

## A WORD FROM THE PASTOR

Happy New Year! Advent is the beginning of a new church year, which always serves as a good opportunity to look forward and back, looking forward to the next year with hope, while also reflecting back on the past year with gratitude. First, we'll start with looking back. This past year has been extraordinary by many measures. God has blessed us with a host of new members and friends. The weather was phenomenally mild in keeping winter's expenses down and monthly surpluses up. We began the year with an Early Bird Giving Plan that came just at the right time. Council pledged \$2,500 in Early Bird Giving, and challenged the congregation to do the same. That \$5,000 grew to \$12,000 and we never looked back. We've been healthily in the black all year long, going 10 for 10 with monthly budget surpluses.

That set the stage for thinking about adding an Internship to our congregational future. We've had Interns in the past, back in the 1970s. We know the strength it can add to our staffing, the excitement it can add to our sense of mission, and the purpose it serves in our desire to contribute to the work of the wider church. We talked about the idea of an Intern in Mutual Ministry in March, introduced the idea to Council in May, created an Internship working group in June, explored the application process in July and August, hosted open meetings to talk about the idea with the congregation in September, and overwhelmingly voted to approve our applying for an Intern at our Congregational Meeting in October. That, too, is quite an impressive march from mentioning an idea to formulating a plan that leads from thought to action.

Speaking about moving from thought to action, the Ninth Annual Youth Mission Craft Show was another reason for marveling at what can happen when a good idea leads to effort, action, resolve and results. We rented more than 60 craft tables, sold more than 300 German dinners, sold oodles of tickets for our Theme Raffle Baskets, and made more than \$4,500 for the Youth of Zion. It was a total congregational effort, with the Youth of Zion, the Men of Zion, the Women of Zion, Church Council, almost every member, even our Food Pantry Ministry, all having a hand in this wonderful success. We thank God, and all of you, for making this event and this year a great blessing for what we do, who we are, and how we serve. So many things have come together so well this past year that we can't help but look forward to the New Year.

That New Year arrives with Advent, which means that our Sunday Evening Advent Programs begin with dinner at 5:00 p.m. on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, with Council featuring Divitis' Italian sausage, with pasta, salad, and lots of desserts, and Zion's Senior Choir leading our service with two Advent anthems. It will be a strong start to what we hope will be another good year for Zion. The Chancel Guild and the Senior Choir will lead us through Advent 2 on December 9<sup>th</sup>. The Youth of Zion and our Sunday School kids take the lead with Advent 3 on December 16<sup>th</sup>, with the Children's Christmas Program in the morning and our *Celebration of Chrismons* in the evening. Finally, with Advent 4 on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, Carole Singer returns with her *Christmas Carols from around the World*, always a great culmination to a wonderful season, which will climax, of course, with Christmas Eve at Zion. December is a busy month, filled with lots of opportunities for worship and service, inviting your participation and support so that we can end the calendar year with strength as we begin the liturgical year in style.

ZION'S ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES

**The First Sunday of Advent: Gathering as Families Welcome the New Year**

Sunday, December 2, 8:00 a.m.: Our Traditional Service, with the Senior Choir singing  
Sunday, December 2, 10:30 a.m.: Our Blended Service, led by Zion's Praise Team  
Sunday, December 2, 5:00 p.m.: Our First Advent Dinner hosted by our Church Council  
Sunday, December 2, 5:45 p.m.: Jesus is the Bread of Life and the Light of the World

[The First Sunday Evening Advent Service welcomes the arrival of the New Year with a focus on Jesus Christ as the Bread of Life and Light of the World. Our Senior Choir will lead our worship, which follows the *Bread of Life* setting; and they will offer two choral anthems, too!]

**The Second Sunday of Advent: The Bread of Life and Light of the World**

Sunday, December 9, 8:00 a.m.: Our Traditional Service, with the Senior Choir singing  
Sunday, December 9, 10:30 a.m.: Our Blended Service, led by Zion's Praise Team  
Sunday, December 9, 5:30 p.m.: Our Second Advent Dinner hosted by Chancel Guild  
Sunday, December 9, 6:15 p.m.: Jesus is the Bread of Life and the Light of the World

[Our evening program again features the many talents that Zion possesses with our Choir and our Praise Team. Join us for an evening service that helps us prepare for the birth of Christ.]

**The Third Sunday of Advent: Gathering as Families around Chrismons**

Sunday, December 16, 8:00 a.m.: Our Traditional Service, with the Senior Choir singing  
Sunday, December 16, 10:30 a.m.: Children's Program, *A Traditional Christmas Pageant*  
Sunday, December 16, 5:30 p.m.: Our Third Advent Dinner hosted by our Youth Leaders  
Sunday, December 16, 6:15 p.m.: *Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace*

[Our morning service celebrates the role of children in telling the story of Christmas, and our evening service tells the story of Christ's coming through symbols depicted with Chrismons.]

**The Fourth Sunday of Advent: Singing Carols from around the World**

Sunday, December 23, 8:00 a.m.: Our Traditional Service, with the Senior Choir singing  
Sunday, December 23, 10:30 a.m.: Our Blended Service, led by Zion's Praise Team  
Sunday, December 23, 5:30 p.m.: Our Fourth Advent Dinner hosted by the Men of Zion  
Sunday, December 23, 6:15 p.m.: Celebrating *Christmas Carols from around the World!*

[Our grand finale is a joyous delight. Plan to join us. You'll be glad you did; and so will we!]

**Our Christmas Eve Schedule at Zion: Two Services, 6:00 p.m. and 8:30 p.m.**

Monday, December 24, 6:00 p.m.: Our Family-Friendly Service, with special music by the children of Zion, Zion's talented members, plus our Carol Setting for Holy Communion  
Monday, December 24, 8:00 p.m.: A Traditional Choral Concert and Carol Sing for All  
Monday, December 24, 8:30 p.m.: Our Traditional Candle-Light Service, with Zion's Senior Choir singing, as well as our special Christmas Carol Setting for Holy Communion

## CHURCH COUNCIL NEWS

Lorin Beaber called our meeting of Council to order at 7:00 p.m. Members in attendance: Brian Milek (Vice President), Juanita Cignetti (Secretary), Dave Palumbo (Treasurer), Beth Shaheen (Resource), Todd Elsass (Property), Cathy Harvey (Caring), Beth Willis (Social Outreach), Dale Jacobs (Worship), Renee Keith (Learning), Vicki Givler (Parish Life), and Pastor Sherwindt. We know that we need to find a replacement for Valerie Robbins, who having recently tied the knot with her husband Alex, now lives in Pensacola, FL. (Wouldn't we all like to be there right about now! Actually, you'd be surprised by the number of snowbirds we have who call Florida home during these winter months.)

Back to the business at hand: Our Treasurer had more good news to share as we enjoyed yet another monthly surplus in October, with Operating Income exceeding Expenses by \$290.62. Through ten months, our year-to-date surplus now stands at \$6,478.53. We are thankful for what has thus far been an extraordinary year. We would surely like to go 11 for 11 with some good numbers in November, which would lead us into December in the best shape we've been for quite some time.

### FINANCIAL FACTS FOR OCTOBER

October Income	\$17,956.77
October Expenses	\$17,666.15
<b>October Surplus</b>	<b>\$ 290.62</b>
Income thru October	\$205,251.78
Expenses " October	\$198,773.25
<b>Surplus thru October</b>	<b>\$ 6,478.53</b>
<b>2012 YTD Surplus</b>	<b>\$ 6,478.53</b>
2011 YTD (Deficit)	\$ (4,657.28)
Look at the difference:	\$ 11,135.81!

*We thank you for your generous support!*

## MORE COUNCIL NEWS

**Worship Ministry, Dale Jacobs:** The Advent and Christmas schedules are set, complete with hosts for our four Advent dinners (see page 3). There will be two services on the Monday of Christmas Eve (6:00 p.m. & 8:30 p.m.), with a Choral Concert & Carol Sing at 8:00 p.m.). We'll have two services on Sunday, December 30<sup>th</sup>, 8:00 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.

**Learning Ministry, Renee Keith:** The Youth Missions Craft Show was a huge success. Our Sunday School Thanksgiving Service Projects went well. Now it's on to Advent and Christmas. The Advent Giving Tree will invite Christmas gifts and dinners for the families we serve through our Food Pantry; and the Christmas Program will be another great one, *A Traditional Christmas Pageant*.

**Membership News:** We took some time on Christ the King Sunday to celebrate the connections we've made with a number of friends and members who have strengthened our congregational family: Fred & Margaret Leffler, Dick & Barbara White, Mark Sickafoose, and his wife Renee, Tony Niesz, Fred Cathers, Richard Biggerstaff, Joan Cogan, Richard & Linda Zumkehr, and most recently, Jon, Barb, and Julie Elsass. We are still hoping to receive more members; but God has once again been good to us as we continue to grow in love and service by grace.

**Treasurer's Report:** We have been blessed in many ways, including our performance with the 2012 budget. Our Early Bird Giving Plan put us nicely ahead and in the black early; and we have improved on that early plus with monthly surpluses. We were also blessed with a mild winter, low utility bills, and not much in the way of snow-plowing. Giving has improved a bit on last year's level, while expenses are lower by about \$10,000.00!

## **MORE COUNCIL NEWS**

**Parish Life Ministry, Vicki Givler:** The Women of Zion celebrated Thankoffering Sunday on November 18<sup>th</sup>, when a good number of women participated in leadership roles in our worship services. Some sang with the Senior Choir, others with the Praise Team. Some served as Readers, Intercessors, and Assisting Ministers, while others served behind the scenes with the Chancel Guild, or as Ushers, or planners. We thank them all: Juanita Bathol, Tina Beaber, Joan Cogan, Corky Coulter, Debbie Fox, Barb Elsass, Marilyn Espe-Sherwindt, Sue Everhart, Jane Fairman, Elaine Fidler, Sue Geib, Joyce Gibeaut, Vicki Givler, Cathy Harvey, Helen Heller, Beth Heller, Savannah Heller, Marissa Keating, Ronda Keating, Miriam Keating, Mabel Kolarik, Linda Lancashire, Carol Rossbach, Jayne Schrader, Carole Singer, Melanie Slease, Edna Smith, Linda Smith, Laura Thompson, Betty Tracy, Kelly Walters, Suzanne Walters, Lorraine Weinman, Beth Willis, and Linda Zumkehr. We would also like to thank everyone who supported the work and witness of the Women of the ELCA with a Thankoffering.

**Property Ministry, Todd Elsass:** An outdoor clean-up day was scheduled for Saturday, November 17, which was a beautiful day for cleaning out the gutters, patching the parking lot, and bagging leaves, lots and lots of leaves. We would like to thank all who joined in our effort: Lorin, Jaret, and Grant Beaber, Todd and Verle Elsass, Carl Geib, Cathy Harvey, Bob Lancashire, Brian and Weston Milek, Dave Palumbo, Adam Schrader, Pastor, Chris Thomas, and Beth Willis. Perhaps you've noticed that a pine tree was removed from the patch of grass that grows between the Bixler Preschool and the parsonage. Again, we want to thank everyone who pitched in to help.

## **MORE COUNCIL NEWS**

**Mutual Ministry, Brian Milek:** Mutual Ministry met to look back at what worked in 2012, and one of the things that worked was setting a fuller schedule of meetings to build camaraderie and a common sense of joint purpose for the work we do, *which is to foster the continuing spiritual development of our leaders and staff. We do this by listening, sharing, and planning the means to advance the overall mission of our congregation.* With this in mind, we set meetings for February, March, August, and September, as we look ahead to redefining the position of Church Office Secretary, filling it, and then getting ready for budget recommendations for 2014.

**Caring Ministry, Cathy Harvey:** The Food Pantry & Clothing Closet were very active in November, distributing 95 turkeys, complete with all the fixings for Thanksgiving dinner. We entered the month with \$4,295.33 in our Food Pantry Fund. In preparing for Thanksgiving, we received \$1,097 in donations for this ministry, along with lots of food and a good number of turkeys; and we incurred expenses totaling \$1,143.39. Fortunately, holiday giving overall helps to make up the short-term deficits we experience with the special generosity we extend with Thanksgiving and Christmas. Your support is very much appreciated and it is always welcome.

**A Glimpse Ahead to November:** It may be a bit early to project exact figures for giving in November; but an initial look at Operating Budget Income and Expenses has put us on track for running a slight surplus as we head into December. That would make it 11 for 11 in terms of monthly surpluses this year. What an extraordinary record for us, and what an extraordinary pattern of giving from you! As always, we thank you for your generosity and support for the work of our church.

## GREAT NEWS FROM ZION'S SUNDAY SCHOOL



### HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO:

### UPCOMING EVENTS – MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

- Saturday, December 15:** Dress Rehearsal for Children's Christmas Program 10:00 a.m.  
**Saturday, December 15:** Pizza Party and Giving Tree Gift Wrapping Party at Noon!  
**Sunday, December 16:** The Children's Christmas Program at the 10:30 Service (only)  
**Sunday, December 16:** Youth of Zion & their families host the Advent dinner, 5:30 p.m.  
**Sunday, December 16:** Youth assist with Celebration of Chrismons Service at 6:15 p.m.  
**Monday, December 24:** Zion's Sunday School will sing at our Family Service 6:00 p.m.  
**Sunday, December 30:** There will be No Youth Sunday School Classes this morning!

### PRE-K THROUGH THE SIXTH GRADE

During December we will combine our Sunday School lessons with practice for this year's Christmas program. We will involve all of our youth, including those in Catechism and High School, with many different roles. We will have speaking parts for those children who are interested in these parts, along with other non-speaking roles to round out our program. This year's program is *A Traditional Christmas Pageant*. We will enjoy the wonderful story of the events surrounding Christ's birth once again with a "traditional" play, music, and a cast of great kids. The larger part of the Sunday School Hour on December 2, December 9, and December 16 will be spent preparing for this program, which will be performed at the 10:30 service on Sunday, December 16<sup>th</sup>. Time is of the essence. We will have a Dress Rehearsal, our Annual Christmas Pizza Party, and a Gift Wrapping Party for the Giving Tree gifts on Saturday, December 16<sup>th</sup>, with all of this starting at 10:00 a.m. We hope to be finished around 1:00 p.m.



There will be Sunday School classes for all ages on Sunday, December 23<sup>rd</sup>. There will NOT be Sunday School classes for our youth on Sunday, December 30<sup>th</sup>. That gives our youth and their teachers a Sunday off. We will resume our normal Sunday School schedule on Sunday, January 6<sup>th</sup>, which just happens to be the Festival of Epiphany, when Christmas is celebrated in Eastern Orthodoxy. Sunday School classes for all ages will begin at 9:15 a.m.

### A FEW WORDS OF THANKS TO OUR YOUTH AT ZION

Thank you to all of our youth for the great job they did decorating this year's Thanksgiving bags for 32 Siffrin Group Homes and 63 of the families we serve through our Food Pantry. Our youth, from ages 3 through 18, beautifully decorated 95 grocery bags for this year's project. We would also like to thank all of the families that donated these bags, and rolls, too, as part of the food that went into the bags. The youth and Sunday School staff would also like to thank the leaders and volunteers of Zion's Food Pantry for all of their time and hard work in making such a big difference in the lives of those in need. You are all greatly appreciated!

## MORE GREAT NEWS FOR ZION'S YOUTH

### **CHRISTMAS IS A SEASON OF GIVING**

The Youth will again sponsor our Advent 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. We are also hoping to help **all** of the families we serve through our Food Pantry by giving them Christmas dinner. So we have placed tags on the tree for a \$25 donation for Christmas dinners in addition to the gift tags. Please take one (or more) of the tags, purchase the item, and bring the gift, **unwrapped** with the tag attached, to church by the date listed at the bottom of the tag.



The youth will be getting together on Saturday, December 16<sup>th</sup>, at Noon (after the Christmas Program rehearsal) to have pizza, and then to wrap the giving tree gifts so that these gifts can be delivered to the families we would like to surprise before Christmas day. Please help our youth help these families have a Merry Christmas, so that those who give and those who receive can feel God's love through this great service project.

As an added treat for our pantry families, the youth and their families are being asked to donate boxes of "kids-friendly" cereals (like Fruit Loops, Lucky Charms, Apple Jacks) and canned soup to help these families enjoy the holiday season. These items can be placed in the red wagon in the Narthex, or given to your child's Sunday School teacher.

Again, thank you for all your support! Our church family is a wonderful family of loving and giving people. While this is true the whole year long, it especially rings true during the Holiday Season; and we are so grateful for everything that everyone does to help us help others!

### **YOUTH TO HOST ADVENT DINNER ON DECEMBER 16**

Advent has arrived, along with our wonderful Sunday evening Advent dinners and services. So, on Sunday, December 16<sup>th</sup>, the youth will host the Advent dinner. We are planning a delicious dinner, finished off with lots of great desserts, and we will be contacting the youth and their families about donating items for dinner, helping to set up, serve, and clean up for that dinner. Dinner starts at 5:30 p.m. So we will need all of the youth at church by 4:15 p.m. to get ready. This is always a great dinner and we appreciate everyone's help in making it happen!

Our youth will also be helping with the Chrismons Service that is scheduled for the evening of Sunday, December 16<sup>th</sup>. The service starts at 6:15 p.m. It tells the story of Christ's birth using symbols from Scripture. We will need help with the readings and we will need children to carry and hang the Chrismons on the Christmas tree.



**Zion's Sunday School Staff would like to wish all  
of our families a very Merry Christmas and  
a Peaceful and Happy New Year!**



## ZION'S FOOD PANTRY

We met between the services in Luther Hall on the Festival of Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday of the church year, to say Thank You to Jayne Schrader for showing us that we have the resources to oversee this ministry we have come to love and value, reaching out to families in need, and inviting them into our church on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays so that we can provide some food, some clothes, some household items, with lots of our love and God's. It's a ministry that began more than a decade ago, and Jayne represents the third leadership team that has helped Zion serve God and our neighbors through this ministry.

Jayne is now looking forward to the blessing of spending lots of time with what will very soon be two grandchildren, which means we are looking to assemble a fourth leadership team to help with the oversight of our Food Pantry. Jayne wanted to make sure that she was on board to oversee this year's *Great Turkey Give-away*, which went superbly; she will help with our distribution of Christmas hams by leading from behind the scenes to guide yet another opportunity to serve.

Council is very much aware of the need to move forward with getting new leadership in place for yet another year of growing in love and service by grace. We know that, as with Jayne, we are looking for someone with a strong presence at worship, because it is our love of God that drives our desire to serve. We are also looking for someone who, like Jayne, works well as a team leader with the team of congregational leaders that's already in place helping to strengthen our sense of community and the many ministries we offer as a witness to the love of Christ alive among us and working through us. We trust that God's grace and your support will facilitate another smooth transition in leadership.

## THE WOMEN OF ZION

The date for the *Chancel Guild Christmas Dinner* is set for Tuesday, **December 11<sup>th</sup>**. Our hostesses this year are Carol Rossbach and Betty Tracy. The cost is \$13.00 per person. The evening's Social Hour begins at 5:30 p.m., with dinner served at 6:00 p.m. Please let Betty Tracy know of your desire to join us by Tuesday, December 4<sup>th</sup>.

The women of Zion meet for their *monthly Bible study* on **Tuesday, December 18<sup>th</sup>**, in Resource Center at 9:30 a.m. Our study is *Gathered by God*, and Session 4 "Shakes It Up" as we join the church in Jerusalem after the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Holy Spirit shakes up the place and empowers believers to speak the Word of God with boldness. It's not just about speaking with power. The Holy Spirit also enables us to pray with faith. If you've ever read the Book of Acts, you've noticed that prayer plays a featured role: Acts 1:14, 1:24, 2:42, 7:59, 9:11, 10:9, 12:5, 16:25, 28:8. Private prayers, congregational prayers, prayers that bubble up from the depth of our being, petitions thrown heavenward when we don't know what else to say, conversations with God at the end of the day, pleadings by the hospital bedside of loved ones: many and varied are the prayers that draw us closer to God and one another. You are invited to join the Women of Zion at their monthly Bible study. Don't forget: that's Tuesday, December 18<sup>th</sup>, in the Resource Center at 9:30 a.m.

Speaking about joining the women of Zion, the *Comfort Givers* can use your company this month. They meet on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursdays, December 13<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, beginning at 9:30 a.m. in Luther Hall. As the old saying goes, many hands make work light. Yours are just the hands we're looking for. We can always use the help. See you there.

## THANK YOU'S AND MORE

*Dear Members of Zion,*

Thank you all! Thank you, Pastor, for your enjoyable visits and for bringing communion to me in the hospital. Thank you, Church Family, for your prayers and cards. I am looking forward to being back in the Lord's house. Again, thank you all for caring,

*Sincerely,  
Ann Semple*

### **OUR CHRISTMAS POINSETTIA TREES:**

We have resurrected our two Poinsettia Trees, actually, raised them from storage in the basement, and we need your help to make sure that members buy enough poinsettias to fill our Poinsettia Trees for Christmas Eve. The cost is \$10 per poinsettia plant. We plan to receive delivery on December 15<sup>th</sup>, and display them with worship on December 16<sup>th</sup>. Order forms are included with the newsletter and available in our Sunday bulletins as well. Please have your orders in by Wednesday, December 12<sup>th</sup>. Your generosity is invited and appreciated. Thank you for your interest.

## SAY "YES" AT CHRISTMAS

*And Mary said, "Yes" when the angel came, not knowing all that it would mean. For "Yes" was only the beginning: "Yes" to giving birth in a cold, dark stable, while cows and sheep looked on; "Yes" to a sword that pierced her soul, as her Son died on a Cross, while she looked on. And Mary said, "Yes, let it be to me according to Your Word."*

*But do I? Do I say "Yes" when God calls to me? Oh, not through an angel who comes in the night, but maybe it's a fellow member of the church who asks if I'll consider sharing in the church's ministry, or maybe it's a former friend who calls to ask about mending a broken relationship, or maybe it's a stranger wondering if I can help with food.*

*And for a moment, as I ponder what to say, can I sense God's purpose flickering like a flame in a sudden breeze, only to be snuffed out by my "no", or will it burn brighter with the power of my "Yes"? For "Yes" is only the beginning.*

*"Yes," I'll give my time sharing God's love through service. "Yes," I'll end a quarrel by forgiving another. "Yes," I'll share what I have with another in need. For somehow I know that even with the small questions, God needs to hear my "Yes" as much as He needed to hear Mary's. "Yes, let it be to me according to Your Word."*

*Perhaps that's why Jesus came to the world as a baby, a baby full of questions, needs, and desires, a baby whose needs are so inviting. As Luther once mused, "What could be more inviting than this Babe playing in the lap of his young mother?" The question we need to ask is this: When He asks to come into my heart this Christmas, will I say "Yes"?*

— Gina Bridgeman —

## ADVENT HAS ARRIVED: WE ARE NOW ENTERING THE YEAR OF LUKE

The year of Mark is now past. The new lectionary cycle turns to the Gospel of St. Luke to guide us on our journey from Advent through Easter, from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, from the quaint details of Jesus' storied birth to the gruesome surprise of Calvary. Luke adds grace and charm where Mark provided only a sketchy outline of the character of Jesus' ministry and the outcome of his life. But in leaving the Gospel of Mark behind, we now have the benefit of knowing that nothing is more important for understanding the point of Jesus' life and his call to the church than the event of the Cross.

Luke adds color and style to the stories Jesus told; but Mark has rightly understood that it was not the wonder of Jesus' miracles, nor the power of his preaching, nor even the warmth of his personal manner that held the key to his identity. It was, is, and ever shall be the Cross that establishes Jesus as God's Son, and maps out what it means to follow him. As many of you now know, I love the Gospel of Mark. It broke new ground in joining the Gospel that Jesus preached to the life he lived. As Mark told the story, it became increasingly clear that the Cross of Calvary was not just one day in the life, one dot on the timeline of Jesus' thirty-plus years on earth. The Cross was the defining moment of his ministry, as well as the heart and hope of his message. The shadow it cast illumines our darkness with the light of God's love.

Of the many characters that Luke will introduce, and among the many themes that Luke's Gospel will cover, we will come to see that one particular theme and one particular group of persons have a special place in Luke's heart. These are the poor, the outcast, the forgotten and abandoned. These are the ones from whom Jesus came; and these are the ones to whom he came. The *Magnificat* of Mary, the story of the Good Samaritan, the weeping woman whom Jesus forgave: all of these stories tell of Jesus' openness to those whom the mainstream had marginalized and the powerful ignored. It was not an accident that in Luke our Lord's Sermon from the Plain begins simply with, "Blessed are *the poor*, for yours is the kingdom of God."

With this in mind, it is both appropriate and timely that as we begin the new church year, our focus in ministry has not lost sight from God's call that we reach out to help those who are in need. We ended the old year with a focus on 95 turkeys, complete with all the fixings for a Thanksgiving dinner for 95 families here in our local community. Now we proceed with the call to provide Christmas hams, complete with all the fixings for a Christmas dinner, for all of the families we serve through the ministry of our Food Pantry. This is our way of being mindful of those who are in need, those who are so easily overlooked, often under-served, and always invisible to those whose focus is on themselves, their own troubles, the small circle of their own family, and the few they regard as their friends.

The Jesus we meet in the Gospel of Luke wants us to look beyond race and clan to see our neighbor and friend in anyone who needs our help, and God's. He calls us to open our hearts to all for whom Christ died, because God's love makes them worthy of ours. Family looks different when all whom God calls His children are brothers and sisters in Christ. That's the connection Luke invites us to make when the story of Jesus leads to the life of the Church, when the Gospel of Jesus Christ leads to its sequel, the life of the Church in the Book of Acts.