

Central Avenue CRC Covenant Plan for Christian Education

Why We Use the Covenant Plan

Central Avenue CRC has consistently supported Christian day school education for more than one hundred years, in keeping with denominational directives. Already in 1870 Synod declared that Christian schools are the "nursery" of the church and that every consistory had the duty, if possible, to establish such schools. The Church Order (Article 71) states: *"The Council shall diligently encourage members of the congregation to establish and maintain good Christian Schools and shall urge parents to have their children instructed in these schools according to the demands of the covenant."*

The basis for this policy is the vow the congregation takes in the sacrament of infant baptism, when we say *"We do, God helping us"* to the question: "Do you, the people of God, promise to receive these children in love, pray for them, help instruct them in the faith, and encourage and sustain them in the fellowship of believers?"

The CRC for more than one hundred years has understood this baptismal vow to require Christian day schooling, unless special circumstances or unique educational needs dictate otherwise. Fulfilling the vow, however, is beyond the financial means of some families and may even preclude sending their children to Christian schools, when they deeply desire otherwise. That is why Central Avenue CRC adopted the Covenant Plan some ten years ago, in order to fulfill our covenant responsibility.

The common metaphor is the three-legged stool of the Christian home, Christian church, and Christian school. A child needs all three to grow to spiritual maturity in Christ. The school is critical because children spend the bulk of their waking hours there. They need teachers committed to Christ-centered curricular materials and classmates who are being raised in the Christian faith. Here they are shaped in their thinking and make life-long friends.

How the Covenant Plan Works

The Central Avenue Covenant Plan makes Christian school tuition a General Fund obligation of the congregation. The plan pays the full cost (less an administrative discount of \$100 per student) for pre-school through high school at schools affiliated with Christian Schools International (CSI) for all families who are members of Central Avenue CRC and decide to participate in this ministry. The tuition cost is a "line item" in the general budget that the members vote on at the annual congregational meeting. The expense thus becomes the obligation of every member. The Christian Education Committee (CEC) administers the plan. *The Covenant Plan is not a "free tuition" plan, but rather a program where we covenant together – even through sacrifice by parents*

and even the broader congregation - over the long-term to provide Christian Education for the children of our congregation.

The Covenant Plan in Wider Perspective

Central Avenue CRC is rather unique in maintaining the Covenant Plan. We are the only congregation in Classis Holland to do so, but across the denomination about 100 congregations use the Plan, many in the Grand Rapids area. Central Avenue is also somewhat unique in that 97 percent of our school-aged children attend Holland, Zeeland, and Beaverdam Christian schools (including 4 home-schooled). This includes 25 families with 66 children. Two children attend public schools. Across the denomination, a recent survey found that only 19 percent of all school-age children attend Christian schools.

Five families with 15 children in Christian schools have chosen not to participate in the Covenant Plan; they pay tuition directly to the schools. The CEC, upon inquiry, has found that these parents made this decision prayerfully and in good conscience before the Lord. We have no right to inquire further, since they are fulfilling their covenant obligations.

Pledge to Share Information

The CEC pledges to meet with the congregation periodically to discuss the Covenant Plan and its out-workings, and to respond to queries, concerns, and suggestions. The CEC meets with parents of school-aged children every January to evaluate the Covenant Plan, determine which families will participate for the next school year, and calculate the budget amount for Christian education. This amount in 2009-2010 comprised 32 percent of the total budget. With steady membership growth, the percentage of the 2010-2011 budget may well rise above 40 percent. This is the single largest item in the budget.

Covenant Plan Blessings for Central Avenue CRC

One might ask whether this expense is worthwhile. Our congregation has thrived these ten years, in part because of the Covenant Plan. When Pastor Jim Scholten began his ministry in 1998, there were only FOUR children in Sunday school. Today, the children overflow the front steps at the Christmas program. We have many more young families and these families are the future of our church. A Christian education for these children will ensure leaders in our congregation and the church of God in the next generation. We believe we are honoring God and keeping our baptismal vows by following the Covenant Plan.

The Central Avenue CRC Christian Education Committee
(contact:) [Bob Swierenga](#), chair

NOTE: Families with new children in the Covenant Plan must be members of Central Avenue by April 1 and the parents must inform the committee of their intent to participate in the plan. If enrolled in the plan by April 1, the children are eligible to be part of the Covenant Plan for the following school year (enrollment in the Covenant Plan is an additional step beyond enrolling them at their given school (currently, the Central Avenue CRC Covenant Plan applies to all Christian School International (CSI) schools in the area that have a mission statement consistent with a Reformed Christian perspective.)

