

All Things New (in good ol' 2023)



Jake Epley
Worship Gathering Director

This past year was one for the books! 🥰 It was amazing to see all the **new** ways God worked in 2023.

This past year, we welcomed **4 new members** to the team (both Music and Tech), bringing our overall number of volunteers to 23 (up from 19 in 2022). It has been encouraging to me to see more people from the Riverwood fam stepping up to share their talents and time to help people worship God at our Sunday Worship Gatherings.

Second, we purchased a **new-to-us** secondhand set of **actual drum mics** to capture a more adequate sound for our cajón (a.k.a. box drum). These same mics were also used to capture our Brass and String players during this past Christmas season, which allowed our church family and livestream viewers to hear them in the sound mix.

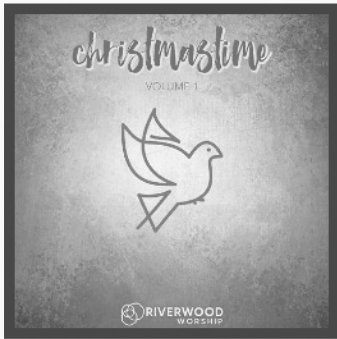
Another asset we deployed this year to help equip more musicians was a **new training resource known as Worship Artistry (WA)**, which gives individualized training for both instrumental worship leading (guitars, keys, drums, etc.) and vocal fronts with a vast catalogue of songs to learn. It was very beneficial to our members who want to flourish in their pursuit of musical excellence for personal and congregational edification.

To build relationships as well as encourage our team spiritually, Grace and I hosted a Worship Team Shtick in September in our home. That night, I introduced a **new element to our rehearsals**, a devotional called *Before We Gather* by Zac Hicks. Each Thursday evening, we read the suggested Scripture passage followed by the short devotional thought from Hicks' book. We then spend time praying for each other and our church family.

Last but not least, we released our **new Christmas EP, *christmastime* volume 1**, during the Thanksgiving weekend! It was an honor and privilege to introduce these Advent tunes to the Riverwood family because each song was arranged by a worship team member! The EP itself was a fun collaborative effort with 3 different producers (2 in Arkansas, 1 in North Carolina) to bring these arrangements to life, showcasing some of the talent on our team.

In the **new year**, my hope is we will continue to see more volunteers join the Worship Team. I am also looking forward to the additional hours and responsibilities I will be taking on in 2024, which will allow me to develop our worship leaders more, write more arrangements for our Brass and String players throughout the year (not just the holidays), encourage our songwriters to work on original worship tunes and rearranged hymns, and contribute in a few other areas as well.

Glory to God in all His splendor, and I look forward to what new things the Lord has in store in 2024! 🙌



Jake grew up in Waverly, is married to Grace, became a new dad in 2023, and is addicted to John Mark McMillan songs.

Join the Party!

EVERY SUNDAY

In the Lobby after the Worship Gathering

THE RIVERWOOD REPORT

JANUARY 28, 2024

THE RIVERWOOD CHURCH 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

\$0.00 (Priceless!)

A YEAR OF GOSPEL GROWTH



Erin Bird
Lead Pastor

Waverly, Iowa - In January, we once again engaged in 21 Days of Prayer & Fasting. For 2023, we used the theme of Gospel Growth. This series had us praying for “**Gospel Growth in Me**” (personal), “**Gospel Growth in Us**” (corporately as a church), and “**Gospel Growth around Us**” (in our community and world). Let me share three examples of how we saw God answer these three prayers...

We saw the gospel taking root and growing at the personal level in a number of people. One bit of proof: we saw **six people go public** with their faith by being baptized.

We also saw corporate Gospel Growth happen in a number of ways. One of the highlights for me was seeing the **incredible generosity** of our Riverwood family at Christmas to help our missionaries in Cambodia bless over 2,500 people with a gift, meal, and the gospel through our annual Impact Gift.

Lastly, we saw the Gospel grow through us to our communities and beyond in numerous ways. The greatest example in my mind is when we **sent three of our teens to North Minneapolis** to serve Patrick Ray and Northside Neighborhood Church for four days in several different ways.

As you can tell through these three examples, (and even more so throughout the pages of this report), **2023 was a great year for Riverwood**.

However...

It is my experience after almost 30 years of full-time ministry that when you wonderfully experience God's direct work around you and in you (like we did this year), you also encounter **spiritual warfare**. I experienced this

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BY THE NUMBERS

Here's what 2023 looked like statistically in a number of areas.

SUNDAYS (Averages)

- 70 in Worship Gathering
Up from 55 in 2022
- 32 in Kids Creek
Up from 27 in 2022
- 7 5/6 graders every other week
- 4 “Viewers” connected online
Down from 7 in 2022
- 102 in the Building
Up from 89 in 2022

GROUPS (Averages)

- 35 Adults in 3 Growth Groups
(71 if you include kids!)
Down from 40 in 2022
- 9 at Wednesday Youth Group
Down from 12 in 2022
- 11 at Thursday Wartburg
Wrestler Bible Study
Up from 8 in 2022

Milestone Numbers on Page 3...

FALSIFIED ADS

GET PEW-DASH SERMON SNACKS!

Sign-up for our new sermon-synced snack delivery service, which ensures you never miss a moment of wisdom during the message. Enjoy locally sourced treats right in your chair, perfectly timed with each preaching point. Because every sermon is better with snacks!

CHANGE LIVES BY CHANGING HAIR

Love to wield scissors like the Sword of the Spirit? Want to part hair like the Red Sea? Then join our newest outreach ministry: **Hallelujah Haircuts!** Learn how to trim sanctified styles and share evangelistic sermons while your client is trapped in a salon chair.

CALLING ALL SINGERS!

Riverwood Worship is preparing to record its next album, a collection of 144+ songs featuring some of history's most famous Gregorian chants! The album will be called *Greg Or Ryan*. Schedule your singing audition today! (Low bass paid extra.)

FOR SALE

Two nice hamsters - \$1 each. Call Timmy: 555-1234


Two noisy, messy, ignored hamsters - Free! Call Timmy's Mom: 555-1234



Nathan Townsley (top) takes an Uber to the potluck food line at the Riverwood July Hangout at Cedar Bend Park. His “driver” is Salem Bird. (Photo credit: Minette Ericson)

MONEY MATTERS

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS & QUICK NOTES FOR 2023



Minette Ericson
Administrator

In 2023, Riverwood experienced one of its healthiest years financially in a long time! Here are some important things to note:

General Fund
We began the year expecting to enact a new financial policy which outlines steps we will take when giving is below budget. However, we ended the year (for the first time in four years) with giving exceeding budgeted needs!

Building Fund
The water leak on the west side of the building was resolved in November with outdoor grates and a sealed door in the Preschool Room. With that repair accomplished at last, we can *finally* order chairs for the Worship Gathering space! Once we order chairs, we should still have roughly \$21,000 left in the Building Fund. There are already a myriad of ideas being considered for its usage. Some ideas include outdoor signage, updated sound equipment, and an exterior paint job. ☺

Minette is married to Dan, homeschool mom to 4, keeps Riverwood organized, and is handier than your grandpa.

OUR GIVING

\$90 to Compassion International for **18 first-time guest** units

\$13,753.41 Global giving*

\$8,500 for current & future church planting

\$1500 Local giving

YOUR GIVING


January 1 – December 31, 2023

General: \$198,516.94

Building: \$10,087.03

*combination of budgeted giving for overseas missionaries, Christmas Impact Gift, and Youth Mission Trip

FROM THE DESK OF (AN) ELDER



Matt Townsley
Elder Chairman

A l m o s t every Wednesday at 6:30 am, the Elder Team joyfully gathers to pray over each and every request shared via *Connection Card* or emailed to prayer@weareriverwood.org. We believe prayer is not only a way for us to connect with God in a personal way, it is also part of how we can “shepherd” the Riverwood family. So please continue sharing your praises and requests with us, whether in written or digital form!

Looking back to 2023, the elder team experienced a couple changes. One change was Luke Anderson stepping down from the elder team in September. We are grateful to Luke and his five years leading and serving on the elder team!

The Elder Team also prayerfully considered several key decisions affecting Riverwood. One decision affected the budget. Each December a choice is put forth to the Riverwood partners whether to affirm the proposed budget for the coming year. The vote for the 2024 budget, however, was slightly different in that an affirming vote enabled Jake to come on closer to full-time. We are looking forward to his ability to give more time and energy to the Riverwood family!

As we look forward to 2024, there is a wonderful opportunity before us to extend a warm invitation to those who may feel spiritually disconnected, encouraging them to discover the path of following Jesus. A few years ago, we would have never anticipated a new elementary school being built near our building. Now, we envision the possibility of parents dropping off their elementary school kids, noticing the Riverwood building, and sensing a divine prompting to connect or reconnect with Jesus.

In the midst of our growing communities and the influx of new businesses and families in the Cedar Valley, we find ourselves at a unique moment, echoing the call in Matthew 9 to recognize the abundant harvest. Let us embrace this season and invite our friends, coworkers, classmates, and neighbors to join us at “the church by the new Prairie West Elementary School.” It’s a chance to help people become who God has created them to be.

Finally, we would like to thank you for your generosity in 2023. Many of you continued to give of your time and talents to Riverwood, while others have stepped up in new capacities. Because of your generosity, we are able to show others in our community what it means to live like Jesus lived and love like Jesus loved through Kids Creek classes, treats after the Sunday worship gathering, and inviting music on the stage. (Please let Jake or Bridget know if you would like to serve in a new way in 2024.)

As we enter a new year, our spiritual growth pathway will continue to be to **Gather** on Sundays, **Grow** through Bible reading and Growth Groups, **Give** of your FIST (finances, influences, skills, and time) and **Go** (share the Gospel and be a blessing to the world). We look forward to a new year and seeing more baptisms and people we know trusting in Jesus for the first time! ☺

Matt is married to Cassy, father of four, preparer of school principals, an active member of Education Twitter, & wears a mean bow tie.



(L to R) Parker Badura, Kaden Badura, and Tsion Bird paint a fence in North Minneapolis. (Photo Credit: LeAnn Bird)

A YEAR OF GOSPEL GROWTH

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“phenomenon” on the mission field in Venezuela. I saw it in ministry stints in Colorado and Cedar Rapids. And I’ve lived it more than once during my time planting and leading Riverwood.

Thankfully, we didn’t experience spiritual warfare like many churches do through extreme disunity or scandal. Rather, we saw it in the **lives of people hurt and/or hindered by sin**.

That’s why for 2024, as Riverwood turns 10, we will have a theme of “**Roots & Fruit**,” inspired by verse 12 of Ezekiel 47, the biblical passage that inspired our name. More about this theme will be shared at our 2024 Vision Sunday Gathering.

In the meantime, I invite you to thank God for a great 2023, but also pray for His work and protection over our church family. ☺


Erin is married to LeAnn, father of 4, addicted to hot tea spiked with honey, and a fan of college wrestling.

MILESTONES (Totals)

5 People (3 teens, 2 adults) on Mission Trip to Minneapolis <i>A Riverwood first!</i>	1 Parent/Child Dedication <i>Down from 2 in 2022</i>	
3 Salvations <i>Up from 1 in 2022</i>	6 Baptisms <i>Up from 3 in 2022</i>	18 Self-Declared First-Time Guest Units <i>Down from 29 in 2022</i>

Kids Korner

An update from **KIDS CREEK**



Bridget Pavelec
Kids Creek Director

We have so much to be thankful for in Kids Creek! In 2023, we had a record number of kids attending our three classrooms on Sunday mornings. I am also extremely thankful for the many people who serve so faithfully in Kids Creek. Our mission is to create a fun, welcoming, and safe environment for kids, families, and volunteers to experience Jesus and grow in their faith.

In our Elementary, Preschool, and 5/6 classes, we continue to use “The Gospel Project” curriculum. Each week from the Scriptures, (and every other week for our 5th & 6th graders), the kids see how the gospel is at the center of everything. This has helped our kids learn important truths like:

- God always keeps His promises,
- Jesus is our one-true mediator,
- and we can have victory over sin because of Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection from the tomb.

This summer, we continued to partner with three different churches from the Waverly community to have a “Stellar” VBS. We had 4 nights full of experiments, games, teaching, and energetic worship. We also celebrated 6 of our kids getting baptized in the Cedar River. It was a joy to watch them act in obedience and take the next step in their faith journey.

I was grateful to be able to take a mini-sabbatical from August-

October. While I continued to create the lessons each week, I didn’t teach in the classrooms. I did miss the kids, but it was such a blessing to have a break and spend time consistently in the Worship Gathering on Sundays, singing, learning, and praying with my Riverwood family.

In conclusion, our Kids Creek team is here to support our families by modeling prayer, service, giving, and showing love for the ones God has put into our care, as well any guest that walks through our doors. It is an honor to get to serve the Riverwood family in this capacity. Thank you for your continued support of our children’s ministry! ☺

Bridget is married to Ed, mom to 5 active kids, grew up in Waterloo, and is a passionate drinker of coffee.