

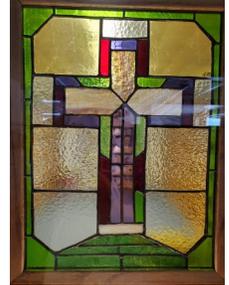


February 2026

A monthly publication of the  
East Martin Christian Reformed Church

## Reflections from the Pulpit

### Rebuilding, Reforming, and Restoring: Lessons from Nehemiah



# The Echoes

Over the past two months, our church has journeyed through the first six chapters of the **Book of Nehemiah**, and it has been a profound blessing to reflect together on God's rebuilding work — not only in Jerusalem's walls, but in our lives, our faith, our families, our church, and our community.

Nehemiah is more than an ancient construction report. It is a testimony to a covenant-keeping God who rebuilds what sin has broken, what suffering has weakened, and what fear has threatened to undo.

We began with **"Rebuilding the Ruins in Tears and Intercession" (Nehemiah 1)**. Before a single stone was lifted, Nehemiah lifted a prayer. He wept. He mourned. He confessed. We were reminded that prayer is not our last resort — it is our first response. Rebuilding begins when we care enough to weep and humble ourselves before the Lord. Many shared how this message helped them see their own ruins not as the end of the story, but as invitations to deeper dependence on God.

In **"God's Good Hand Is Upon Us" (Nehemiah 2)**, we saw that the ruins were real — but more real was the sovereignty of God. Nehemiah testified, "The good hand of my God was upon me." We were encouraged to look beyond the "ra" (trouble) of our circumstances and trust the "tov" (goodness) of our faithful God. Even what appears bad, God uses for His glory and our good.

Then in **"United We Rise, Divided We Fall" (Nehemiah 3)**, we saw families working side by side. No one rebuilt alone. Priests, merchants, rulers, men and women — each had a section of the wall. The message was clear: rebuilding is not a solo mission; it is a community enterprise. Church membership, accountability, and shared responsibility matter. When one stone is removed, the wall weakens. When each stone stands in place, the wall rises strong.

**Nehemiah 4** brought us to the reality of opposition in **"Building with One Hand, Standing Guard with the Other."** Growth never goes unchallenged. As the wall reached half its height, fear and discouragement spread. Yet Nehemiah declared, "Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome... our God will fight for us." We were reminded

that resistance is not a sign that God has stepped away — often it is evidence that He is at work. In our own seasons of uncertainty, we are called to keep building, keep praying, and keep trusting.

In **Nehemiah 5**, we were confronted with the danger within: selfishness and spiritual indifference. Rebuilding requires not only defending against outside threats, but repenting of sin within. Compassion and repentance go hand in hand. A restored wall without restored hearts would mean nothing.

Finally, in **“Faithfulness Is Fruitfulness” (Nehemiah 6)**, we saw that opposition does not disappear — it adapts. Distraction, intimidation, and compromise threatened the work. But Nehemiah refused to abandon what God had entrusted to him. Faithfulness is not measured by immediate results, but by obedience. We were challenged to make the main thing the main thing: spiritual rebuilding and corporate responsibility, always depending on God, always being discerning.

The wall in Jerusalem was completed in fifty-two days — but the greater miracle was what God rebuilt in the hearts of His people.

As we continue forward, may we remember:  
Rebuilding begins with prayer.  
Progress requires unity.  
Opposition demands dependence.  
And faithfulness honors God.

The same good hand that was upon Nehemiah is upon His church today. May we continue to rise and build — together — for the glory of God.

### **Church Membership Classes**

We have been greatly blessed over the past two months to host two separate membership classes. It has been a joy to walk alongside those who are prayerfully exploring what it means to belong to a local church family.

I’ve had the privilege of meeting with Nick, Trevor, Logan, and Peyton—twice at church and twice in their home. They are eager to learn more about our church, our beliefs, and the people God has gathered here. They are prayerfully considering a commitment to membership in the spring or early summer.

One of the blessings of holding class in their home was the opportunity to spend time with Courtney, Nick’s wife. Courtney has been courageously battling cancer since August 2025. We have been praying for her and for the entire family as they continue to depend on the Lord for strength and healing. As a church, we look forward to continuing to surround them with prayer, encouragement, and practical support in this season.

We are also meeting with Cathy McMullin in a separate membership class. Cathy has faithfully attended Libby’s Plainwell Bible Study for the past ten years, yet had never formally committed to a local church. She began attending our worship services later last year and has expressed great excitement about learning more about our congregation. Cathy is prayerfully discerning membership as the Lord leads, and we are thankful for her growing connection to our church family.

We warmly welcome Nick and his family, as well as Cathy, as regular attendees of our church. As a congregation, let us commit to serving them, loving them, and walking with them during this important season of discernment and growth. May the Lord continue to build His church—stone by stone, life by life—for His glory.

## Praying for the Nation: Japan

Population Total: 122,829,000

Population in Unreached People Groups: 120,571,000 (98.2%)

Christian Adherent: 1.9%

Japan is not a persecuted nation in the traditional sense. There is religious freedom. Yet it remains one of the most spiritually resistant and difficult places for gospel growth. The challenge is often cultural, relational, and spiritual rather than legal or violent opposition.

### Prayer Points:

1. **Spiritual Awakening:** Pray that hearts shaped by secularism and material success would hunger for Christ and see Him as Savior, not foreign religion.
2. **Against Indifference:** Ask God to replace apathy with curiosity and open doors for gospel conversations.
3. **Churches & Pastors:** Pray for encouragement, boldness, and deeper discipleship in often small congregations.
4. **Gospel Workers:** Ask for wisdom, strong relationships, and perseverance for missionaries and local believers.
5. **Families & Youth:** Pray for hope amid loneliness and pressure, and for the next generation to stand firm in faith.
6. **Revival:** Ask the Lord to bring new spiritual life where the soil seems hard.

## Congregational Meeting

A special congregational meeting was held on January 25.

Dennis DeYoung opened with prayer.

The discussion centered around the visa situation for Pastor Joel.

May 16—his current visa/work permit expires. At that time we will apply for a R-1 visa. Pastor Joel will not be allowed to work, drive, or receive compensation after this date but can remain in the U.S. for a 60-day grace period.

The Visa application decision will take 60-90 days unless we pay a \$3,000 fee for expedited 15-day decision.

If the application is approved Pastor Joel and family need to return to the Philippines to attend a visa interview and obtain a visa there. This would likely take a month after returning.

As soon as the visa is obtained they can return to the U.S. and resume work.

The Council asked for permission to spend up to \$20,000 for visa application costs, airfare, and any additional costs.

The vote by voice acclamation passed.

Cameron Tuinstra closed with prayer.

## In Contact With Council



Tim Westendorp opened the meeting of February 10 with a Daylight devotional on Genesis 13, 14 and 18 and opened with prayer.

The minutes of the January 13 meeting were read. A motion to approve passed.

Pastor's report:

- ◆ Pastor Joel and his family will leave on June 14 for the Philippines to receive new passports and visas.
- ◆ They hosted Larry Tuinstra for lunch, met with Nick Shealy and his family, did communion with Mary Visser, visited with Bill and Bonnie Snook, talked with Paul and Betty DeMann, Jamie and Tara DeMann and Chuck and Henrietta Paufler.

Deacon's report: General fund is 8% ahead and Ministry shares is 21% behind. A motion to approve the offering schedule passed.

The Evangelism and Outreach committees are planning to start VBS with the daycare at East Martin Christian School.

Two Council visits were made.

Old business: 16 to 20 people are planning to go on the mission trip to Asheville during spring break. Julie Wubben is planning to go to Cuba on a mission trip this summer.

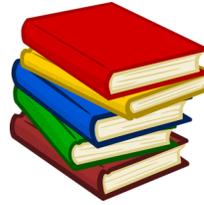
Pulpit supply: Pastor Marc will conduct the service here on February 22 in the morning. Pastor Joel is planning to go to a conference at Westminster on March 18.

Classis meeting is scheduled for March 10; Dennis and Tim will attend.

Names for the office of elder and deacon were reviewed.

A motion to adjourn passed.

Don closed with prayer and has devotions at the next meeting on March 9.



## New Books are in the Library

THE LIGHTHOUSE AT THE COVE—AMY CLIPSTON  
SUNRISE REEF—IRENE HANNON (Hope Harbor Novel)  
FROM THE VALLEY WE RISE—ELIZABETH MUSSER  
TRACK OF COURAGE—SUSAN MAY WARREN (Call of the Wild #1)  
THE GIFTED—ANN H. GABHART  
EDGE OF TRUTH—JANICE CANTORE  
Suspense  
THROUGH EACH TOMORROW—GABRIELLE MEYER (Timeless #6)  
MARRYING THE MATCHMAKER—JODY HEDLUND (Shanahan Match #4)

## Congratulations Eden!!



Eden Suk was selected as one of the 3 females from her senior class at Martin High School to compete for Homecoming Queen.

The freshman and sophomore classes each select one male and one female to run for Duke and Duchess. The junior class chooses 2 males and 2 females to compete for Prince and Princess. The senior class chooses 3 males and 3 females to compete for King and Queen. All high school students get to vote for each title.

The final results are revealed at the Boy's Homecoming basketball game. Each of the candidates walk with a partner onto the court. All who win receive a sash and the King and Queen receive a crown as well.

Eden indicated it was a very fun night that will be a highlight of her senior year.

Congratulations Eden!!

## Calling all Cookie Bakers



We will be packing boxes for our military personnel and college students who live away from home the middle of March. We will need at least 10 dozen cookies plus other items such as wrapped candy, wrapped chocolates, Kind bars etc.

If you are willing to help, please watch the bulletin for details and the sign up sheet in the narthex.

Kalamazoo Christian High School's spring musical will be the "Sound of Music".

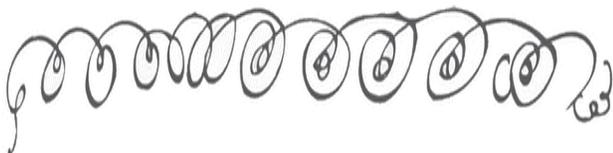
It will be held at Comstock Community Auditorium, March 19-21.



## MARC

While you are grocery shopping in March, please purchase some of the items below for the Martin Area Resource Center and put them in the grocery cart in the narthex.

Canned fruits, canned veggies, juices, applesauce, canned meat; i.e., tuna, chicken.



## Greeters

March 1: AM—Ron & Lorraine Vandenberg, Wayne Leep; PM: at MRC  
March 8: AM—Elders; PM—Rebekah Westendorp, Thomas Westendorp  
March 15: AM—Seth & Keri Watson, Cameron Tuinstra; PM: at MRC  
March 22: AM—Chase & Laura DeMaagd, Tim Westendorp; PM: Bruce & Renee Aukema  
March 29: AM—Randy & Mary Bouman, Dean Wubben; PM—Libby Dendel

## Ushers

March 1: Ryan Tucker, Henry M. Tuinstra, Scott Tuinstra  
March 8: Luke Watson, Seth Watson, Tom Westendorp  
March 15: Bruce Aukema, Randy Bouman, Joe DeKoekkoek  
March 22: Kevin DeKoekkoek, Chase DeMaagd, Dave DeYoung  
March 29: Jacob DeYoung, Joel DeYoung, Levi DeYoung

## Nursery

March 1: Rebekah Westendorp  
March 8: Jen, Violet and Willow Tuinstra  
March 15: Laura DeMaagd  
March 22: Riley and Addison Tuinstra  
March 29: Jessica Tucker

## Library

March 1: Rena Lynema  
March 8: Linda DeYoung  
March 15: Ida Westendorp  
March 22: Rena Lynema  
March 29: Linda DeYoung



## Offerings for January

General Fund	\$ 9,036.00
Ministry Shares	1,408.00
Faith Promise	
Shaarda	325.00
Smit	1,675.00
Tiemeyer	225.00
Walker	225.00
East Martin Missions	150.00
Education Assistance	438.00
Benevolence	180.00
Barry County Christian School	70.00
East Martin Christian School	2,700.00
Heritage Christian School	150.00
Kalamazoo Christian High School	70.00
Tri-Unity Christian School	200.00
Zion Christian School	70.00
Martin Area Resource Center	517.00
Reframe Ministries	390.00
World Renew—DRS	70.00
The Luke Society	70.00
Project Hope	224.00
Reaching the Forgotten	70.00
Mel Trotter Mission	70.00
Christian Neighbors	70.00
Growing Hope Globally	70.00
Gideons	70.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$18,543.00</b>

## Maple Glazed Bacon Wrapped Brussels Sprouts

Brussels sprouts—wash and trim  
 Bacon—thick cut—cut in half  
 Maple syrup—I used Bourbon Barrel Maple Syrup  
 Tooth picks

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. This is crucial for ensuring that the Brussels sprouts bake evenly.

Wrap each Brussels sprout with half a slice of bacon and secure with a toothpick.

Arrange the wrapped Brussels sprouts on a baking sheet. Make sure to space them to allow for even cooking and crisping of the bacon.

Brush generously with maple syrup adding sweet glaze that will caramelize while baking.

Bake for 25-30 minutes or until the bacon is crispy and the Brussels sprouts are tender.

Serve warm and enjoy.

Can wrap Brussels sprouts in bacon and secure with toothpicks up to 24 hours in advance. Cover tightly with plastic wrap and store in the refrigerator. When ready brush with maple syrup and bake.

## Offering Schedule for March

March 1: AM—General Fund/Ministry Shares;  
 PM—at MRC  
 March 8: AM—East Martin Christian School;  
 PM—International Campus Ministries  
 March 15: AM—General Fund/Ministry  
 Shares; PM—at MRC  
 March 22: AM—East Martin Missions; PM—  
 Bible League  
 March 29: AM—East Martin Christian School;  
 PM—Reach the Forgotten

