



SUMMER 2021

UNITY CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL TIDINGS

FAITH, EXCELLENCE, SERVICE

Growing Students to Make a Difference in this World

It is our belief that Christian school education is essential for developing our Christian worldview. This is the reason so many in our community have chosen to send their children to a Christian school. Unity's purpose is to help students know the Lord, love the Lord, and learn through the revelation of scripture how this becomes real for them. At Unity, every corner of life for our students is infused with scripture, which allows the Holy Spirit to work in their lives. This is done to benefit each person in this life and eternity in seeking to restore the Kingdom of God on earth.

The past year has been challenging as normal routines of work, school, church—and really all of life—was disrupted through the global pandemic. Society seemed to be in constant unrest as cultural issues dominated the news stories and social media, causing the lives of high school students to become very confusing.

The environment faced in the world today is rapidly changing and students graduating from high school will be facing a very pluralistic society.

While societal issues faced are in constant flux, the word of God is never changing. As our school faced challenges, we felt secure in the fact that our outlook on the changing environment need not change as everything done in school rests in scripture. This fact will always remain a constant! Navigating the pandemic at school was frustrating, yet hope was never lost as the consistent messaging of who Jesus Christ is, and how a relationship with Him provides salvation for those who choose to be His follower.

When questions arise around cultural issues, Unity Christian will always seek first what is revealed in scripture when answering questions. Students are taught that their identity is in Christ and all

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Celebrating the Unity Christian Class of 2021

WEDNESDAY, MAY 12 – The UC Class of 2021 received recognition for all the hard work they have done over their four years at Unity.



SATURDAY, MAY 15 – 156 Seniors graduated from Unity Christian High School!

Sitting in the bleachers—while parents, family and friends sat in the infield—the Unity Class of 2021 participated in an in-person graduation ceremony! Praise the Lord!



Following Jesus... from the Inside-Out

"Is it that time of year already?" I looked at my watch, checked the date, and continued the conversation in my mind. *"Yes indeed! Here we go again!"*

I sat on the couch in the basement of our house. It was while peering out a window overlooking the backyard, I first noticed the ritual unfolding underneath the deck. The annual process is so consistent we can count on it with nearly the same certainty as the changing of the seasons—which incidentally ushers the process in.

Tucked up at the top of a support beam spanning the width of the deck, a pair of robins worked tirelessly gathering materials and building a nest.

The robins do not seem to be aware of our presence on the other side of the glass, so we always have a front row view of God's hand in nature in the lives of these birds.

Yes, falling debris from the nest and bird droppings make a mess on the patio, but a little cleaning is a small price to pay for the chance to observe a fascinating process.

After two weeks of incubation the eggs hatch and both parents shift their attention, spending most of their time feeding the baby birds. It strikes me how baby birds instinctually associate the arrival of a parent at the nest with food. Tiny heads, with beaks open wide, rise from the warmth of the nest to receive another meal.

Two short weeks later the tiny birds have grown significantly. The nest once offered safety and shelter, but now it seems far too small to host the rapidly growing young robins.

It is time to leave!

Watching fledgling robins leave the nest reminds me of watching young children take the first-ever leap into a pool.

Move to the edge... back away... return with toes over the edge... parents encouraging... wait... wait some more... and finally, take the leap!

Of course, just like a parent waiting in the pool for a child to jump in, the work of parent robins

"Therefore, be imitators of God, as His beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us."

Ephesians 5:1-2

is not finished when the fledgling leaves the nest, it just shifts into another new phase... oversight!

Watching robins faithfully carry out their duties beneath our deck each year without fail, I cannot help but also notice the parallels to adults raising their children to the point when they take the leap (after a much longer time than the birds!) out of "the nest."

On May 15, Unity celebrated the graduation of 156 seniors. It has been said many times, but this graduation capped a year unlike any other in the history of Unity Christian. However, despite the differentness of the school year, many things remained unchanged. One of those was the inevitable transition ushered in at graduation from the four-year journey through high school to whatever comes next for seniors.

And much like the varied degrees of the bravery young robins have leaving the nest, seniors during their final days at Unity also exhibit emotions ranging from excitement and hope, to fear and uncertainty. On the morning of graduation, comments from soon-to-be graduates served as evidence to their inner thoughts...

"I can't believe we're finished with high school!" "What am I supposed to do now?" "I have to start work on Monday already!" "I'm not ready to be done." "Finally!" "This is awesome! I've been ready to graduate for a few years."





One senior, Ashley (not her real name), approached me and exclaimed, *"It's time to go inside-out... right, Mr. Landstra?"*

"You got it, Ashley!" I replied.

Several days before graduation Ashley and I met for her Senior Conference. Senior conferences are conversations I have with every senior. I listen as seniors unfold stories of life, faith, their time at Unity, and future hopes and dreams. We also talk through whatever questions they may have.

Although Ashley spent all four years of high school at Unity, she is among a group of seniors who had not spent the entirety of their school experience in Christian schools. Ashley's senior conference was the last in a series of conversations spanning the past two school years.

That first conversation (during Ashley's sophomore year) came about somewhat unexpectedly. I was standing near the main entrance doors after school wishing students a good afternoon on their way out of the building when Ashley came walking in my direction.

Ashley approached the doors. Since she was walking near me, I noticed that she appeared to be deep in thought. We made eye contact long enough for me to ask, *"Everything ok?"*

Ashley broke from her fixed gaze and stopped walking. She looked at me for a moment and asked, *"Can I talk with you for just a minute?"*

I nodded my head in the affirmative and said, *"Sure! Let's chat."*

We took the short walk to my classroom and sat down in two chairs, facing each other.

"What's on your mind?" I asked.

Ashley sat back, exhaled and said, *"I was hanging out with one of my friends from my old school last night. We were having a disagreement about some issues between us. The more we talked the more heated we both got. I ended up saying something to her I should not have said."*

Ashley paused, gathered her thoughts, and continued. *"No sooner did the words come out of my mouth when my friend shot back, 'I thought you went to a Christian school? Is that how they teach you to talk to your friends?'"*

Ashley bounced her leg rapidly up and down off the floor as emotions from the previous night came flooding back. Holding her hands upward in exasperation Ashley confessed, *"I totally know I screwed up!"* Lowering her hands she continued, *"I completely admit I was wrong. But after she threw that comment at me our conversation was basically over."*

Ashley paused, so I asked, *"Are you and your friend going to be alright?"*

"We will," Ashley answered. *"We have had our fights before. We are good friends so this will pass. But it makes me so mad when people say things like that!"*

Ashley's clenched fists matched her angry glare as she sat at the edge of her chair and verbally unloaded. *"I don't understand why some people think we are different from each other just because of the school we go to."*

Ashley shook her head from side to side, non-verbally answering the question she was about to ask. *"It's not fair, is it, for people to expect just because I now go to a*

Christian school, I am supposed to be some kind of better Christian?"

I thought for a moment about Ashley's question. It was a good one. And one I heard before in different situations from both young and older people.

Instead of answering Ashley's question, I asked her a question: "Ashley, what does it mean to you to be a Christian in a Christian high school?" (This question would provide the framework for our conversations over the next two years.) And so, we started talking...

Now, two years later and just days before graduation, Ashley and I sat in the same two chairs for one last conversation before she embarked down a new road in her journey.

We spent time reminiscing about how Ashley's time in high school had passed by so quickly, what her plans were for the summer, whether she believed she would cry at graduation, and her hopes to stay in contact with all her friends in the future.

But most of our conversation centered on how Ashley had increased in her faith and what it meant for her to be a young Christian leaving high school and stepping into a larger world.

"Mr. Landstra, as I've read my Bible and thought about it more, I believe when I was younger and first beginning to take my faith more seriously, I was trying to live it out in a way that made it harder for me to grow."

I acknowledged Ashley's observation with a nod and asked, "Ok. Well then as you sit here now, what is it you realize now you didn't back then?"

Ashley lifted her eyes up, looking for the right words, then said, "Looking back, Christianity for me was a list of dos and don'ts. I saw my commitment to God through the lens of my behavior and what I was doing right. If I had a good day, I felt like I was a good Christian. If I had a bad day, I wondered if I was a Christian at all."

Jesus said: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 13:35

Ashley raised her hands off her lap with palms up in a questioning pose, "Does that make sense?" she asked.

"Absolutely!" I replied. "But tell me what you realized... What changed?"

Ashley leaned back in the chair, gazed in thought at the ceiling, returned to eye contact with me and with a smile on her face responded, "I realized I couldn't do it anymore! I couldn't keep going with my faith dependent on how I was behaving from day to day."



Ashley paused for just a moment, pointed at me and said, *“I realized Jesus didn’t want me to understand my faith in terms of being a ‘good girl’. For some reason, the verse that says, ‘Come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest’ filled my brain.”*

I smiled at Ashley’s epiphany. *“Then what happened?”*

Ashley continued, *“It was like Jesus was telling me, ‘There is a better way. You need to know who I am before you follow me. Stop trying to prove you are a Christian.’”*

I interrupted Ashley. *“You know Ashley, the realization you are describing makes me think about our very first conversation. Do you remember it?”*

Ashley sprang to an upright position, lifted her hands and exclaimed, *“Ugh! Yes! I was so mad that day!”*

I raised my eyebrows, smiled and nodded slightly, *“I remember too!”*

“Do you remember what you were so upset about?” I asked.

Ashley rolled her eyes and replied, *“Yeah, I just didn’t think it was*

fair I was expected to be different just because I went to Unity.”

I jumped in. *“What do you think now? Do you still think it’s unfair?”*

Ashley crossed her arms as she settled back into the chair. *“That is a tough question!”* Then, she thought for a few moments and said, *“I guess I think it is fair and it isn’t fair at the same time. How’s that for a clear answer!”* A big smile accompanied the end of her statement.

I waved my finger back and forth in Ashley’s direction, giving her a big grin. *“You know I’m not going to let you get away with such an incomplete answer! I am very curious what you mean. Help me understand.”*

Ashley did not hesitate. *“I was upset because it felt like I was being called out for not being Christian enough. In my sophomore year of high school, I had the mindset my actions solely determined whether I was Christian. So, when she challenged me by calling out a Christian school kid like me for saying something inappropriate, it felt very much like being accused of not being Christian at all. And I don’t think it’s fair because kids in a Christian school struggle in the same way kids in any other kind of school struggle.”*

We sat in silence for a moment, allowing Ashley’s words to settle. I leaned slightly toward her and said, *“But, you also believe it is fair to a degree. Explain...”*

“Well,” Ashley said, *“I realized in the last year or so if I was going to be serious about my faith, I needed a different kind of relationship with Jesus, one I never really had before. The more I learned about Him, the more I wanted to follow what He said.”*

Ashley now waved her finger back and forth at me and continued,





“But unlike earlier in high school, I was no longer striving to live out my faith. I was just trying to keep on Jesus’ good side. Now I’m doing it out of gratitude for the relationship I have with Him.”

She lowered her finger. *“So, it is fair to expect Christians to be set apart from everyone else. But... I don’t think it has much to do with where they go to school. I believe it is a Christian thing, not a school thing.”*

Ashley gave a thoughtful nod and continued, *“I know you understand, Mr. Landstra, just because someone goes to a Christian school does not mean they have a relationship with Jesus. And to expect them to behave differently only because they are at Unity versus another school makes it seem like behavior comes before belief.”*

Ashley sat back, gestured toward me for a response saying, *“Do you agree with me, Mr. Landstra?”*

“I do,” I responded, without hesitation.

Ashley beautifully described in words her answer to a challenging

question with which, over the years, many others have also wrestled: What does it mean to be a student (and a Christian) in a Christian high school?

When I added, *“In fact Ashley, I think you nailed it!”* Ashley’s face lit up with a big smile.

“You realized a truth about your faith much earlier than many do,” I continued. *“Christians often place the cart before the horse in faith development. We look for evidence of Christianity through behavior without realizing the Holy Spirit transforms hearts before hands and feet. And instead of experiencing freedom in Christ, Christians who live this way often experience a lot of guilt, resentment and frustration because they always feel they are coming up short.”*

Ashley nodded, and added, *“That is totally how I felt!”*

“Right!” I jumped in. *“But the Holy Spirit led you to understand you had to become a Christ-follower from the inside-out. Your heart was transformed by a relationship with Jesus and, eventually, the transformation worked its way out*

into your daily life... the stuff you do. Too often we go outside-in with faith, looking at behavior first and eventually looking at the condition of the heart.”

I paused for a moment, pointed at Ashley, and said, *“You, Ashley, are an inside-out Christian!”*

A few days later Ashley and all her Senior classmates walked joyfully across the stage at graduation, receiving their diplomas and capping their time at Unity.

Taking those initial steps “out of the nest” after high school are often filled with uncertainty and apprehension. Unlike the robins, whose young leave the nest after only a couple weeks, parents and grandparents experience eighteen years of love and relationship with their child. They understand—in a way any high school graduate cannot at this point—just how challenging life can be and how important a heart-changing commitment to Christ is for the journey.

We pray our graduates listen and hear the word of God spoken to Jeremiah:

“You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all of your heart.”

May all Christians, as faith-infused followers of Christ, discover a life-long, transformational, inside-out relationship with Jesus while we do His will and experience a life of gratitude!

God bless the Class of 2021 and the Unity Christian community!

From the front row...

Dan Landstra
Director of Spiritual Life
and Leadership

Growing Students to Make a Difference in this World (Continued from p.1)

other influences in their life will not change who they are in Christ. Nurturing the souls of young people to claim Christ as their own is the mission of Unity Christian.

The seeds of Christianity are planted in the classrooms at our school. As students are taught, they are called to restore God's kingdom on earth and are reminded of the story in Mark that the kingdom does not come by force or the mighty hand, but by a tiny seed. We plant in our students the seeds to make an eternal difference.

"He also said, 'This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.' Again, He said, 'What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like the mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all the garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.'" Mark 4:26-32.

What then shall we do? The kingdom of God is defined by love rather than anger. Jesus taught people to love God, their neighbor, and their enemies. Instead of fanning the embers of anger, He urged his followers to cultivate the virtue of love. At Unity, the question asked of our students

often is this: What does love require of us? When students begin to look at how best to love others, they begin the process of living Christ-like. Unity students... sowing the seeds of love and making a difference as they navigate the world around them.

This past school year, while it has been difficult, provided the opportunity to be with our students in school. Students learned that no matter the world surrounding them, their true measure of success is how well their hearts—through His Son Jesus, and by the power of the Holy Spirit—are being shaped into the image of Christ.

As our students seek truth and learn the values we hope to instill, there are other influences that vie for their attention and control. In a world where everyone says they have the answer, who do you listen to? The fact that our students are being taught through the lens of scripture can put our souls at rest. Planting seeds of faith, learning to love like Jesus, and understanding their identity in Christ is the answer our students seek. Unity Christian is that outpost where students who need the truth, find it!

Blessings to all, and may you be that small mustard seed growing to make a difference in this world!

Jerry DeGroot
Principal/CEO



The Class of 2021

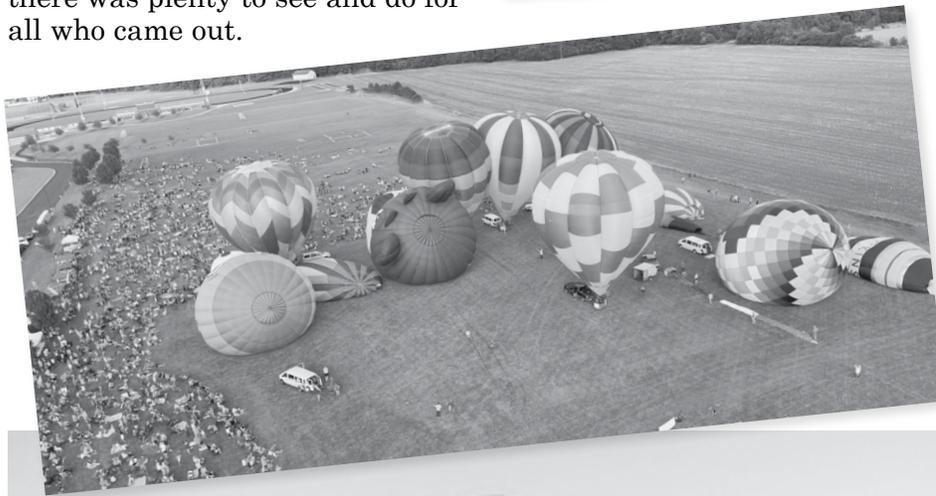
Unity Hosts Hudsonville Balloon Days!

On Friday and Saturday, June 18 and 19, Unity Christian's campus hosted Hudsonville Balloon Days—the first of what will hopefully be an annual event. The organizers of this event were looking for a beautifully manicured, wide-open space, and recalling Unity Christian's exceptional campus, thought it would be perfect. So, they called to see if we would be willing to host.

On both days, the event began at 6 a.m., with a range of activities during the afternoons and evenings, until 10 p.m. The weather on Friday was too breezy for a launch, but those who attended were treated to the amazing sights and sounds of the huge Hot Air Balloons being fired up. On Saturday however, the weather cooperated so the balloons were able to launch! And there was plenty to see and do for all who came out.

The UC parking lots were filled to capacity, as the event was a huge success. Among the vendors selling food were Unity Christian Seniors offering submarine sandwiches and chips.

We are so grateful to UC supporters who helped make our campus such a beautiful and welcoming presence in this community!



Thank You, UC Celebration Banquet 2021 Underwriters!

On Monday, April 26, Unity held its annual Celebration Banquet. Our guests were treated to an excellent dinner catered and served by **The Trestle Stop Restaurant** of Hamilton. The featured guest speaker was **David A.R. White**—author, founder, producer, and actor for Pure Flix Entertainment—a Christian production company for family-values based films and television shows. David shared his God-given dream that he has pursued in his own life, and encouraged our guests to consider what dreams God has given each of us to pursue.

Thanks to the support of our **Banquet Underwriters**, this event would not be made possible as a “free” event and fundraiser. This year’s banquet raised almost \$160,000 for the Education Foundation and Tuition Assistance. Please thank the businesses and individuals listed here who made this evening possible...

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Vollink Eyecare PLLC
West Michigan Cabinet Supply, Inc.
West Michigan Community Bank
West Michigan Document Shredding



Births

Viviana Victoria Boldt was born to parents **Dan ('06)** and **Gina Boldt** on June 15, 2021.

John Richard Dykstra was born on April 2, 2021 to parents **Randy ('93)** and **Danielle Dykstra**, and welcomed by siblings Heather (4), and William (2).

Aubrey Lynn Haak was born to parents **Brian (2011)** and **Rebecca Haak** on March 7, 2021.

Warner John Kuperus was born on March 16, 2021 to parents **Cameron ('05)** and **Tara (Zuiderveen '06) Kuperus**, and welcomed by his siblings Sydney (6), Miles (4) and Hendrik (2).

Chase Daniel Steenwyk was born on March 3, 2021 to parents **Dan** and **Kelsey (Brummel '09) Steenwyk**, and welcomed by big brother Brayden (2).

Cameron Scott Van Laar was born on February 3, 2021 to **Jeff ('06)** and **Allie Van Laar**, and welcomed by big brother Jackson (2).

Archer Michael Van Laar was born on February 9, 2021 to **Dan ('11)** and **Hailey Van Laar**, and welcomed by big sister Emery (2).

Lily Paige Zuiderveen was born on March 8, 2021 to parents **Grady ('09)** and **Allison (Walt '09) Zuiderveen**, and welcomed by big brother Oliver (3).

Please submit any Alumni marriage or Alumni birth announcements to: 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 will 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!

Alumni in Missions

Joshua Bode ('95) – Omán, UAE (RCA pastor); **Jeff and Melissa (DeJonge '93)** Bos – Omán, UAE; **Patti (Steenwyk '88) Brander** – Mission India/Grandville MI; **Kristin Bremer ('17)** – Mexico (YWAM); **Ben and Kari (Vriesman '09)** David – Uganda, Africa; **Ray ('93)** and **Angie De Lange** – Vancouver, BC, Canada; **David and Jillian (Honderd '09)** Draayer – Zambia, Africa; **Abby (Deters '12)** and **Ronald Nowicki, Jr.** – Glen Arbor, Michigan (Grand Traverse Young Life); **Barry Dykstra ('10)** – Byron Center, Michigan (Youth for Christ, BCHS); **Ryan Elders ('05)** – Eastern Ottawa County, Michigan (Young Life Ministry); **Kyle ('01)** and **Heather Glashower** – Coral Springs, Florida (One Hope); **Merissa Harkema ('09)** – India (Sarah's Covenant Homes); **John ('74)** and **Ruth (VanZalen '74) Hoekwater** – Chicago, Illinois; **Carrie Kennedy ('03)** – Nicaragua (Young Life Ministry); **Thomas ('99)** and **Tera Krol** – Karen, Kenya; **Edgar and Jamie (Ponstein '05)** Martinez – Minneapolis, Minnesota (YWAM); **Gary Miedema ('71)** – Robertson, South Africa; **Matthew ('07)** and **Rachel Schmitt** – Bloomington, Minnesota; **Mandy (Beute '97)** and **Josh Shaarda** – Obule, Uganda; **Angie (Beute '95)** and **Tim Shiedrecht** – Soroti, Uganda; **Scott ('81)** and **Mary Ann Stroven** – Orlando, Florida (Student Ministry of Cru/Campus Crusade for Christ); **Brenda Vander Schuur ('78)** – Guinea (Resonate Global Mission); **John ('88)** and **Kazumi Van Farowe** – Japan; **Tim and Kari (VanOverloop '79)** Willoughby- Uruguay South America; **Noah and Maria (Postema '98)** Ward – Thailand (OMF International); and **Nathan ('87)** and **Brenda Yonker** – Haiti.

If you know of other UC Alumni serving in missions, please send their names and information about their ministries to development@unitychristian.org, or call 616.662.4011.



Due to space constraints, Alumni in the Military can be found on the Unity Christian website at www.unitychristian.org/Alumni.



Scrap Metal Drive

On the weekend of April 30 and May 1, Unity Christian held a Scrap Metal Drive to raise funds for the Education Foundations of Hudsonville Christian and UCHS. Thank you to all who came out and donated their metal items and appliances! And a big thank you goes to all the volunteers, and coordinator **Mr. Alden Jelsema!** This year we raised \$12,631.35, with half (\$6,315.68) going to Hudsonville Christian! Feeling so blessed!



Golf Outing 2021

On Monday, June 7, the UC Athletic Boosters once again held the annual UC Golf Outing at Sunnybrook Country Club. This fundraising event not only benefits the athletic program but the Education Foundation as well. There were 21 teams in the morning flight, and 32 teams in the afternoon flight. Lunch was served between flights, and participants also had the opportunity to sign up for "silent auction" items prior to tee-offs. At the dinner following the event, prizes were awarded, and auction item winners were announced. This year, we raised approximately \$24,000 to benefit Unity Athletics and the Education Foundation. Thank you to everyone who participated and helped make this another successful outing!



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Come In, We're Open!

Beginning on July 5, **revive** is once again OPEN at 10 AM, Monday through Saturday, for shopping! As a "Welcome Back to Mornings" bonus, all shoppers arriving between 10 a.m. and 12 noon will receive 50% off Anything You Wear, including all clothing, shoes, purses, jewelry, and accessories!



Did you know you can shop **revive** online? Check out the unique items listed on eBay and what's for sale on Craigslist. And don't forget about all the Amazon listings for **revive** as well! Find a link to everything **revive** is selling online by visiting **revive's** website (www.reviveresale.org) and clicking on the "SHOP" tab.

Congratulations!

to all the 2021 graduates
for a job well done in a year
like none other!



revive has been blessed over the years by talented students who have volunteered their time and talents to cashier, handle donations, and do all sorts of jobs. Thank you, Graduates!

"Work hard and work smart, use your God-given talents to the best of your ability, set your goals high in life so you can expand your talents. May God continue to bless you."

—Alden Jelsema, **revive** volunteer

Extended Donation Hours:

Tuesday & Thursday: 10 am – 4 pm
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Shopping Hours:

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Contact Us:

Phone: 616.662.3375 | Email: revive@unitychristian.org
Website: www.ReviveResale.org
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