



WINTER 2021

# UNITY CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL TIDINGS

FAITH, EXCELLENCE, SERVICE

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## Count Your Blessings!

*If your family was like mine,* gathering this past Christmas was a little different. While we did not see everyone face-to-face, personal contact was made through calls, texts, Facetime and more. The extended family get-together was replaced by individual families reminiscing on past Christmas celebrations. While this may have caused disappointment, we found this Christmas to be one where we chose to focus on the countless blessings we experienced in the past, our present, and the bright hope of our future. Celebrating the birth of our Savior and knowing our God is sovereign, especially during uncertain times, was example enough of the blessings we experience.

In-person school was paused during Thanksgiving and Christmas, and that was a challenge. This situation was not desired, but the resiliency of our students and staff was remarkable. Starting in-person education again on January 7 was extremely exciting and such a blessing. Our students and staff continue to rise above the

circumstances and maintain the standards of excellence in Christian education. This too is a huge blessing!

Not seeing family and pausing in-person school are situations that can cause tension, frustration, and anxiety. It is important to focus on our God who is sovereign and find the blessings in our current situation.

The impact of the pandemic is immeasurable. Every facet of life has been impacted, but none more than those whose employment has been taken away. Enrolling students in Christian school is a step of faith as parents commit financially to make this happen. This year, as in past years, no student is denied enrollment at Unity based on finances. An increasing number of families this year qualified for tuition assistance far above the normal aid provided. In fact, Unity was \$150,000 over budget in issuing tuition assistance. Each year our PACE (Partners Advancing Christian Education) campaign provides \$400,000 towards our annual budget

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## Count Your Blessings! (Continued from p.1)

with portions of that going towards tuition assistance. As of today, our community has provided \$550,000 towards the PACE campaign. The tuition assistance shortfall was exactly matched by the extra monies given during the PACE campaign. What a blessing! God is at work in all circumstances.

Unity Christian is remembered by many through their year-end giving. This practice held true again and our school was blessed beyond measure at the end of 2020. Unity's current revenue sources have been impacted by the pandemic, and our community provided the needed assistance allowing Unity to sustain the current shortfall in finances. What a blessing! God is working through his people.

There are many ways to leave your legacy, and some individuals who have been blessed financially choose to leave a legacy that supports a cause. Unity has benefitted for years from those who wish to financially sustain Christian education for the future. Recently a family gifted Unity Christian with \$450,000 through their estate. This money was allocated to support the future needs of families who desire Christian education and need assistance. Several years ago, Unity began an endowment that could support this need and with the recent gift we have been blessed beyond measure. This type of blessing allows Christian education to be a reality to families in need. Another example of God blessing the Christian school community!

Blessings come in more ways than finances. And during this pandemic our community has shown the love of Christ in many ways. Our school has

received an out-pouring of love through the notes of encouragement, the gifts of love to staff, the loving support of our students, and through the prayers of many have sustained us through a challenging year. In a time when there can be discord the unity displayed within our community is the true blessing that makes Christian education at Unity a reality.

Students are in school, and for this we can be thankful. While all the normal activities of school are different, the blessing of teachers meeting with students and sharing the love of Christ is as strong as ever. Unity Christian is a beacon of hope that shines bright. Together as a community, staff, students, and parents we are experiencing God's blessings in a variety of ways.

We pray that life will soon go back to what we remember. Meeting with families at Christmas, going to concerts to enjoy the talents of our students, students participating in activities, teachers taking students on field trips to explore God's creation, and our student body worshipping God in community. Until that time, it is important that we pause and seek to see the blessings that surround us and thank God for His faithfulness to us.

Count your blessings, for they are many. Praise God, what a blessing He is!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jerry DeGroot". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jerry DeGroot  
Principal/CEO

# COVID, Culture, and Community: Senior Reflections on Fear and Faith

*(Please note: All student names in this article have been changed to protect anonymity.)*

The feeling was very strange. At minimum it was outside the norm. At most it was unsettling. After nearly 30 years in the classroom, a teacher starts to believe they may have seen it all. But this was different... very different.

The bell marking the beginning of class just finished its scheduled nine-second ring. Mid-day was fast approaching. Of the 35 desks in the classroom, nearly a third of them were empty. The Unity seniors occupying the remaining desks sat quietly.

Some checked their phones while waiting for class to begin. Others slowly sorted through their backpacks, taking out items needed for class. Many sat still, just waiting. The blank stares and emotionless eyes projected feelings of weariness.

The stillness in the room—a room normally filled with talking and laughter that accompanied friends and classmates entering a room—was noticeably out of place. The silence and defeated body language stirred images in my mind of a team gathered in the locker room just after a heart-breaking defeat.

*"This is not normal,"* I thought to myself. *"Especially at this time of day."*

I began class with the routine which, by this point in the year, had become normal: Take attendance, then connect with students not in class by way of a livestream. Seniors in the room patiently waited for the digital connection with their absent friends, allowing them to "participate" through their screens at home.

Everything about how this class began was different. But it was a "different" which, unfortunately, was becoming more normal by the day.

It was early November 2020—just another school day amid a global pandemic.

COVID case numbers in Ottawa County had steadily risen for weeks. As a result, more students faced quarantines from positive tests and/or exposure to others who tested positive. The uncertainty surrounding each day was reflected in conversations in classrooms and common areas:

*"I hope I don't get quarantined."  
"My church was closed last week because of positive cases."*

*"Do you think schools will be shut down?" "I just wish this was all over!"*

A short time later, Unity (along with all high schools in Michigan) was closed to in-person learning.

For all of us, living with "unknowns" resulting from situations beyond our control is unsettling. Despite differences of opinion, one thing seems certain: Coronavirus collectively brought citizens of the world to a persistent state of daily uncertainty as to what might happen next.

The cumulative effect of COVID had (and still has) an increasing impact on students. Add to that a growing number of cultural issues, most of which students are keenly aware (political unrest and division, the November election, social issues and protests, riots, divisions within churches and families

resulting from intense emotions and beliefs) and a perfect storm is created, pushing students toward mental and emotional fatigue.

On this November day, the seniors in class appeared to have had enough. At the beginning of the school year, students were like the powerful tractors launching off the start line at a pulling contest—full throttle, digging in for traction, determined to get to the finish. Now they seemed more like tractors struggling mightily with the increasingly difficult task of pulling the shifting weight on the sled—tires spinning wildly, stressing, desperately desiring to get to the finish.

I stood in front of the class, joining them in silence for a moment, and taking a quick glance at each student, I said, *"You folks seem really flat today!"*

No response.

Sweeping my arm and open hand across the room while focusing on empty desks, I asked, *"Is all of this getting old?"*

Sara, from a desk close to the front sat up tall and exclaimed, *"Oh my goodness... Yes!"*

Suddenly, from the speakers on my computer a voice rang out, *"It's definitely*

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getting old for me!” Students chuckled at their quarantined classmate joining in unexpectedly from the livestream.

*“I think we’re just done with all of it,”* said Ryan.

Heads nodded. No one else spoke.

In the days leading up to this class period I had been contemplating an idea for initiating conversation with the seniors. Given the way the class was beginning, this seemed like an appropriate time to see what the seniors were thinking.

*“I’ve got something I want you to do.”* Eyes perked up, wondering what might be asked of them.

I handed each senior a large index card. *“I would like for each of you to think back over the last eight months or so. Think about everything that has occurred—events directly related to school, events occurring in culture, and events occurring within our local community. Then, if you can, I would like you to finish the following sentence: ‘Based on what I have observed over the last eight months, I know the devil is real because...’”*

I repeated the sentence once more, paused, then added, *“You may come up with as many reasons as you want. Don’t limit yourself to one if you have more.”*

Some students went right to work. A few sat back in their desks, contemplating what to write. Under his breath and perhaps believing no one would hear, Will quipped, *“Easiest assignment ever.”*

Within moments after explaining the assignment everyone in class was writing...

After enough time had transpired and every senior was finished writing, I asked, *“Well...? Was it easy or difficult to come up with your list?”*

*“No Problem!”* Caleb shouted.

From a different part of the room, Ali added, *“I didn’t know this assignment was coming, so I was surprised how quickly I came up with my list.”* She thought for just a moment then asked,

*“Are we going to hear what everyone else wrote?”*

*“Perhaps we will,”* I replied. *“But there is more to this assignment than what you just completed. The other part of it will come tomorrow.”*

From behind masks, furrowed brows, sideways glances, and narrowing eyes indicated evidence of curiosity from the seniors. Tim lifted his palms up exasperated and asked, *“Why don’t we just do it now?”*

I walked in the direction of Tim’s desk. *“I understand why you want to know now what is on the cards, but I want you to reflect overnight on what you wrote today.”* I paused for a moment, pointed my finger to the ceiling, smiled behind my mask and exclaimed, *“And, I also want to get a head start on you and read what you wrote today before I give the next part of the assignment.”*

Heads nodded and index cards started coming toward the front. I assumed some seniors were smiling at my attempt at humor, but I could not see them!

After school I read through the stack of cards. While not surprising, it helped me grasp more fully why, perhaps, the seniors appeared weary coming into class.

*“...I cannot remember a time when it felt so tense wherever I go.”*

*“...we have neighbors who won’t talk to each other anymore because of their yard signs.”*

*“...it feels like my church is dividing over stuff that should not matter.”*

*“... not only are we not praying for our enemies, we’re yelling at our friends.”*

*“...it seems like everything has to be a fight.”*

*“...I know people who are walking away from their faith because of what they see around them.”*

*“...we don’t eat dinner together anymore because it turns into arguing.”*

*“...he is deceiving us into believing politics defines us.”*

There were many, many more. Every student had at least three separate sentence completions written down. The responses confirmed students were fatigued not only by COVID quarantines, but by the feeling of helplessness accompanying so many things out of their control.

An interesting component I had not anticipated in the responses was the direction toward which their frustrations were focused. The students increased awareness of evil and the devil was clarified not in specific events in culture and society at large as much as in the response to those events within their community.

The following day the seniors gathered in class for the second half of the assignment.

Sara walked in along with her classmates, looked at me and proclaimed, *“I’m ready for part two, Mr. Landstra. What do you have for us today?”*

Ryan added, *“I thought of something else I could put down. Can I still add something?”*

I chuckled and responded, *“Sure!”* then added, *“I thought that might happen for a few of you!”*

The bell rang. One by one, each senior received back the card filled with their responses from the day before.

*“Today I would like for you to write something on the back of your index card. It is the exact opposite of what we did yesterday.”*

A few heads nodded indicating they knew what I might be asking.

*“Finish this sentence on the back of your card with as many things as you can: ‘Based on what I have observed over the last eight months, I know that Jesus is real because...’”* I repeated the sentence one more time.

Unlike the previous day where everyone immediately went to work, this statement gave some students pause. Blake looked at his blank notecard, chuckled to himself, looked at me and said, *“I’m going to have to think about this for a minute.”*

Sherry spoke up and asked, “Is this supposed to be harder?”

“That is what I am hoping to find out, so do the best you can,” I replied.

“Fair enough,” she answered, and started writing.

After everyone finished, I collected the cards and said, “We’ll talk about this tomorrow after you have a chance to reflect on what you wrote, and I have a chance to read.”

Even though it took longer for the seniors to finish the second sentence, there was also a consistent thread weaving through their responses. For many, evidence of Jesus was found through acts of love and kindness, not necessarily in the culture at large, but much closer to home—their community...

“...I believe He is present in our chapel worship.”

“...people seem to be looking for ways to help others.”

“...I have seen kids at school try to calm down angry people.”

“...by spending time together, our family has actually grown closer during COVID.”

“...we’re actually able to be in school when many are not.”

“...people ask me how I’m doing quite often—they really care!”

“...there is no way we make it through this if Jesus isn’t real!”

On the third, and final day of this project I handed back the cards one more time and said, “Look at the lists on both sides of your card and raise your hand if your list for Jesus is longer than your list for the devil.”

I paused, waiting for the students to double check both lists. Initially no one raised their hand. To be sure there was no misunderstanding I repeated my request... No hand went up.

Having already read through the cards, I knew the answer to the question I was about to ask. However, I wanted the seniors to visually understand for themselves, so I asked one more time.

“Out of all the lists in class, does anyone have a longer Jesus list?”

The seniors looked around the room, exchanging glances as if to say, “Do you?” Still, no hands went up.

I asked, “How might you explain this? Why, in a room full of students, many, and perhaps all of whom have committed their lives to Christ, would no one have more evidence of Jesus than the devil in the last eight months?”

At that moment, Kate, a vocal leader in class tentatively raised her hand. I nodded toward Kate. She lowered her hand, paused, then said, “It just feels lately like the devil is winning. Every week it seems there is more focus and attention on what is going wrong.”

Kate paused. Every eye in the room focused on her. A few students were nodding in agreement. She continued. “I guess with all the tension, anger, fighting, and everything else, it seems like the devil would be more satisfied right now than Jesus. I think that is why the devil list is longer.”

Micah raised his hand and added, “I agree with Kate, but I’m not sure what to do about it.” Again, many heads gave consent to Micah’s words. “You know how in class we say, ‘Don’t just tell me the problem, tell me what you’re going to do about it!’ Well, to be honest, I don’t know what to do about it. It feels like a rip current when we’re trying to get back to shore.”

Kate jumped back in. “I know how the story ends. Nothing about my view of Jesus and salvation has changed. I still believe one hundred percent Jesus ultimately wins. But in times like this, I think a lot of us struggle with feeling alone—literally and figuratively.”

The conversation continued for the rest of the class period. Seniors took the opportunity to share their perspectives and express their thoughts, concerns, and frustrations.

With some time to use before the dismissal bell, I brought closure to our conversation. “When you read through your Bible you will find the devil succeeds most when he isolates us from Jesus and community. He wants you to

“There is no way we make it through this if Jesus isn’t real!”

be and feel alone. He did it with Jesus when he tempted him in the desert. Remember?”

Behind masked faces, blinking eyes and slight nods indicated understanding. So, I continued.

“Your lists are honest reflections of how you feel. Many Christians through the ages have experienced the same feelings—*isolation, uncertainty, fear—and in many instances they faced situations far worse than what we currently do. The one constant through it all is God. And the promise He makes to His children is eternal... ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ Let me show you an example. Open your Bible to II Kings 6.*”

Pages ruffled as the seniors looked for the passage, wondering what it might offer. Once everyone found the text I said, “I do not know how many of you remember this story, but Elisha is woken by his terrified servant who, with fear and trembling in his voice, tells Elisha their camp is surrounded and vastly outnumbered by enemy forces from Aram. From the perspective of the servant, this day will be his last on earth. Given the dire circumstances, the servant is certain there is no hope.

“Now look at verse 16 and see what Elisha’s first words are to his servant.”

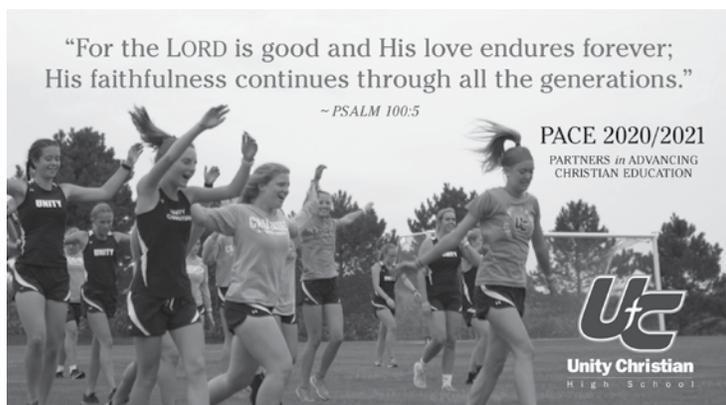
Heads bent down and eyes scanned the page for the verse. Each student read Elisha’s response:

“Do not be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”

I gave the seniors a moment to process Elisha’s words, then said, “The phrase ‘Do not fear’ or ‘Do not be afraid’ appears 364 more times in the Bible.”

Raised eyebrows among some seniors indicated they were unaware of this fact.

(Continued on p.7)



## PACE 2020/2021

**THANK YOU!** The UC PACE Drive for 2020/2021 has raised **\$550,000**—exceeding the \$400,000 goal by \$150,000! God is so good, and we are humbled by the generosity and commitment toward the support of a Unity Christian education through this drive. Even in this time of pandemic, many of you have stepped up to the plate (as you have time and time again) and we want you to know how much you mean to us.

“Thank you” seems inadequate in expressing our gratitude to you. So, we give praise to God for you, asking Him to bless you. May this new year bring you peace and prosperity! Praise to the Lord our God who so marvelously blesses us with such a caring, dedicated community!

## UC Community Business Directory

The UC Community Business Directory offers FREE listings of all businesses and individuals who support Unity in some way financially. This support can be through student tuition payment by parents or grandparents, business and individual sponsorship of the Banquet, Golf Outing, Patron Programs, donations to PACE or the UC Education Foundations, etc. Available on Unity’s website at [www.unitychristian.org/CONNECT/BusinessDirectory](http://www.unitychristian.org/CONNECT/BusinessDirectory)), the directory offers a wide range of goods and services... We encourage our UC community to check out the businesses and services who support Unity FIRST—before checking “Angie’s List” or the Internet!

To be included, contact the Development Office at 616.662.4011, or email your information to [development@unitychristian.org](mailto:development@unitychristian.org). If you are already listed in this directory, please check your listing and send any corrections or updates to [development@unitychristian.org](mailto:development@unitychristian.org) or call the Development office by March 31, 2021.



## Celebration Banquet 2021

As we look ahead toward spring, we are planning to hold the **UC Celebration Banquet** on **Monday, April 26** in Unity’s multipurpose gym. We will be featuring guest speaker **David A.R. White**, one of the founding partners of Pure Flix Entertainment®. He had been scheduled for last year’s banquet, and David had graciously agreed to honor this commitment when we cancelled the 2020 banquet. David is known for his work as an actor, writer, director and producer in nearly 20 feature-length films (including *God’s Not Dead*, *God’s Not Dead 2*, *Mercy Streets*, *Hidden Secrets*, *Jerusalem Countdown*, *Me Again*, *Brother White*, *Revelation Road 1, 2 & 3*, and many others.)

A formal invitation will be sent out in March, once we confirm that we will be able to gather as a large group once more in celebration of Unity and Christian education! We look forward to treating all our wonderful supporters to an evening of fellowship and great food!



## Marriages

**Zac Billin ('10) and Carrie Snickers ('07)** were married December 7, 2019.

**Brett DeVries ('14) and Sarah Persenaire ('16)** were married on July 17, 2020.

**Jonathon Snickers ('05) and Autumn Cooper** were married on October 12, 2019.

**Steffani Snickers ('12) and Zach VanderWeide** were married June 22, 2016.

**Tom Snickers ('09) and Megan Korber** were married December 12, 2016.

**Andrew VanZyrtveld ('14) and Anna Jeffries** were married on June 18, 2020.

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*Please submit any Alumni marriage or Alumni birth announcements to: [development@unitychristian.org](mailto:development@unitychristian.org), or call 616.662.4011. (PLEASE NOTE: To celebrate our newest little ones, we have a FREE "UC Blue Crew" Onesie that parents/grandparents may pick up from the Development Office at 4542 48th Avenue, Hudsonville MI. Please call or email the Development Office and we'll put one aside for you. Thank you! If you would like your announcement shared on our UC Instagram and Facebook pages, please send a picture of your newest addition and we will post it at the end of the month!*

## Births

**Evan James DeYoung** was born on February 12, 2020 to parents **Scott ('04)** and **Sara (Jongekrijg '05) DeYoung**, and welcomed by big sisters Aubrey (5), Tessa (4) and Carlie (2).

**Wrenley Grace Billin** was born to parents **Zac ('10) and Carrie (Snickers '07) Billin** on September 29, 2020.

**Tucker Jay Dalman** was born on August 11, 2020 to parents **Tiffany (Miedema '05)** and **Jeff Dalman**, and welcomed by siblings Colton (5) and Chase (3).

**Luca Jack Gratson and Levi Anthony Gratson** (twins!) were born to parents **Emily (Jipping '05)** and **Anthony Gratson** on October 18, 2020.

**Brooks John Grysen** was born April 21, 2020 to parents **Josh ('05) and Rachel (VanDyke '06) Grysen**, and welcomed by big brothers Carter (5) and Hudson (2).

**Benjamin Jay Jeltema** was born on July 21, 2020 to parents **Ryan ('99) and Katy Jeltema**, and welcomed by big sisters Lucy (7) and Victoria (4).

**Lauren Grace Persenaire** was born to parents **Joe ('11) and Jenna Persenaire** on May 13, 2020.

**Bowen Hughes VanderWeide** was born to parents **Steffani (Snickers '12) and Zach VanderWeide** on July 27, 2019.



**Please Note: Alumni in Missions and Alumni in the Military are now listed on the UC website at [www.unitychristian.org](http://www.unitychristian.org) under ALUMNI. If you have changes or updates for either of these sections, please contact the Development Office at 616.662.4011, or email [development@unitychristian.org](mailto:development@unitychristian.org).**

## Heart to Heart (Continued from p.5)

I continued. "What happens next helps us understand why we don't need to live with the feeling the devil is winning, because it's not true. Verse 17 says: 'And Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.'"

Seniors looked up from their Bibles, reflecting on the words of Truth.

Pointing toward each student, I concluded, "My prayer for each of you is to live without fear, having the ability to 'see' the unseen. And during this challenging season of life, you know and believe, despite the darkness we face, the army of the Lord and the community of believers ultimately will surround and overwhelm the Enemy—You are never alone!"

*"...to this very day, "normal" still feels distant. Challenges are ongoing. Uncertainty greets every day. Despite this, we trust in God's faithfulness."*

A short time later, the bell rang. The seniors packed up their belongings and walked out to face the rest of their day in a world in need of a Savior.

Many days have passed since those conversations with the seniors.

November and December brought remote learning. Year 2021 brought students back to school, but to this very day, "normal" still feels distant. Challenges are ongoing. Uncertainty greets every day. Despite this, we trust in God's faithfulness.

Join us in praying Unity continues to provide a place where isolation gives way to community, fear gives way to trust, and the lies of the enemy give way to the love of Christ, the truth of the gospel, and the blessing of Christian community.

Lord Jesus, open our eyes that we may see.

**From the front row...**

**Dan Landstra**

**Director of Spiritual Life and Leadership**



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## The Switch to SPRING is just Around the Corner at RevivE!

Look for SPRING clothing, purses, shoes, floral arrangements, home goods, and more – all filling **revivE's** shelves the first part of March!

Stop by for a visit or contact us with any questions! (See contact info below.) We'd love to share with you all the great things about being a part of the **revivE** volunteer family!



### Volunteers Needed

Looking for ways to fill your days with something meaningful and fun? Look no further than **revivE!**

**RevivE** is always welcoming new volunteers for a variety of jobs at any schedule you can offer. Particularly at this time, **revivE** could use help **sorting donations** of all kinds, including everything that's being donated to more specific areas such as clothing, housewares, or electronics. Or maybe you have the flair for floral arrangements? We have a well-stocked and organized floral department, and we need **someone to work on floral arrangements** too!



[www.facebook.com/RevivEResaleStore](http://www.facebook.com/RevivEResaleStore)

Follow **revivE** on Facebook for the latest details and updates, and help us reach 3,400 "likes"! Plus, you can now find **revivE** on Instagram, too!

### Shopping Hours:

**M-W-F: 12-5pm; T-Th: 12-7pm; Sat: 12-3pm**

**Donation Hours: T-Th-Sat: 10-12 Noon**

Phone: 616.662.3375

Email: [revive@unitychristian.org](mailto:revive@unitychristian.org);

Website: [www.ReviveResale.org](http://www.ReviveResale.org)

3675 Baldwin Street, Hudsonville, MI 49426