keep everyone informed, as you are a vital part of this process.

For now though, the most important thing you can do is to pray for us, Sam Hamstra and for our future next pastor.

Lynn Veldman, Secretary, Search Committee

# **An Introduction**

**Rev. Ben Snoek, Worship Advisor**

## **About me:**

I have a deep love and concern for Christ's church, particularly those gatherings of the church that we call the Christian Reformed Church. I grew up in the denomination, baptized and raised at Calvary CRC in Holland, Michigan. When I felt that God was calling me to serve in vocational ministry, I decided to leave the "West Michigan bubble" and studied at Indiana Wesleyan University. I earned my bachelor's and master's degrees at IWU and then completed further graduate studies at Calvin Theological Seminary to meet CRC ordination requirements.

As we speak, I am in the process of defending my Ph.D. dissertation; I plan to graduate this fall from Columbia International University. My doctorate is in systematic theology, focusing my research on evangelical worship practices. I am very passionate about the study and renewal of Christian worship, especially in local church congregations. I participate in worship advising with CRC denominational staff and contribute regularly to the Reformed Worship journal.

I was ordained in the CRC in February 2021, first called to serve Asbury University (Wilmore, Kentucky) as Director of University Chapel. A few months later, I took a risk and accepted a one-year appointment at Trinity Christian College as Interim Campus Pastor. Since August 2022, I have been the permanent chaplain at Trinity, and I also get to teach our ministry courses. I love serving college-aged students at such an important season of their vocational and spiritual formation. God has surprised me with the joys of campus ministry, and I am now grateful that God has surprised me with the opportunity to serve in a part-time capacity at the Western Springs CRC.

Outside of work, you might find me searching out local coffee shops, baking cookies, or spending time with friends. I'm new to the area, so I welcome any recommendations for places to enjoy in the west suburbs!

## **About my area of ministry at WSCRC:**

The council has entrusted me, as Worship Advisor, with responsibilities for preaching and liturgy. I will preach on the first Sunday of the month (and participate in the celebration of Communion), and I will plan the liturgies for each Sunday service. I

work closely and collaboratively with Renee DeJager, who plans the musical elements for services. I also serve on the Worship Committee, led by Dr. Sharon Robbert. Finally, I will support the elders with some elements pertaining to the pastoral transition.

**My thoughts for ministry at the church in the upcoming year:**

I have described myself as a resource to the congregation during this season of transition. With so many staff transitions at this church in the past year, I understand those who might be feeling apprehensive or even pessimistic toward this year of change. I hope, then, to be a stabilizing force and to use what I learn about the congregation to support a healthy and fruitful leadership transition. I also hope that my knowledge of denominational life and pastoral realities might offer an “insider’s perspective” to these complex considerations.

This is not my first time serving a vacant Christian Reformed congregation. In 2019, I served the Kibbie CRC (South Haven, Michigan) during a period of vacancy and offered similar support to their ministries of preaching and liturgical planning. Having served as an interim pastor both at Kibbie and at Trinity, I have found that just as much as pastoral transitions can be stressful and panic-inducing, these seasons can also be wonderful opportunities to watch God start new and exciting opportunities. I hope that, in this upcoming year, we might approach this transition with a posture of courage and curiosity, daring to believe that our God will bring us to a good and blessed place.

Based on my observations in these past few months, I believe that God has blessed the Western Springs CRC with the resources, capacity, and enthusiasm for fruitful ministry in our neighborhood. What if we made room for the Spirit to surprise us, disrupting what we think is best and trusting in what God might be calling us to embrace next? I have found the WSCRC family to be a kind, generous, and passionate community, and I pray that God will bring leaders who can align our congregation with God’s big dreams.

If you have questions or thoughts on how my work can serve you and the congregation this year, feel free to catch me after a service or email me at [ben.snoek@crcws.org](mailto:ben.snoek@crcws.org). God has great things in store for WSCRC, and I look forward to journeying together as we pursue God’s will to the glory of his name.

# **An Introduction**

## **Renee DeJager, Director of Music Ministries**

Renee was born and raised in Chicago and the western suburbs, respectively, and music has always been a big part of her life. She started piano lessons at the age of 6, began clarinet in the 4th grade and sang in the choir while attending St. John Lutheran in Lombard. When her parents moved to Hinsdale, she began attending Timothy Christian Schools at the Western Springs campus, starting in 6th grade. While at Timothy, she participated in band and choir, singing and serving as the accompanist, both in middle school and high school. It was in high school where her passion for choral music and teaching were ignited. She graduated in 1985.

The Lord led her to study at the Wheaton College Conservatory of Music where she graduated with a Bachelor of Music Education degree along with a second major in German. She served in the public school system for 20 years. While working, Renee attended 4 summers at the University of Illinois (Urbana Champaign) earning a Master of Arts in Music Education in 1996. She returned to Concordia University Chicago to earn a Master of Science in Educational Leadership in 2013.

In 2010, the Lord led Renee to return to Timothy Christian to serve as the K-8 Music teacher. To challenge students who excel in the choral art, Renee also established an auditioned group called Jr. Chamber Ensemble for grades 5-8, which meets before school two days a week. TCS now has 5 choirs from grades 5-8 of which Renee directs four.

Renee is in her 34th year as a choral music educator. She is a frequent choral adjudicator and presenter and has held leadership positions in Illinois Music Educators Association and the Illinois chapter and Midwest regional chapter of the American Choral Directors Association. She has been published in the national journal of the American Choral Directors Association.

Outside of teaching, she enjoys traveling, gardening, baking, cooking, reading, and most of all, spending time with her 3 children, all of whom graduated from Timothy Christian High School. Her oldest son, Michael (28), graduated from Lewis University and is an aircraft mechanic for United Airlines at O'Hare. He and his wife, Molly, live in Carol Stream. Her daughter, Christa (25), graduated from Wheaton College and works at Caring Network as a pregnancy consultant, and her youngest son, Andrew (20), is a junior studying physics and mathematics at Calvin University. In addition, she also sings with the Hinsdale Chorale and is thrilled to serve as the Director of Music Ministries at the Christian Reformed Church of Western Springs.

## **An Introduction**

### **Rebecca Walstra**

"Hi! I'm Rebecca Walstra, but everyone knows me as Becky. (I'm only Rebecca in writing!) I grew up on a vegetable farm in Chicago Heights, IL and moved to Cedar Lake, IN 3 years ago. I currently live in an apartment with my cat, Honey. I attended Illiana Christian High School while it was still in Lansing, Illinois and graduated in 2018, the last class from the old building! Then, I attended Trinity Christian College and got my BA in Mathematics (huge shout out to the best math prof ever ;) ). I graduated in 2021...COVID style. While at Trinity, I got an internship at Schillings in St. John and moved into full-time work there after graduation. I am now a sales assistant in the Kitchen & Bath Department and am starting to manage my own accounts with builders. When I was little, my family attended First Reformed of Lansing (now, First PCA) and then First United Methodist Church in Lansing. When I was 6, we started attending church at Oak Glen URC in Lansing. I am currently a member of Immanuel URC in DeMotte, Indiana.

Music has always been a part of my life. My grandma, Jean Walstra, was a well-known organist in the Lansing/South Holland area. She wanted to start me with piano lessons when I was two...my parents said she was crazy! So instead, she would sit with me at the piano while she babysat me. She passed away when I was 3-1/2, but my

parents started me in lessons not too much later when I was 4. I took piano lessons from Mary Wiltjer and Linda Vegter. I "graduated" to organ lessons when I was 11. Justin Rich is my organ teacher. I started playing with my school's choir when I was in junior high and continued to play for my grade school and high school choir all through high school. I also started to accompany Men of A-Chord when I was in 8th grade, and have become more involved with them ever since! I played the piano for Messiah and Elijah with the Illiana Oratorio Society last winter and spring and am currently practicing playing the organ for this winter's performance of Handel's *Messiah*. (Please reach out to me if you'd like to come sing with us!) I have also played for a couple pop-up choruses over the past several years, and play occasionally with the Lakeside Artists Guild and Academy. I played for my first full church service when I was 13, and have loved it ever since! I started with covering services at random churches, and eventually started to get scheduled regularly at a couple churches. Previously, I played on Sunday mornings at St. Peter & St. Paul Slovak Lutheran Church, a very small church in Blue Island. I still continue to play for a couple URCs for evening services.

I am so excited to see where God leads me in my work in the Lord, and look forward to all the new opportunities for me to share my gifts at Western Springs CRC! "

## **Marriage Announcement**

January 9th is a special day in the lives of Christopher and Maria Dumitrescu (née Sasaki). It was the date of their first date and will be the date of their wedding ceremony exactly two years later in Hawaii. The pair met in their breakroom and shared lunchroom at the company they work for. Daily discussions during lunch led to that first dinner date.

The bride, a 2008 graduate of LTHS and a 2012 graduate of Monmouth College majoring in international business was born and raised in Sendai, Japan. At age 15, she began living with her grandparents, WSCRC members George and Alice Smith, and started attending WSCRC with them, occasionally playing her flute with the

church music ensemble and taking part in Sunday school. She made a profession of her faith in 2009 at her church in Sendai. She is employed as a Laser Application Engineer at Amada America in Schaumburg.

Christopher Dumitrescu, the groom, was born and raised in Elmhurst, graduated from York High School, and subsequently obtained his BS in Business Administration-Accounting at Roosevelt University. He was baptized at his Church in Chicago in 2016. After a decade of working as an electrician for his father`s company, including a few months in Okinawa, Japan, he is currently employed as a Sales Assistant and Administrator at Amada Machinery America, also in Schaumburg.

Chris and Maria enjoy living an active lifestyle both physically and intellectually. Some of the mutual hobbies include exercising, bike riding, reading, and playing duets at church, Chris on the piano and Maria on the flute. They are both currently learning each other`s native language, Japanese and Romanian.

The couple were officially married in a civil ceremony on August 18th. They were joined by family from Iowa, Michigan, and Japan as well as nearby family and friends for a celebration party on the following day. They plan to make their home in Arlington Heights.





# **Our Newly Elected Council Members**

**compiled by Brent Yurschak**

In keeping with our tradition, we present (auto)biographical sketches of our newest-serving council members. All entries are in alphabetical order.

## **ZACH GARDNER, Deacon**

I officially became a member of Western Springs CRC in April 2023. My wife, Melissa, grew up attending Western Springs CRC and we were married here in December of 2017. As you can see, even prior to becoming an official member, I've had ties to Western Springs for a number of years. I grew up in western Michigan and attended an RCA church there where I made profession of faith at 15 years old. I've spent most of my adult life living in the Midwest minus the four years we spent living in Northern California while I was an active duty officer in the Air Force.

Melissa and I have been married for five years and we have two children: Connor, 4 and Charlie, 1. We are also expecting a baby boy in December of this year.

I have a bachelor's degree in civil engineering and work as a project manager / civil engineer for a company which primarily works with federal clients. I also serve as a civil engineer officer on a part-time basis in the Illinois Air National Guard in Peoria, IL.

Being a dad of young kids, I find myself often watching Sesame Street, playing Floor is Lava, or generally playing with kids. I also enjoy playing volleyball, running, biking, hiking, board games, and throwing the frisbee around. This is the first term I have served as a deacon and I'm looking forward to serving the congregation.

## **JOHN PROKOP, Deacon**

I was a member of Saint Paul's United Church of Christ since being baptized at age 16. I received a phone call one day from my longtime friend Chuck Wierema saying that he had a new pastor, Pastor Mark, and we were invited to attend a worship service.

This church, with its strong teaching of the Bible, has really strengthened my faith. This is the second time I've had the honor and privilege to be a deacon.

Mary and I have been married now for 31 years. We met while my two daughters, Stephanie and Katie, and Mary's son Nick were playing Catch the Old Man at McCollum Park (Downers Grove) one day after work. I was bushed. I sat down and Mary asked how I knew Nick. I told her my Katie had a crush on Nick; they met at the daycare center. After many bike rides, hayrides, fishing outings, zoo visits, and movie nights, she finally answered yes. Nick was my best man. Stephanie lives in Apollo Beach, FL, Katherine lives in Fort Myers FL, and Nick lives in Myrtle Beach, SC. We have 5 grandchildren – Aiden, Addie, Matthew, Luca, and Emylia. In my spare time I enjoy drowning nightcrawlers in my 14' fishing boat.

**RANDY SCHMURR, Elder**

My wife Kimberly and I started attending Western Springs CRC in September, 1993. At that time, we had been married for only a year. Since then, we have raised 4 children, 2 of whom have graduated college and started lives of their own in Florida and Virginia, and 2 who are in the midst of college at Calvin University and Lipscomb University. As we are on the cusp of an empty nest, we have been learning what it takes to be parents to adult children and what it means to get re-acquainted as a married couple without the constant distraction of children.

As a family, we enjoyed visiting the many wonderful national parks which usually involved tenting and lots of hiking. Now that our children have busy schedules of their own, we find opportunities to explore the places where our children have settled as we visit them.

I have a bachelor's and a master's degree in electrical engineering. For most of my career, I have designed and supported the manufacturing of electronic controls for home appliances as a design engineer and as a manager. I am now involved in the expanding industry of product packaging and automated warehousing for all of us

online shoppers.

In my free time, I enjoy car repair and home maintenance and construction. My most recent project involved the remodeling of a bathroom in our house.

I have always had a passion for the church, and I am a strong believer in small groups as one of the best ways that a church can serve its members and for members to grow spiritually and grow in community. My favorite passage is Romans 8 which summarizes basic truths about the gospel and the amazing power of Christ's work to free us for service to God as we are freed from the shackles of sin.

In my one term as a deacon and three previous terms as elder I have had the privilege serving both in joyous and difficult times in the life of Western Springs CRC. The challenge ahead of finding a pastor is nothing new, and I am encouraged by a congregation that continues to serve one another. My prayer is that as we serve in this little corner of God's Kingdom, we fully embrace the place where God has put us and seek to serve that Kingdom with all of our heart, strength and mind never forgetting that God has a plan for each one of us and for the congregation of Western Springs CRC.

**TOM VAN KOEVERING, Elder**

My wife, Denise, and I have been members of Western Springs CRC for 26 years. Denise and I have been married 32 years. We have two grown boys and a new daughter—in law (Mitchell and Colleen and Luke).

I have been a deacon three times since joining this church, and this is my second term as elder.

I work with blind and visually impaired students at Chicago Public Schools. I teach them travel skills so they can be independent travelers.

In my free time since I no longer watch our boys play sports, I spend a lot of time participating in outdoor activities, projects that need completing and traveling.

I like to travel to warm areas in the winter and go and visit the kids and other family members during other times of the year.

## Thank You from Dan Mattix

Dear church family,

Thank you for your kind generosity throughout our ministry transition. We are so grateful for all the thoughtful words, gifts, and encouragement we have received.

Especially thoughtful was your collective gift the academic regalia that I was able to wear at the graduation ceremony last month.

We are so grateful that our children were baptized at WSCRC, they took their first steps and had their formative years in 5200 Wolf Road, and we will always treasure the thirteen-and-a-half years of fulltime church ministry invested in Western Springs Christian Reformed Church. May God bless your continued growth and fruitfulness in ministry. Great things lie ahead for our WSCRC church family!

Dan, Katie, Clara, and Ethan Mattix



*At left is a photo of Dan wearing the academic regalia at Moody's commencement, pictured with former CRCWS intern (and 2023 Moody graduate) Jane Jaikumar.*

## 2023 Graduates

compiled by Brent Yurschak



*Noah Wyant* graduated from Lyons Township High School. He is attending the College of DuPage and is enrolled in the culinary arts program.



*Matthew McKenney* graduated from the University of Illinois at Springfield and received a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Science. At commencement, he sang the State Song of Illinois.

Matthew is currently employed at Fast Enterprises, consulting for the Illinois Department of Revenue in Springfield. He is creating software to streamline government processes such as issuing and maintaining government licenses.



*Anja Robbert* graduated from Whitworth University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology. She is currently working at Habitat for Humanity.



*Luke van Koevering* received a Master of Science degree in Cardiovascular Perfusion from Rush University. He has since moved to Grand Rapids, MI and is employed at Corewell Health.