

December 2005 Newsletter

From the Pastor

Advent announces the arrival of the New Year, and leads to the celebration of Christmas. With the arrival of a new church year comes all sorts of new dates for the calendar. The Sunday School is actively preparing for the Children's Christmas play, with weekly rehearsals, and plans for two performances on December 18, one at 8:30 a.m., and again at 10:30 a.m. The Youth of Zion are busily at work making plans for helping several families have a merrier Christmas through the efforts of our Giving Tree. Both the Men of Zion and the Women of Zion have special Christmas dinners on the calendar. And in the midst of all this seasonal busyness, Zion has its traditional schedule of Sunday Evening Advent Dinners and Devotions inviting your support ... and attendance. The New Year is here, and that means we've got lots to do.

The First Sunday in Advent focused attention on Advent wreaths and another edition of our Daily Devotional Guide for Advent. We had great participation once again, with Confirmands and Sunday Schoolers, our Confirmation Teacher and Christian Education Director, many members of the Chancel Guild, participants in our Adult Sunday School Class, Church Council officers, the Pastor, and our Webmaster taking the time to add a meditation to our Devotional Booklet. We also included Classic Editions from the past as a way of improving on what was already a good idea for Zion and a great discipline for families.

Now, with the Second Sunday in Advent we prepare to host our friends at St. Paul's Catholic Church for what has become one of the highpoints of the season, our Service of Lessons & Carols. The dinner for this evening service is, of course, simply and invariably outstanding. This year's service will include St. Paul's Youth Orchestra, the Instruments of Christ, along with tuba accompanist, John Myers. Zion's talented contributors include Shirley Horton (viola) and Carole Singer (piano), along with Dale Jacobs, Beth Heller, Darlene Milavickas, Marilyn Espe-Sherwindt, Suzanne Walters, and many, many more. You will want to join us on the evening of December 4, with dinner beginning at 5:30 p.m., and the service at 6:15 p.m.

The Youth of Zion, along with their parents and adult advisors, will take the lead for our Sunday evening program on December 11. The food will be great, as it was last year, when Lisa Kay, Lisa Roman, and Jane Bernabei baked lasagna for our gathering. The service will be a celebration of Christmons, first used by Lutherans in 1957 to decorate their Christmas tree with symbols that told the biblical story of Christ's coming. In addition to telling the story of Christ's coming through Christmons, we will create a craft so that each of our families can take a Chrismon home with them. CHRISMON comes from two words, CHRISt and MONogram.

Finally, the week that begins on Sunday, December 18, sets great things in motion. The Senior Choir will host and serve dinner, and then lead us through a program that celebrates Christmas carols from around the world. On Saturday, December 24th, we will return to Zion for three Christmas Eve Services, an increasingly popular family-oriented service at 6:00 p.m., and then two traditional Candle-Light Services with Holy Communion to follow. On Sunday morning, Christmas Day, we will have one service, which will begin at 10:45 a.m. What a series of Sundays to start the new church year; and what a series of services to welcome Christ's birth. May the disciplines of Advent heighten our joy and focus our lives on the reason for the season.

Peter's Page

Every month Pete Fenney posts a page on our website called Peter's Page. Pete doesn't fashion himself to be another St. Peter, but it is that witness that inspires his writing and reflections. Peter was a leader among the Twelve, a leader in saying YES, a leader in taking charge, a leader in missing the point, a leader in needing forgiveness. There is no doubt that you would find Pete's commentary interesting and insightful. Here's a sample, just in case you haven't been able to find our website, or Pete's page.

Fall

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Fall has been a deep dark period of American life when the world has turned bleak and hard. Iraq remains uppermost in our thoughts, but our sensibilities have had to stretch to add Katrina to the shock and frustration. It is a return to those days in the 40's when insanity was spreading like a fungus across Europe and Asia adding words like 'blitzkrieg' and 'kamikaze' to our daily newspapers. Now, it is Baghdad and New Orleans. We face the double burden of balancing the unending reports of death and terror not just from the Middle East but from the southern region of our own beloved country. Many are asking questions about the readiness of our government, our safety forces and ourselves.

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Where does our religion fit in here? When we pray for the victims of Katrina, the safety of our men and women in Iraq and for this nation, you and me, what does that really require? Are we giving with part of our fortune, our time and ability fighting against the world's psychotic blundering? Is God really on our side? Possibly his attention is elsewhere in those places where men, women and children are suffering and facing terror of nature as well as man. That might be the prayer we should include in our daily talks with him.

Get What You Ask For!

A veterinarian had a woman bring a limp parrot into his office one day. She placed the bird on his table and asked him to save her pet. The vet took out his stethoscope and listened to the bird's chest. After a few moments he said "I am sorry Polly has passed away." The unhappy lady wailed, "Are you sure? I mean you have done no tests on him. He might be in a coma or something!"

The vet rolled his eyes, shrugged and left the room. Moments later the vet returned with a beautiful black Labrador. As the bird's owner looked on with amazement the dog stood on his hind legs, put his front paws on the table and sniffed the parrot from top to bottom. He looked at the vet with sad eyes and shook his head. The vet escorted the dog from the room and returned shortly with a cat. The cat jumped up on the table and delicately sniffed the bird. The cat then sat back, shook its head, meowed and ran out of the room.

The vet looked at the woman and said "like I said your parrot is most definitely, 100% certifiably dead." He then turned to his computer hit a few keys and produced a bill. "A hundred and fifty dollars!" she cried. "just to tell me my bird was dead?" The vet shrugged. "If you would have taken my word for it the bill would only have been \$20.00, But with the lab report and the cat scan, it's \$150.00!"

Zion's Food Pantry

MEAT VERSES TOILET PAPER: it sounds pretty gross; but that has been the ongoing dilemma at the Food Pantry. With cuts in the budget at the state level, the Akron-Canton Regional Food Bank raising their handling fees per case of food, the Food of the Month Club drying up, an increase in the number of clients we serve, we have had to make some tough choices, choosing meat over toilet paper. Guess what? You can't function well without either one. We have learned that lately toilet paper has been mysteriously disappearing from Zion's bathrooms on Food Pantry Tuesdays. Either we have a sneaky church mouse, or the families we serve may have to make those choices at home. We have chosen meat over toilet paper; but now we realize that we must choose both, and offer both because that is a real need of the families we serve. The only thing left to do is ask. Throughout the month of December there will be a holiday box placed in the Narthex. We will be collecting paper products for Zion's Food Pantry clients. We welcome any form of paper products, but would appreciate the necessities, like toilet paper and tissue paper. Others in our community were able to enjoy a Thanksgiving meal.

After six years of representing North Canton in the fight against hunger, the community has finally recognized that there is hunger in North Canton, and that our congregational family at Zion is helping in this fight. We have had several food drives arrive at Zion's front doors: Hoover High School, a local company, and two other congregations. We were able to share our message about hunger with the youth at St. Paul's Catholic Church. I asked them if they thought anyone in their lunch period at school was on the state-assisted lunch program. Their answer was No. But in reality several of their peers' families were clients of our Food Pantry.

The truth is that our Food Pantry would not be as successful as it has been without the good people of our congregation who support us, the volunteers who work with us, and the dedication that so many muster to maintain it. [The truth is - and this is a note from the editor - that our Food Pantry would not be as successful as it has been without the tireless leadership of Shirley Cavender. Her words are right on: we appreciate your help, and we need more of it. There are many ways that we can help persons whose needs move us to respond. One of those ways is to join in our effort to help through the Food Pantry. Offer your time, your talents, your treasures, some tissue paper, or toilet paper. Let's take care of those whom God has called us to serve. We'll all feel better about the difference we're making for the community and in the church.]

Christian Education

SHARING FAITH IN A NEW CENTURY: Continuing in Zion's quest for a healthier church, the Adult Sunday School Class will be offering a new Bible Study called Sharing Faith In a New Century, written by the ELCA. This 4-6 session study will focus on evangelism in the Word and discussion to help us summarize the teachings from the Bible. Congregations known to be effective in their ministry share two basic characteristics. These are a clear sense of purpose and mission, and openness to innovation and change. This Bible Study can help to clarify a vision of evangelism and identify the necessary steps to bring it to life.

Imagine the deep and abiding joy experienced by those who stood personally in the presence of Jesus Christ. The Gospel writers tell the story of a drama so great, so life changing, and so complete that the world has never been the same. The first Christians were busy sharing the story of Jesus Christ. They knew that what had happened would forever change the world. They knew his life, death and resurrection meant that God had fulfilled his promise to redeem creation from all that worked to destroy it. They knew that Jesus Christ had come to build his Church "and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." [Matthew 16:18b]

Christ still intends to build his Church. This evangelism vision invites us to imagine what could happen in the future if we made evangelism and discipleship our primary focus. Christ wants to build his Church. How will we partner with Jesus Christ in the coming years to make this happen? Come and join us at the Sunday morning Adult Class, as we discuss these questions and arrive at answers that will transform us and Zion.

Teacher Spotlight

TEACHER IN THE SPOTLIGHT: This month's Sunday School Teacher Spotlight is on Connie Riffle who currently teaches our 3rd grade class. Connie has been a member at Zion for over 40 years. She was confirmed and married at Zion, and both of her children were baptized here. She has been married to Rick for 23 years, and her children are Melissa and Chad Riffle who have grown up at Zion! Connie has been teaching Sunday School for about 25 years. She has taught grades 1, 2, 3 and 4 during that time. Her favorite part of teaching is helping the children to understand the word of God. The kids always enjoy Connie's class!

During the week, Connie is an instructional aide and recess monitor at Barr elementary. Her hobbies are crafting, reading and shopping. Her favorite food is Chinese and her favorite movie is The Wizard of Oz. In her spare time she also enjoys watching the Food Network Channel and listening to Rod Stewart's music. Connie is an invaluable member of Zion's Sunday School staff, and we would like to thank her for all of her great work and dedication!

Sunday School

Upcoming Events – Mark your calendars! - Sunday, December 4: Children's Program Practice during Sunday School & 10:30 service; Sunday, December 11: Children's Program Practice during Sunday School & 10:30 service ; Sunday, December 11: The Youth Advent Service: Dinner at 5:30 p.m.; Service, 6:15 p.m.; Saturday, December 17: Dress Rehearsal for the Children's Christmas Program at 10:00 a.m.; Saturday, December 17: Pizza Party for Youth 12:00 p.m., plus wrapping Giving Tree Gifts; Sunday, December 18: The Children's Christmas Program at 8:30 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.; Saturday, December 24: The Children's Choir will sing at the Family Service (6:00 p.m.); Sunday, December 25: There is no Sunday School; only one Worship Service at 10:45 a.m. Pre-K THROUGH 6th Grade - The month of December will be devoted to play practice and the Christmas Story. This year's program is called Twas the Night Before... Two readers will share the Christmas Story from a beautiful storybook as we see the characters in the story come alive. Practice will be during Sunday School through December 11th. We will also practice during the 10:30 a.m. service on December 4th and also on the 11th. Dress Rehearsal will be Saturday, December 17th at 10:00 a.m. in the Sanctuary. We will have a pizza party at Noon to celebrate the kids' hard work. The kids are also invited to stay and help wrap the giving tree gifts after we have pizza. Our older youth will be joining us for pizza and gift wrapping.
A Reminder to All: There will be no Sunday School on the morning of Christmas Day!

Children's Choir Schedule

Saturday, December 24: We sing at 6 p.m. Family Service; Sunday, January 29: We will sing at the 10:30 a.m. Service; Sunday, February 26: We will sing at 10:30 a.m. Service; Sunday, May 14 (Mother's Day): We will sing at the 10:30 a.m. Service; Sunday, June 18 (Father's Day): We will sing at the 10:30 a.m. Service

The Children's Choir practices each Sunday from 9:10 to 9:30 a.m. before Sunday School. Thanks, again, to Suzanne Walters for the terrific job she has done with our kids! They sang The Lord is My Shepherd on Sunday, November 20, beautifully! Also, thank you to Taylor Roman for accompanying the choir with her flute. It sounded great! The girls were outstanding! Thank you to all of our wonderful singers and musicians!

Youth

The Youth will sponsor a Giving Tree this Christmas season for several families in our community who are in need. The Giving Tree, located in the Narthex, has tags with gift suggestions for these families. Please take one tag (or more), purchase the item and bring the gift, unwrapped with the giving tag attached, to church by Friday, December 16. The youth will be getting together on Saturday, December 17, at 12:00 p.m., to have pizza and to wrap all of the Giving Tree gifts so they will be delivered to the families before Christmas Day.

There will also be a box by the Giving Tree for household items like toilet paper, tissue paper, paper towels, napkins, bar soap, toothpaste (adult & child varieties), shampoo & conditioner (adult & child varieties), dish soap and any other household items that will help with day-to-day living for these families. We will be putting together care packages for each family with the items that are donated. Please help our youth to help these families have a Merry Christmas and feel God's love through this great service project.

The Youth Sunday Evening Advent Service will be on December 11, beginning with dinner at 5:30 p.m., and followed by an enjoyable service that focuses on Christmons. We will provide an opportunity for families to make their own Christmon to take home with them. Since we will be responsible for preparing the dinner and service that evening, we will be contacting our youth and their families to help with this evening.

The Youth of Zion continue to collect gallon milk, water or juice jugs that are made of clear plastic. We will be making luminaries out of these jugs for Christmas in order to line the church property for a beautiful holiday effect. Finally, there are still a few Cookie & Brownie Jar Mixes left for \$5.00 each. These make great teacher or family gifts for the holidays. We have Chocolate Chip Cookie, Country Oatmeal Raisin Cookie, and Chocolate Brownie Jar Mixes available.

The Winter Gathering, always a great favorite among Zion's Youth, and an exceptional event organized by the Lutheran Youth Organization of our Northeastern Ohio Synod, is set for the weekend of January 6-8, 2006. This year's theme is Choose Christ. The gathering will focus on how "choices" in our lives make a difference and how God intends for the Scriptures to help us with the choices we make. David Shearer, from AGAPE, and Rachel Kurtz are the invited speakers for the weekend. Zion usually has quite a group that heads north to the Holiday Inn, right off the Independence exit on I-77. We gather at the church on Friday afternoon at around 4:00 p.m., and try to leave in time to get there around 6:30 p.m. These weekends have been unbelievably enjoyable. We stay at the Holiday Inn Friday and Saturday nights, and return Sunday around lunch time. There are workshops galore, several social gatherings, and lots of recreational options. The cost is a \$25 non-refundable deposit per person, with the youth budget and youth fund picking up an additional \$45. See Steve Ross or Wayne Sleese with your interest.

AS ALWAYS, THANK YOU FOR YOUR AMAZING SUPPORT OF ZION'S AMAZING YOUTH!

Church Council News

Perfect attendance: that says it all. The support of Council members working together and the support of the congregation are making a difference. In attendance were Laura Thompson, Carol Rossbach, Jayne Schrader, Dave Palumbo, Lorin Beaber, Peter Fenney, Cindy Ferry, Bob Lancashire, Ann Lemmo, Steve Ross, Renee Schrader, Sharon Stout, and Pastor Sherwindt. Dave Palumbo presented a Treasurer's Report for October that showed Income year-to-date moving ahead of Expenses year-to-date due to a generous month, where monthly income exceeded monthly expenses by just over \$3,000. Attendance figures for October matched this good news, as we are on our way to making sure that average annual attendance at worship does not drop below 170, which is where it has been for the last two years. We would like to grow, and in many ways we are growing; but this bottom line stability will help us feel that we have a sure foundation for moving ahead. We were happy to welcome three new members to Zion: Jim and Beverly Dansizen, and their son, Howard. The Dansizens are very active in the North Canton community, and oversee the publishing Our Town.

Stewardship Notes

A heartfelt "Thank You" to the congregation of Zion! Your generous giving of your time and money is producing visible results. Events and ministries such as the Craft Show, Youth Halloween Party, workdays at the church, the Congregation Meeting, the Children's Choir, our Communion Class, and more: all have been well attended and supported. Financial donations for the Food Pantry's Thanksgiving Turkey drive, Habitat for Humanity, church renovations, and the General Fund (that covers our operating expenses): all have exceeded expectations. This has enabled Zion to help others in the community and to show a slight surplus of \$35.00 year-to-date.

Clearly, God is at work at Zion and momentum is building! It feels good being part of the effort and seeing the positive impact that we can have on the church and community when we work together. Zion is growing stronger and healthier with each additional member that attends a church event, lends a hand to one of our ministries, or donates towards financial goals. Even attending worship contributes to the fellowship and health of our church.

As the renovation of the bathrooms nears completion, we will look to the next phase of our renovation plan: a new sound system for the Sanctuary. More details on that will be provided as we begin getting estimates. If you are interested in getting more involved, feel free to contact any of the members of the Zion Connection, the Church Council, or Pastor Sherwindt; and "get in on the action" at Zion!

Peace of the Lord be with you, The Stewardship Committee

Men of Zion

The Men of Zion gathered for a delicious dinner prepared for us by Tina Beaber on the Wednesday evening of November 16. We'll also be meeting for dinner the third Wednesday in December, which is the 21st. While that luscious lasagna served in November will not be on the menu, we do anticipate a great evening, with more than our share of good food, great fellowship, and growing friendships. All men are invited - no, expected - to join us.

We were very happy with the turnout we enjoyed for our two clean-up days, one in October, and another on November 12. Much was accomplished, as we cleaned out the gutters, picked up the yard, cut back our flowers, and made plans for trimming the trees around the church. The pancake breakfast was outstanding. Our thanks to our chefs for the month: Tina Beaber and Chris Thomas. Our thanks, as well, to all who joined in our efforts to keep Zion looking beautiful.

SENIOR BIRTHDAYS

December 7 - Dorothy Jenkins; December 12 - Fred Elsass; December 27 - Ruth Brigham

DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

12/04 - Dale & Faye Shankle; 12/04 - Jerry & Kathleen Iams; 12/07 - Barry & Susan Williamson; 12/12 - Charles & Shelley Shankle; 12/12 - Don & Shirley Hertler; 12/15 - Charles & Shirley Cavender; 12/28 - Fred & Carolyn Elsass; 12/31 - Steve & Linda Ross

The Women of Zion

THE CHANCEL GUILD CHRISTMAS DINNER will be held Tuesday, December 13, 2005. Our social gathering begins at 6:00 p.m., with dinner served at 6:30 p.m. All Chancel Guild members and one guest are welcome. The cost is \$9.00 per person, and we ask that reservations be made and paid in cash by Sunday, December 4, to Helen Heller or Kay Davis. The menu consists of cranberry salad, pork tenderloin, baked sweet or white potato, green beans with bacon & onion, rolls & butter, angel food with custard & fruit topping, coffee and hot tea. We hope to see everyone there. **THANKOFFERING SUNDAY** made the week-end of November 12-13 a great celebration of the work and witness of the Women of the Church. In addition to assigning women to roles as worship leaders, changing such things as the Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness, adding special litanies, and finding hymns highlighting the role of women in our lives, we have collected close to \$1,000 in Thankoffering envelopes. Our thanks to you - men and women - for supporting the Women of the Church at Zion.

The monthly **WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY** will meet on Tuesday, December 20, continuing our focus on Acting Boldly with the fruit of the Spirit. Patience is the fruit of the month. What is bold patience? It is actively pursuing a goal while also waiting calmly for God's answers. What if God's answer is No, and how do we handle God's Yes's? Have you ever enjoyed the gift of patient listening? Do you often practice it: hearing with understanding, letting others know how deeply you value them? These are the kinds of questions we will explore as we look more closely at our fruit of the month.

Advent

Yes, the Advent Daily Devotional Guides are out! Our thanks to all of our members who took the time to prepare a meditation, and to all of our members who will take the time to read them. This is surely the busiest time of year for many. Family schedules and personal agendas fill with meetings, programs, parties, all sorts of obligations. In choosing between meditation and manic shopping, prayer often loses out. How do we carve out moments of quiet so that we can open ourselves to God's presence?

Perhaps we have to lower our sights from hours spent with families at home and lots of time for worship and prayer. Between traffic jams and parking lot crushes, scribbling holiday notes and decking our halls, there may still be ten minutes - or even five - when the family can sit quietly around the light of the Advent wreath.

Zion's Daily Devotional Guide for Advent is designed to fit into your schedule, whether once a day, or just once a week. Whatever time God gives, let's make sure we don't forget to carve out some

space for growing closer to God and to one another as we prepare to receive the child who is coming, Christ the Lord ... Christ our Lord.

Thanks, again, to Taylor Roman, Becca Coulter, Kelly Walters, Laura Thompson, Laura Kay, Lisa Roman, Mabel Kolarik, Gregg Evanoff, Carol Rossbach, Brian Kay, Emily Whalen, Mark Morris, Garry Leed, the Apostle Paul, Betty Tracy, Blair Wood-side, Pastor Sherwindt, Pete Fenney, Debbie Fox, Roberta Rownd, Matthew and Ben Mathie, Carole Singer, Chuck Danner, Dave Bower, and Paul Harvey: for the time you took, for the thoughts you offered.

ADVANCED GIVERS

Last year, as the month of December came to a close, a handful of families gave their giving for 2005 in 2004. Some did this for tax reasons. Others did this because they were asked if they wanted to help us make a down-payment on the 2005 budget. For some, capital gains made such gifts possible and desirable. Whatever the reason, we received \$36,000 in Advanced Giving last year. That was absolutely incredible! It meant that every month we were able to count on \$3,000 in support for the Operating Budget. What is even more important, the generosity of some inspired support among many others, as we have maintained a healthy relation between income and expenses all year long.

As you now know, in October income pulled ahead of expenses for the year. In November, it looks like we extended that \$35 surplus to about \$500. Again, this may not seem like much to many; but it is great news for Zion. It means that if we remain vigilant and generous in our giving, there is a good chance that we will reach our budgetary targets, and exceed them, perhaps by a wide enough margin to erase the slight deficit left over from 2004. That's the goal, and it looks very much in reach.

So, if you would like to be among Zion's Advanced Givers, taking a look at what you expect to give in 2006, and giving it in total or in part by the end of December 2005, consider this brief note your invitation. If you would like to talk with someone about whether this might make sense for you, then Pastor Sherwindt, our President (Laura Thompson), the Treasurer (Dave Palumbo), or our Resource Ministry Elder (Cindy Ferry) would be good persons to contact.
