

A WORD FROM THE PASTOR

2009 is now past, and while we have not computed all the final figures, we know that we ran a healthy surplus of income over expenses. We entered the month of December with a year-to-date budget surplus of \$4,134.17. During the month of December, with the help of our Advent Giving Tree, we gave over \$1,000 to the Food Pantry's efforts to serve our neighbors through the Christmas season. We continue to receive contributions to the Steve Dague Fund and our HV/AC Fund. Even with the arrival of winter, we were able to extend our budget surplus, not just a little, but quite significantly! We set as our goal at the congregational meeting in October the target of doubling the \$7,609.95 surplus we have accumulated with small but steady positive balances over the past four years. Since we ended October with a deficit of \$1,295.55, it was unclear how well we would do this year; but that changed with November, when the monthly surplus of \$5,429.72 created a year-to-date surplus of \$4,134.17. December's surplus looks like it will add at least that much and more, leaving us with a year-end surplus that could double the accumulated surplus we've been working on for the past four years.

Put simply, this means we will start 2010 with a sufficient surplus to hire that Church Office Secretary we've been working without for well over a year-and-one-half. We are grateful for the faithful members who have offered their time and talents to help keep the Church Office functioning without missing a beat. Helen Alex, Vicki Givler, Mabel Kolarik, Carol Rossbach, Jayne Schrader, Betty Tracy (and others) have been a great help – and great sports – in their willingness to serve in more ways than they might have imagined. But the truth is that all of us know that we need our Church Office Secretary. Sure, it's always nice to see the Pastor's pretty face; but it would be much nicer if he were down the hall at his desk rather than right inside the office door! Look, if it weren't so important to remain focused on all the improvements we've made, with our new sound system, our remodeled restrooms, our Sanctuary renovations, and the new HV/AC system, we would have filled the secretary's position a good long while ago. But as a part of leadership's commitment to steering clear of deficits, while also needing to raise \$135,000 in special property projects and another \$40,000 in special benevolence fundraisers, we decided to endure a little understaffing temporarily.

This "temporary" understaffing will now soon be history. An advertisement for a Church Office Secretary has been placed in *The Repository*. Members are also invited to apply. (Just remember that every applicant except one will not get the job.) The Task Force working on this position replacement includes the Pastor, Jim Fidler (our Council President), Sue Heyard (Council Vice-President), and Brian Milek (Task Force Chairperson). We expect that interviews will be conducted during the middle of January; and we should have a new Church Office Secretary when February begins! I'll confess that it has been quite a challenge keeping our focus on our Lord's call, the church's work, our short-term needs, and pressing projects. But when you see that we've raised all we needed with our many property projects, and that we've found the wherewithal to fund benevolence with unbelievable results, and that we have met our budgetary goals with an accumulated surplus totaling just about what we need to pay our Church Office Secretary for 2010, it's hard not to celebrate what we've done. So, without further adieu, allow me to say thank you. Thank you for a year to remember, for several years to remember, and, most of all, thank you for your support for the life and mission of our church.

AN OVERVIEW OF BENEVOLENCE FOR 2009

Zion takes great pride in supporting the work of the wider church. All of the money that is given to Zion is used to support the work of God's kingdom as best we can envision it and organize ourselves to do it. We are very conscientious in our desire to be faithful stewards with all that money that our members and friends share with us. That goes for what we spend to support our ministry here at Zion and for what we give to support the ministry of others.

\$20,040 Our primary commitment to the work of the wider church comes through the support we give to the Synod. We gave \$20,040 to the *Northeastern Ohio Synod* in 2009. Our Synod keeps about 50% for local efforts here in Ohio, and sends the other 50% to the *ELCA*, which extends the reach of the church across the nation and around the world. The ministries we help through this support are far more than we can name, but they include mission outposts like St. James in East Cleveland, Lutheran Outdoor Ministries in Ohio, Lutheran Social Services in our area and around the state, just to name a few of the ministries we are fond of helping.

\$ 1,000 We also contributed \$1,000 in response to a *Bishop's Special Request* that each congregation give an additional \$1,000 to help offset underfunding of the Synod's budgetary needs. Through the Women of Zion, we contributed over

\$ 603 \$600 to the *Women of the ELCA*, along with supplies for *Lutheran World Relief*. Our major commitment here at home to assist in helping to respond to needs beyond our own is focused on *Zion's Food Pantry and Clothing Closet*. We can also include such efforts as our *Turkey Give-Away* and the *Advent Giving Tree*, providing food for families and even gifts for children during the holiday season. Earlier this year, we were able to use an *End-of-the-Summer Party*, our ministry of *Vacation Bible School*, even the *Hortons' 50th Anniversary Party* to help us

\$ 7,337 raise \$7,337 for the Food Pantry. These dollars really do maximize the help we extend to persons who need us locally. Speaking locally, *Vacation Bible School*

\$ 555 kids generated \$554.74 in support of care for animals through the efforts of our Humane Society. In terms of a helping hand given to friends and family here in the congregation, we continue to offer significant assistance with the *Steve Dague*

\$8,000 *Fund*, another testimony to the generous spirit that thrives among us. These outlets of goodwill are truly impressive, very encouraging, and deeply gratifying.

Zion's established practice over the years, when it comes to setting benevolence targets, is to set a goal of giving 15% of our offering income to ministries other than our own operating expenses. According to our best estimates, this would have set as our goal the amount of \$28,680. Once again, we sailed passed that goal with benevolence support exceeding \$37,535.00! As you can see with the above figures, we gave an amount that is far greater than even the 15% we regard as our fair share of the work of the wider church. For that we are both proud and grateful. You should know that our Church Council tries very hard to make sure that our generosity with benevolence does not leave us with a deficit here at home with our own operating budget. In the end, it is only your generosity that allows us to do that. In fact, it is only your generosity that allows us to do anything. For that, and so much more, we offer our thanks to God and to you.

CHURCH COUNCIL NEWS

Since we moved our Council Meeting up a week, we did not coincide with the Chancel Guild's Christmas Dinner, which meant that we could start at 7:00 p.m. without rushing or inconveniencing members of Council who are also members of the Chancel Guild. In attendance were Jim Fidler, Sue Heyard, Dave Palumbo, Jayne Schrader, Tina Beaber, Cathy Harvey, Chris Thomas, Linda Lancashire, and Pastor Sherwindt. The amazing thing about this meeting, which occurred on the very first day of December, is that Dave Palumbo had a November Treasurer's Report! What is more, his report offered lots of really good news! Our utility bills were \$9,000 less this year than last year, a savings of almost 25%; and actual natural gas usage in 2009 was 34% less than it was in 2008.

The bottom line of all this is that we ran a surplus of \$5,429.72 for the month of November, which turned our year-to-date deficit of \$1,295.55 into a year-to-date surplus of \$4,134.17! Other than our utility bills, there were no real surprises on the expense side of the ledger, just a very big and timely upside surprise with your generosity and our monthly income.

ZION'S NOVEMBER FINANCIAL FACTS

November Income	\$23,022.03
November Expenses	<u>\$17,592.31</u>
November Surplus	\$ 5,429.72
Income thru November	\$205,752.78
Expenses " November	<u>\$201,618.61</u>
Surplus thru November	\$ 4,134.17
Our 2009 YTD Surplus	\$ 4,134.17
The 2008 YTD Surplus	\$ 1,447.07

We thank you for your generous support!

MORE COUNCIL NEWS

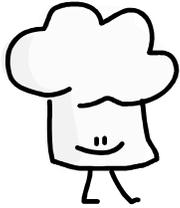
We spoke at some length about timing for hiring of a Church Office Secretary. Mutual Ministry presented a job description that included four major components: facilitating effective communication, assisting with volunteer coordination, helping to manage the church office, and serving as our office receptionist. The position begins at \$10.00 per hour, and involves working Monday through Friday, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Since our focus was on good news, we enjoyed a brief review of several funds for which we have been raising money this year. As a congregation we had hoped to raise \$60,000 over two years for the HV/AC Fund. With eight months yet to go, we stand at \$57,125! While we soared passed our original targets when beginning the Steve Dague Fund, we continue to receive and distribute funds to assist with Steve's recovery from near-complete paralysis. We amazed ourselves by raising over \$30,000 for this fund: \$18,775 was distributed in 2008; \$8,000 in 2009; \$3,290 remains in the fund for 2010.

Looking forward, while replacing Steve Ross on Council remained a reality we would rather deny, the prospect of asking Jim Dansizen to fill out the remainder of Steve's term as Witness Elder made our action very inviting. We asked ... and Jim accepted. Now that's good news. Jim has been a big part of the work and a faithful member of the team Steve assembled with our Witness Ministry. So, it looks to be a good fit. The Lord does indeed provide, along with the good folks at Zion.

FYI: The Festival of Epiphany has become an occasion for CALM to offer a *Service of Lessons & Carols* with Holy Communion. Zion Lutheran on Raff Road will host this service on Wednesday, January 6, at 7 p.m.

THE ADVENT FOOD REVIEW



We enjoyed four inspiring evening services during the Advent season, each beginning with our signature delicious dinner. The Men of Zion got the Advent season off to an exceptional start. Randy Cizek, Dale Jacobs, and Mark Votaw took the lead in preparing Roast Pork, Mac & Cheese, and Baked Beans. Our service featured Jim Fidler in a drama focused on Jesus' gift of Holy Communion. Dave Palumbo led Council's preparations of pasta & Italian sausage the following Sunday. Our Service of Lessons & Carols always offers a great showcase for the wonderfully talented people we've been blessed with at Zion. On the third Sunday of Advent it was the Kays and the Romans who combined forces with the Youth of Zion to wow us with pasta, meatballs, sausage, pepperoni bread, garlic bread, and desserts galore. Zion's Youth then led the way at worship, offering readings that told the story of Jesus as Prince of Peace, with our music featuring songs from Taize, a Protestant monastery in France founded after World War II, dedicated to praying for peace in our world. Our final Sunday in Advent found the Chancel Guild in the kitchen, serving a "Kay Davis" recipe for Sloppy Joe's, with salad, rolls, drinks, and lots of delicious desserts. Carole Singer enlisted husband Ron's help in taking us on a journey that featured Christmas carols from around the world – England, Wales, Norway, Germany, France, and Poland, with Negro Spirituals and American Christmas classics. The service reached its very loud climax when everyone used a vast selection of musical instruments from around the world to end with our making a joyful noise to the Lord! Great food, wonderful fellowship, and inspiring worship: these have become the hallmarks of our Advent season at Zion.

CHRISTMAS WORSHIP, TOO

There are so many persons to thank for all that they do in preparing for the Christmas season. We can begin, of course, with Chris Thomas, Carl Geib, and Bob Lancashire for their help with getting our wreaths and Nativity in place; and we should thank Carol Rossbach and her son David for giving our Nativity characters a complete makeover! When we think of Christmas, we think music; and we have many talented persons to thank for the music we enjoy at Zion: Fred Locker, Phil Lehenbauer, the entire Walters family (Brian, Suzanne, Kelly, Kevin, and Casey), Dale Jacobs, Carole Singer, Beth Heller, Vicki Givler, Helen Heller, Joyce Gibeau, Carol Rossbach, Lorraine Weinman, Darlene Milavickas, Marilyn Espe-Sherwindt, Matt Slease, Tom Votaw, the Children's Choir.... But there are many others who help to lead the worship we enjoy: Jim Fidler, both as actor and reader, and Elaine Fidler, along with Marissa, Ronda, and Miriam Keating, Chuck Danner, Jane Fairman, Betty Tracy, Carolyn Elsass, and our youth – Taylor and Brooke Roman, Laura Kay, Kevin, Kelly, and Casey Walters, Christian, Savannah and Summer Heller, Brandon and Brooke Stout, Lya, Kat, Weston, and Amelia Milek, Carley and Cassie Frank, Nathan and Jeremy Fox, Eric and Justin Dague, Natalie and Christian Henderson, Jaret and Grant Beaber, Mallory and Marcus Rhodes, Ashley Sir Louis, Max Jacobs, Marissa Hilson, Carson Lancashire, and Christopher Thompson. Whether it was Sunday morning, Sunday evening, or Christmas Eve, the voice of our youngest members is such a big part of what makes this season special. Finally, we want to thank everyone who bought poinsettias for the Sanctuary. Red adds such a festive note to the praise we raise and the worship we offer.



GREAT NEWS FROM ZION'S SUNDAY SCHOOL

UPCOMING EVENTS – MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Sunday, January 3: Zion's Sunday School Choir Practice resumes in Choir Room at 9:10 a.m.
Sunday, February 14: Saying our farewells to Alleluia, since Ash Wednesday is February 17
Sunday, March 21, 5:30 p.m. – Our Sunday Evening Lenten Dinner hosted by Zion's Youth
Saturday, March 27: Dress Rehearsal for Children's Easter Program & Pizza Party, 10:00 a.m.
Palm Sunday, March 28: Our Children's Easter Program during the 10:30 a.m. Service (only)

PRE-K THROUGH THE HIGH SCHOOL

We will continue with our regular Children's Choir and Sunday School format during the month of January. The kids will begin with choir practice at 9:10 a.m., with Kelly Walters directing. Then, Pre-K through Sixth Grade will go to their Sunday School class at 9:30 a.m. Catechism and High School classes will begin at 9:15 a.m. each Sunday, with Confirmands meeting with Renee Schrader in the Resource Center, and our High Schoolers meeting with Tina Beaber in the Youth Room. A great big THANK YOU to all our Sunday School classes for decorating their Christmas bulletin boards and class doors. Everyone did a great job. It all looked so festive as we celebrated the birth of Jesus. We will leave these decorations up this month. So, make sure that you take the time to check them out with your children.

TELLING THE STORY OF CHRIST'S BIRTH THROUGH CHRISMONS

We would like to thank everyone who helped make this year's Christmas Program such a great success! The turnout on December 13th was fabulous, and the kids did a great job reading, carrying the Chrismons, decorating our tree, and setting the beautiful Christmas manger scene. We are so grateful to have a great group of kids from our pre-schoolers all the way through to our High Schoolers who pitched in and made this year's program so wonderful! We had a full cast of participants, but we would like to extend a special thank you to Carson Lancashire for stepping in the morning of the program to fill our third Wiseman spot, and for doing a great job.

Also, thank you to the Sunday School leaders and the High School class for helping with our rehearsal and the pizza party afterwards. Thank you, too, to Carol Rossbach for making the large Chrismon symbols, which were mounted on processional staffs and carried into the Sanctuary by our children. Finally, thank you to Kelly Walters for leading the music, and to Suzanne Walters for her accompaniment. Everyone's time, dedication and commitment to our kids is so greatly appreciated! Thank You! Thank You! Thank you to everyone involved!



MORE GREAT NEWS FOR ZION'S YOUTH

THANK YOU TO OUR YOUTH FOR A GREAT DECEMBER

December was a very busy month for the Youth of Zion, and there are many *THANK YOU*'s to share! First, thank you to everyone who so generously supported Zion's Advent Giving Tree this year. It was once again an amazing success! Not only were we able to collect all of the gifts for several families we sponsored from our Food Pantry, but we were able to collect over \$900 in \$25 gift tags, which insured that all of the families we serve would enjoy all the fixings for a festive and full Christmas meal! That is truly a picture of what the Christmas Season is about – sharing God's love and helping those in need! Thank you to everyone for making such a wonderful difference for families right here in our North Canton neighborhoods! It is so wonderful to know that Zion is such a compassionate, loving and overwhelmingly generous congregation! We extend a great big *THANK YOU* to Brooke & Taylor Roman for putting up our Giving Tree this year, and to Dean Fox for helping us to move the Giving Tree in our Narthex into the Sanctuary, where it became our Chrismon Tree for the Children's Christmas Program.

We would like to thank everyone who baked and delivered so many cookies! We didn't quite reach 120 dozen; but we were able to put together well over 70 dozen, which turned out to be over eight hundred cookies. What an extraordinary effort! These cookies went to a very good cause. We were able to treat many deserving people to some very delicious Christmas goodies.

Next, we simply must thank our youth of all ages, along with their parents and adult leaders, who helped to wrap all of the gifts that came in through our Giving Tree. This is an enormous undertaking, and everyone pitched in with great enthusiasm! The kids also did a great job creating Chrismons for Zion's families to enjoy at home, gifts that were given to all the families that joined us the next day on December 13th. But before the arrival of that big day, we had a great afternoon of fun, food, and service on Saturday, December 12th!

Finally, thank you to all of the youth who helped with the Youth Advent dinner and service. We really appreciate the dedication of our youth and their families, especially during the busy holiday season. A big thank you goes out to Lisa, Brian, and Laura Kay for heading up and leading the Youth Advent Dinner, with lots of help from the Roman Family. The meal was delicious and enjoyed by all. Also, thank you to all of the youth and their families who contributed food, helped to serve the meal, and stayed to clean up afterward. Lastly, thanks to all of the youth who did a fantastic job reading their parts during the service that evening.

December was truly a great month for the Youth of Zion and our congregation. Everyone should be very proud of all we accomplished and shared during this holy and special time!

Zion's Sunday School Staff would like to wish all of our families

God's Blessings for a Peaceful & Happy New Year!



FOOD PANTRY THANK YOU

When we think back to our humble beginnings nine years ago, it was quite common to see a committed corps of three – myself (Shirley Cavender), Margaret Porter, and Karen Kirk – on hand to meet the ministry needs of our food pantry and clothing closet. Now, with the group gathered for service in December 2009, we enjoyed the company of twenty-six awesome, selfless volunteers. Does it really take that many volunteers? Yes! We could not have accomplished all that we have if it was not for the great teamwork of our volunteers, together with your great support. I consider all of Zion's parishioners to be team members, because without your continuing support for this outreach ministry, we could not go on. We would not be able to supply food for sustenance, sundries enabling children to attend school, clothing to keep them warm, and hugs to help so many make it through another day.

This Christmas, because of the great support we received through the Advent Giving Tree, every client received a large Christmas ham and a \$10.00 gift card from Fisher Foods. According to needs we could discern, clients were chosen and asked about gifts that would make their Christmas complete. Gift tags were then placed on the Giving Tree. All the gifts were purchased, wrapped, and then distributed on Tuesday, December 15th, when we were received with overwhelming *thank you's* and overflowing tears. Many of these families live right in North Canton. One, in particular, was beside herself with joy and immensely grateful that our church family at Zion gave freely and abundantly to support a stranger. I told her that the moment she entered Zion's door she entered our family and our hearts, and was no longer a stranger – ***and that is surely the God's honest truth!***

THANK YOU'S AND MORE

Dear Zion Lutheran Church Youth,

Thank you so much for the wonderful, hand-made cards you created for the children who are hospitalized here at Akron Children's Hospital. The children who need to spend time with us always enjoy receiving special gifts from special friends during their stay. Your cards will surely bring many smiles.

Thank you also for the friendship bracelets for the children. They, too, will bring much joy to our sick patients.

Thank you for choosing to brighten the lives of patients in our care. Please know that you have made a difference and that we truly appreciate your thoughtfulness. We wish each of you a happy and healthy holiday season.

*Sincerely,
Judy H. Pedrotty,
Director, Volunteer Services*

Martin Luther King, Jr., born on January 15, 1929, will be remembered on January 18. His was a witness inspired by the life of our Lord Jesus. Here is one of his many memorable quotes: "Hatred paralyzes life; love releases it. Hatred confuses life; love harmonizes it. Hatred darkens life; love illumines it." Amen

THE WOMEN OF ZION

Thankoffering Sunday in November provided a very nice follow-up to Blanket Sunday in October. With Blanket Sunday, the Women of Zion filled 33 boxes with 64 quilts, 22 blankets, along with 67 school kits and 48 health kits, and sent them off to Lutheran World Relief. With Thankoffering Sunday, the Women of Zion sent \$603 to ELCA headquarters to help with the ministries of the Women of the ELCA. We thank the women for their generosity, and the congregation for your generous support.

The Chancel Guild's Christmas Dinner on Tuesday, December 9, continued the theme of exceptional food for Zion's members during the Advent season. Dinner was delicious: jello salad, chicken, pot roast, mixed vegetables, grilled asparagus, and a very light (but luscious) crepe for dessert. Helen Heller led devotions. Edna Smith conducted a brief business meeting; and the Chancel Guild's plans for their Advent dinner were set. That evening, previously praised on page 3, made for a delightful celebration of good food and a great service. Our thanks for the extra service required with additional communion services during the holiday season, along with the added responsibility of caring for so many poinsettias.

All women are invited to join us for our monthly Bible study, which meets in Luther Hall on the third Tuesday, which this month is January 19 at 9:30 a.m. January's session continues our study of Romans, with a focus on Paul's rhetorical flourish in chapter 8 praising the power of God's love and proclaiming our share in its eternal victory over death. Nothing – no where, no how – will ever separate us from the love of God, which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen

ODDS 'N ENDS AT ZION

Thank you to the Daughters of America:

The Mary Lincoln Council of the Daughters of America meets in Luther Hall on the second Monday of every month. Their organization has also scheduled state-wide conferences at Zion, too. Following their December meeting, they decided to help our Christmas efforts through the Food Pantry by contributing to our Advent Giving Tree. We appreciate their generosity, and we thank them, one and all: Carolyn Wise, Lenora Walter, Joann Varian, Janet Snow, Virginia Smith, Eileen Lower, Evelyn Knouff, Jean Kennedy & Jean Fisher.

Thank you to the Parkview Dinner Club:

There are a number of local groups and organizations that have gotten involved in helping families in need through our Food Pantry & Clothing Closet. The Parkview Dinner Club – fun-loving, out-going, and others-oriented – understands that there are many ways to enjoy God's gift of good food, with gifts to our Food Pantry being one such outlet of goodwill and care for others. We thank you for your generosity. Many of our members encourage their friends to join in the fun of working together to help others in need. In fact, another *join-the-fun* connection is our local **AARP, chapter #2894**, which has faithfully brought food to Zion to assist in our ministry of reaching out with love and food.

Thank you to our friends and members:

Support for the Advent Giving Tree took many forms: gift tags were taken; presents were purchased and wrapped for delivery; cookies were baked and distributed; and the \$25.00 Christmas dinner tags were over-subscribed, with ten more coming in than were originally on the tree! We raised \$900 for our Food Pantry and the families we serve. What great generosity and compassion.

THE BOOK OF FAITH INITIATIVE – ALIVE AND WELL AT ZION

What comes to your mind when you hear the word *Bible*? Do you remember learning Bible stories in Sunday school? Memorizing Bible verses? Family devotions? The *Lutheran Women Today* Bible studies? Maybe you're new to this Bible stuff and it isn't part of your memory bank at all. Or maybe what you picture is a beautiful, but seldom opened coffee-table Bible.

Perhaps you associate the Bible with old-fashioned language, outdated moral codes, and strange prophecies. Does the idea of reading the Bible make you think about long-ago people and events with no relevance to today? Does the idea of studying the Bible make you worry about losing your faith?

Most Americans, religious or not, have heard of and read part or even all of the Bible. It is arguably one of the most often referenced books — or set of books — in our culture. Pastor Sherwindt has sometimes referred to the authority of the canon, and the long process by which the Bible came to be recognized as an authoritative canon in the church. In its most basic definition, the Bible is a diverse collection of writings, divided into two main sections:

- the Old Testament, which tells the story of God's relationship with and work on behalf of the Hebrew people;
- the New Testament, which shares the story of Jesus, God's Son, and his teachings, death and resurrection, as well as the experiences and faith of the first followers of Jesus.

It seems simple enough, but its meaning – and its significance to the Christian faith – is far more complex and profound. As Lutherans, members of the ELCA believe that the Bible is the written Word of God. It creates and nurtures faith through the work of the Holy Spirit and points us to Jesus Christ, the living Word and center of our faith. And in reading the Bible, we are invited into a relationship with God that both challenges us and promises us new life. The Bible tells the stories of people living their faith over the centuries and, through its demands and promises, forms us as a people of faith.

As we read it, the language of the Bible becomes our language. It shapes how we think and speak about God, about the world, and about ourselves. What is more, we become renewed, enlivened, empowered as the language of Scripture forms our hearts, our minds, our community conversation, and our commitments.

We have a calling as the people of God. Part of our calling is to know, hear, share, and be rooted in scripture. We are renewed, enlivened, empowered and sent by the word. As we live into our calling, as people who are formed by scripture, we become renewed in our faith, enlivened through the Spirit, and empowered through the cross of Christ to serve God and neighbor. The ELCA Book of Faith Initiative invites the whole church to become more fluent in the first language of faith, the language of scripture; and that is precisely what we are doing with our Adult Forum on the last Sunday of the month during the Sunday School hour in Luther Hall. Come and join us, as we open the scripture, and allow the scriptures to open our hearts to the living presence of our Risen Lord. That's Sunday morning, 9:15 a.m., in Luther Hall.