



Following the Star into 2024

Our first Sunday in 2024 is Epiphany Sunday, the day when we remember the Magi who followed the star which led them to Christ the newborn King. When the star stopped over the place where the child was, Matthew writes, “They were overwhelmed with joy” as they knelt and presented the holy family with their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.



On Christmas Eve, I challenged us to consider how Mary must have felt as she dealt with angelic visits, travelled to visit her relative Elizabeth, then later to Bethlehem, while also coming to grips as an unwed mother carrying nobody less than the Son of God incarnate. All throughout the Christmas story, Joseph and Mary surely realize that their lives are changing, forever.

The Star of Bethlehem always reminds me that anything is possible.

I looked back, and in January 2023, we were putting the last beam on the new covered south entrance, and the Welcome Center was yet to be built. I said then, “By the end of 2023 we hope to be fully enjoying our new addition.” That was a hope that has turned into a reality! We have been enjoying our new addition as we host various activities and see our dreams materialize. It is wonderful to dream and then see your dream take shape.

What are our dreams for 2024? I have always believed that any facility is just a place where even bigger things can happen. A building is not an end in itself; it is a means to an even greater end. We have already experienced some great things happening in the Welcome Center as we’ve hosted various receptions and gatherings there – like after a Vesper Concert, for a recent lunch for the presbytery committees, after our annual Remembrance Service or Quiet Christmas, and especially when we hosted a national mission conference and 15 students from Creighton unexpectedly appeared to join us. We are also finding new ways to use the Hearth Room, the Quiet Room, the new classroom, and the new kitchenette. Again, a great facility is a means to an even greater end.

May our recent success with the Welcome Center stir us on to even greater things – and more dreaming. In 2024, our Session will resume our annual retreat together after a hiatus due to COVID. Please share with us your dreams for PCOC as we move into God’s future together. Happy New Year!

Your pastor and friend,

P.S.
Join me for Tuesday Bible Studies, which resume on January 9 — find the details on page 7.



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Marshall Zieman**
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Christmas Stewardship

But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all people.” -Luke 2:10

This announcement came on the first Christmas Eve to the shepherds. I enjoyed that moment in our children’s pageant as George and Ada made their heavenly announcement.

I hope you are enjoying the Christmas season as it ends with Epiphany on January 6, 2024!

Christmas Stewardship: two words you most likely have never seen put together. In fact, I don’t believe I have ever used them together in a sentence.

We may talk a lot about being good stewards of our facilities and managing our money well, but stewardship is more than that.

Take a moment and think about how God has blessed you: a loving spouse, children, a roof over your head, abundant food sources — the list is yours to make. Now, take another moment and think about how you are stewarding those blessings this holiday season.

During the Advent and Christmas season, we tend to scramble and make sure we have everything under control. But, amid the scramble, we tend to neglect resting in God’s goodness, which includes delighting in what he has entrusted to us.

There are several few ways we can practice “Christmas stewardship” this season, but here are a few I have found helpful:

Put Your Phone Down

Your email, text message, or aimless scrolling can wait. The people around you and the time spent practicing gratitude are far more important than whatever is on your phone.

Trade Presents for Presence

We shop more during Christmas time than we do the entire year. I am not saying there is anything wrong with giving physical gifts. But there are other ways you can show the people you love that they are valued: through quality time. This goes hand-in-hand with the point above. Be intentional with your time this season.

Focus On the Reason For the Season

Don’t let Christmas pass you by this year without pausing to remember why we celebrate in the first

place. Through worship we are stewarding the personal, unique relationship we have with our Creator.

I hope you have a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! I am thankful for you all, and praying your holiday is full of peace, joy, and gratitude as I look forward to Epiphany!

Facility Improvements

Hopefully, Church of the Cross has its newly installed monument sign next to the south entrance on 114th Street. It is a handsome update to help direct drivers to our sanctuary entrances.

Soon the Fellowship Hall ceiling and light project will begin! I look ahead to this improvement.



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Business Administrator
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Finance Committee Moderator:
Mimi Bauer

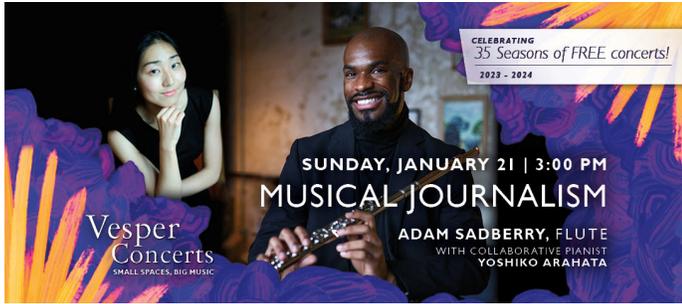
Building and Grounds Committee Moderator:
Casey Ballou



Cross Care
connections

Cross Care Connections provides a personally tailored relationship with a fellow church member to walk with you at life’s most challenging times. These trained compassionate individuals can provide confidential support to help you navigate major life events.

Contact Marshall or Rock in the church office for more information about this program or to request a Cross Care provider.



Adam Sadberry: Musical Journalism

Join us for the next Vesper Concert on Sunday, January 21, at 3:00 p.m. Our guest performers are Adam Sadberry and Yoshiko Arahata.

Flutist and educator Adam W. Sadberry is paving a distinctive career with his citizenry, creativity, and vibrancy both on and off stage. This multi-media performance will captivate you as you follow in the footsteps of Adam’s grandfather and unsung hero of the Civil Rights Movement, L. Alex Wilson.

Yoshiko Arahata enjoys a multifaceted career as a pianist, collaborative and chamber musician, educator, and composer throughout the US, Europe, and Asia and holds degrees in piano performance from Eastman School of Music and Northwestern University.

The Luther College Nordic Singers Coming to PCOC on February 1

Join us on February 1 at 7:00 p.m. for a concert by the Luther College Nordic Choir. You won’t want to miss the stunning performance by these students under the direction of Dr. Andrew Last. Highlights of the program include choral classics from Rachmaninoff and Hassler, contemporary premieres by Zachary Moore, and selections from the fusion oratorio Considering Matthew Shepard. Tickets (\$20 adults / \$10 students) are available online at tickets.luther.edu and will also be available at the door via cash, check, and credit card.



Church of the Cross is fortunate for this opportunity to host one of the premiere college choirs in the nation.

Please let Kristi know if you are interested in hosting 2-4 students overnight in your home. You will take the students home after the concert, offer a snack, sleeping accommodations, and bathroom access. In the morning, after offering a breakfast, the host family will transport the students and their belongings back to the church to catch the bus.



Kristi Treu

Director of Music & Executive Director of Vesper Concerts
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Worship & Music Committee Moderator:

Jayne Frederickson

Update on the Associate Pastor Search

The PCOC resume, also known as a Ministry Discernment Profile, has been approved and posted to the Church Leadership Connection (CLC) website. A brief description of the associate pastor position and a link to the CLC website can be found on the left side of our Church of the Cross home page. The Associate Pastor Nominating Committee (APNC) is encouraging members of the congregation to share the link with anyone who may be interested in applying or with those who can help spread the word about our search for an associate pastor.

This past week, the APNC began reviewing profiles from individuals who paired with our PCOC resume. The review will continue in the coming weeks as more profiles become available. We appreciate your help in spreading the word that PCOC is hiring!

- Emily Murray,
Clerk of the APNC



Children's Christmas Pageant

Thank you to everyone that worked together to pull off this fabulous production. About 60 preschool, elementary, junior and senior high youth, and adults participated in this event. What a special gift it was for our congregation! A special thanks goes out to Sue Thomas. Without her, this pageant wouldn't be possible. I am ever grateful for her creativity, enthusiasm, and love.



Cornerstone Resumes January 10 – March 13

Join us for food, fellowship and fun on Wednesday nights. All are welcome!

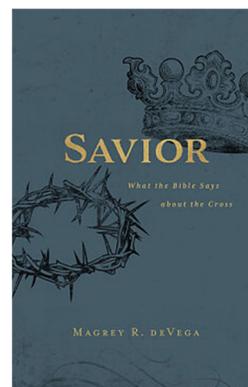
- 5:30 – 8:15 p.m. Childcare is available
- 5:15 – 6:00 p.m. Children's Choir
- 5:50 – 6:45 p.m. Chamber Choir
- 6:00 – 6:30 p.m. Dinner
- 6:30 – 7:15 p.m. Children's Bible Study (PS - 7th grade)
- 6:30 – 7:30 p.m. Confirmation Class
- 6:30 – 7:30 p.m. Adult Ed Class
- 6:50 – 8:20 p.m. Alleluia Choir

Be sure to register and submit payment online by January 1. Registering ahead of time helps us plan for class supplies and gives us an accurate count for dinner so that we have enough food, but not so much that we are wasteful. We hope to see you there!

Lenten Study 2024

This year's churchwide Lenten Study will begin February 18. We'll be studying Magrey DeVega's book, *Savior, What the Bible Says about the Cross*.

The Bible uses many images to understand the meaning of Jesus's death and resurrection. In *Savior*, DeVega guides us through these images to achieve a richer understanding of the Christian faith. By exploring the mystery of salvation through the cross, we can deepen our love for God and others and strengthen our commitment to follow Jesus.



The Lenten Study is a great opportunity to get to know others in the congregation while preparing for Easter. We hope you will join us on this journey.

Register online by February 1.

If you need assistance registering, stop by the Information Desk in the Welcome Center, and someone will be glad to help you.

Scan to Register:





Important Dates to Remember

January 7	Sunday School begins
January 10	Cornerstone begins
February 18	Lenten Study begins
April 7	Confirmation Sunday

Serve Our Children and Youth

Our Children and Youth Ministries are looking for a few more volunteers. If you love working with children and building relationships with youth, this is the job for you! Contact Heather for ways you can make a difference in the lives of our children and youth.



Good News from Heather

I am happy to report that I am cancer free! I have finished all 18 rounds of chemotherapy and immunotherapy, I am done with surgeries, and I'm almost done with OT. I'm ready to get back to feeling "normal" again. And I can't say it enough, I appreciate our church family so much. Having your support throughout this ordeal has meant more than you know. Thank you! Now let's celebrate!

Churchwide Garage Sale on July 27

Our goal is to raise \$5000 for the senior high mission trip. Your donations will make this possible!



Start saving your treasures now but keep them with you. We don't have room to store anything prior to July 14.

Here are the items we will not accept: TVs, tires, mattresses, candles, liquids, VHS movies, cassette tapes, items that are broken, missing pieces, ripped, stained, or dirty.



Heather Berry
Director of Christian Education
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CE Committee Moderator: Jeremy Cunningham

JHF Leaders: Jeremy Cunningham, Julie Evers, Ashley Sherlock, and John Stalnaker

SHF Leaders: Dawn & Brad Gibson, Ethan Bennett, and Susan Price



DEACONS' UPDATE

Happy New Year from the Deacons

Before we get too far into New Year's business let me recap the wonderful PCOC tradition that is the Advent Dinner. The Advent Dinner was a wonderful success again in 2023. Jerry and Renee Cornett organized a delicious meal consisting of beef brisket, roasted potatoes, green beans, salad, and dinner roll. Jerry and Renee enlisted all available Deacons to assist in every aspect from setting tables and serving drinks to all the cleanup. For those who enjoy the data behind such a large undertaking, we prepared 90 lbs. of brisket, 20 lbs. of salad, 20+ lbs. of green beans, and 30+ pounds of potatoes. We served approximately 220 people. Although this is primarily a Deacons committee service to the church, many committees have a role in getting everything in place, so thank you to Buildings and Grounds, Congregational Life, Membership, Finance, Presbyterian Men, Mission, Worship and Music and the Communication team.

Looking ahead to the New Year the Deacons will continue to serve the church through the Neighborhood Care program, hospital visits, home meals, prayer shawls, funeral luncheons and home delivered communion among others activities.

Aside from the routine activities mentioned above, the Valentine outreach committee, currently lead by Becky Ziemann, will soon be preparing Valentine care packages for our college age. Before you know it, Spring will be here, and the Deacons will be hosting a Senior Recognition Brunch for the high school seniors at PCOC. There is much to look forward to in 2024!

Happy New Year!
Christopher Voss, Deacon

Deacons Moderator:
Neal Hubbard



- 1/1 Linda Dobry, Nolan Hopp, Chris Voss, Frank Watt
- 1/2 Barbara Haar-Rightmyer, Dick Kelley, Nancy Koehler, Dan Olson
- 1/3 Gene Pugh, Meg Whaley
- 1/4 Conlin Grady, Janey Miller
- 1/5 Kim Banat, Liz Brecki, June Karges, Josh Murray, Cindy Nisley
- 1/6 Andrew Ebert
- 1/7 Keith Allen, Heather Berry, Bill Hanley, Diane Holubeck, Tim Johnson, Blake Kahler, Diane Kratz, Madisyn Spielman
- 1/8 Quinn McFadden, Jeff Quine, Ann Schmidt, Joan Thorson, Marilyn Willis
- 1/9 Megan Davelaar, Bob Hoisington, Ryan Kort, Sharon Sievers
- 1/10 Andrew Berry
- 1/11 Jennifer Arnold, Sheri Cunningham
- 1/12 Linda Bauer, Aurora Quartoroli
- 1/13 Sam McClain, Katie Rock
- 1/14 Evelyn Aziamoe, Gail Hille, Danial Holdren
- 1/15 Taylor Koch, Dwight Peterson, Max Rieke, Carol Sorensen
- 1/16 Brad Dittman, Stephanie Voss
- 1/17 John Broderick, Emmie Fuller, Launie Lambert
- 1/18 Franny Bartling, Anna Ellinghaus, Sharon Marvin-Igel, Lois Morris, Sharon Rich
- 1/20 Alta Empkey, Charlotte Thiessen
- 1/21 Michael Anderson, Loni Williams
- 1/23 Amy Ellis, Mary Beth Gust
- 1/24 Kaitlynn Evers, Joan Miles, Josephine Tot
- 1/25 Quinn McGuire
- 1/26 Becky Bianchi, Brad Jacobi
- 1/27 Spencer Kussman, Marissa Mathia, Hadley McDaniel, Tyler Zimmerman
- 1/28 Peg Hiles, Anne Laws, Rose Lippincott, Jessa Sherlock
- 1/30 Jonathan Fritz, Edward Huff, Jr.

Reminder: Call the church office when you or a family member is hospitalized. 402-333-7466

Prayer Requests

Submit a prayer request online or use one of the yellow Care Cards in the pews.. All requests are shared only with members of the prayer team.

Prayer Team Coordinators:
Julie Buehler or Judy Arms

Next New Member Discussion January 14, 2024

Do you know someone who is looking for a church home? Invite them to visit church with you in the new year!

Our next New Member Discussion will be on Sunday, January 14, 2024 after the worship service. The discussion will last about an hour, and a light lunch will be provided.

Scan our QR code to sign up online or call the church office to register!



New Member Reception January 21, 2024

The Membership Committee is hosting a New Member Reception on Sunday, January 21 in Fellowship Hall at 10:00 a.m. between worship services.

All members are invited to attend as we welcome those members who have joined our congregation from January 2023 through January 2024. Cake and beverages will be served.

Membership Committee Co-Moderators:
Amy Boesen & Brenda Graumann



Reception for Gayle on January 7

On Sunday, January 7 during the coffee fellowship hour, we will host a reception honoring Gayle Kerr-McFadden. In late December, Gayle concluded her nearly four years of employment at PCOC. Her hiring came at the right time as she was instrumental in getting the livestream up and running. Please join us in thanking her for all she's done for the church's communications and technology areas.

Presbyterian Women on January 4

Welcome the New Year with the Presbyterian Women as we continue *Sacred Encounters* on January 4 at 9:30 a.m. in Room 15. Jacquie Kluck is presenting lesson 5, A Person with Leprosy Encounters Jesus.

Our Gifting Gals Project with Heartland Hope Mission in January is collecting socks. We have a bin inside the circle drive, should you wish to help. We appreciate all the donated items, as do the lady clients at HHM.



Our future collections will be February panties; March Bras; and April Sunscreen and Sunglasses. Thanks again for your help. Questions? Contact Cindy Nisley.

Keep Moving in the New Year

Music and Movement exercise classes meet at 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. every Monday and Thursday. The group is back in action on Thursday, January 4. Questions? Contact Betty Baddley.

Tai Chi meets at 10 a.m. on Mondays and Thursdays. Drop in anytime if you'd like to attend a class. Our first class in 2024 will be January 4. Questions? Contact Paula Allen.

Active Minds

Active Minds will resume on January 9 and will be playing a unique card game called Somerset. You can learn this game in one week. Patient teachers attend every week, so feel free to drop in any Tuesday that your schedule allows. We meet in the Lower Level Great Room, from 2-4 p.m. Questions? Contact Earlene Uhrig.

Book Group on January 17

PCOC Book Group will meet Wednesday, January 17 from 5:15 to 6:30 p.m. to review *The Extraordinary Life of Sam Hell* by Robert Dugoni. All readers are welcome!

Questions? Contact Charlotte Hubbard.

Breast Cancer Support Group

For anyone currently diagnosed with Breast Cancer. Contact Karen Morey or Heather Berry for more information.



(continued on back page)

Congregational Life Committee Co-Moderators:
Kathy Nickel & Stephanie Weaver



The Tuesday Bible Studies

Our Tuesday gatherings resume on January 9 in the Welcome Center classroom!
7:00 a.m. (men's only)
1:00 p.m. (everyone)

Join Pastor Marshall for the Tuesday Bible Studies as we study the Old Testament book of Exodus. We are currently in chapter 20, where Moses receives the Ten Commandments.

Newcomers are always welcome; just bring your favorite Bible and join us in the classroom in the Welcome Center



Humanitarian Aid through PDA for Israel and Palestine

The Mission Committee will send \$5000 from their current budget to Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) for humanitarian aid in Israel and Palestine. Working through partners on the ground and ACT Alliance, PDA's response efforts will encompass an array of vital humanitarian interventions, including medical supplies, shelter, WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene), food and non-food items, and delivering crucial psychosocial support to individuals. If you would like to join in supporting relief efforts, the church will collect donations through the end of January. Write PDA Israel/Palestine on the memo of your check, or you may give online via the church website by choosing Disaster Relief as the fund.

Serve at Siena Francis House

Sign up to serve dinner at Siena Francis House on Sunday, January 14 from 4:15 to 6:15 p.m. You can also join our last minute volunteer list. Questions? Contact Keith Allen. Sign up online via the church website.

From the Mission Mailbox

The Mission Committee would like to share with you some of the mail we receive every month from the organizations which are the grateful recipients of your generosity. Below are the latest thank you notes we have received:

- ROC thanks you for supporting the kids and asks for your continued prayers.
- Amanda DeVries, Community Engagement Manager for Heartland Hope Mission, thanks you for being a financial partner in 2023. Ms. DeVries said, "So many families have been impacted in our community as a result of your compassion and generosity. Your donation has helped to feed the working poor in the community as our numbers are up significantly due to the effects of inflation!"
- CASA for Douglas County thanks you for your \$2,400 gift which will help coach, empower and inspire volunteer advocates to improve the lives of abused and ne-



glected children. Kimberly Barnes, Executive Director, wrote, "At any given point there are over 1,500 children in foster care in the Omaha area, but nearly 70% of these children lack the consistent advocacy of a CASA Advocate. Your generosity helps us reach our vision of providing a CASA Advocate to every child in foster care who needs one."

- CASA for Sarpy County thanks you for your generous donation of \$3,550 which will help provide Christmas gifts to all of the children served by Sarpy County CASA. Currently, they are serving approximately 125 children, according to the Program Director Tara Williamson.
- Camp Calvin Crest thanks you for your donation of \$8,600 which enables life-giving things to happen at the camp.
- Your contribution of \$390 to Heartland Hope is greatly appreciated to help them assist working poor families with groceries.
- Your gift of \$1,000 will help with the 16 Completely KIDS after school locations, which are safe places for students to have fun, unwind, and gain new skills.



Agape for All

Cocoa, Cookies and Conversation
Thursday, January 18, from 7-9 p.m.
Welcome Center
Submitted by Patty Ritchie

Bring a friend and share the warm Hearth Room atmosphere! Share your questions, ideas, and concerns as we celebrate our ongoing journey. Everyone will have opportunities for meaningful conversations.

Education, fellowship, and engagement are all part of our PCOC path. With Agape for All we focus on social justice and in particular racial justice. With tremendous thanks for the contributions and leadership of many Agape members, and with great anticipation for additional opportunities to expand our minds and hearts, we look forward to our gathering.

(continued on next page)



Mission Committee Moderator:
Anne Wattles

Our Mission Committee made a decision on behalf of Agape for All that will make a wonderful contribution to our North Omaha community partnership.

Through our partnership with Mt. Moriah Missionary Baptist Church, a Family Wellness Fair is being planned for April 27, 2024. This Fair will be held at Skinner Magnet School located at 4304 N. 33rd Street. It will be designed to connect families with community resources and information through a day of free fun, food and fellowship. The event will cost approximately \$10,000 to put on, plus volunteer efforts of dozens of agencies and individuals.

It is exciting to know that a \$2,000 contribution from PCOC will help make this event a success. These dollars come from a portion of the annual pledge that each of us make - so thanks to each of us for our continued generosity and dedication to mission work!

Stay tuned for Agape for All guest speakers this spring, following our Lenten Studies.

Agape Book Report

My Time Will Come: A Memoir of Crime, Punishment, Hope, and Redemption

Written by Ian Manuel

Book Report Submitted by Patty Ritchie

Published in 2021, this narrative begins with a compelling dedication page from the author which offers gratitude to people who gave him a chance, forgiveness, and freedom. It also includes thanks to “all of those who told me that I’d never amount to anything - that I’d die nameless, just another number in prison. I hope my story helps you believe in miracles and magic. It was you, the naysayers, who gave me the motivation to seek the impossible, to keep clinging to the faith in my darkest hours, to know that My Time Will Come...”

Children born in severe poverty and violent communities are often abandoned and grow up with deep trauma disorders. Such is this story.

Ian Manuel, age 14, sentenced to prison for shooting a woman, spoke to a visitor, the famed lawyer Bryan Stevenson, through a thick glass wall, and because of Ian’s nervousness and desire not to disappoint, asked if he could recite an original poem. Bound with chains and restraints, he conveyed many emotions - grief and sadness, strength and resolve - also hope. Stevenson’s preface propels us to make the effort to read and discern.

I asked myself how on earth does a child have enough fear, enough brash and erratic intent to steal, rob and even shoot a gun? Would I, given the same circumstances? I gasped at the slashes of verbal and physical cruelty and also marveled at the life changing kindnesses of caring adults. I cringed when I visualized a small black boy soaking in chlorinated water, hoping his skin would be light enough for his mother to love.

At times I almost denied the stories told, because I did not want to believe that children could experience such atrocities. Sexual abuse, sudden loss of love, neglect, and not just from family, but also from society, such as a neighborhood that would not tolerate a private, predominately black elementary school. I would begin to breathe easier when a good role model entered the story, like Bob from the YMCA in Tampa, but it would take more than one enlightened person to turn the trajectory of Ian’s life. My clenched jaw during the prison descriptions reflected my ignorance.

Do you know that the United States is the nation with the highest rate of incarceration in the world? We are able to make changes, just as an individual inmate can, just as an individual citizen can. The shooting victim in this story testified, “There should be nothing ordinary about thirteen year old children shooting adults, and we need to do extraordinary things to help address the problem in American society that allows child trauma and violence to be so poorly managed.”

Often the extraordinary begins with knowledge and courage.

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**Next Cross Currents Deadline is:
Third Friday of the month
January 19, 2024**

More Fellowship Events

Presbyterian Men on January 20

On Saturday, January 20 at 9:00 am, PCOC men are invited to attend a continental breakfast and program in the Welcome Center featuring Dr. William Schlichtemeier, Retired Eye Surgeon. Bill will speak primarily on “Modern Eye Care”, but he will also speak about his Charity Eye Missions in Mexico and Central America performing cataract surgeries, Eye Care for the Elderly, Advances in Eye Medicine & Interesting Treatments. We expect to learn a lot about one of God's most precious gifts, the “Gift of Vision”! You won’t want to miss this special program! Please sign-up to attend at the Information Desk by Sunday, January 14. Invite someone to attend with you. Contact Gary Fitch with questions.

Cross Currents

The *Cross Currents* is published monthly by the Presbyterian Church of the Cross, 1517 South 114th Street, Omaha NE 68144-1799

For general questions about the church, contact the Church Office:
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To submit content for the Bulletin announcements or the *Cross Currents* newsletter, contact Communications:
Email: communications@pcoc.us
