

## A WORD FROM THE PASTOR

Yes, it's true! Yet another unbelievable year of incredible generosity has struck again at Zion! That is the good news with which we enter another January for what is now the eighth year in a row. Thank you for your generosity and support! Thank you for an incredible December, and for an incredible year. Thank you for an incredible string of years, with budgets in balance, benevolence at record levels, pride in the rich legacy of our past as we prepare for a great bicentennial, and boldness as we embrace our future with hope. God has surely blessed us with the community we enjoy at Zion. May we all use these blessings in ways that contribute to the strength of our church and the work of God's kingdom.

While 2013 continued a string of successful years, it also constituted great follow-through on the strong years we have enjoyed since the initiation of Early Bird Giving back in 2012. We have now been operating from ahead for two years, 24 for 24 in monthly surpluses! The month of December saw Total Income that was the best ever, with over \$36,000 in giving! These figures allow us to begin 2014 with \$14,500 in Advanced Giving, and an accumulated surplus of just under \$14,000! The precise figures of our financial facts are still in flux as members and friends mail in their final end-of-the-year gifts and offerings; but taking this time to herald the good news of a great year is simply our way of celebrating the obvious. Again, thank you for your generosity and support.

Zion values generosity, and these figures show it; but the generous way in which our members and friends support our church does not end with the treasures we share. God's people at Zion have also been generous in sharing their time and their talents. December has been a record month in this regard, as well. Our five Sundays in December, our four Sunday evening Advent programs, with dinners enjoyed, music made, worship offered, Christmas hams given, holiday help extended, decorative touches applied, with giant wreaths, poinsettia trees, giving trees, Chrismons, special readings, special music, choral anthems, Christmas plays: it has been one memorable month, indeed. Let's face it, December is the kind of month that can be completely exhausting; but news like this also makes it incredibly exhilarating.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all! To our Fred Locker, Steve & Mary Jo Robbins, the Kent State Stark Chorale, Zion's Chancel Guild, Debbie & Dean Fox, the Sunday School staff, the Youth of Zion and their families, Dave Palumbo, the Church Council, our Senior Choir, Tony Niesz, the Men of Zion, Mark Votaw, Randy Cizek (and Fritz, too), Dale Jacobs, Carl Geib, Verle Elsass, Chris Thomas, Bob Lancashire, Betty Tracy, everyone who purchased poinsettias, Ron & Carole Singer, Beth Heller, the unforgettable rhythm section celebrating Christmas carols from around the world, Phil Lehenbauer, Jon & Barb Elsass, the Walters family, all of our readers, teams of volunteers who serve with the Food Pantry, the Clothing Closet, the Comfort Givers, office staff, trustees, deacons, worship leaders: all of you make us strong and keep us faithful. It's been a great month, and a great year. May God's richest blessings be yours.

In His service, and yours,  
Pastor Mark Sherwindt

## CHURCH COUNCIL NEWS

December's Council Meeting was scheduled very early in the month on the first Tuesday, and we enjoyed perfect attendance! Mark Votaw called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. Brian Milek, Juanita Cignetti, Dave Palumbo, Cathy Harvey, Beth Shaheen, Todd Elsass, Vicki Givler, Carol Rossbach, and Pastor Sherwindt were present. Brian Milek offered opening devotions.

Dave Palumbo shared the good news that we kept our string of surplus months going with yet another monthly surplus of \$31.93 in November. Over the course of the year, we have been able to keep expenses down both because utilities have remained low and because we have left the Office Secretary's position unfilled. So, while income has not been quite where it was last year, we have been very effective in managing our expenses in a way that has maintained strong positive balances in all church funds. We have a number of property projects we would like to take care of before June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2014, but we are in really good shape as we look ahead to an exciting bicentennial year at Zion.

### **DECEMBER FINANCIAL FACTS & MORE**

December Income	\$ 25,197.96
December Expenses	\$ 25,166.03
<b>December Surplus</b>	<b>\$ 31.93</b>
Income thru December	\$235,926.37
Expenses " December	\$232,106.76
<b>Surplus thru December</b>	<b>\$ 3,819.61</b>
<i>Our Accumulated Surplus</i>	<i>\$ 13,878.62</i>
<i>Advanced Giving for 2014</i>	<i>\$ 14,500.00</i>
<i>Bicentennial Gifts Fund</i>	<i>\$ 23,100.00</i>
<i>Undesignated Memorials</i>	<i>\$ 17,164.93</i>
<i>Our Youth of Zion Fund</i>	<i>\$ 7,983.66</i>
<i>Zion's Food Pantry Fund</i>	<i>\$ 4,593.80</i>

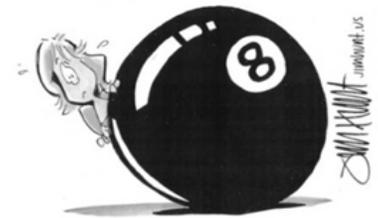
***We thank you for your generous support!***

## MORE COUNCIL NEWS

**Resource Ministry:** Two years ago, Mark Votaw examined our balanced budgets from 2006 through 2011, and noticed that all of our big expenses came in the first quarter, while much of our big giving typically came in the fourth quarter. We were putting ourselves behind the eight ball

in having to play catch up all year long. Council recognized this pattern, and tried something new. We

called our plan **Early Bird Giving**. We were not asking for more, just that members and friends give earlier. We kept track of these gifts, and received more than \$12,000 in Early Bird Giving in 2012, which kept us in the black all year long. We received more than \$8,000 in Early Bird Giving in 2013, which again kept us in the black all year.



This program has reaped great benefits for us. We hope that our patterns of giving have changed. While we will not chart our efforts this year, we hope that members will continue to use our *Early Bird Giving envelopes* so that we can continue the trend of operating from ahead all year long. If you do your part, we'll do ours; and Zion will benefit.

**2006** Zion's Budget in Balance: Yes!

**2007** Zion's Budget in Balance, again

**2008** Zion's Budget in Balance, again

**2009** Zion's Budget in Balance, again

**2010** Zion's Budget in Balance, again

**2011** Zion's Budget in Balance, again

**2012** Zion's Budget in Balance, again

**2013** Yes! Our budget is balanced, again!

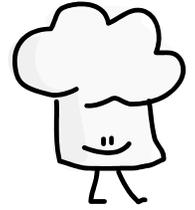
## MORE COUNCIL NEWS

**Property Ministry:** We had some great help in getting the outside Nativity scene up (Carl Geib, Verle Elsass, and Todd Elsass) and the Poinsettia Trees ready for Christmas (Carl Geib, Chris Thomas, and Bob Lancashire). For those who may not have yet seen the light, we want to thank Randy Cizek, Brian Walters, and Mark Votaw for replacing the lights and fixtures in the gym with florescent. We now enjoy three times the light for one-third the cost! In the meantime, we have begun to test Zion's interest in getting some property projects completed in anticipation of our big day on June 14<sup>th</sup>. An informal survey is available in the Narthex, which has listed such projects as resealing and re-stripping the parking lot, making some improvements to the kitchen, repairing the overhangs by the Narthex and Luther Hall, addressing issues of acoustics in the gym. Please take the time to let us know what you think we might do.

**Internship Committee:** Our application to serve as a Sponsoring Congregation in the Internship Program is in the process of being completed. Funding for 2014 is set; we are well on our way to funding the 2015 portion of our commitment as well. We have added Miriam and Ronda Keating to our numbers, and we have begun to circulate a survey that asks about the kind of things we value in serving youth and young families. We have great families, but are finding it challenging to plan programs that increase the number of families and youth involved in what we desire to do. While we anticipate that an Intern can help, we know that we have to set the right priorities, come up with more effective models of leadership, and experience some momentum in growing involvement if we hope to incorporate the resource of an Intern in helping us make progress.

## THE ADVENT FOOD REVIEW

We enjoyed four inspiring evening services during Advent, each one beginning deliciously with dinner. Average attendance approached 80, which is exceptional, with our First Sunday Evening in Advent providing a very strong start. Mary Jo & Steve Robbins took the lead, the evening featured a delicious tortellini soup, a trio of tasty sandwiches, and desserts galore by the Chancel Guild. During the evening service, the Kent State Stark Chorale under the direction of Fred Locker provided an incredible start to the season.



Jeff & Connie Frank took the lead for our Second Sunday Evening Advent Dinner, with lasagna, garlic bread, salad, and again, desserts galore. Debbie & Dean Fox joined in helping to organize this effort in the kitchen, and in the Sanctuary, too, with the Youth of Zion serving as our readers, while the youngest among us decorated our tree with handmade Chrismons. Carole Singer was joined by Jon & Barb Elsass in providing the gifts of special music for the evening.

Dave Palumbo led the Council's effort the next Sunday, featuring Divitis sausage, great pasta, and some fabulous desserts by Tony Niesz. The service featured special music and classic readings, with four anthems offered by our Senior Choir, and an additional piece from Jon & Barb Elsass. The Men of Zion took the lead for our final Sunday in Advent, offering the Caribbean heat of Jamaican jerk pork, Kingston shrimp, with a tropical rice pilaf, a vegetable medley, and again, desserts by Tony. Carole Singer was assisted by Beth Heller in leading us on our journey of Christmas carols from around the world. Great food, wonderful fellowship, and inspiring worship: these have become the hallmarks of our Advent season at Zion.

## THE WOMEN OF ZION

*Zion's Comfort Givers* will get back to their regular schedule in January, meeting on the second and fourth Thursdays of the month at 9:30 a.m. in Luther Hall. That's **January 9th and 23rd**. If you would like to be a part of this great tradition of service, just join us. The women love the company and can use the help. Feel free to join us for coffee, great conversation, and the gratifying feeling that we are making the difference God desires.

*The Chancel Guild* enjoyed their annual Christmas Dinner on the Tuesday evening of December 10<sup>th</sup>. The evening began with punch, assorted nuts, and conversation, followed by a cranberry salad, with *Swiss steak* as our entree, mashed potatoes and green beans, and a pumpkin roll for dessert. Shirley Cary, Sue Heyard, and Betty Tracy were our hostesses for an enjoyable evening. While we're on the topic, we extend our thanks to the women of the Chancel Guild for the extra work required with additional communion services during the holiday season, along with the added responsibility of caring for the many poinsettias that filled our beautiful Poinsettia Trees.

*The Women of Zion* meet for their monthly Bible study on **Tuesday, January 21st**, in the Resource Center, beginning at 9:30 a.m. January's focus is *Offering Hospitality*. All of us want our churches to be welcoming places. Sometimes we fall short. How do we live out the grace God gives with the hospitality we offer in our churches? As we move into a new year, Session 5 invites us to look more closely into the story of *Abigail, the Calm Strategist* for clues that will help us make the connection between God's love and ours. Please feel free to join us for what will certainly be a time of good fellowship and lively conversation.

## BICENTENNIAL NEWS

A funny thing happened on the way to the production of what we believed would be a beautiful bicentennial commemorative plate. Joel Cary and Brian Walters became convinced that a four color design would be more stunning than a single color of black on white: and were they ever right! The design was always compelling: our four church homes over the span of two hundred years of life and ministry in North Canton. But the switch to a full palette of colors brings this history to life. We love it; and so will all of you. While the price went up to produce the plates, the cost to all of us will remain exactly the same: **\$35 per plate!**

Joel Cary, son of Shirley and the late Arden Cary (of *Can-Do Promotions*), saw the beauty, loved the color, and wanted our history to come alive. He decided that the added color would be his gift to *Zion's Bicentennial Celebration*; and what a gift this will be for all of us. The only catch is that instead of selling 100 of these beautiful plates, we now get to sell 125 of an even more beautiful gift for ourselves, our children, and friends of our congregational family. Let's all do our part, and then some.



## GREAT NEWS FROM ZION'S SUNDAY SCHOOL



**HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO:**

### UPCOMING EVENTS – MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

**Sunday, January 5:** The Schedule of Sunday School Classes for All Ages resumes at 9:15 a.m.

**Wednesday, March 5:** The Arrival of Lent with Ash Wednesday, Evening Service at 7:00 p.m.

### SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES: PRE-K THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL

This is just a reminder, we will resume our normal class schedule on Sunday, January 5<sup>th</sup>, when classes begin at 9:15 a.m. Same time, same places, same teachers, and more students! Everyone is welcome, even friends ... especially friends. We look forward to seeing everyone as we start off the New Year 2014!

### CHRISTMAS THANKS FOR “CHRISTMAS BY THE BOOK”

It was another outstanding program by the youth of Zion! A big thank you to everyone who helped with this year's Christmas Program. It was a great program, and the kids did a fantastic job, as always! We hope you enjoyed this year's play, the beautiful music, and a cast of Zion's finest, which included our narrators, Mary & Joseph, Gabriel, Elizabeth, the shepherds, and, last but not least, our three Wise Men.

*Christmas by The Book* told the traditional Christmas Story starting with the Scriptures prophesying the coming of the Messiah and continuing through the birth of Jesus and beyond. Much of the narration and dialogue from the play was taken directly from the Scriptures, allowing our sacred writings in the Bible to present the events of that first Christmas. There are so many filters through which the story of the Christmas must pass in the world around us that it is important to let the original sources tell the original story of the birth that changed the world.

This message reinforced the narrative told through the Chrismons placed on the Giving Tree, when our youth let God's Word lead the way in learning about the Babe born in Bethlehem. Ascension Lutheran Church in Danville, Virginia wanted to make sure that we longed for the “real” real thing, not a Coca-Cola Santa, but the Savior who is Christ the Lord. It's such a simple message, but easily obscured when we are looking in all the wrong places.

A big thank you goes out to our Sunday School staff, parents, and volunteers for all of their help in making our program such a success. We would also like to thank Suzanne Walters for her musical direction, and Brian Walters for his taking care of the sound system. A special thank you goes out to Casey Walters, Kevin Walters, and Jeremy Fox for their beautiful voices in singing *Mary Did You Know?* during our play. Everyone's time, dedication, and commitment is so greatly appreciated! Thank You! Thank You! Thank you to everyone involved!



A BIG THANK YOU FOR A GREAT DECEMBER

December was a very busy month for Zion’s youth, and there are many, many thank you’s to share! First, thank you to everyone who generously supported Zion’s Giving Tree this year. It was once again an amazing success! Not only were we able to collect all of the gifts for three families and our friends at the group home where Dick & Bruce & Karen live, but we were able to collect \$25 for the many families who receive Christmas dinner through the ministry we offer through our Food Pantry. That is truly a picture of what the Christmas Season is about – sharing God’s love and helping those in need! It is so wonderful to know that Zion is a compassionate, loving, and overwhelmingly generous congregation! A big thank you also goes out to Dean & Debbie Fox for working together to get the tree up and the lights on our Giving Tree this year.

Next, we absolutely must thank the youth of all ages, plus parents and adult leaders, all of whom helped to wrap all of the Giving Tree gifts. This is always a lot of fun and is greatly appreciated as we try to pull everything together for this busy season! We had a great afternoon of fun, food, and practice on the Saturday afternoon of December 14<sup>th</sup>, despite the snowy weather! We appreciate everyone coming out and braving the snow and cold! It was a great rehearsal and the kids really did a great job. Also, a huge thank you to our Sunday School leaders and parents who helped with our practice, with our pizza party, and organizing the gifts that afternoon. Everything came together because of the great effort everyone put forth to help make it happen. Thank you.

Finally, thank you to all of the youth and their families who helped with the Youth Advent dinner and service on December 8<sup>th</sup>. We really appreciate the dedication of our youth and their families, especially during the busy holiday season. A big thank you goes out to the Frank family for leading our efforts with the Youth Advent Dinner. The lasagna (with and without meat), the garlic bread, and the desserts were very tasty and enjoyed by all. Also, thank you to all of the youth and their families who set up, contributed food, helped to serve the meal, and then helped clean up afterward. We are so lucky to have such a great group of families that are always willing to pitch in and help! And, thank you to all the kids for reading and hanging the ornaments for the Chrismon Service. This always turns out to be a great evening!

December was truly a great month for the youth of Zion and our congregation. Everyone should be proud of all we accomplished and shared, because all of us helped make it happen. As we begin the New Year, look for some fun events that we will be having for the youth and for our families! We are busy trying to plan these activities and will have more information coming soon!



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

**God’s Blessings for a Peaceful & Happy New Year!**



**THANK YOU'S TO ZION**

*To Zion's Food Pantry & Clothing Closet:*

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!  
Thank you for all the wonderful care you've given me and all the others. May God bless you and keep you in His loving arms.

*Wishing you a wonderful Christmas,  
Jeanne C. and Mary N.*

May your Christmas be filled with joy and happiness that last throughout the new year. Thank you for a great year of God's blessings through you for me and the community. May God's blessings continue for all in 2014.

*Thank you,  
Brenda M.*

*Dear Church Family,*

Thank you for the wonderful meal that you prepared for our family and friends after our father's funeral. It was a comfort to visit with those we don't see often and to see familiar faces from our years at Zion. The food was delicious and the care and concern displayed by everyone was a special memory for all of us in the Babich family.

*Sincerely,  
Helene Babich*

*Dear Pastor Sherwindt,*

Thank you for the comforting and personal message you delivered at our Dad's funeral service and in the cemetery chapel. Zion Lutheran Church was an important part of Dad's life, and we appreciate your shepherding and your visits with him over many years. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ shine over you and the congregation.

*Sincerely,  
Helene Babich*

**THANK YOU'S AND MORE**

*Dear Pastor and Members of Zion,*

During a time like this we realize how much our friends and relatives mean to us. This is just a note to say thank you for visiting Mom at the hospital and at the Compassionate Care Center. We also want to thank you for officiating at the funeral service. Please tell the ladies who helped with the luncheon that we so appreciated the time this allowed us to spend with family. The food and desserts were really, really good. Your expression of love and concern will always be remembered.

*Sincerely,  
Linda Lenz and the family of Betty Lenz*

*Dear Pastor Sherwindt,*

Words alone can never adequately express our gratitude for your support, friendship, prayers, encouragement, and love. You have helped to guide us through our most emotional and challenging days.

*With grateful hearts,  
Becky Volkmann, Don Hertler, Jr.,  
and Susie Van Vranken*

Martin Luther King, Jr., clergyman, activist, humanitarian, and civil rights leader, was born on January 15, 1929 in Atlanta. His life will be remembered on Monday, January 20<sup>th</sup>.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF MILAN "MIKE" BABICH

(September 4, 1923 – December 7, 2013)

The church knew Mike as a soft-spoken, hard-working, fun-loving man, who spoke reverently and humbly about his love for God, family, and life as gifts not to be taken for granted. Mike was always active at the front lines of everything; but came from a tradition that tread lightly around those sacred places where God's presence was named and honored, and his love for life that rose up from a deep-seated passion that was rooted in the depths of his being. I thought that Marc described this sense of his Dad well in the obituary, where he talked about Mike's career at Goodyear capturing two of the great "passions" of his life – cars and racing. They could be called hobbies, or lifelong interests, and they were; but they were, first of all, "passions" because Mike was a "feeling" man – not in the sense that he was a hugger, but that there was a burning and a yearning that was buried deep within that drove him as he found his way through life.

In this regard, I very much appreciated the early experiences recounted in the obituary, which were clearly formative events in Mike's life: born in Minnesota, with deep-seated roots in the family's native Serbia, and two-and-one-half years spent in a German prison camp as a boy, still too young yet to be called a young man. Mike often spoke of that experience in our Sunday School class as we discussed international topics that were a part of classes on war and peace during the Iraq War. He didn't elaborate much on the particulars of that internment; but it fed his passion to think beyond our borders with a love for this country and a desire to lift up peoples around the world who longed for freedom in their lives and safety for their families. He worked hard to enjoy a little bit of the good life, and he always tried to give back. His forty-two years of service with Goodyear took him across the country and around the world. After retiring, he gave back to North Canton by creating a custard stand on South Main Street, *Ro's Custard Creations*, which stands and thrives to this day because of the hard work that Janet and Denny have invested to keep this vision alive.

I knew Mike through the better part of his retirement. I often visited Mike and Rosalie in their home. I saw Alzheimer's take its toll on Ro, and then on Mike. It was difficult for Mike to lose those things he had worked hard to enjoy – the people he loved, the active life he cultivated, then his home, and mobility, too. It was like losing his freedom all over again. His will to resist losing his freedom was harnessed as a young boy in a German prison camp. But this latest struggle was different. The man heading into his late eighties wasn't the man-in-control his strong physical frame suggested for so many years. Aging was no more a friend to Mike than were the prison guards who held him captive decades ago; but it was becoming increasingly clear to all who were close to him that his mind simply wasn't as agile as it once was.

Mortality is a curse we cannot shake, from which we cannot hide, or ever defeat. We are in bondage to this curse and, try as we might, we cannot free ourselves. The Good News of the Gospel is that God has done what we could not. It is the story we celebrate during this holy season. "The divine became human so that the human might become divine." The divine took on the limits of our mortality so that we might share in the gift of God's eternity. This faith sustained Mike during his darkest days – during his youth and at life's end. The Good News of Christmas, our great Reformation faith, the promise of Resurrection: these are the key to the story of our salvation. They come together for us in this service that celebrates life, the presence of God's life in which Mike's life is preserved forever. "In my Father's house there are many rooms", and one of those rooms has been reserved for Mike ... in Jesus' name. Amen

IN LOVING MEMORY OF BETTY L. LENZ

(October 3, 1924 – December 14, 2013)

The deeper our love, the greater the sadness we feel as we mourn the loss of one whose love always lifted our spirits and brought joy to our lives. Even though I only knew Betty for a short time, it was a time rich in the knowledge of what a wonderfully supportive woman she was. I learned this first-hand through the support she offered me; but more importantly, I saw her support as we responded to the challenges presented by Steve's fall and recovery from a serious spinal cord injury, which will soon be six years ago. That's the time during which I got to know Betty's quiet strength and incredibly gracious love. Put simply, I cannot imagine anyone more giving, more loving, more gently encouraging, more willing to be there and ready to help. What a joy and an honor to watch as she became a part of our church family, when we were learning how to live as the family of God.

In talking about how to live the faith that's in us, Paul writes, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to everyone. Don't be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And you will see that the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, and if there is anything worthy of praise, let your mind focus on these things. And keep on doing these things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me...." (Philippians 4:4-9) That "me" in Paul's text could clearly be Betty; and it was Betty for us.

Betty was a great lady, a wonderful woman, with a gentle way about her, and a sense of humor, too. There was one Sunday morning when during the announcements I was describing the plight of our coed softball team and the need for players, especially women; and I mentioned in passing, as she came forward to receive communion, that God might be calling Betty to service. I was just trying to put a smile on her face; and the next Sunday she put a smile on mine. She brought a gift bag, and it had a softball in it, along with \$20 to help cover whatever expenses might be incurred by softball teams. "I can't play," she said, "but I can help." And she surely could, and did. She was funny, supportive, faithful, and attentive both to God's call and to the needs of folks around her. We all got a good look at what God's love looked like, because Betty lived it. She came from modest means, but she knew how to do her humble hometown roots proud. She led a good life, a faithful life, a blessed life. I'd like to close by drawing our attention to a passage in Matthew that tells us more about being blessed and staying humble.

"Blessed are the poor and humble in spirit" – that's Betty – "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those that mourn" – that's us – "for we will be comforted" – by the Good News of God's faithfulness. "Blessed are the meek" – not the weak, but the quietly and firmly supportive, like the firm strength Betty lived and passed on to her four daughters – "for they will inherit the earth." This leads us to the last of the blessings in the Beatitudes: "Blessed are those who stand firm" – who stand firm against the flow of culture around us; for blessings await, the blessings we know Betty is enjoying because she knew how to stand firm against the flow of the world, and how to stand firm with us, always affirming what is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, and worthy of praise. Let's stay focused on the life she lived and the love she shared. That's our message this morning, and the message this season, that God's love is with us and God's life is ours, now and forever ... in Jesus' name. Amen