

Covenant Call – May 2026

A Letter from Caitlin



Dear Covenant Community,

On Sunday, April 12th we had our 2026 Annual Meeting of the Congregation. We reflected on 2025 and felt energized about our plans for 2026. We heard about our finances, Session Teams and their plans, we elected 3 folks to serve on the Nominating Committee, and I gave a "State of Covenant" address. There will be official Annual Meeting minutes, but for now I want to share my "State of Covenant" address with everyone who's involved in the life of Church of the Covenant. My hope is that the "State of Covenant" address gets us all on the same page. *It's a little bit long and formatted how I spoke it, so be prepared 😊*

"State of Covenant" Address

Rev. Caitlin Culp

2026 Annual Meeting of Arlington Presbyterian Church of the Covenant

We're springing alive this season as we witness to Christ's resurrection — it's the Easter season, after all!

And we're springing alive as we prepare for our inaugural Spring Alive! event on April 25th.

We're already springing alive like our azaleas that appear each Spring....

- We have an incredible weekly Bible study.
- We have 8 children who attend church regularly and 7 folks who are in their 90s! — we've got the whole age spectrum, y'all! That's really cool.
- We worship weekly, we have special music and a lovely choir, children are involved in worship, we have a sister church with whom we're building a close partnership, we have meditation time w/each other, we do a heck of a coffee hour, we support local nonprofit organizations, and we support Othow and his peoples in South Sudan.
- We've got big plans for this year — the Spring Alive! Event, more intentional partnership with our Scout Troop, hosting a blood drive, creating a walking group, planning playground meetups, unique worship experiences, and hosting an outreach event about planning memorial services and discussing the logistics of aging and dying.

We're very much alive!

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Simultaneously, our congregation has been on the decline in terms of the number of members, the number of folks who pledge, the number of people who visit our church, and the number of congregants for at least 20 years.

This puts us at a critical juncture.

We love God and this place and we love each other and we love our community. We want Covenant to continue to exist as a church.

AND we know our financial state. The reality is that **Covenant is nearing the end of its life if we continue on this trajectory.**

I imagine that's not what you want to hear. It's not what I want to say. But I think it's important that we're all on the same page. AND that we remember that this trajectory isn't the final word.

Because we're resurrection people. We live in resurrection hope.

And there's all sorts of ways that we can try to spring alive some more — to keep on living!

The thing with being resurrection people, and with springing alive, is that it can't be done alone.

- There's no member of Session who's Jesus.
- The people who've helped Covenant stay afloat for all these years can't do it alone.
- I was called to this church by y'all and by God. But I'm certainly not a Savior.
- **We've gotta all be in this together — in different ways based on our varied gifts, abilities, and capacities. Covenant Members and Covenant Friends (folks who are involved in the life of Covenant but are not official "members") are all part of this.**
- Together.

Friends, Covenant's Session asked me to "cast a vision" or "share my ideas about Covenant's present and future." They asked for a "State of Covenant address." Well, careful what you ask for! 😊

Siblings in Christ, Resurrection People of Covenant, this is my hope for Covenant in 2026:

- I hope that we'll continue getting to know each other as individuals. I'm grateful for all the ways you've invited me into your lives and hope we can do more of that. What a privilege it is to be with y'all during your times of great joy, immense sorrow, and in the mundane in-between. Also, watching y'all love Charlie and support Charles and me is the greatest blessing. Thank you.
- Next, I hope that we'll get to know who we are as a church right now — grateful for the almost 70 years of our faithful witness. We've always been a church that prides itself on its Christian Education — that's why we were formed. We had the thriving Backyard program before the pandemic. We tried to resurrect that program as Treehouse but it's just not in the cards for us right now.

How can we grieve some of who we've been and some of what we've done and find ways to move forward?

I hope that we can explore who we are right now, as the 25ish regular worshipers and the 30ish folks who are involved in the life of Covenant.

- Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, I hope that we'll discern who God's calling us to engage with and how we're called to engage with them — our neighbors, the people surrounding this place, right here and right now.

As we think about how Covenant might spring alive in new ways, I invite us to reflect on these questions:

- How can Church of the Covenant continue to exist for years to come?
- What does it look like to explore an innovative "business" grounded in our mission?
 - Or how might we engage in mixed-economy worshiping experiences? That could mean we continue to have 11am Sunday worship in the sanctuary but we also have worship at a park at 9am. Or have Bible study at a coffee shop. Have worship at a playground.
 - Mixed-economy worship experiences practice the ministry of meeting people where they are.
- How might we connect with our neighbors, learn who they are, and what they want and need from our church?
- If Covenant closed our doors tomorrow, who would miss us? Who would notice that we closed? What would they miss?

As we reflect on these questions and on my hopes for Covenant in 2026, I've got some action items for us.

First, let's celebrate: We've had 3 consistent visitors in the last three months. We had the biggest Christmas Eve service that Covenant's had in a while. We had 44 folks on Easter Sunday, including 3 kids & 3 babies in-person and 2 kids online!

- People are looking for community and we've got something to offer. But we have to let people know what we're doing. We have to get the word out about our events. Our community.
- This is the work of outreach. Outreach takes time, energy, and commitment. Outreach requires that we know **who we are** AND **how to market ourselves**.
 - Half of Kent's job is outreach. One third of my job is outreach. How can the congregation support our efforts and how can Kent and I find time to focus on outreach.
 - Members and Covenant Friends are encouraged to be a part of the work of outreach. Join our committee, lead a new initiative, partner with us on a new initiative, share your ideas 😊
- How can we find ways to engage in the ministry of meeting people where they are — likes Ashes-To-Go at the metro or passing out water to folks on Military Rd.
- Think about a church that you drive past or a church whose events you've attended or a place that you've heard about and thought "that place sounds cool!" — How did that place/church get your attention? How did you find out about what they're doing? Let Kent and me know! This is a priority of ours — making sure people know that we're alive and meeting people where they are.

Second: Session will learn more about a program called [Project Regeneration](#) in May and decide on our participation. Project Regeneration is run by the Presbyterian Foundation and requires that we discern who we are. During the project, we'd spend 40 days reading, reflecting, praying, and discussing with

each other about the witness that God wants Covenant to have in our community. Project Regeneration, or some iteration of it, would also give us an updated financial analysis and picture of our present and future.

Third: We've been invited to join the [Missional Incubator](#) program through National Capital Presbytery. This program is different from ones Covenant has started with the Presbytery before.

- The Missional Incubator is run in-house. Covenant would be part of an intentional cohort.
- Churches in the first two cohorts are doing things like Kirkwood Pres in VA who's preparing to sell their church building to a developer for assisted living. The church would continue being a church, just with a different building, **and** they'd become a hub for ministry with older adults. And Warner Memorial Pres in MD who's hoping to turn their education wing into a bowling alley which will have bowling leagues that foster connection among adults in their neighborhood. You can learn more about what churches are doing here: <https://thepresbytery.org/missional-incubator-today-post/>
- If we embark on the Missional Incubator, I'll lead the work alongside 2-3 of y'all — we'll need a team that has energy, openness, an innovative spirit, time, and a deep commitment to following God's call, rooted in prayer. The Missional Incubator program has a cohort beginning this fall. I hope they'll have one in 2027, too.
- Missional Incubator isn't our only option. There's also opportunity for "fresh expressions" of worship that might engage more folks in the community.

Those are the action items: celebrate & market ourselves, discern, and engage in new ways of thinking about worship & church.

This is a lot of information to take in. I imagine you have questions. Let's talk about them! This needs to be the first of many conversations that we have about our future.

Siblings in Christ, Covenant is a tight-knit, loving community that is committed to God and dedicated to each other. We have so much to offer. We've got opportunities galore.

I'm still new here — I'm playing that "new" card til at least a year! --- Y'all are what make this place what it is.

Come to me with questions, with ideas, I certainly don't have this figured out — this is about trying some new things to see if they can help us exist longer — let's brainstorm together.

My hope for Covenant in 2026 is that we'll continue all the things we're already doing and that we'll embark on this journey of discovery together — that we'll discern who we are, who God's calling us to engage with, and how we can live into God's call.

Friends, how's that for "springing alive"?!

Blessings,
Caitlin



Spring Alive for Covenant Spring Worship!

Sunday, May 3rd - Older Adult Sunday & Communion Sunday

Sunday, May 17th - Ascension Sunday followed by Memorial Service for Ike Barnhart, 12:30pm

Sunday, May 24th - Pentecost Sunday with guest preacher Shani McIlwain

Sunday, May 31st (begin 10:00 am Summer worship) - Trinity Sunday



Summer Worship



Our summer worship schedule begins at 10:00 am on Sunday, May 31st. We'll worship at 10:00 am through Rally Day, September 13th. We hope for summer worship to be accessible, fun, engaging, and participatory. After worship, enjoy some extended time with your family on summer Sundays!



Dipping into the Isaiah Study on Your Own Schedule

At the end of May Tuesday Morning Bible Study will conclude its focus on the Prophet Isaiah and take a break for the summer months. However, you can still sample classes in this Zoom program from recordings captured this past winter and spring. Starting with the second class on Isaiah, the gallery view of the class participants was recorded and stored on the Google drive at:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1HEI2aqBt9gJAMd5JVd7DMwtCsYohYml4?usp=sharing>

You are welcome to sample one or more of these Zoom classes at your convenience. If you are interested in following Bible study in this way in the future, please let Susan Tarr know your interest. We'll be making a decision about continuing these recordings or about offering a duplicate evening session of the class in the fall.



Memorial Service for Ike Barnhart

The author of 2nd Timothy reflects on the nature of a life lived fully for the faith when he writes, "As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2nd Timothy 4: 6-7).

Ike Barnhart was a beloved member of Church of the Covenant. Ike entered the Church Triumphant on July 5th, 2020. We continue to give thanks for the many ways that Ike lived her life in faith and her dedication and love for her family, friends, and Church of the Covenant.

On **Sunday, May 17th from 12:30-1:30pm at Church of the Covenant** there will be a memorial service to give thanks to God for Ike and to witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The memorial service will also be live-streamed via our Sunday worship Zoom link.

A service of interment will be held at Church of the Covenant's Memorial Garden immediately following the memorial service. Folks are invited to a **reception in Covenant's Fellowship Hall** after the service of interment.

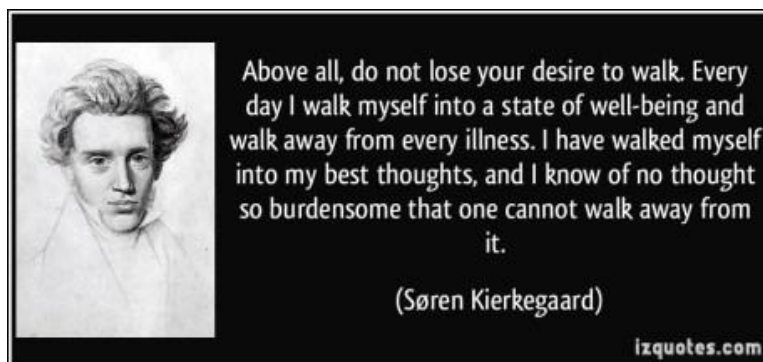
1 I lift up my eyes to the hills — from where will my help come?

2 My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

Psalm 121: 1-2



Walking Group



Join us on the 4th Sunday morning of the month at 8:30 am at Potomac Overlook Park (next to the playground) for a half-hour stroll. Together we'll explore and put Kierkegaard's quote into practice. We hope to see you there!



Outreach Corner

On the morning of April 23rd, Kent attended an Interfaith leaders meeting with Arlington County Sheriff Jose Quiroz. Faith leaders heard from a panel including the Sheriff's Office Chief Medical Director, Dr. Richard Malish, the Community Readiness Unit Manager, Ms. Camille Watkin, and the Chaplin, Michele Reynolds. The presentations focused on medical and spiritual care for inmates, as well as educational and vocational programs offered with a focus on reentry into the greater community after incarceration.



Easter Sunday Lilies

Many thanks to:

John and Susanne Tribble

Pat and Susan Tarr

Joyce Tannahill

Bill Murphey and Barbara Washburn

Gloria Hurdle

Eugene and Sarah Godwin

Marita Dillery

Hille Blackshaw

Who contributed the lilies that decorated our sanctuary on Easter Sunday.

Thanks to Gloria Hurdle for her usual excellent job of collecting the orders, buying the lilies and decorating the sanctuary. Thanks to Pat Tarr for setting up and taking down the crosses.



One Great Hour of Sharing

Covenant members and friends contributed \$700.00 for PCUSA’s denomination wide One Great Hour of Sharing offering. The fish-banks yielded an additional \$149.00, (\$30 in coins and the rest in checks and notes). for a **grand total of \$849.00**. Thank you.



Upcoming Events at Covenant

Session Meeting: Tuesday, May 12th; 7:30 pm via Zoom.

Memorial Service for Ike Barnhart: Sunday, May 17th at 12:30 pm in the Sanctuary.

Walking Group: Sunday, May 24th; 8:00 am at Potomac Overlook Park

Summer Worship Begins: Sunday, May 31st at 10:00 am.



We’re glad you were born! Covenant sends Happy Birthday wishes to:

May 08 – **Abe E. Enriquez** (2005)

June 02 – **Julia Natiello**

May 23 – **Sheila Mack**

June 03 – **Charlie Okpala** (2025)

May 24 – **Diane Gardner Quinn**

June 05 – **Margie Kelleher**

May 25 – **Stan Fetter**

June 20 – **Callie Vance** (2007)

May 26 – **Mary Margaret Whipple**

June 24 – **Gloria Gibson**

May 29 – **Kristen Tyagi**

June 24 – **Graham Reid** (2014)

May 30 – **Roy Vogel**

June 24 – **Barbara Washburn**

June 27 – **Parker Vance** (2019)



Connect With Covenant



<https://www.youtube.com/@churchofthecovenantarlingtonva>



<https://www.facebook.com/CovenantArlington>



<https://covenantchurcharlington.org/>

Weekly Zoom Devotional; Thursdays @ 12:00 pm:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81145588523?pwd=mk9SSHeaz8cApcDQyZpPSkYEJBTkRG.1>

Church Zoom link:

<https://cofc.zoom.us/j/86035210161?pwd=dUQ2Y2VwdThDUWVVT3B6VGFZQldGQT09>



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***Office Hours: Tues, Weds, Thurs: 10am-3:00pm**



Spring Alive!

On the following page you will find images from our Spring Alive! community event on Saturday, April 25th. The weather held out for us, the EIPC band was fantastic, the bounce house and popcorn were huge hits, our community partners were generous and informative, and our community came out and participated in a big way. In other words, our prayers were answered! A huge thanks to our Mission and Outreach team for their meticulous planning and execution of the event. Another big thanks to our sister church EIPC for the delicious food, wonderful live music, and beautiful wares for sale. And a grateful thanks to all of the Covenant community who came and enjoyed the event as well as helped to break down and managed to get everything inside before the rain began. It truly was a combined group effort all the way around!