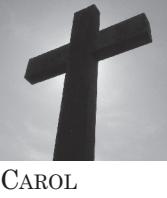


## RELIGION

## PASTOR'S COLUMN

## My Vow is ...

CAROL  
DESCHEPPELFIRST LUTHERAN  
CHURCH, MILFORD

We are a couple of weeks into the New Year. Did you make a New Year's resolution, and is it still alive and well? Are you still committed to it? Are your resolutions focused on physical health, mental health or spiritual health? Do you have other aspirations not specifically related to your health (but isn't everything related to health)? Studies show that health-focused resolutions are the most commonly selected.

A Forbes survey from 2023 identified that 62% of people feel pressurized to make a resolution and 8%

of them have dropped it by the end of January. Given that statistic, most are probably still on task with their resolutions. Twenty-two percent back away from their resolution(s) by the end of February, and another 22% by the end of March. I'm not sure what that says about us. Was the resolution not really important in the first place? Are we not committed? Were you feeling pressured to come up with a resolution to have a response when someone asked what your resolution is?

Sometime ago, I read a poem by Rachel Macy Stafford named "My Vow to Soften." I thought about the words of that poem again as we began a new year. Maybe those thoughts and words could become the focus of a resolution for me or for you. I don't know about you, but I've had more harsh and hateful words than I can endure. Can we please try something different?

The first stanza of the poem reads:

"I've had enough of my hard edges. I'm tired of straining my voice. I'd like to loosen up and laugh a little more, be positive rather than negative."

It's hard to find laughter and positivity in the midst of the negativity in today's world. Mutual respect and civil discourse seem to be rare or missing. Stafford's poem goes on to express many beautiful and compassionate expressions of what her vows for a time of softening would look like. The link to her poem is below, but here are a few excerpts:

- I vow to listen to opinions. I don't always have to be right. I don't always have to agree or have the last word.

- I vow to remember he is in the process of becoming; she is in the process of finding her way. And they are more apt to do it if I stop telling them how.

- I vow to greet my family — and myself — with a loving smile, no matter what happened yesterday. Grudge-

holding only hurts us all.

- I vow to pause before correcting. I will take a moment to consider if the mistake even needs to be mentioned.

- I vow to be a voice of encouragement in a demeaning world.

- I vow to be softer today than I was yesterday — a softer voice, a softer posture, a softer touch, a softer thought, a softer timetable.

- I vow to be softer toward the imperfect human being inside me and the one beside me.

By being softer I can hear more, learn more, feel more, and love more. Do any of these resonate with you or do you have some you would add to the list? I vow to \_\_\_\_\_. Think and pray about it and fill in the blank. A few of mine are:

- I vow to extend grace when my first reaction is judgment.

- I vow to more quickly see and generously embrace the goodness in others.

- I vow to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly (Micah 6:8)

If you are committed to weight loss, more time in the gym, or other goals in the new year, good for you! We can all benefit from aspirations to seek greater physical health. But don't stop there. I encourage you to consider making your own vows of "softening."

Maybe, just maybe, we should begin this year digging deeper and being a voice of quiet, fostering dialogue and peace, seeking justice where it is devoid, loving our neighbor (yes, all of our neighbors), stop overlooking and/or repeating hate-filled words, and excluding others who are all made in God's image.

We have an opportunity to begin anew to offer something different to the world. Individually and collectively, we can be the source of an invitation for someone to feel included, valued and loved.

## AREA CHURCH LISTINGS

## ASSEMBLY OF GOD

Foundation  
Church, Spencer

Rev. Nicholas Hanges,  
Senior Pastor

1410 W. 18th St.

712-262-6292

foundationspencer.com

- Sunday School K-12, 9 a.m.

- Sunday Prayer/  
Fellowship, 9 a.m.

- Sunday Worship, 10 a.m.

- Kids Church Sunday,  
10 a.m.

- Wednesday All Ages,  
6:30 p.m.

## BAPTIST

Baptist Church,  
Sioux Rapids

Rev. James Marshall

- Sunday Worship, 9:30 a.m.

- Sunday School, 10:30 a.m.

First Baptist  
Church, Spencer

Rev. Tim Smith

1200 Grand Ave.

712-262-1325

firstbaptistspencer.com

- Sunday School,

- 9:15 a.m.

- Sunday Upward Look —

KICD 1240 AM, 10 a.m.

- Sunday Worship,

- 10:30 a.m.

- Sunday AWANA, 4 p.m.

- Sunday FBC Youth

Group, 6 p.m.

## CALVARY CHAPEL

New Life Worship  
Center, Spencer

Rev. Tracy Baugh

1217 Fourth Ave. W.

712-262-3125

- Sunday Bible

- Church, 10 a.m.

- Wednesday Prayer,

- 6:30 p.m.

## CATHOLIC

St. Joseph's Catholic  
Church, Hartley

Rev. Kevin Richter

260 N. Fourth Ave. W.

712-928-2626

- Primghar St. Anthony,

- Sunday, 8 a.m.

- Hartley St. Joseph,

- Sunday, 9:30 a.m.

St. Joseph's Catholic  
Church, Milford

Rev. Brian Hughes

1305 Okoboji Ave.

712-338-2274

Sacred Heart Catholic  
Church, Ruthven

Rev. Paul Kelly

1801 Rolling St.

712-852-3187

Sacred Heart Catholic  
Church, Spencer

Rev. Kevin Richter

1111 Fourth Ave. W.

712-262-3047

- Saturday Service, 4:30 p.m.

- Sunday Service, 11 a.m.

Livestreamed at:  
spencersacredheart.com/  
onlinemass

## CHURCH OF CHRIST

Trinity United Church  
of Christ, Hartley

140 N. Fifth Ave.

712-728-2889

## CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE

Spencer Family  
Church, Spencer

Rev. Larry Neiderhiser

905 Fifth St. SW

712-262-7298

spencerfamilychurch.org

- Sunday Worship,

- 10:30 a.m.

- Sunday Kid's Church,

- 10:30 a.m.

- Wednesday Life

Group, 7 p.m.

CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST  
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTSChurch of Jesus  
Christ of Latter-Day  
Saints, Spencer

1701 W. 11th St.

712-262-6172

- Sunday Sacrament

Meeting, 10 a.m.

- Sunday School;

Primary and

Youth Meetings,

11:10 a.m.

- Sunday Men's Priesthood

Meeting and Women's Relief

Society, 12:10 p.m.

## CONGREGATIONAL

Grace Congregational  
Church, Greenville

Rev. Tonna Parsons

- Sunday Worship,

- 10:30 a.m.

## EPISCOPAL

The Way Station,  
Spencer

Rev. Beth Preston

120 W. Fourth St.

712-580-5463

revbethpreston@gmail.com

- Sunday Service, 3 p.m.

St. Alban's Episcopal  
Church, Spirit Lake

Rev. Carolyn Tuttle

23rd and Zenith

712-336-1117

- Sunday Mass/

Eucharist, 10 a.m.

All Saints Episcopal  
Church, Storm Lake

Rev. Stacey Gerhart

121 W. Marina Road

712-202-6624

- Sunday Eucharist,

- 10 a.m.

## EVANGELICAL FREE

Riverside Evangelical  
Free Church, Linn Grove

• Sunday Worship, 9:30 a.m.

- Ignite, 6:30 p.m.

- Salt Youth: 7:15 p.m.

CrossWinds  
Church, Spencer

Campus Rev. Jordan Gowing

Rev. Dr. Kurt Truckess

1900 Grand Ave, Suite A

712-584-3151

spencer@crosswinds.tv

- Sunday Worship,

- 8:30 a.m. and 10:15 a.m.

## FIRST CHRISTIAN

First Christian  
Church, Spencer

(Disciples of Christ)

Pastor Interim

915 Fourth Ave. SW

712-262-2945

- Sunday Service,

- 9:30 a.m.

In-House and Facebook Live

School: 4:30 p.m.

## FIRST CONGREGATIONAL

## First Congregational&lt;br