

# DEWITT REFORMED CHURCH



Reformed Church in America  
FEBRUARY 2025



Monthly Church Newsletter  
Rev. Dr. Micheal Edwards,

## Pastor's Reflection:



## The Greatest Love - Jesus' Love: The Conditions of Discipleship

"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also ... . And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me ... . So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26-27, 33).

If the closest relationships of a disciple's life conflict with the claims of Jesus Christ, then our Lord requires instant obedience to Himself. Discipleship means personal, passionate devotion to a Person—our Lord Jesus Christ. There is a vast difference between devotion to a person and devotion to principles or to a cause. Our Lord never proclaimed a cause—He proclaimed personal devotion to Himself. To be a disciple is to be a devoted bondservant motivated by love for the Lord Jesus. Many of us who call ourselves Christians are not truly devoted to Jesus Christ. No one on earth has this passionate love for the Lord Jesus unless the Holy Spirit has given it to him. We may admire, respect, and revere Him, but we cannot love Him on our own. The only One who truly loves the Lord Jesus is the Holy Spirit, and it is He who has "poured out in our hearts" the very "love of God" (Romans 5:5). Whenever the Holy Spirit sees an opportunity to glorify Jesus through you, He will take your entire being and set you ablaze with glowing devotion to Jesus Christ.

The Christian life is a life characterized by true and spontaneous creativity. Consequently, a disciple is subject to the same charge that was leveled against Jesus Christ, namely, the charge of inconsistency. But Jesus Christ was always consistent in His relationship to God, and a Christian must be consistent in his relationship to the life of the Son of God in him, not consistent to strict, unyielding doctrines. People pour themselves into their own doctrines, and God has to blast them out of their preconceived ideas before they can become devoted to Jesus Christ.



## African American Month Attire:

It has been the church tradition to wear African Attire during the Month of February in observance of Black History Month.



## Special dates

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African American History Month

Valentine's Day, February 14, 2025

Presidents Day, February 17, 2025

## Preaching for the Month of February:

- ( 2 ) Rev. Dr. Micheal Edwards
- ( 9 ) Rev. Dr. Micheal Edwards
- (16) Elder Irma Williams
- (22) Rev. Dr. Micheal Edwards

## Birthday of the Month: FEBRUARY



7<sup>th</sup> Joyce Williams, 14<sup>th</sup> Tiana Howell 15<sup>th</sup> Deacon Carol Garcia Petersen

## AFRICAN-AMERICAN History Month





- February 2, 2025: Communion Visitation
- February 3, 2025: A Day of Fasting and Praying.

## Words of welcome

- Jesus calls us to follow him. We start by hearing his teachings and being strengthened through Holy Communion. So we are here. Welcome, one and all.
- Welcome to DeWitt Reformed Church, in the name of Christ our Savior, our Brother, our Friend. Amen.
- Family of Christ, welcome to worship! In Jesus' name, please greet the children of God seated near you.

## Preparation for Worship

### For the Week of February 2

Jesus, this Valentine's month and all year long, help me live in love so that, whatever else I do, I will not be "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13:1, NRSV).

### For the Week of February 9

Wherever you call me to go this week, Lord, may I respond like Isaiah: "Here I am. Send me" (Isaiah 6:8). And may my time at worship today strengthen me to do just that.

### For the Week of February 16

God, I come to you with many preoccupations. Settle my spirit in the embrace of your love and peace. Amen.

### For the Week of February 23

As days grow longer and we continue to celebrate your light this Epiphany season, dear Jesus, help us spread kindness and compassion in ever-widening circles as testimony to you.

## REFLECTIVE LOVE

### PAYMENTS FOR YOUR "2025"

ASSESSMENT (\$111.00) CAN BE PAID TO THE CHURCH. PLEASE SEE: ANY DEACON



### In Gratitude:

- Those members who participated in the Prayer Fellowship

## A prayer of confession

Dear God, we admit we've fallen short in all areas of our lives. We haven't followed you faithfully, and we haven't shown

love to our neighbors. We don't deserve your forgiveness. But we confess our sins, knowing that you are a God of grace. Thank you for offering us your riches at Christ's expense. Give us a clean slate and help us live for you, now and always. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## The greatest love of all

For God so loVed the world  
thAt He gave His  
onLy  
begottEn  
SoN,  
thaT whoever  
belIeves  
iN Him should not perish  
but havE everlasting life.  
(John 3:16, NKJV)

## The gift that gives



Love ever gives,  
forgives, outlives  
and ever stands  
with open hands.  
And while it lives, it gives.  
For this is love's prerogative —  
to give, and give, and give. —John Oxenham



We're so accustomed to hearing the Bible's "love chapter," 1 Corinthians 13, at weddings and other occasions that we may not really hear its meaning anymore. It can help to listen to something familiar said in different words. What new understandings of love does this paraphrase from *The Message Bible* reveal to you?

"Love never gives up. Love cares more for others than for self. Love doesn't want what it doesn't have. Love doesn't strut, doesn't have a swelled head, doesn't force itself on others, isn't always 'me first,' doesn't fly off the handle, doesn't keep score of the sins of others, doesn't revel when others grovel, takes pleasure in the flowering of truth, puts up with anything, trusts God always, always looks for the best, never looks back, but keeps going to the end. Love never dies" (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, MSG).

## REFLECTION:

- "Try to be a rainbow in someone's cloud." —Maya Angelou
- "Love is something eternal; the aspect may change, but not the essence." —Vincent van Gogh
- "There are no seven wonders of the world in the eyes of a child. There are seven million." —Walt Streightiff
- "Without Valentine's Day, February would be ... well, January." —Jim Gaffigan

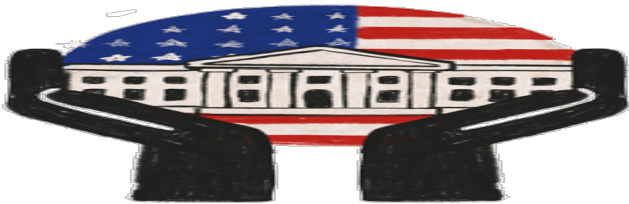
## Spring training for Christians

The word Lent comes from Middle English and German words for springtime. In light of the start of baseball season, some people call the pre-Easter season “spring training for Christians.” This fresh perspective moves away from the flawed understanding that Lent must be somber, or that giving something up for Lent is punishment for sin or a way to earn God’s favor.

As people of faith, we should never take a season off. But every so often — at least once a year! — we do well to examine where we need to get back in shape spiritually. Perhaps we will indeed opt to give something up: that swearing habit, sleeping in on Sundays, or the cost of a weekly treat so we can donate the money instead. Or maybe we’ll take on something new for Lent: a Bible study, prayer routine or service project.

Hebrews describes spiritual discipline as challenging in the moment but yielding righteousness later. The writer urges us, “Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees ... so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed” (12:11-13, ESV). May the spring training of Lent strengthen and heal us all.

## A prayer for Presidents Day



Lord of heaven and earth, we offer you our deepest gratitude for this country and the freedom to worship you. Stir up a sense of stewardship so we all may care for our nation and each inhabitant of it.

We pray especially for our leaders, that you will bless them with wisdom and humility. Prompt everyone in positions of authority to pursue righteousness, justice and the welfare of all.

Remind us of the psalmist’s teaching: “Happy is the nation whose God is the Lord” (Psalm 33:12, NRSV). May that promise be fulfilled “from sea to shining sea.” Amen.

## True love

Many of us celebrate Valentine’s Day in both fun and serious ways. Children exchange treats and humorous cards with classmates and friends; some bring home handmade cards for the adults in their lives. Romantic partners may go out to eat and present each other

flowers, chocolate, a fancy card — maybe even an engagement ring!

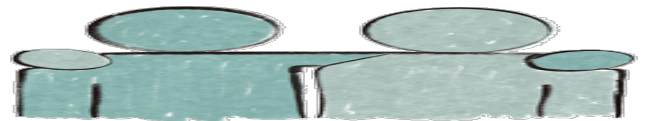
As playful as Valentine’s Day can be, it’s also a great time to remember the serious side of love, as indicated by these quotes:

- “When you love someone, you love the whole person as he or she is, and not as you would like them to be.” —Leo Tolstoy
- “You don’t love someone because they’re perfect; you love them in spite of the fact that they’re not.” —Jodi Picoult
- “Love ... is quiet understanding, mutual confidence, sharing and forgiving. ... It settles for less than perfection and makes allowances for human weaknesses.” —Ann Landers

We can do the difficult work of true love — actions, not just feelings — only because God loved us first. He did (and does) so despite our imperfection, and in Jesus, God shows us how to share true love with others. This Valentine’s Day, if you don’t remember any other profound quotes, hold this one in your heart:

- “We love because God first loved us.” —1 John 4:19 (NCV)

## “I am here”



In *Bread for the Journey*, theologian Henri J.M. Nouwen calls consolation — from “to be with” (con-) “the lonely one” (solus) — “one of the most important ways to care.” He writes, “Life is so full of pain, sadness and loneliness that we often wonder what we can do to alleviate the immense suffering we see.”

Although consoling doesn’t necessarily remove someone’s pain, Nouwen notes that it serves a deeper purpose: To console means “to be there and say, ‘You are not alone, I am with you. Together we can carry the burden. Don’t be afraid. I am here.’ That is consolation. We all need to give it as well as to receive it.”

## The work of racial reconciliation

Racial reconciliation isn’t a new concept. Some 2,000 years ago, the apostle Philip recognized that a man from Ethiopia was just as worthy of baptism into the body of Christ as were the natives of Judea and Galilee.

In *Color-Courageous Discipleship*, Michelle T. Sanchez views racial reconciliation as a personal journey for the greater good. “Jesus seeks to bring about the kind of

inner transformation we need to transform our world God's way," she writes. That echoes Martin Luther King Jr.'s statement: "Only through an inner spiritual transformation do we gain the strength to fight vigorously the evils of the world in a humble and loving spirit" (*Strength to Love*).

On Racial Reconciliation Sunday, observed the second Sunday of February, consider how you can address racial issues. Sanchez suggests simple steps such as starting a conversation with someone of another ethnicity or advocating for a friend. Consider how other people's lives and challenges are different from yours. Pray for people of different races and cultures. Ponder how you can come alongside and walk with them — and they with you.

In God's creative and thorough plan, he might transform your own life as you try to transform the world. —Janna Firestone

## Love makes us worthy

Unlike God, who loves unconditionally, humans often make choices and set limits when doling out affection. But Thomas Merton reminds us, "Our job is to love others without stopping to inquire whether or not they are worthy. That is not our business and, in fact, it is nobody's business. What we are asked to do is to love, and this love itself will render both ourselves and our neighbors worthy."

As for how to develop and maintain that type of love? Merton shares, "It is in deep solitude that I find the gentleness with which I can truly love my [neighbors]."

## Leave it to God

Fourth-century theologian Augustine urged again and again that we focus on practicing love in the here and now, not on worrying about our lives in the hereafter.

In *Beautiful Bodies*, Margaret Miles writes that especially regarding complicated doctrines like predestination and challenges like "The one who endures to the end will be saved" (Matthew 24:13), we can't do anything *but* leave those to God. It's impossible for humans to take responsibility for ourselves in such matters. If we could determine our afterlife destiny by means of effort, persuasion or bribery, self-pride would surely be the accompanying sinful result.

"In fact," Miles writes, "preoccupation with one's eternal destiny distracts from a Christian's present business. 'Leave it to God,' St. Augustine said, and place your attention on living lovingly in the body of Christ here and now."

Puzzle! 1 John 4:16 (NIV).

# Puzzle!

Use the clues to fill in the boxes. Then write those letters on the correct numbered lines below to complete 1 John 4:16 (NIV).


A place to live        
1 2 3 4 5

Opposite of dark        
6 7 8 9 10

Companion         
11 12 13 14 15 16

Hand greeting       
17 18 19 20

Male adult      
21 22 23



8 2 16 13 4 6 2 19 5

17 9 2 5 19 5 12 6 7 19 5 4

13 15 6 2 19 20 6 7 19 14 4

13 15 8 2 16 18 15 16

8 2 16 13 23 10 1 14 21

1 John 4:16, NIV

## "Time"

Time is  
too slow for those who wait,  
too swift for those who fear,  
too long for those who grieve,  
too short for those who rejoice.  
But for those who love,  
time is eternity. —Henry Van Dyke

## All the ways God helps us

When young adults land in difficult situations and desperately call home, parents respond in various ways. They might remind their son or daughter of



guidelines learned years back — behavior and problem-solving skills to get back on track. Or maybe parents direct their kids to a mentor, expert or resource for assistance. But if the crisis is severe, no doubt these loving parents hop in the car, or even on a plane, and go to their child. They embrace and support them, perhaps even taking initial steps to bring them through the chaos to a new beginning.

When the people of Israel were in the wilderness, exile and countless difficulties in between, God lovingly used each of these strategies. God reminded Israel of the Ten Commandments and other laws he gave to guide their life together. Sometimes he sent prophets and other leaders to direct the people into better ways and times. God does the same today, reminding us of Scripture's guidance and sending us prophetic voices and wise leaders.

Above all, when nothing less would save people, ancient and modern, from the dangers of sin and death, God came to us as Jesus. God's only Son walked with us, lived through our troubles alongside us, taught us new ways directly and brought us out of the problematic place where we were trapped and into a new beginning.

—Heidi Hyland Mann,  
based on a sermon by Pastor Dave Sonnenberg

## Bible Quiz



The short Old Testament book of Lamentations is a set of communal laments (sorrowful songs) about the destruction in 587 B.C. of which city, by which people?

- A. Babylon; the Assyrians
- B. Jerusalem; the Babylonians
- C. Rome; the Greeks
- D. Caesarea Philippi; the Romans

## Kindness kickbacks

Random Acts of Kindness Day, observed each year on February 17, is a reminder of the power of altruism. Followers of Jesus express kindness selflessly, out of love for God and our neighbors. Yet in return, we reap emotional — and even physical — benefits.

Researchers have identified a “helper’s high” that can ease anxiety and depression. Spontaneous or planned acts of “pro-social spending” have been shown to

reduce blood pressure, improve heart health, reduce pain and even extend longevity.

For maximum impact, experts recommend getting creative with random acts of kindness and mixing them up. But no matter how you spread kindness, you’re bound to experience blessings in return!

## Valentines for kids

Valentine’s Day isn’t just for schoolchildren and sweethearts. Loving parents should strive to give their children these life-changing gifts during February and beyond.


- **Acceptance:** Say and show that you love children for who they are. Give this gift with a kiss.
- **Self-confidence:** Help boost kids’ trust in themselves. Give this gift with a hug.
- **Peace:** Model how to give your worries to God. Offer this present with laughter.
- **Gratitude:** Help children be genuinely thankful for each new day and for all of life. Give this gift as they go out the door.
- **Faith:** Introduce children to Jesus, the best friend they’ll ever have. Do this by taking them to church and Sunday school regularly.

## Christian symbol



**CENSER & INCENSE** — A censer (or thurible) is a vessel for burning incense during worship. Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches, as well as some Protestant ones, often do this on special occasions. Censers come in many sizes, shapes and designs. A worship leader may swing a chain censer to waft the fragrant smoke over the congregation during a procession or benediction. As incense burns in a censer and smoke wafts upward, it symbolizes prayers of the faithful, floating to God. "May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice" (Psalm 141:2, NIV).

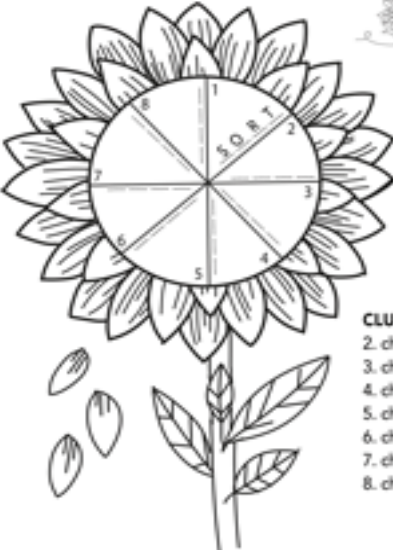
# PUZZLE



## THE LOVE CYCLE

In 1 John 4, God instructs us to love other people. Where does our love come from?

Directions: Starting at #1 and going clockwise, solve each clue to create a new four-letter word. Then write the eighth word in both blanks below to complete 1 John 4:19, NIV.



We \_\_\_\_\_  
because [God] first \_\_\_\_\_d us.

1 John 4:19, NIV

**CLUES**

2. change 1 letter: a tent to play in
3. change 2 letters: a crease in paper
4. change 1 letter: a precious metal
5. change 2 letters: a beautiful dress
6. change 1 letter: opposite of up
7. change 2 letters: a type of bird
8. change 1 letter: God is this (see 1 John 4:16).

## a lovely aroma

Make this sweet-smelling gift for a friend or valentine.



**What you need:**

- Colored felt
- Scrap paper
- Permanent marker
- Scissors
- String
- Essential oils (rose, lavender, etc.)



**What you do:**

1. Draw a flower shape on paper and cut it out.
2. Place the flower template on felt and draw around it with the marker.
3. Cut out the felt flower. Then cut a small slit or hole through it.
4. Cut 8 inches of string. Thread it through the felt flower and tie to form a loop for hanging.
5. To the felt, add 3 to 5 drops of essential oil. This air freshener will last about 2 weeks.
6. Revive the scent, as needed, by adding a few drops of essential oil.




### THE PRAYER CORNER:



**"JESUS IS ON THE MAIN LINE" ~ Prayer Call in!**  
 There will be a call in time to pray for the Ministry of God's Church and Prayer of Intercession: Other Days will be added.  
 Please check Sunday Announcement  
 Mondays & Thursdays at 9pm.  
**Dial-in Number:** 1-774-220-4000  
**DeWitt's Conference ID:** 28028