

May 17, 2026



The Vine

The Newsletter of West Leonard Street Christian Reformed Church

Growing devoted followers of Jesus who share his love . . .

Pastor's Pen

55 Years of Ministry — A Few Reflections

As you know, I have decided to terminate my ministry in the church setting at the end of the month. So I thought I would share a bit of my “journey.”

My desire to become a pastor arose in my heart or mind when I was in middle school. Interestingly, my parents never specifically encouraged me to consider that vocation. They never said to me when I was young, “Have you ever thought about becoming a pastor?” Instead, I was inspired to become a minister by my pastor’s (at that time) example. I could understand his sermons, liked him as a catechism teacher, was moved by the interest in me and other young people. Of course, ultimately it was the Holy Spirit who created this desire in me. With that career in mind, I eagerly enrolled in Calvin College and Calvin Seminary, from which I graduated in 1971.

During my full-time ministry I served two churches - Seymour Church and Westend Church - for 20 years each. Both of them were very supportive of my ministry.

After I retired from full-time ministry in 2012, I was offered a part-time interim pastor position by Harderwyk Church in Holland. How I enjoyed that! That was followed by serving 8 other churches in the same role: Third CRC in Zeeland, West Leonard (2x), Ideal Park in Wyoming, Shawnee Park, Blythefield in Rockford, Plymouth Heights, Jamestown, and Dorr. Thus, 2 churches full-time and 9 part-time.

What I discovered and found so enriching was that no church has a monopoly on saints (or sinners too, for that matter). I remember when I left my first church, Seymour, to go to Westend, I thought of about 10 families I wished I could take with me to my new congregation —people very involved in ministry. Well, I found them in my new church, except they had different names. And they appeared in West Leonard Church too, again with different names.

A second observation is that one of the greatest joys in being a pastor of a church is to see lay people involved in ministry. Seldom (if ever) did I have the feeling of being a loner in ministry. The phrase “all the members are ministers” is not a cliché. It is a rich reality. We are co-workers with each other and co-workers with Christ. What a good feeling it gave me to see about 20 people show up for Neighborhood Work Day a few Saturdays ago, and the same could be said for the many who are involved in the Diaper Depot program.

And thirdly (always three points, right 😊), I have thoroughly enjoyed my work. Obviously there have been challenges and some rough times (there are in every job), but I would not trade my job for another. What a privilege to come alongside of people in their hurts and joys, to be the presence of Jesus in their lives. And to think that I was getting paid all these years for digging into God's Word and then sharing it in my preaching. I have no hesitancy in recommending the ministry as a wonderful vocation to consider and enter.

So what's next for me? I will keep serving as very part-time chaplain at Edison Christian Living Center, and I will keep being involved in several volunteer opportunities. I look forward to being blessed as a worshipper. And, as a friend of mine put it, when it comes to preaching, instead of being a "starter" I will be in the "bull-pen," available if other congregations call on me.

- Pastor Henry Admiraal



CHURCH COUNCIL REPORT

The following is a summary of some of the work of council over the last nine months. These are generally organized by monthly meeting dates.

July 14

Council thanked Pastor Matthew for accepting the call of West Leonard Christian Reformed Church eight years ago and all the good and faithful service he has provided over those years. We now recognize and approve of his accepting a new call to Community Church Roselawn and end our call with him as of August 3, 2025.

We reviewed the timeline over the next few months and what that might look like.

- Dusty states that Linda Rienstra and Sue VanderMeer are in the process of planning

a farewell party on behalf of the church.

- Dusty will be providing pulpit supply with some input from Laurie Hinken and Sue Lettinga.
- Executive Committee will start investigating the procedure for hiring an interim pastor.

It is council's hope to have an interim pastor hired soon.

Council had an initial discussion about a pastor search committee and how that might look.

- Update the Job Description.
- Update the Church Profile
- Create a list of possible members for the committee. Look for young members that are willing to serve.

Council received a letter from Harvest Church, Orthodox Presbyterian.

Wayne Veenstra, a church planter for River Presbyterian Church, is reaching out to inquire whether we would be open to renting out our facility to a new church plant. After reading the letter and an ensuing good discussion, it was apparent that the council was very interested in this opportunity.

August 18

A motion was made by council to hire an interim pastor. This motion passed. The elders will meet with both Jim Dykstra and Henry Admiraal to determine their interest in this position and they will come to council with a recommendation.

A motion was made that council approve the Space Sharing Agreement as presented by River Presbyterian Church Plant. The motion passed.

A motion was made that council approve the following people to be asked to serve on the Pastor Search Committee: Mary Bouwkamp, Ryan Bylsma, Melody Flanders, Marla Roedema, Amy VanderSlik, Natalie VanderMeer, Liz Nguyen, Ann Wiersma, Mike VanderWall. The motion passed.

Council had a discussion and decided that for better communication, it would be good if all council members were on a church committee. This had been the policy in the past.

Fellowship Committee Report - The Back-to-School Fall Event went very well. We ran out of school supplies two times and workers ran to the store to replenish our supply. We also handed out a good number of great books that were donated.

Cory McCallum, Alex Flanders, and Julie VanderSlik will take turns leading the Fellowship Night Bible Study.

October 6

A motion was made that council approve Pastor Henry Admiraal to be our new Interim Pastor. This motion passed.

October 20

The Boiler Replacement Ad hoc Committee – The report of September 22, 2025, was reviewed. The report states we may begin starting to put our rooms back together on September 29, 2025.

Additionally, a Boiler Fund Update, dated 10-20-25, was distributed and reviewed. The report indicated that our giving has been good, and we may not need to borrow any additional money as originally anticipated.

A motion was made that Cory McCallum be allowed to start a monthly game night ministry at West Leonard CRC.

November

A letter of thanks was sent to Windemuller Electric Company for their donation of the electrical work needed that was associated with our new boiler-- a \$10,000.00 value.

December

A letter of thanks was sent to RiteWay Plumbing and Heating for the great work they provided removing and replacing our boiler system. Also a special thank you (due to their efficiency) for the unexpected reduction of the contract – a gift valued at \$40,000.

January 26

The Properties Committee report, dated January 19, 2026, was very extensive. A few of the highlights follows:

- The new boiler is now working and a class to learn how to run it was attended by Gary

Hinken, Dave Tacoma, Glenn Hudson, and Diane Hamstra.

- The boiler room is being refinished – floors, walls, etc.
- The kitchen floor is being replaced because of the tiles breaking up.
- One of the Activity Center furnaces was replaced.
- Required elevator upgrades.
- Parking lot refinishing.
- New pulpit
- There is a 30% increase in building insurance rates, and we will be looking for a new agent.
- We are also getting along well with our space sharing with the River Presbyterian Church plant.

We thank the Properties Committee for all of their hard work and especially its chairperson, Diane Hamstra.

Pastor Search Committee - The Pastor Search Committee minutes of September 24, October 7, 21, 28, November 11, 25, and December 9, 2025 were reviewed. The committee will soon be sending in the church profile and responding to requests from pastors with an interest in possibly serving at our church. Council thanks the committee for all their diligent work, and we will continue to hold them in our prayers.

March 9

The Outreach Committee reports the spring workday is scheduled for April 18, 2026; rainout date is April 25, 2025.

Pastor Henry announced his retirement as our interim pastor.

April 27

Julie VanderSlik has agreed to serve as leader and organizer of the 2026 August Back-to-School Event and communicated this to the Outreach Committee and the Fellowship Committee.

The Executive Committee reviewed the congregation's nominations for the offices of

elder and deacon. After their review, these nominations are presented to council for their approval and then the nominees will receive a letter requesting that their names be allowed to stand in nomination for elder and deacon.

A motion is made to approve the proposed budget to be presented to the congregation for their approval at a congregational meeting on June 7, 2026. This motion passed.

The elders are recommending to council that we hire Pastor Jim Dykstra as our next Interim Pastor. This motion passed. He will begin in July and will preach two Sundays a month.

A very special thanks to Dusty VanderMeer, our first time council chairperson, for a great job during a very busy year.

- Ed DeKorte
Clerk of Council



May 2026

Hello from your stellar Pastor Search Committee!

😊 I know I'm on the committee but trust me they are! We have such a good group, and we have really loved our time together so far. We have robust discussions and at times bring things up the other person hasn't thought about but is on the same page about the really important big items, and that is such a blessing.

We are marching along in our work. Our profile and documents are all set, as I explained when I gave an in-person report a couple of months ago. Since the live posting of our pastoral position (March 11), we have gotten double digits in replies from interested candidates, and that has been really encouraging. We are now at the point where we have narrowed down our list of

candidates we feel could be a fit for West Leonard and are in the midst of contacting them and scheduling preliminary first interview and in some cases more substantive second interviews. This will take a little bit of time yet, but we are getting closer to making decisions. I know that may sound a little vague, but it's hard to be specific at this point with names etc. and still needing to be confidential.

Rest assured we are at work and things are definitely moving along.

It is reasonable to think we could have a pastor(s) come to preach in the next couple of months, and then wouldn't it be great if we could have someone in place by the fall when ministries start up? That is a wonderful goal and one we continue to pursue, but we also continue to remind ourselves and want to remind you as well that this is all in **God's timing**. We'd rather take a little extra time and listen **carefully** to God and the Holy Spirit than choose the wrong person or make a wrong decision.

We feel the weight of how important this is to all of you and to the future of our church but cling to the knowledge that God is over all, in all and working through all. Please cling to that knowledge with us and trust him to lead us to the next shepherd of our congregation.

Continuing in prayer,

Amy (for the Pastor Search Committee)

Mary Bouwkamp, Ryan Bylsma, Melody Flanders, Liz Nguyen, Marla Roedema, Natalie VanderMeer, Amy Vander Slik, Mike VanderWall, Ann Wiersma.

The Diaper Depot (reboot version) Turns One Year Old



The reboot of our Diaper Depot ministry had its first birthday this past November. It has been one of my life's greatest blessings to be involved and watch how God is using it to show our guests (and us) His love. Early in the planning stages, the Diaper Depot team became aware of grant funds from Classis North available for ministries like this. We applied and were awarded \$5,000 to help us get started. With this money, we were able to do renovations to an unused classroom in our basement to provide a space from which to run the ministry. As well we were able to defray start-up costs by purchasing needed supplies to run our every-other-month give-away events. The grant came with the requirement to submit a written review. Below are some excerpts from that review that sum things up nicely:

1. How did this ministry help your congregation connect with, serve, and ultimately share the gospel with unbelievers?

At our give-away events, guests are welcomed as just that-- guests. We designed our events to stand in contrast to many experiences that people who struggle face. Guests are first warmly greeted at the door. They then have a one-to-one conversation with a check-in person who does not ask for documentation or proof of a need but instead inquires about their family and exchanges pleasantries. They pick up a week's worth of diapers and wipes in the sizes they need. These are packaged in handled shopping bags which look more like a purchase than a hand-out. Guests can stay for a donut and coffee or juice. Round tables and chairs are set-up and guests are encouraged to linger if they choose. We have volunteers whose only job is to converse with guests. We hope it is a humanizing experience for people for whom getting help is often de-humanizing. We aim to simply show the love of Jesus.

2. In what ways was the revitalization ministry successful?

Our refurbished space is perfect for our needs. We are able to easily hand-out between 200 to 300 bags of diapers at an event. However, we remind ourselves regularly that the goal is human contact and not numbers, and we have collected numerous stories.

- At the first event, one of our greeters noticed the dejected, beaten down way many guests entered and noted that everyone's shoulders were higher and they had a smile as they left.
- One guest told us she had been parked in the Dollar General parking lot next door to our building while she was searching for coupons and trying to scrape together enough money to go in and buy diapers. She happened to look up and see our curb sign that we were open. She said, "I just whispered, 'Look at you God.'"
- One Saturday a dad walked in looking like he'd rather be anywhere but there. He said he and his wife had just had a conversation that morning about not knowing where the money was going to come from to buy diapers. He happened to drive by, saw the sign, and knew he had to stop even though he didn't want to. He left with 3 bags of diapers, a donut and a smile after exchanging a couple jokes with one of our greeters.

3. What percentage of your members were involved? How many of your members were involved in this ministry? In what ways were they involved?

We run each event with between 12-15 volunteers. Approximately 15-20 members regularly volunteer. Additional members regularly pray for the ministry, and many, many more donate diapers and wipes and/or funds.

4. What adjustments did you make and why?

West Leonard had a new boiler system installed in September of 2025 which forced us to run our September event in a different room without our set spaces. We learned then just how helpful those spaces are! That event did not run nearly as smoothly.

We also were hoping to increase events to monthly in our second year, but realized that we do not yet have enough donations and funding to sustain the inventory needed for that. We intend to explore additional funding sources during this next year, hopefully with the involvement of the Northwest Food Pantry.

5. What did you learn from this revitalization ministry?

In a fresh new way, we have learned that serving others blesses us. We have received far more than we have given. We also have seen first hand how treating people as a welcome guest rather than a number can make a big difference in a person's Saturday morning. We have come to consider serving in this way a treasured privilege.

If you are considering becoming involved with the Depot but are unsure, please come visit one of our events. You are welcome for any length of time to check it out. It's great fun and you will definitely leave blessed!

- Diane Hamstra and the Diaper Depot Team

SUNDAY SCHOOL RECAP

Another busy year of Sunday School has come to an end. What a fun and rewarding year for both students and teachers!

The younger kids (first through fifth grade), taught by Ann Wiersma, followed a lesson plan from a book that was full of the Bible's most popular stories-- sort of a greatest hits collection, if you will. They learned about creation and the flood as well as the plagues of Egypt. Most of the book focused on the New Testament, particularly the parables that Jesus taught his followers as well as the miracles he performed. We did a treasure hunt before learning that true treasure is the love and grace of Jesus. We learned how Jesus fed the 5000 and we enjoyed some Swedish fish and crackers in place of real fish and loaves of bread. If you saw us out in the back parking lot adding Mentos to Diet Coke, we promise we weren't just making a mess; we were learning about how anger makes us feel before talking about how the Bible teaches us to handle it. We had the best time together. What a great group of kids.

The older kids (grades 6 through 12), taught by Julie Vander Slik, also studied hard this year. Their area of study was the first half of *The Heidelberg Catechism*, and their focus was the Apostle's Creed. They also did some fun art projects and had a great year learning and growing in their faith.

We feel so blessed to have these awesome kids in our lives, attending and participating in West Leonard Church. We look forward to seeing them all again in the fall.

- Ann Wiersma



ENDOWMENT FUND

As many of you know, our West Leonard Endowment Fund was established initially with the profit from the sale of our parsonage in 2004, and the monies were placed in a mutual fund through the Olsson Investment Group of Wedbush. The initial goal of the Endowment Fund was to offset the cost of our pastor's housing allowance in our church's annual budget. The long-term goal is that through the growth of the fund and additional donations, the Endowment Fund will cover a greater portion of our budget.

The initial deposit to the Endowment Fund in 2004 was \$123,000; and in June, 2005, \$6,200 was used toward our 2004/2005 fiscal year budget. In the time since then, our church has received a number of estate gifts and other contributions from our members. The fund balance as of March 31, 2006, was \$514,960.85, and this was after we took out \$50,000 in October, 2005, that was used to pay for our new church boiler! The available contribution amount for the end of the 2024/2025 fiscal year was \$24,517.59. Due to strong giving by our congregation, only \$2,165.21 was needed to balance our budget on June 30, 2025. Years like that allow our balance to grow for future years when we may need it more. What a blessing this has been for our church!

The larger the Endowment Fund grows, the more money will be available for our church ministries. This fund provides a means for members of our congregation to invest in the long-term stability of our church. Please consider the Endowment Fund in estate planning and/or an individual gift.

If you have any questions, please talk to Mike Vander Wall, the chairperson of the Finance Committee.

LATE SPRING/SUMMER



CELEBRATIONS!

80+ Birthdays

June 6	Merle Veenstra (85)
July 8	Marilyn Pardee (90)
July 17	Mary Polonowski (81)
July 30	Karen Kass (88)
August 2	Bob Orange (80)
August 8	Waye Warners (89)
August 17	Ed Pardee (86)

Anniversaries

May 2	Alex & Melody Flanders (6)
May 5,	Ed & Jan Wierenga (59)
May 7	Bob & Marian Orange (60)
May 8	Gary & Laurie Hinken (46)
May 10	Andy & Victoria Pastars (24)
May 17	Ryan & Jenny Bylsma (11)
May 23	Glenn & Marlene Hudson (45)
June 2	Robb & Ann Wiersma (25)
June 13	Paul & Mary Cornish (23)
June 20	Mike & Rachel VanderWall (28)
June 22	Gary & Jan Breen (59)
June 24	Bob & Karen Hengeveld (48)
June 24	Jeff & Ila Cole (32)
July 7	Michael & Mayme Becker (10)
July 8	Steve & Lisa Kuiper (38)
July 25	Aaron & Jen Pennington (21)

August 6	Ken & Joane Vander Slik (61)
August 9	Ken & Sherry Thomasma (53)
August 11	Justin & Liz Nguyen (14)
August 11	Dan & Lisa Wisneski (36)
August 15	Dusty & Lisa VanderMeer (23)
August 20	Dave & Laura Tacoma (43)
August 21	John & Betty Bouwman (51)

Missionary Birthdays

June 11	Ruth Hoekwater
July 18	Robert Garcia

Missionary Anniversary

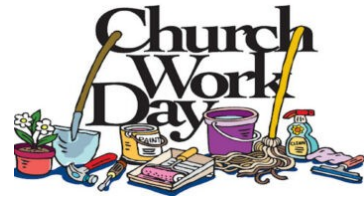
May 21	John & Ruth Hoekwater
August 22	Ken & Chris Van Weerdhuizen

Children's Worship

Stepping into children's worship after Matthew and Tracy's departure was something I approached with a bit of hesitation, but also with a clear nudge from the Holy Spirit that I couldn't ignore. Since then, it's been a season full of growth, laughter, and yes... a fair share of "character-building moments," especially when Gigi and Koa decide that listening to Mom is optional during class time. It turns out leading other people's children is one thing; leading your own in front of everyone else is a whole different level of sanctification! This role and ministry has been refining not just my teaching skills, but my mothering. Growing my patience, deepening my grace, and reminding me daily how much I rely on the Lord.

We've truly missed Anna and Eleanor's presence in our class, but we trust that God is already preparing the next generation of little hearts to fill those seats. It's such a joy and privilege to help plant seeds of truth in these young lives, seeds that we pray will take deep root. One verse that continues to guide me is: "Let the little children come to me... for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matthew 19:14). What a beautiful reminder that this work matters eternally. I'm so grateful to be part of it, and I'm excited to see how God continues to grow our church family with the community that surrounds us!

- Jenny Bylsma



For one of the few times in the 20 years we have been doing neighborhood work days, we had to postpone the work on April 18 because of heavy rains earlier in the week. It "just so happened" that God provided warm and sunny weather the following Saturday-- a beautiful morning to work!

24 volunteers ranging from ages 9 to 80 showed up to help. Before we opened in prayer and reviewed the work to be done, we briefly reminisced about Bill Wiersma's passion for these work days and for the joy he had in serving others. A week or two in advance of most work days, Bill was usually the first person to ask me about the upcoming job sites. He then would ask if any "chainsaw" work was needed, which, of course, he gladly offered to do 😊. When Karen and I visited Bill and Bonnie a week or so before the work day, Bill mentioned that he would be unable to help out this time around. Karen told him that she would send along a big batch of cookies in his honor for the other workers to enjoy.

We worked at 8 different homes that morning, including the home of our new neighbor, Miracle. She's the lady who left a message at our church office saying how blessed she was to be in this home and to have "brothers and sisters who loved the Lord" as her neighbors.

Gary and Diane led the workers who helped out on different projects around church. The outdoor crew did some edging and weeding and spreading mulch around where it was needed. They also split the decorative grasses in the back parking lot and replanted some in the front lot. The indoor crew cleaned and polished pews, washed windows and began deep cleaning some pink chairs in the basement.

A big thanks to all who were able to help out on that morning! Lord willing, we will gather again in late September to continue to serve and bless our neighbors.

- Bob Hengeveld

HIGHLIGHTS AND FAVORITES FROM



2026/2026

On March 18, we completed another year of GEMS. Our highlight for this year was definitely relationships! We had 11 girls in our club this year and it was a JOY to see them each week, watch them interact with each other and deepen their relationship and understanding of God's great LOVE and protection over them.

Our Theme for this year was WALK ON WATER. Our Bible stories and lessons taught us about heroes of the Bible-- ordinary people who trusted an Extraordinary God. We learned to Step out in Faith like the disciples in the boat during the storm, Step out to Trust like Peter when he walked on water, Step out to Lead like Moses, Step out to Worship like Joshua, Step out to Pray like Daniel, Step out to Serve like Mary, Step out to Testify like the Samaritan Woman and Step out to LIVE for GOD like Peter after he denied Jesus three times!

The favorite activity each week was craft time! The girls were so creative! We decorated treasure boxes, enjoyed making things with beads such as candy canes and Jesus fish, made snowmen out of coffee creamer bottles, made Valentine centerpieces and painted on canvas!

We ended our year with our annual trip to the Trampoline Park and were happy that the Boys Club could join us this year! A fun time was had by all!

We didn't want the year to end but are so thankful for all the blessings God provided through GEMS this year!

Thank you for your prayers and continued support of the GEMS ministry where Girls Everywhere are Meeting the Savior!

West Leonard GEMS Counselors:

Lisa Wisneski

Barb DeKorte

Lisa Kuiper

GEMS CRAFTS



Snowmen



Valentine Centerpieces



Canvas Art

WEDNESDAY FELLOWSHIP NIGHT Adult Bible Study



Except for one snow day and several holidays, the Men's Life group met every Wednesday morning from mid-September through late April. Most weeks we had 15 to 20 men attending. We had the joy to read through and study the gospel of John this season. Sometimes we were reminded of familiar stories and verses, and sometimes the Holy Spirit showed us things in a totally new light. The beauty of studying the Bible in a group setting is that the Spirit points out different things to different people.

Here are some of the major themes that we talked about and pondered over this season:

- Jesus is the light of the world and we, His followers, are called to reflect His light to a world living in darkness.
- Jesus is the Good Shepherd. His sheep will recognize His voice and are called to follow Him.
- Jesus is the way, the truth and the life—the only way to the Father.
- Jesus commands us to love others as He loved us-- with humility and with a servant's heart.
- Jesus reminds us to keep focused on Him, to bear fruit that will last. We can do nothing apart from Him.
- Jesus willingly endured the cross and laid down His life as our sacrifice because of His great love for us.
- At the end of the gospel of John (20:31), we are reminded that the gospel message calls everyone to a response of faith.

Lord willing, we will gather again in September to start a new season studying the book of Acts. We would love to have you join us.

- Bob Hengeveld

Our Wednesday Fellowship Night ministry year has wrapped up and it is time to take stock. There is some satisfaction in knowing that it was a good year, The name of Christ was proclaimed, scripture was studied, songs were sung, nails pounded (shoutout to Boys Club), and we fellowshiped with one another. This article is going to relate our experiences with the Wednesday night Bible study.

When we met together to plan out what we would study on



Wednesday nights, we decided for the first half of the year to study a couple of the minor prophets. This was challenging to prepare for and to study. Speaking for myself, it stretched me. I think Bible studies should stretch you and cause you to ponder what God is teaching us. We looked at Habakkuk. This book showed us so much that we joked we should make t-shirts that said "Habakkuk—who knew?" I'd wear that shirt!! Zechariah also put us through our paces as we focused on its Messianic prophecies that showed how God guided his plan of salvation through the ages and even today.

The second half of the year we studied 2 Peter and 1 John. What riches awaited us there!! In 2 Peter, the apostle Peter knows he will soon go to be with God. Because of this he focuses on reminding his readers how God wants them to live. He writes: "His (Christ's) divine power has given us everything we need to live a godly life" and then. "Make every effort to add to your faith" (no resting on our laurels!). And 1 John opens with words that stir the soul: "God is light, in him there is no darkness at all." That light gives us a life free from darkness!

It is important to add knowledge to our faith and to put in the work of pondering and searching for what God wants us to know. If you are looking for a Bible study with great fellowship and care for one another, come this fall and check us out and "ponder anew what the Almighty can do".

- Julie Vander Slik

SAVE THE DATE!

Church Picnic



Our annual West Leonard Church Picnic has been scheduled for Tuesday, June 23, from 5 to 8 p.m.

The shelter (Shelter A) at Millenium Park has been reserved for us and we are looking forward to a fun potluck and time to relax and hang out together. The shelter is technically “ours” all day. So, if you want to hang out earlier in the day, feel free to use the fishing docks, walk the trails or sit on the beach. More details to come!

Tales from the ‘Hood

Time Waits for No Dog

Hello faithful *Vine* readers! Along with you, I had quite the cold and snowy winter! But patrol the neighborhood I did! Well . . . maybe not as much as in the other seasons, but my grandma and I ventured out every chance that we two old gals could muster through the weather. And some days we simply hung out in what grandma calls “the back 40,” which is really our very modest-but-fenced back yard. Mostly this involved grandma throwing snow into big piles and making trails for me. I defiantly ignored those and blazed my own way to nuzzle under the willow bushes.

But here is my confession: I did turn into somewhat of a winter couch potato as I watched our neighbors brush snow off their cars and birds peck seed from the feeder on the porch outside my front window, while the squirrels (aren’t these creatures supposed to sleep all winter?) scarfed up whatever the birds knocked off. But the best part of this activity was that I assisted grandma in filling the feeder for the birds. She buys bags of food that include peanuts and raisins, so there are always a couple morsels for me. 😊

Okay, so my winter was not thrilling. But the least appealing aspect of winter weather is not seeing our neighbors – human and canine. If we did see people, they were always hurrying to get into their vehicles or warm homes. And most dogs were on a mission to do their business and get home ASAP. Sigh . . . winter walking is a lonely venture. But grandma said that time is not to be wasted. We valiantly bundled up and made our rounds whenever we were able, and grandma told me that we need to look for “the glory” every day. I’m not exactly sure what that means, but grandma was so enthralled with a huge snowfall on her birthday that she took some pictures! And one day we stood near our beloved park and watched bundled-up kiddos sled down the hill while screaming with delight. Grandma actually laughed!


The bundling part, though, got a bit difficult for me. My stylish hot-pink coat with the faux-fur trimmed hood has become nearly impossible to fasten. I know I’ve gained weight, but honestly, although I could wish, I am not fed any more food than my normal allotment. Turns out I have “lumps.” I have heard that this is a fairly common condition in older, large dogs, and so it has now plagued me. And then one day arrived on our porch a package containing a flashy royal blue “squall coat” for yours truly. I thought I looked better in hot pink, but this one at least fits over my girth!

And so at the age of at least 10+, my age is catching up with me. In addition to my weight issue, I truly struggle with stairs because my hind legs no longer work like they should. And, despite new cushy carpet on the stairs in our house, grandma sometimes has to help me down, and a did fall a few times. And I am much more mellow and bark less. However, last weekend I was so excited to see grandma’s son and grandson that I nearly turned somersaults and in the process broke a lamp. I did get the routine “shameful” lecture, but I do believe that grandma was happy to see me in a brief burst of liveliness!

But even in my aging process, grandma sees lessons to be learned. She told me that earthly bodies aren’t made to last forever, and age takes its toll on humans and canines alike. However,

once I'm down the porch steps, I still walk quite well on my neighborhood patrol. This spring we have already talked to a woman whose husband recently died, a woman whose husband is gravely ill and many children on their way home from school. So it's important to get out and about and keep listening to the folks in the neighborhood where God has placed us. I heard grandma telling someone on the phone about how so many of you – West Leonard people, many of whom are also aging – help our neighbors in so many ways and keep doing what Jesus has told you to do – growing as disciples who share His love.

And – of course – there is another lesson. Always look for the glory, which grandma voices in what we see in our small corner of this amazing world. No matter the weather, we often slow down and grandma says things aloud to God: Lord, thanks for those amazing cloud formations! Thanks for the beautiful songs of the birds! Thanks for lovely budding trees and flowers! Thanks for all creatures great and small! (Not sure for me if that includes cats.) A few weeks ago, we were able to see close-up a turtle on a sun-drenched rock with two small babies. Grandma whispered (turtles are easily frightened), “Wow, God! You love us so much! Thanks for letting us see these wonderful creatures!”

And, she said (even though I have been known to nap during lengthy conversations with neighbors), we should look for Jesus in every face. 😊  Nova

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Growing devoted followers of Jesus who share his love

For Mercy has a human heart,
Pity a human face,
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, the human dress.
Where Mercy, Love and Pity dwell
There God is dwelling too.

- William Blake (1757-1827)
Excerpt from “The Divine Image”