



Associate Pastor of Worship and Arts Randall Wilkens directs the singing of “Lyssna” at a Sunday service in 2011.

Lyssna

A time-honored tradition that goes back to the early church

By Rick Lund

At the conclusion of the Sunday morning service on December 22, Pastor Randall Wilkens will invite anyone in the congregation to come to the choir loft to take part in a time-honored and, dare I say, essential Bethany tradition.

The Christmas season, you see, doesn’t really begin until the singing of “Lyssna,” an old Swedish choir number that is stamped into the very DNA of our 103-year-old church.

The peculiar, yet joyful and expectant song *Lyssna, lyssna, hör du änglasången? Lyssna, lyssna, Åra vare Gud!* (*Listen, listen! hear the angels singing? Listen, Listen! Glory be to God!*), calls us –

perhaps as never before – to block out the noise around us, listen to the angelic choir, and celebrate anew God’s love for us through the birth of His son, Jesus.

This treasured tradition began with the early Swedish-speaking church, and very likely the original charter members that began meeting in homes and eventually the basement of the original church on Evergreen Street in 1922.

Steve Elde, grandson of charter
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The origin of ‘Lyssna’

Its genesis can be traced back to 1898 at a Covenant church in Nebraska
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Flood repair to building a drawn-out, frustrating process

Work to repair water damage from last January’s water-line break was expected to be completed by Thanksgiving. Better late than never, but exasperating just the same.

The restoration of the north side of the building has been an arduous process that has frustrated church leaders, as attendees at an October 27 congregational meeting learned. BCC has struggled for months to get the church’s insurance company to agree to the reasonable costs of repair and replacement for damaged spaces and items.

Bethany did not receive any reimbursement checks from the insurer, Brotherhood Mutual of Fort Wayne, Indiana, until August 26, more than seven months after frigid temperatures over the Martin Luther King weekend broke ¾-inch and ½-inch copper lines, causing an estimated \$150,000 in property damages.

“Dealing with this company has been extremely difficult,” said BCC Chairman Jerry Gard at the congregational meeting.

BCC leaders in August filed a complaint with the

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Getting to know ...

the Schaffners

This committed, young family stayed the course with Bethany

By Rick Lund

One of the fallouts from the shifting sands of culture and political divide has been the decline in church attendance in the U.S., particularly among Millennials and Gen Xers.

We've certainly seen that trend at Bethany, especially since the global pandemic. Our congregation is smaller and older now than it was in 2019. There are fewer young adults in the pews on Sundays, which means less younger families.

That's why we're especially appreciative of church members Bryce and Kirstin Schaffner and their four children Eli (15), Magnus (13), Anika (9) and Eden (6). The Schaffners have attended Bethany since 2008, and never blinked when a few friends their age left the church in recent years.

"We stayed because we really believe in the foundation of Bethany and what it's about," said Kirstin.

Added Bryce: "We tend to be pretty committed people, and are more likely to double down than abandon ship when things get challenging."

We're glad the Schaffners chose to stay.

Kirstin is finishing up her first year on the Leadership Team, as vice chair. On January 1 she slides into the chairperson role, replacing outgoing chairman Jerry Gard. Kirstin served as a member of the recent Pastoral Search Committee. She has also taught a girls high-school Sunday School class and worked in the nursery.

Bryce has also pulled nursery duty, and has helped with various work projects in and around the church. Seeing himself as not too young to serve, Magnus is in his second year on the usher team on Sunday mornings. Eli is on the usher sub list.

Bryce and Kirstin have spent



Bryce Schaffner with the two boys, Eli and Magnus.



Kirstin Schaffner with the two girls, Eden and Anika.

most of their lives in the Pacific Northwest.

Bryce moved with his family from the Midwest to Eatonville, Washington, when he was 12. He's lived most of his life in rural areas. Eatonville, in the shadow of Mount Rainier, was in Bryce's words "the Land of Milk and Honey – just far enough removed from the city, but close enough that you don't feel isolated. There's a lot of country things to do."

Born in Ohio, Bryce was raised in a church with a Mennonite influence, and in churches with a "little bit of Baptist," but evangelical overall

and largely non-denominational.

Kirstin, on the other hand, was "a Lutheran girl through and through" growing up in the Seattle eastside city of Kirkland.

"There are lots of Lutheran pastors in my family," she said. "My grandpa, uncle and cousins. My parents were very involved in our church. I was very involved in our church. I have an appreciation and love for those traditions (in the Lutheran church), and that style of worship is very much a part of me."

For college, Kirstin chose – no surprise – Pacific Lutheran University. And that's where she met Bryce. They met on the

first day of freshman orientation, were in a group of best friends all four years, and got together their senior year. Kirstin graduated from PLU with degrees in History and Global Studies, Bryce in Biology and Business.

Work brought the couple to the Skagit Valley.

Bryce is Vice President of Business Development for Bellevue Healthcare in the company's Burlington branch, which operates out of the old Harley Davidson building along Interstate-5. Kirstin owns her own business with Arbonne International, a health and wellness company whose product lines include skincare, cosmetics and nutrition. She also works for the Mount Vernon School District as a social worker, a five-day-a-week job that places her at Washington Elementary School and LaVenture Middle School.

Four active, school-age kids who are involved in myriad of activities keeps Bryce and Kirstin on their toes. They consider themselves "glorified Uber drivers," but without the pay.

All four kids take piano lessons and are involved in sports activities. Eli, not quite old enough to drive, is a sophomore at Mount Vernon High School, where he saw varsity action this fall on the football team. Magnus plays basketball, baseball and flag football, and is an artist who likes to create things.

Anika, says Bryce, may become the best athlete of the bunch. A gymnast, he says she's doing "hand-stand pushups" at age 9. All four, the parents point out, are doing "very well academically" in the classroom.

Bryce and Kirstin say they chose Bethany 16 years ago because it "felt like home." They also early on made good friends through a "small group" with seven to nine couples of similar ages. Although some members of the group no longer attend BCC, they remain good friends, and their kids are still close.

"We appreciate the (Bethany) community and the varied worship styles, and the Covenant Church's stance to agree to disagree on certain matters, because we are held together by shared purpose and beliefs that are much stronger," said Kirstin.

The meaning of Advent

By Rev. Brad Bergfalk
BCC Lead Pastor

American Christmas celebrations are often accompanied by great celebration, good food, and nostalgia. Even though we may continue to worship on Christmas Eve with family and time-honored traditions, most churches jump right past the period prior to Christmas we refer to as Advent.



Advent calls us to reflection, repentance, and self-denial. As Tish Harrison Warren suggests, “Advent asks us to decelerate, be still, and rest.” As a result, the season of Advent is countercultural. On an annual basis, Advent reminds us that we are called to be different. Advent reminds us we are strangers and aliens—people who are never quite at home in our world.

Advent reminds us that to follow Jesus is to be a misfit. And the challenging part of being countercultural is to adopt a set of Advent practices that

don’t come across as holier-than-thou. Tish Warren Harrison asks, how do we honor the season of preparation and penance without being a total killjoy as Christmas bells ring all around us?

Advent is a gift, not a burden. Keeping Advent is a formative spiritual practice that the Church has incorporated into their annual calendar for millennia.

By practicing the discipline of Advent, we are better prepared to understand and celebrate the birth of Jesus. The traditions of Christmas help us celebrate the birth of a Savior

while the practice of Advent prepares the soil of our hearts to be open to this new thing God is doing in our world and in our lives.

As you turn your gaze toward many of the activities that accompany the Christmas holiday season, consider marking your days with prayer, repentance, fasting, and acts of generosity. These will prepare your heart to understand the meaning of Christmas in a whole new way.

Reflection inspired by Tish Harrison Warren, Advent—The Season of Hope, Intervarsity Press, 2023

Grateful for Amy Muia’s faithful service

Bethany Covenant on November 10 said farewell to its beloved Associate Pastor of Congregational Care, Amy Muia.

For the past three years, Amy has dutifully and whole-heartedly tended to the spiritual needs of our congregation.

“I’ve come to appreciate the profound sensitivity you have for the spiritual needs of people around you,” BCC Pastor Brad Bergfalk told Amy, as staff and church leaders gathered around her near the end of the Sunday morning service for a sendoff prayer. “And I don’t know that we’ll be able to find someone with that deep level of care.”

“You’re always willing to step into the ministry if there’s something that needs to be done. You’ve never said ‘no, that’s not part of my job description.’ (Instead) you’ve said ‘I’ll do it.’”

Amy is returning to New Earth Recovery, the nonprofit ministry she and husband Alan co-founded in 2011. Amy joined the Bethany staff in November 2021 as a half-time, Associate Pastor of Congregational Care. By July of 2022 she was bumped up to three-quarter time, and was formally installed for that position in October of that year.

The ongoing need at NER, coupled with BCC’s need to trim the budget, led Amy to make the difficult decision.

“It is with sadness but a sense of peace that I submit my letter



Amy Muia has been Associate Pastor of Congregational Care for the past three years.

of resignation ...” wrote Amy in a letter to the congregation. “When I left NER at the end of 2021 to help Bethany during the crisis of multiple staff departures, no one took my place at NER, putting the burden of my responsibilities upon Alan in addition to his own. Since that time, NER has grown even more, opening a sixth recovery house and launching the Recovery Café to serve the homeless of Skagit County.

“At the same time, I’ve been aware that the church’s financial situation is inadequate to sustain the number of staff we currently have. We are a smaller congregation than we were before, and I recognize that though it’s difficult for everyone, certain cost-

saving measures are inevitable. I want you to know that this decision was not taken lightly. But it does seem that the needs of New Earth Recovery and the current financial gap at Bethany could both be helped by my stepping down from my role.”

Her areas of responsibilities, quite frankly, are too many to name in this space. But it includes crisis care and hospital visitation, visiting elderly members, prayer appointments for emotional and spiritual healing, assisting with Sunday services, occasional preaching, directing the Bethany Care Team (who visit shut-ins), providing spiritual care to the bereaved and serving as a staff liaison to the Deacons. For the past year or so, she has also helped with youth group on Wednesday evenings, a role she plans to continue.

Since there are no immediate plans to replace Amy, it’ll take a village to pick up the slack. Other members of the staff, the Diaconate, the Care Team and various laypersons will help cover congregational care. The Diaconate on January 1 will unveil “POD” – which stands for “Personal Outreach for Deacons” – where the congregation will be divided among the Deacons, so everyone will have a Deacon checking in with them. Diaconate chairperson Bev Conn will manage the prayer chain. Anne Miller will become the Care Team coord-

inator. Vicki Lund will coordinate the Sunday morning prayer station.

Amy was issued a Covenant ministry license in 2012, largely for her role as a jail chaplain in the Skagit County Jail for 14 years through the ministry of Tierra Nueva and at NER, which she co-directed for 11 years before coming on staff at Bethany.

Amy is also a gifted speaker – she was one of the keynote speakers at the recent Covenant Women’s Ministries fall retreat – and an award-winning author. She was named this year’s winner of the Flannery O’Connor Award for short fiction. Her forthcoming novel “A Desert between Two Seas” will be published by the University of Georgia Press in the fall of 2025.

“Bethany is a special place, and we want to see it thrive,” said Amy. “Alan and I will continue to stay in the church community and use our gifts among you as we are able. I depart with a sense of peace, gratitude, and hope, and I thank you for entrusting me with the beautiful souls at Bethany these three years.”

Said Brad: “Amy’s attention to detail, heart for those who are hurting, and wisdom when dealing with difficult circumstances have been instrumental during her time on staff. I am grateful I have had the privilege of working alongside her.”

– R.L.

Lyssna

Continued from page 1

members Nels and Christine Elde, remembers as a child in the 1950s being reluctantly present on Christmas morning for the annual “Julotta” services and singing of “Lyssna.”

“Jul” in Swedish means Yule, or Christmas. “Otta” in Swedish means dawn. Late to bed on Christmas Eve, Steve recalls being literally “dragged out of bed” by parents Mel and Myrtle on the Elde farm and carried to the car for the drive into town for Bethany’s “Julotta” service, which could be begin as early as 5:30 a.m.

Many decades later, the song still stirs deep emotions in the now-retired Covenant pastor.

“I remember my dad and uncle Bob’s (Elde) voices in the choir,” said Steve. “I can still hear my dad’s voice: ‘Ara vare Gud uti höj-den.’ And then uncle Bob would come in with the tenor part, ‘fridpå jorden, fridpå jorden!’ I just could hear them, and I hear your dad (Cliff Lund), too.”

“It was amazing.” Steve also heard something else – a variation of the Swedish words. He and cousin Randy Elde, blurry-eyed at the start of the service, were wide awake and giddy with laughter during the singing of “Lyssna.” That’s because what they thought the choir was singing actually was:

*Lefsa. Lefsa.
Herring and lasagna.
Lefsa. Lefsa.
Herring tastes so good.
Lefsa. Lefsa.
Herring and lasagna.
Herring. Herring.
Herring tastes so good.
Herring tastes so good, in the morning.
In the morning. In the morning ...*

“We would roll

around in the pew laughing, and our parents would ask ‘what’s goin’ on?’” said Steve. “But it became something we looked forward to.”

Longtime BCC member Louise Bottles is the youngest child of Sivert and Marit Torseth, immigrants of Norway, and members during the church’s early years. Louise joined the BCC choir when she was 13 years old.

“I think I’ve listened to it (Lyssna) and sang it all my life,” she said.

From choir to congregation

“Lyssna” was sung by the choir in the early years. When Doug Vetvick was hired as music director in 1978, he was told in no uncertain terms by his predecessor, Rudy Leander, the choir *will* sing “Lyssna” on Christmas morning.

“Rudy made it quite clear that was the expectation,” said Doug, who had only heard the song performed once, in the Covenant church in Florida he grew up in. Although he had never sung “Lyssna,” he was familiar with the song because of his wife Becky’s family (the Hanstads) and extended Torseth family at Bethany.

“Rudy helped me with the pronunciations, as I tried to get that down and



The Bethany choir, pictured in the mid-1930s. Bob Elde is in the top row, far left. His brother and Steve’s father, Mel Elde, is also in the top row, third from left. Charter member and Swedish immigrant, John E. Lund, is in the second row, far left. The photo was taken during the Christmas season. Was the choir preparing to sing “Lyssna?”

pass it on to the others (in the choir),” Doug said.

Shortly after the congregation moved from the old church to the present church building on 18th Street, “Lyssna” shifted from a choir anthem to an open invitation to anyone in the congregation.

“People started asking me ‘can we join the choir in singing it?’” Doug said.

Then something remarkable happened. Young people who had never sung “Lyssna” before, but had heard it sung for years, wanted to join the chorus. By then the song had moved to an all-

congregation tradition.

“To find out that all these kids knew this song without ever singing it, it was just part of the fabric of their lives,” Doug said. “It was mind boggling to me, really, that something had made that type of impression on them. That they would actually, almost by osmosis, learn the words and memorize them.”

No longer a “Swedish Club”

The pastor who will direct this year’s singing of “Lyssna” was well familiar with the song while growing up in a small Covenant church in Kansas.

“My dad was the pastor, and our family was one of the few non-Swedish families in the church,” Randall said. “I remember how every Christmas, all the folks who’d grown up speaking Swedish in their homes would gather on the

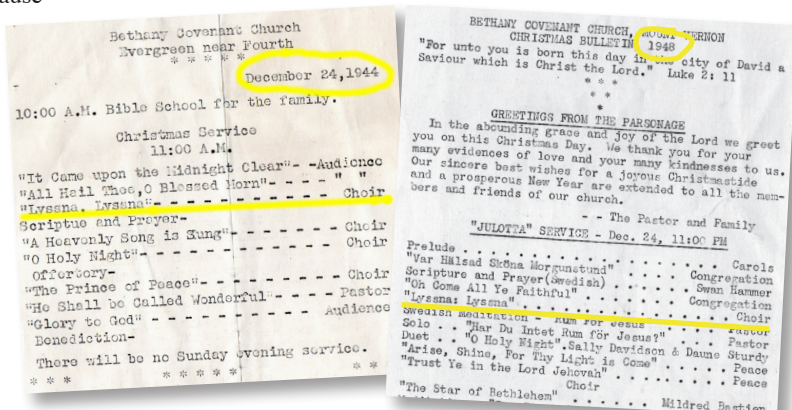
platform to sing ‘Lyssna’ in our ‘Julotta’ service.

“As a boy I always found the singing of ‘Lyssna’ fascinating, and a bit odd. And I never got to participate — only listen ... which is what ‘Lyssna’ means, after all.”

That is until the Christmas after the retired choir director who for years directed “Lyssna” passed away.

“I was back for the church’s Julotta service and everyone was in an uproar about who would direct ‘Lyssna’ in his absence,” said Randall. “The church’s choir director was reticent to do it, but I as a 29-year-old graduate student in music was cheeky enough to volunteer. By this time many of the original ‘Lyssna’ choir had also gone to be with the Lord, so younger singers had begun to take their place — my sister among them. The first time I’d ever performed ‘Lyssna’ was as its director.”

Randall would never forget the song. He made his own edition, translating it into English, but with few chances to sing it for 25



Bethany Covenant bulletins from 1944 and 1948.

“Lyssna” in those days was always sung by the choir.

years until 2006, the first year he arrived at Bethany.

"I'd learned 'Lyssna' so well by then that I could direct it from memory," Randall said. "But while I may have been directing, the singers were really the ones in charge. I watched with amazement as a huge choir of folks – young and old – streamed to the front of the sanctuary to sing. One of them was my own mom, who'd never gotten up the nerve to join the choir of Swedish immigrants back in Kansas."

Speaking of nerve, the tradition struck a sensitive one of a regular attender in the 1990s. We had just performed the song at the end of the Sunday service when this person caught me in the narthex.

"I feel like this was just for those in the 'Swedish Club,'" he said. Clearly, he felt like an outsider.

Today, as the church has moved further away from its Swedish heritage, it feels the song has broken loose from the bonds of ethnicity and age.

"It's not about trying to hang onto the Swedish tradition at all," Doug said. "It's just deeply rooted in the life of that church. It's become a Christmas tradition that is treasured."

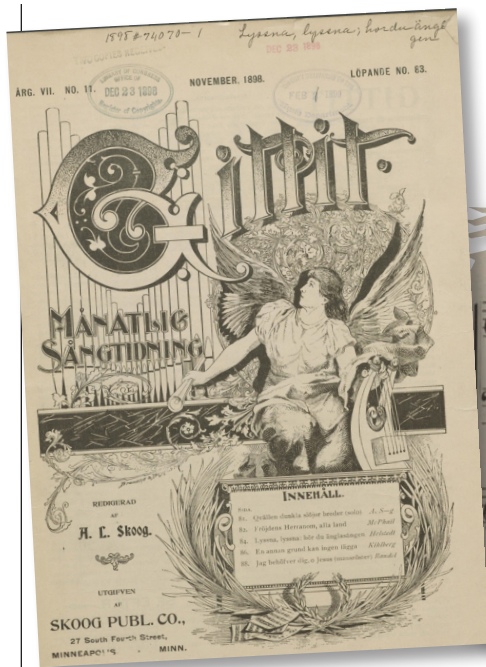
"Lyssna" means "listen." It's the message that has stood the test of time. Our fast-paced culture competes for our attention. We talk to God. But do we listen for God's response? Too often, we'd rather listen to our technology.

The song written 126 years ago is poignantly relevant today. Perhaps the early Swedes were on to something.

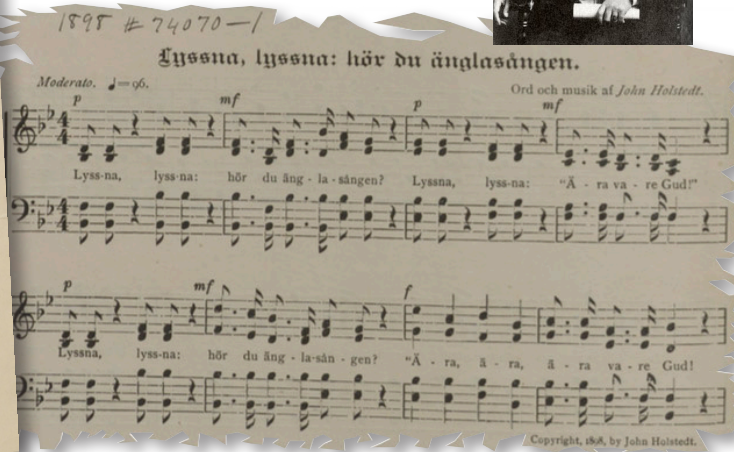
While Steve can still hear the voices of his dad and uncle singing the song, we all should heed the call to pay attention:

Listen, listen! Hear the angels singing? Glory be to God!

And that is a message worth repeating.



A.L. Skoog, at right, published his own music and those of others in his periodical publication "Gittit." In this issue, November of 1898, he released the song we have all come to know and love, "Lyssna."



It all started in Stromsburg, Nebraska

"Where is it written?" is a long-held linchpin of the Evangelical Covenant Church. The saying invites us to turn to what the Scriptures say to discern God's truth in our lives.

As we usher in another Christmas season at 103-year-old Bethany Covenant Church, inquiring minds want to know the answer to another profound question:

"Where and when did the singing of "Lyssna" begin?"

It is a legitimate question. And I wish I could tell you the answer for Bethany. In a search of church archives, the earliest documentation I could find was a Christmas Eve day bulletin from 1944.

It's reasonable, however, to assume the origin of "Lyssna" at BCC goes back much further, perhaps even to the church's beginnings in 1921. For one, Bethany would have been on board with the early Swedish traditions of the Covenant.

The singing of "Lyssna" was one of those traditions. The Swedish melody was written in 1898 by John Holstedt.

It's possible Holstedt translated the song into English. More than likely, however, it was early Covenant translator and songwriter Andrew L. Skoog.

Born in Varmland, Sweden, the same region my grandfather, John E. Lund, immigrated from, Skoog settled in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1869. A few years later, Skoog was saved at a revival meeting led by Rev. E. August Skogsbergh, a leading preacher in the early Covenant church who would be dubbed the "Swedish Moody." Beginning in 1879, Skoog and Skogsbergh would work alongside each other for many years at Covenant churches in Chicago and Minneapolis.

Where was "Lyssna" written? Experts in Swedish Covenant music, have long speculated Chicago, Minneapolis, Jamestown, N.Y., Worcester, Massachusetts, or Rockford, Illinois – all prominent Swedish enclaves in the early church. It's none of the above.

This is where I

have breaking news. I asked Andrew Meyer of Covenant Archives in Chicago for some help. He was able to obtain documents from the copyright office of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. that Holstedt wrote the song in a Covenant church in Stromsburg, Nebraska.

The song's birthplace and date also confirm what many have suspected over the years, that "Lyssna" was a creation of the Swedish-American Covenant Church. I was always of the belief the song was brought to the U.S. by Swedish immigrants.

"It is unknown in Sweden," said Chuck Olson, an authority on Swedish-Covenant music.

Longtime North Park University Professor Elder M. Lindahl suspected as much more than 60 years ago. Lindahl had fond memories of the singing of "Lyssna" as a child in a Covenant church in the Midwest, and hoped for a similar experience during a visit to Sweden.

"My personal contact with angels was never,

before or after, so close as it was on those dark, cold, snowy Christmas mornings," Lindahl wrote in a 1991 edition of the magazine "Pietisten." "Though barely able to keep my eyes open, I knew in a profound way that Christmas morning was unlike any other morning of the year."

But Lindahl's dream to experience the thrill of singing "Lyssna" in a city north of Stockholm was shattered in 1963.

Lindahl attended three "Julottas" on the same Christmas morning in the city of Uppsala – in Gamla (old town) at 5 a.m., the city cathedral at 6 a.m., and at the Covenant church at 7 a.m.

"What struck me that morning was the absence of 'Lyssna' at each service!" wrote Lindahl in the Pietisten article. "Three times I plodded through 'Var Hålsad' (All Hail), but where in the world, or, the heavens, were the angels?"

News flash to Sweden: No dearth of angels here. The angelic chorus is heard each December in Mount Vernon.

BUILDING,
continued from the cover

Washington State Office of the Insurance Commissioner. Shortly after, the church received the first of three checks totaling a little more than \$134,000, which includes an estimated \$19,000 in lost offering income for January 14, the Sunday worship service was cancelled. Church leaders are reasonably hopeful another check for an estimated \$24,000 in depreciation costs will be forthcoming.

The water damage shut down use of the children’s nursery, a sizeable portion of the north hallway, the chapel and adjacent choir music storage room. Staff offices also sustained damage. Running water caused damage to drywall, insulation, molding, carpet, electrical wiring, computers, financial records, a piano, furniture, books and toys. The Bethany Preschool and Children of the Valley had to move classes and supplies elsewhere in the building.

The church shortly after the flood hired SERVPRO to do demolition of damaged sheetrock, insulation and water pipe. Rich Stewart of RMI Plumbing was hired to repair the broken lines, replacing much of the building’s original copper lines with PEX, which will better withstand a freeze. Rich also installed more shutoff valves to isolate any future water-line breaks.

Hedlund Builders of La Conner, one of three contractors who provided bids, was hired to do the reconstruction work. New sheetrock was hung and insulation replaced in October. Painting, and laying of new carpet was underway in early November.

Church member Bob Erickson has served as volunteer onsite coordinator. Thanks to the timely work of Brian Hedlund’s construction company and Bob’s leadership, the project as of mid-November was three weeks ahead of schedule.

“Bob is on the job site nearly every day,” Jerry said. “So there was no lost time waiting for decisions to be made. When they have questions, he’s here to answer them.”

Those in attendance at the October 27 meeting also got an

1. The water break first discovered on January 13 flooded the old choir room now known as the Chapel, as well as the adjacent choir music storage room.



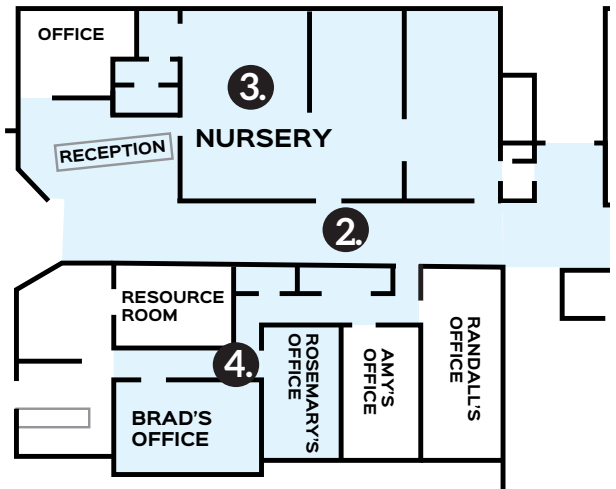
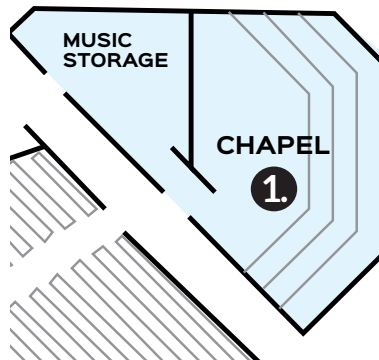
WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE



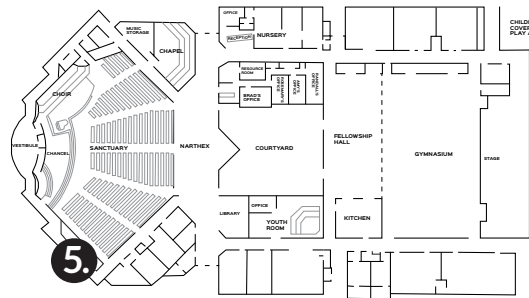
2. Copper pipes broke in the ceiling of the north-wing hallway, damaging sheetrock, insulation and flooring.



3. Much of the nursery sustained water damage.



Key: The most damaged spaces from the January 13 water break



5. Unrelated to the January water break, but in need of water-damage repairs nonetheless. Rusted out “roof sumps” need to be replaced and rotted soffits repaired.



4. Water crept down the staff office hallway, and caused damage to Brad and Rosemary’s offices.

update on the roof repair, which is unrelated to the January flood, but also caused by water damage.

The flat portions of Bethany’s roof have been leaking water for quite some time. During heavy rains, BCC Building Superintendent Oleg Radchishin has had to place drip buckets on the floor to collect the water drips. Eventually, he was able to divert water to outside the building. The sources for the leaks are rusted-out roof sumps (drain pans). HyTech Roofing of Lynden has been hired to replace the failing drain pans and repair the damage around the

downspouts, including the rotted wood soffits, for about \$2,700. The church will eventually need to replace the flat-roof portions of the church.

In other news at the congregational special meeting, members voted 91-4 to approve a revised budget of \$897,000 for the 2024-25 fiscal year. That number is about \$100,000 less than the budget that was approved at the semi-annual congregational meeting in June.

The reduced budget needed to be made, Jerry told the congregants. He said the church has been running on deficit

spending, and at its current rate would deplete its cash reserves by the first of February.

“We’ve been spending between \$25,000 and \$32,000 more per month than what we are bringing in,” Jerry said.

Church leaders maintain a congregation our size – about 275 Sunday attendees on average – cannot sustain a budget of \$965,000. Annual giving is currently about \$840,000. The lower budget was made possible by:

- Amy Muia’s resignation as Associate Pastor of

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Church members stay committed as BCC works toward financial stability

By Adam Deitz
BCC Treasurer

Bethany Covenant Church remains in a time of transition. Our church, like many others, faces a different world than the one we knew before 2020.

But, as Christians, we know that God is in control—even now. Proverbs 16:3 reminds us: “Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.” The BCC congregation continues to demonstrate unshakable commitment to God with their generous giving.

For the reasons mentioned in the (Bethany Beacon cover) article on the rebuild of the north side of the building from last January’s flood, the church’s current cash

reserves are not an accurate representation of the funds held for paying staff and other ministries. Cash balances are inflated while the church holds money from the insurance company for building repairs.

Monthly giving so far this fiscal year has been near to the levels seen in 2023, while expenses have been a bit higher than budgeted amounts. Notably, several congregants have taken advantage of tax rules that allow for donation of certain IRA/trust/investment distributions. These tithes have been very helpful to bolster the church’s general fund.

If you are retired, it may be worth asking your tax professional if such a donation

would be available in your situation. Regardless, this Treasurer, the Stewardship Team, and the Leadership Team all remain very grateful for each and every gift given in support the church’s ministries. Thank you!

Turning to the numbers

BCC presently has \$240,016 in working cash, \$134,294 in designated funds, and \$75,025 in emergency funds. These figures all continue to indicate that the church is operating with deficit spending. The Leadership Team is aware of the issue and will likely make additional budget reductions in 2025. Even still, we are reminded to keep the faith! God will establish our plans.

FINANCES

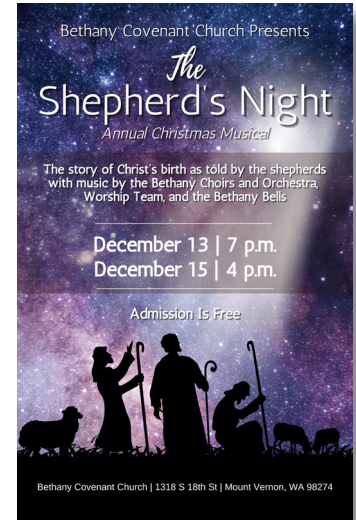


Tree planting, phase two

More than 20 volunteers turned out on a cold, rainy day on Saturday, November 16 to plant and stake 11 Red Maple “Red Sunset” trees in the east parking lot, the same number of trees planted at this time last year. BCC member Wayne Ramsey organized and led the volunteers, who were rewarded with doughnuts, coffee and pizza.



Above, some of the group that turned out for the tree-planting work party. At left, Eli, Magnus and Bryce Schaffner help a worker secure a Red Maple.



Come hear the Christmas story from a shepherd’s point of view

By Rev. Randall Wilkens
BCC Associate Pastor
of Worship and the Arts

Shepherds are literally down-to-earth people. Could it be that they were chosen to spread the news of Christ’s birth because God knew they’d tell the story honestly, unpretentiously, and enthusiastically? And might they even have told it poetically?

King David, after all, was both a shepherd and master poet of the Psalms. So you see, it’s really not much of a stretch to think that a bedraggled group of shepherds could tell the story of Christ’s birth through poetry! Because that’s just what they’re going to do in this year’s Bethany Christmas Musical “The Shepherds’ Night,” which will be performed Friday, December 13 (7 p.m.) and Sunday, December 15 (4 p.m.)

Come hear the shepherds’ whimsical, rhyming tales as they regale us with their account of the most amazing night in history! And of course they’ll be joined by our Bethany Choir, Bethany Young Voices, Bethany Bells, Worship Team, Orchestra—and you!—celebrating this wondrous story with glorious, stirring music of the season.

As always, admission is free, and cookies and coffee will be served afterwards.

Come one, come all and invite your friends, family, and coworkers, as we proclaim the birth of Jesus our Savior!

BETHANY COVENANT CHURCH
 1318 S 18th ST
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BUILDING,

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Congregational Care, effective November 15. There are no immediate plans to replace her position on staff.

- Medical insurance savings for Bethany’s full-time employees, Brad, Randall, Abby and Oleg. Bethany has been paying about \$30,000 per year in insurance premiums for each of its five full-time employees to receive medical insurance through the Covenant. That figure would have been even higher with an expected 15 percent increase at the first of the year. Instead, each full-time employee will receive a \$1,200 monthly stipend for top-end medical insurance through the Washington Health Benefit Exchange, which is outside the Covenant plan. The insurance switch will save Bethany about half of the cost of what its currently paying.

- The church will begin collecting \$2,100 in monthly rent for the “brown house.” In exchange for paying rent beginning January 1, Abby will

receive a \$15,000 bump per year in housing allowance.

- Removed the budgeted \$2,500 from the paid “Toddler Time” supervisor position.

As many of you know, a power surge from a recent storm damaged our sanctuary lighting control system and sound system. The power supply and digital dimmer control rack for the lights are being repaired by the manufacturer out of state. Until then, the company sent us temporary parts to activate the ceiling lights.

As for the speaker system, Dimensional Communications gave us a \$1,500 bid to repair the broken amps. The parts wouldn’t arrive until mid-December, after the Christmas Musical. Instead, Oleg found refurbished amp parts on Ebay for \$600. Using the church’s Genie boom lift, he was able to reach and replace the amps himself, saving the church \$900.

Most of us are unaware that this is just another example of Oleg’s behind-the-scenes, problem-solving skills.

– R.L.

CHURCH CALENDAR

DECEMBER

- 6:** Noel Concert, 7 p.m.
- 8:** Bi-annual congregational meeting, noon.
- 13:** Christmas Musical, 7 p.m.
- 15:** Christmas Musical, 4 p.m.
- 19:** BCC Preschool Christmas program, 6 p.m.
- 21:** Heart to Heart Christmas brunch, 9:30 a.m.-noon.
- 22:** Singing of Lyssna during the morning service.
- 24:** Christmas Eve Service Family service, 5 p.m.; Christmas Eve Lessons and Carols service, 7 p.m.

Events online: Check our website for upcoming events at www.bccmv.org

Delegates needed for PacNWC meeting

The 2025 annual meeting of the Pacific Northwest Conference will be held May 1-3 at Bellingham Covenant Church.

If you are a member and interested in representing Bethany as a delegate, please contact a member of the Leadership Team.

PacNWC delegates are invited to attend the Friday afternoon workshops and Friday night worship service (May 2). The actual voting takes place at the annual business meeting, which runs from 9 a.m.-

noon on Saturday morning. The annual meeting concludes with a lunch.

Bethany can have up to five voting delegates. We have two openings.

Delegate numbers

Church delegates to the PacNWC annual meeting are determined by the number of members a church has. Bethany currently has 293 active members, so are eligible for five delegates.

Church members	Delegates
50 or less	2
51 to 150	3
151 to 250	4
251 to 350	5
351 to 500	6
501 or more	7

Source: Pacific Northwest Conference, Article VII. Section 7.2 of the By-Laws.