

GREETINGS FROM THE PASTOR:

March has roared in like a lion, at breakneck speed, and, like Lent, has arrived much too soon to find us ready for the changes that are in store. In this regard, we can speak about the pace of Lent and the early arrival of Holy Week and Easter. The annual community *Stations of the Cross* service held on Good Friday used to be outside at the corner of Maple and Main. This year we will be inside protected by the warmth of Walsh University's newly completed Our Lady of Perpetual Help Chapel, fully aware that while March 21st is the arrival of Spring, it is still much too soon to count on spring-like weather. We can also talk about the challenges that have been brought our way with the arrival of 2008, which, since the end of January and for much of February, has visited us with wintry weather that has led to higher heating bills and heftier expenses for snow plowing and salting. We will see part of these effects in this month's Financial Facts, but much, much more in the months to come.

But mostly, when we think about the challenges we face with the reality of change, it is the continuity of staffing presence and program leadership that comes to mind. As you read (*on page 3 in this newsletter*) about the business Church Council discussed at our February meeting, you will be startled to find that our music ministry, the food pantry and our church office – areas where we have grown comfortable with the familiar faces and weekly patterns that have come to characterize our ministry – will sooner or later take on a new look, sooner with regard to the church office and later with regard to the music ministry. But whether it turns out to be sooner or later, it has become clear that March has ushered in a season of change at Zion.

As often happens, life's interests, commitments, and challenges are in a constant state of flux; and that is what we have heard from Diane Dunphy, Shirley Cavender, and Suzanne Walters as they have been thinking about their lives and ours. Diane has taken a new job. Shirley and Margaret have taken another look at their seven years of service with the food pantry. Suzanne has found that she's accumulated too many commitments, with too few hours in the day and not enough days in the week to feel comfortable with all of the responsibilities that go hand-in-hand with the position of Music Director. We know the story. We've heard it before. And we are deeply sympathetic with the reasons given for these changes, and so very appreciative for all that these fellow workers in the kingdom have shared with us. They've inspired our involvement, shared their love, and they have our total unconditional support.

We know that the Lord will provide as we move forward with the work God has called us to do. The very season of Lent is an annual reminder that life is more like a pilgrimage and a journey than investing everything we have in making this earth our home. One of the important lessons in Lent, Genesis 12:1-4, to be precise, reminds us that God's call to Abraham involved leaving the place he called home, the place where he felt comfortable, and required the courage and faith to follow God's lead to the place where God's faithfulness and Abraham's blessing would be more fully revealed. It is, to be sure, difficult to muster up the faith that believes that God will, in fact, provide; but that is the biblical record. That is the challenge of faith, learning how to trust in God's promise as we maintain our focus on growing in love and service by grace.

CHURCH COUNCIL NEWS

We began the year with good attendance: Carol Rossbach, Jayne Schrader, Dave Palumbo, Tina Beaber, Betty Tracy, Mary Humbert, Bob Lancashire, Steve Ross, and Pastor Sherwindt. We missed Mark Votaw, Jim Fidler and Chris Thomas, and we are still looking for a Worship Ministry Elder.

Pastor Sherwindt thanked our thespians for their performances during our Lenten dramas (Jim Fidler, Pete Fenney, and Dale Jacobs), and everyone expressed appreciation for our hosts, who have offered really delicious dinners (the Men of Zion, the Chancel Guild, and the Senior Choir this far). The support of members in attendance has been a bit disappointing; but our dinners and our dramas have been exceptional.

Tina Beaber thanked Council members, the congregation, and our youth for a wonderful response to our entry into the Souper Bowl, a great tradition that combines our enjoying the big game with reaching out to folks who need the very basics to live from day to day.

ZION'S FINANCIAL FACTS: JANUARY

Carryover 2007 Surplus	3,765.17
Income for January	14,580.88
Expenses in January	<u>18,396.93</u>
January's Deficit	(50.88)

Expenses are running ahead of schedule with utility bills and snow plowing and salting adding to the costs of winter in Ohio. Our income, on the other hand, has been on the light side of normal. We are going to need more generous giving in order to avoid falling too far behind our budget goals and guidelines for 2008.

We thank you for your generous support!

MORE COUNCIL NEWS

Much of the conversation of January's meeting looked ahead to some significant changes during the coming year. Part of these changes will be seen in the property projects that are being discussed by the Boiler Task Force and overseen by our Sanctuary Renovation Task Force. Other challenges will involve the Music Program, the Food Pantry, and the Church Office.

We mentioned in last month's newsletter that Suzanne Walters has been dealing with a hectic schedule at work, pressures at home, and too much to do at the church. She has decided that she will need to pull back from her commitments to our music program with the end of the choral year in June. We'll talk a lot more about what this means for Zion in the months to come.

Shirley Cavender has also found herself rethinking her commitments that have grown in depth and breadth over the years. Shirley and Charlie have a new grandson, with the birth of Ephraim to Candace in February. Her interests in devoting time to the challenges posed by hunger in America have expanded to the inner workings of the Stark County Hunger Task Force, along with doing advocacy work with schools, churches and community groups. Let's face it, Shirley and Margaret have been our point persons at the Food Pantry for seven years, and it is time for others to step forward to help build up our ministry of outreach.

Finally, Diane Dunphy – an absolute gem of a find for the Church Office – has found a position in publications that has piqued her interests, and she will be leaving Zion on March 7 to pursue this opportunity. We are so grateful for all that she has offered with her time at Zion, and we wish her nothing but the best in everything that she does.

FAREWELL, DIANE DUNPHY

By the time that some of you receive this newsletter, Diane Dunphy will have already made the transition from the church office to her new job. Her two years among us as Church Secretary have won her nothing but our praise and gratitude. Her annual reviews by Mutual Ministry were always filled to overflowing with superlatives recognizing her outstanding service. Her conscientious attention to detail, pleasant manner and infectious friendliness made the office hum with inviting efficiency. She stepped in right after Christmas two years ago and made herself at home among us; and along the way, she made us feel like she was part of the family.

Whether it was answering phones, preparing the bulletin, helping with the newsletter, she was always there doing whatever she could to get the job done, making sure that we had a lot of fun along the way. Many of us will recall how Diane stepped in as a wonderful helper during the first Youth Missions Craft Show she experienced at Zion. The next year she was clearly in charge, filling in, making contacts, bridging gaps, and getting that massive undertaking hitting on all cylinders. She was a great helper, an effective leader, a willing partner, and a wonderful friend.

We were blessed to have her, and we are happy for her as she takes on a new challenge that promises new opportunities to grow in life's journey. The season of Lent underscores this theme that life is a journey, that God often calls us to leave the place where we've grown comfortable to follow His will as He opens new doors and leads in new directions. We pray God's richest blessings on Diane as she embraces the changes that await her with confidence that she will do much to honor the gifts God has given her. We thank God, and Diane, for making Zion a stop along her way.

HELLO TO HOLY WEEK!

With the arrival of March, we are quickly approaching the celebration of *the Great Triduum*, the church's historic remembrance of the three holiest days on the Christian calendar, from the evening of Maundy Thursday through to the close of the day on Easter Sunday. *The Great Triduum* is marked with services on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday. We are all obliged and encouraged to take the time to honor these holy days with the decisions we make and the worship we offer.

Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday on March 16. Zion has taken well to the practice of waving of our palm branches during the Palm Sunday Parade. It has also become our custom at Zion to feature the Children's Easter Play on Palm Sunday. This year the Sunday School will present *Harriet's Easter Hunt* at the 10:30 a.m. service. Palm Sunday is a festive beginning to a week that quickly turns somber as we head toward the crucial three days of *the Great Triduum*.

We gather for worship on Maundy Thursday at 7:00 p.m., when our service completes the gesture we began with the imposition of ashes on Ash Wednesday. Back then it was the mark of the cross: *Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return*. On Maundy Thursday it is prayers for healing and the anointing with oil: *I lay my hands upon you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, beseeching him to uphold you, to fill you with his grace, that you may know the healing power of his love*. This service can touch our spirits and build our faith, as we pray for the gift of healing for those whom we love, and prepare for the unfolding drama of God's love that leads through the cross of Good Friday to the empty tomb of Easter.

THE END OF OUR LENTEN SCHEDULE LEADS TO HOLY WEEK AT ZION

February 6, Wednesday	7:00 p.m.	Ash Wednesday Worship Service <i>“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”</i>
March 2, Sunday	8:00 a.m. & 10:30 a.m. 5:30 p.m. 6:15 p.m.	Lent 4, Are We Blind to God’s Love? Dinner hosted by the Church Council We are host to St. Paul’s this evening
March 9, Sunday	8:00 a.m. & 10:30 a.m. 5:30 p.m. 6:15 p.m.	Lent 5, Holy Week will soon arrive Dinner hosted by the Youth of Zion The Passion Narrative of St. Matthew

HOLY WEEK ARRIVES WITH PALM SUNDAY AND THE GREAT TRIDUUM

(March 16) PALM SUNDAY	8:00 a.m. 10:30 a.m.	Our Traditional Liturgical Service The Palm Sunday Parade at 8:00 a.m. The Choir sings <i>The King of Glory</i> We feature our Children’s Easter Play <i>Harriet’s Easter Hunt</i> , 10:30 a.m. only Zion’s Praise Team leads our Worship
(March 20) MAUNDY THURSDAY	7:00 p.m.	A Service with Prayers for Healing The Celebration of Holy Communion The Senior Choir sings <i>King of Tears</i> Worship ends by Stripping the Chancel
(March 21) GOOD FRIDAY	12:00 p.m. 7:00 p.m.	Our Ecumenical <i>Stations of the Cross</i> The Chapel at Walsh University North Canton Ministerial Association Zion’s Historic TENEBRAE Service The Choir sings <i>Crucify This Man</i> Special Readings & Special Music A Second Anthem: <i>Ah, Holy Jesus</i>
(March 22) EASTER EVE	5:00 p.m.	The Great Vigil of Easter, featuring Fire, Water, Wind, and Communion
(March 23) EASTER	8:00 a.m. 9:15 a.m. 10:30 a.m.	Our Traditional Festival Worship Choir: <i>Crown Him, the Risen King</i> Zion’s Annual Easter Egg Hunt Great Fun for Kids of All Ages! Blended Service of Heartfelt Praise Zion’s Praise Team leads Worship

GREAT NEWS FROM ZION'S SUNDAY SCHOOL

UPCOMING EVENTS – MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Sunday, March 2: Children's Easter Program Practice during Sunday School at 9:15 a.m.

Sunday, March 9: Children's Easter Program Practice during Sunday School at 9:15 a.m.

Sunday, March 9: Youth of Zion host our Lenten Dinner and lead our Lenten Service

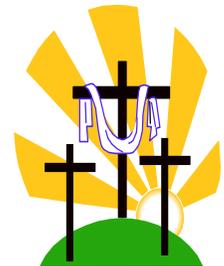
Saturday, March 15: Children's Easter Program Dress Rehearsal in the morning at 10:00 a.m.

Palm Sunday, March 16: Children's Easter Program during the 10:30 a.m. Worship Service

Easter Sunday, March 23: Our Children's Easter Egg Hunt for all ages during Sunday School

SUNDAY SCHOOL: PRE-KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE 6

We will continue practicing for the **Children's Easter Program** this month. This year's program is called *Harriet's Easter Hunt*. We will follow a little girl named Harriet as she goes on an Easter Hunt to find out what Easter really means. Play practice will continue each Sunday during Sunday School through March 16. Practice begins at 9:15 a.m. and includes rehearsal of parts and learning the music for the play. The children will perform the program on Palm Sunday, March 16, at the 10:30 a.m. worship service only. We will have a dress rehearsal on Saturday, March 15, at 10:00 a.m. Dress rehearsal will be followed by a pizza party to celebrate all of the children's hard work.



We will also have our Easter Egg Hunt on the morning of Easter Sunday, March 23, during Sunday School. Children of all ages are invited to go on an Easter Egg Hunt. They will hunt for eggs all over the church and outside if the weather permits. Please have your child bring their Easter Basket on Easter morning, and we will meet in the Narthex at 9:15 a.m.

OUR SNOW TUBING YOUTH & FAMILY EVENT

Thanks to everyone who joined us at the Polar Blast Snow Tubing Park. We had a great night! The chutes were fast and the weather was perfect! Our group was fifty strong: how about that! The pizza, the fun, the soaking wet slopes: it was unbelievable. Afterwards, our older youth, joined by a few youthful adults willing to stay the night here at the church, extended our fun all the way through dawn, and beyond, to the early service at Zion! What a great night! What a great group! We are planning another Youth & Family Bowling Event, which will take place at the end of March or the beginning of April. Be sure to look for details in the weeks to come! You can be sure that it will be another great night of fun and fellowship!

MORE GOOD NEWS FOR THE YOUTH OF ZION

THANKS FOR A FABULOUS SOUPER BOWL

A big *thank you* to Tina Beaber, Renee Schrader, the High School Class and our Catechism Class for all of their hard work on the *2008 Souper Bowl*. They did a great job of raising money and collecting food to help others in need. As a congregation, we are very proud of them for all of their efforts and for a job well done!

And here's a *Thank You* and an update from our Youth: "The Youth of Zion would like to thank the congregation for their support during our *Souper Bowl*! We raised a total of \$527.64 for the Cleveland-based charity *Shoes & Clothes for Kids*. Then, on February 10th, Tina Beaber, Renee Schrader, Steve and Linda Ross accompanied eight of the youth to Kohl's to purchase all sorts of clothes and lots and lots of shoes for the charity ... and boy did we do well! We purchased ninety-four articles of clothing for only \$350.00! The leftover money was used to purchase Payless gift cards so that the kids we were helping could pick out their own shoes! We had lots of fun, learned money management, bonded closer with each other, and served the Lord and his sheep! Mark Votaw will be personally delivering all our goodies to *Shoes & Clothes for Kids*. Thank you, Mark! And a huge *thank you* to the Zion Congregation! God bless each one of you, and God bless our amazing youth!"

OUR YOUTH LENTEN DINNER AND SERVICE IS MARCH 9

The Youth of Zion will be hosting the Lenten Dinner & Drama on Sunday, March 9, 5:30 p.m. The kids and their families will be serving a wonderful meal and, of course, fabulous desserts. During the service, the kids will offer their rendition of Matthew's Passion narrative. We will be contacting the youth and their families with details about dinner and parts for the service.

A FINAL ACME RECEIPTS REMINDER

Thank you to everyone for bringing in your Acme receipts. If you still have Acme receipts dated between September 29, 2007 and February 16, 2008, please turn them in no later than Sunday, March 2nd. We only have until Saturday, March 8th, to process our receipts and turn them into Acme. Thanks again for your support of Zion's youth, we really appreciate it!

WE'VE GOT A DATE FOR VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL!

Vacation Bible School is scheduled for the week of July 21—25, from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Join us as we have a great week of learning and fun in *God's Big Backyard*! The week will be all about service with the themes **Serve Family**, **Serve Friends**, **Serve Neighbors**, **Serve Community** and **Serve Jesus**. As always, we will need plenty of volunteers to make our VBS a success. If you are available and interested, please contact Debbie Fox at 330-966-2433. If you are not available during that week, there are still many other ways to help out. In May and June, we will put out donation cans, along with sign-up sheets for the food and supplies needed for the week as well as sign-up sheets for the work days to do all of the prep work for VBS. We truly appreciate the support Zion always gives for this great event!



A HUGE EVENT AT ZION!

The *Lutheran Men in Mission* in the North-eastern Ohio Synod will celebrate their 2008 Spring Rally, Reunion, and 20th Anniversary here at Zion on Saturday, April 12, beginning at 8:00 a.m. and finishing up at 3:00 p.m. We will look back on humble beginnings of this vibrant and expanding ministry. It will be a day of celebration, great joy, and, of course, delicious food!

The day will begin with morning refreshments and registration at 8:00 a.m., followed by words of welcome, fraternal greetings, and worship. We encourage everyone to bring pictures or any other memorabilia of past events sponsored by the Lutheran Men in Mission. As the Men of Zion know, Dick Spall has been a longtime Zion booster for Lutheran Men in Mission.

Doug Haugen, ELCA Director of Lutheran Men in Mission, will be our keynote speaker. He will talk about our humble beginnings and where we will take this ministry in the future. As many already know, Thrivent Financial for Lutherans has provided matching funds in helping to raise \$1,000,000 by August of 2008. Doug Haugen will talk some about how these funds will be used to strengthen the future for Lutheran Men in Mission, both nationally and regionally.

We will also have some young men present who will share the tremendous impact on their lives that their participation in "Road Trip Events" have had on them. Steve Hisey, Lay Minister at New Horizon Lutheran Church in Homerville will be one of these men sharing his story about the power of God working through ordinary men to change the world and us for the better.

The cost of this event is \$20.00, which will include dinner at Noon, guest speakers, musicians, worship, the works. Please feel free to bring your wife as wives and partners have been an important part of our ministry.

RSVP by April 7 to Dick Spall (330-499-7369)

MEN OF ZION HIGHLIGHTS

The *Men of Zion* enjoyed another moment of great triumph with the first *Sunday Evening Lenten Dinner & Drama on February 10th*. Jim Fidler offered a powerful portrayal of Caiaphas, the High Priest during our Lenten drama, and the Singing Chef led the men in the kitchen with the cooking and during the service with their singing.

Our regular monthly meeting will be held on **March 5th**, beginning with dinner in Luther Hall at 6:00 p.m. This is a busy month for the Men of Zion. We will head out to Holy Trinity Lutheran Church on Middlebranch and 55th to see if we can't help Dale Jacobs defend his title at the Third Annual Lutheran Men in Mission Chili Cook Off. The big day will be Saturday, March 8th, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. A \$5.00 donation from tasters is invited in order to help with the ministry of Urban Ark in downtown Canton. It's a great cause, with some great chili, and all in great fun. Plan to join us. Everyone is invited.

Habitat for Humanity in Greater Canton is on the agenda of Lutheran Men in Mission and the Men of Zion, too. We decided at our last meeting that we would help with the efforts being organized by several of our sister ELCA Lutheran churches in the Stark County area. An organizational meeting scheduled at St. Stephen Martyr on the evening of February 26 needed to be postponed due to weather conditions. Look for more information in the weeks to come.

The *Third Annual Golf Outing* at Raintree Country Club in Uniontown will take place on **Saturday, July 12**. This has become a great way to have fun, enjoy the fellowship, win some nice prizes, and wind up with a great steak dinner, too. It is also a great way to raise money for men and women preparing for ministry at Trinity Lutheran Seminary.

THE WOMEN OF ZION

“Blessed are the pure in heart; for they will see God.” [Matthew 5:8] Session 7 of our study on the beatitudes is entitled *Pure in Heart, Rich in Vision*, and continues to use these teachings of Jesus as a compass for discipleship. We believe that Jesus is the image of the invisible God. What blocks our view of God? What clouds our view of seeing God in others, in ourselves, in our church? Please plan to join us for our Bible study, which is scheduled for **Tuesday, March 18th**, beginning at 9:30 a.m. in Luther Hall.

Don't forget that *Zion's Comfort Givers* continue to meet on the second and fourth Thursdays of the month, *March 13 & 27*, beginning at 9:30 a.m. in Luther Hall. We enjoy coffee, conversation, and being filled with the feeling of knowing that we are helping others through the good that we do.

The *Chancel Guild* was more than ready for their turn in our Sunday Evening Lenten Programs, serving an exceptional dinner with a wide array of delicious desserts on the evening of February 17. Their next meeting is scheduled for **March 11th at 6:30 p.m.**, when the focus of attention will be directed toward repairing the hymnals.

THANK YOU'S TO ZION

Dear Members of Zion Lutheran Church,
First, my apology for the lateness of this note. I would like to extend our heartfelt appreciation for the kindness you shared by providing Christmas gifts for several of our children and their families. Having talked with some of the parents, I know that it was such a joy that their children had wonderful gifts on Christmas morning! We would also like to thank you for providing several families with food when there were crisis situations occurring for them. There are so many barriers for many of our economically disadvantaged students; your kindness has helped to remove some of them.

*Mardy DiGiancinto,
Principal, Glenoak*

Dear Pastor Sherwindt,

Thank you so very much for coming all the way to Montefiore Hospital in Pittsburgh to visit with me! I certainly appreciated it. . . . I'm up and about at home and getting stronger all the time.

*The love of our Lord,
Anna Mae LeBeau*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This past year has been one of many accomplishments for the Adullam Christian Fellowship (in St. Bernard Parish). We are pleased to report that God has moved tremendously on our behalf in 2007. We are rebuilding our Sunday School rooms. The offices are in full operation, as are the kitchen and fellowship hall. We have housed over 1,000 volunteers from all over the country. We have organized summer sports camps for the children of St. Bernard Parish. A new flag football league is now underway. Your prayers and financial support are greatly appreciated. We just want to thank you for your contributions to our ministry.

*God bless you,
Randy & Jill Millet*

ODDS 'N ENDS OF INTEREST

Interested in Lutheran Marriage Encounter?

Thanks to a large gift from an Ohio Family Foundation, scholarships are now offered for couples whose financial circumstances would otherwise make it unlikely that they would attend an Encounter Weekend. So, if you know a couple, including yourself, who may be interested in finding out more about this assistance, please contact the Church Office, or one of our local leadership couples (Bob & Linda Lancashire, or Bob & Darlene Kail).

Did You Know? We are still in the season of Lent, with the color purple seen in the paraments placed on the lectern, pulpit, and Lord's Table, as well as the Pastor's stole and chasuble. In ancient times, purple garments were expensive and hard to find. The dye came from rare sea mollusks that had to be crushed to garner their purple fluid. One small ounce of purple dye required 250,000 mollusks! Then the right kind of fabric had to be placed in the dye, dried and made into clothing, which was time consuming. Generally, only wealthy people and members of royalty could afford purple garments. For example, in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man "was dressed in purple and fine linen." [Luke 16:19] Purple is used in our Sanctuary during Lent because our Lord Jesus Christ is the King of kings!

How About Another Aptitude Test? Many of us know our IQ (intelligence quotient), but how about our SQ (spiritual quotient)? Lent is a good time to think about the quality of our spiritual life. Do you think about God often, or rarely? Do you pray often, or only occasionally? How well do you know the Bible, the Commandments, or the Beatitudes? Take some time during Lent to spend more time in prayer, more time reading your Bible, and more Sundays in worship at Zion.

OUR HEARTFELT SYMPATHIES

We extend our sympathies to Chris and Peg Thomas. Chris' Mom, Margaret Snyder, was called to her heavenly home on February 21, having been blessed with a long and healthy life of 91 years, 1 month, and 5 days. She was a lifelong member of St. Jacob's Lutheran Church on State Road. We were blessed here at Zion both to have known Chris' Mom during these last few years, and to have been asked by the family to preside at her Service of Christian Burial. Pastor Sherwindt's homily offered some explanatory remarks, which are included here:

"When Chris and his sister Helen and I were together talking about this service, I discovered that I would have to cover for the Pastor who knew your Mom best, the Pastor at St. Jacob's for about as long as any can remember, Pastor Herb Garnes III, recently retired and now enjoying life in Guam. I am happy to be here on Pastor Garnes' behalf, and I feel privileged to be here as a part of this service to celebrate the life of Margaret (Thomas) Snyder. She lived a long, full, and rich life – not rich in the sense of silver spoons, a life of leisure, living each day in the lap of luxury, but rich in the love she shared with friends and family, rich in the courage she taught her children, rich in the fortitude she lived and taught in the face of life's hardness, rich in the virtues of quiet strength, humble gratitude, and steadfast faith in a gracious and loving God."

We extend our sympathies to Darlene and Bob Kail. Darlene's Mom, Eileen Johns, was called home to heaven February 8th. Eileen worshiped with us regularly and came to spend much of her week at Senior Independence. She regarded Zion as her home, and would have become a member had we acted with greater pace. On the next page I've included some of the words that I shared at her Service of Christian Burial.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF EILEEN JOHNS

May 30, 1924 – February 8, 2008

What I find interesting about the passage we read from Matthew 25:31-40 is how little are the things that Jesus identifies as ultimately decisive. It's not as though Jesus tells us to climb the highest mountain, or to cross the widest sea or deepest ocean to prove our love and devotion. Jesus isn't asking us to battle the fiercest foe, or enter into the stronghold of our enemies to rescue him from danger, or death. We don't need to be Rambo, or Wonder Woman, or James Bond. We don't need fancy cars, or super powers, or great wealth. We can do these things right where we are, with nothing more than what we already have. Eileen knew this, and she was the master of little gestures of love, small acts of kindness, a word of encouragement, the pat on the back and gentle hug. She was surprisingly observant, and always willing to be helpful. Of course, you all already knew how your Mom was the master of the little things that mean so much. She wasn't one who looked for a lot of fanfare. In fact, it was impossible to drag any news out of her about the good that she did. I read in the *Repository* about her life as a WAC, referring to her role in the Women's Army Corps, where, with the Coast Guard, she assisted with our efforts in World War II, probably offering logistical and secretarial support. I had never heard a thing about it. Eileen didn't talk much about herself, the good that she did, the people she helped, or the needs that she met. But it is these little things that God looks for, these little things that mean so much to the folks who need them, and us.

When I saw her in the hospital, she did a great job explaining to the doctors exactly what was going on with her. I had no reason to suspect she wouldn't walk out the doors of Aultman Hospital and head back home to Bob and Darlene's. Then, when I got to the hospital later that evening, Darlene explained that complications set in, and that it didn't look like Eileen would be discharged at all. I couldn't believe that Eileen would not rally. But the truth is that Eileen knew that God had said it was time. She didn't resist. She waited for those who needed to get here. She said her goodbyes, and then went home to heaven, peacefully, without lingering, with no regrets, just a willing spirit, a gentle look filled with love and gratitude, quietly and graciously taking her leave. Death likes to make it hard for us, but Eileen made it easy, by letting us know that she was ready to go, that she wanted to go, not because she didn't love us, and not because she hadn't enjoyed life, along with the friendships we share, the good times we recall, the tough times we endured, everything about the gifts and challenges that come with living. She loved it all and the folks with whom she shared it. The truth is that we can't go any more graciously than the way we have just witnessed. Eileen knew it was time. She got to tell us what she sensed; she prepared us, thanked us, loved us, and all without lingering, or suffering, or feeling like a burden. She was still young at eighty-four, given more years than she had imagined. She was blessed in life and blessed in death.

I think what she would want us to remember is what our Lord tells us in Matthew 25. It is the little things that matter – the kind word, the almost unnoticed gesture, the pat on the back, the helping hand. Don't overlook the little things. We're not asked to give a million dollars, to climb the highest mountain, sail the ocean blue, or slay fire-breathing dragons. We are just asked to give what little it sometimes takes to share a bite to eat, to reach out when someone needs a hug, to offer our interest and love when things aren't going well. It's the little things that matter most, and you will not go unrewarded – whether it's the gratitude you receive from others, or how gratified you feel within because you know you got it right and you're learning about life's point, by responding to that little voice within, God's voice, saying, "Even as you have done it to the least of these, it's just like you have done it to me." May God be praised! Amen

