

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 tenth 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 healthy levels, pride in the rich legacy of our past, and boldness as we embrace our future with hope. God has surely blessed us with the community we enjoy at Zion. May we trust in God's grace and use all of these blessings in ways that contribute to the strength of our church and our work in God's kingdom.

While 2014 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. This quirky program has allowed us to operate from ahead all year long, with our strong fourth quarter propelling us into the next year with surpluses across the board. Once again, the month of December saw Total Income that was the best ever, with over \$42,350 received in giving! We begin 2015 with \$14,000 in Advanced Giving, and an accumulated surplus of almost \$14,000! These figures reflect the strength and resolve of your faithfulness; and we thank you for your generosity and support.

2014 was another very generous year; but it will be remembered for the unending string of events we planned to celebrate our bicentennial anniversary, with special services, featured speakers, former members, and plenty more to remember, along with some significant bicentennial property projects to fund. With all of these priorities to keep in mind, we were still able to keep our eyes on the prize of contributing to the work of the wider church. Mission Support approached \$21,000! Support for the Food Pantry, together with commitments to the Stark County Hunger Task Force exceeded \$7,500! Responding to the needs of neighbors near and far came close to \$3,000! When our generous support of others' ministries get added into the mix, our support for the work of the wider church exceeded \$31,500 in 2014!

2014 was quite a memorable year; and yet, we did more than look back to the past. The Youth of Zion enjoyed a great day at the Akron Zoo. We hosted another successful Vacation Bible School and a hugely successful Fall Craft Show & Oktoberfest, with a very generous down-payment on what should be a great year for youth at Zion. Between the Men of Zion and the Women of Zion, Zion's Comfort Givers and the Chancel Guild, the Food Pantry Crew and our Clothing Closet, Zion's Senior Choir and the Praise Team, the Sunday School staff, Church Council, and the many ministries through which we involve volunteers in the work we do in our commitment to grow in love and service by grace: all I can say is thanks be to God and thanks to you, too, for all that we do together that makes us strong and keeps us faithful.

Let's face it, it has been another great month and another great year for God's people gathered at Zion Lutheran Church. As we greet the New Year, we pray that God will bless us richly so that we can continue to be the blessing God has called us to be for the church and for the world.

In His service, and yours,
Pastor Mark Sherwindt

CHURCH COUNCIL NEWS

Council Meetings in both November and December enjoyed the usual good news of two monthly surpluses, with total income in December exceeding all expectations for another blow-out end-of-the-year display of generosity! What a great way to ring in the New Year. We extend our thanks to all.

While winter already began to take hold in November, our utility bills have not yet reflected the worst that will soon arrive. Expenses have been modest, and giving has been extraordinary, resulting in two more monthly surpluses, and an end-of-the-year surplus of \$2,469.59. We actually exceeded our targets for giving in 2014. We also easily exceeded our goal of maintaining a healthy level of congregational benevolence.

It's been a good year in every way, with all of our various funds sporting healthy balances, all of our bills paid, several important bicentennial property projects now completed, with small surpluses across the board that give us a nice cushion as we look ahead to what is expected to be another very cold winter in northeast Ohio.

DECEMBER FINANCIAL FACTS & MORE

December Income	\$ 24,242.88
December Expenses	\$ 24,196.15
<i>December's Surplus</i>	\$ 46.73
Income thru December	\$306,782.38
Expenses " December	\$304,312.79
<i>Surplus thru December</i>	\$ 2,469.59
<i>Advanced Giving for 2015</i>	\$ 14,000.00
<i>Bicentennial Gifts Fund</i>	\$ 10,382.28
<i>Our Accumulated Surplus</i>	\$ 13,767.09
<i>The Youth of Zion Fund</i>	\$ 7,541.97
<i>Zion's Food Pantry Fund</i>	\$ 6,762.89

We thank you for your generous support!

MORE COUNCIL NEWS

Resource Ministry: We are now becoming very familiar with a solution we call **Early Bird Giving**. The problem is this: the weather in northeast Ohio means that lots of our big expenses come in the first quarter, while Thanksgiving and Christmas mean that much of our big giving typically comes in the fourth quarter. Church Council recognized this pattern, and, in truth, raising awareness about our need for Early Bird Giving has done something about it for the past three years. Regardless of the whether we call this up-front giving Advanced Giving or Early Bird Giving, we will start 2015 with \$14,000 we can begin applying toward the expenses the winter months will bring. We are grateful for this cushion because it means that we can meet our expenses on firm financial footing.

Our call for *Early Bird Giving* has reaped great benefits for us. We hope that this pattern of giving continues. While we will not actively chart our efforts this year, we hope that members will 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 all of us will benefit. Thank you for listening, and for responding with your generous support.

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 Zion's Budget in Balance, again

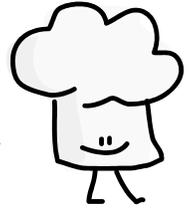
2014 Yes! Our budget is balanced, again!

CHRISTMAS EVE AT ZION

Between the Nativity scene outside and the Poinsettia trees inside, Christmas is always a beautiful season at Zion. Delicious Advent dinners, distinctive Advent devotions, and an exceptional collection of talented musicians and voices providing special music during the Choral Concert on Christmas Eve: what a wonderful way to celebrate the birth of our Lord! There are so many groups and persons to thank for everything we get to enjoy: the Chancel Guild, the Men of Zion, the Senior Choir, the Praise Team, our musicians, each of the groups that hosted our four Advent dinners, the ministries that plan the services, our resident artist, who made the Advent wreaths, and our Christian Ed Director, who makes sure that we have an Advent Giving Tree, which becomes our Chrismon Tree, the final signature touch to a season that keeps the story of salvation at the center of our focus. So thank you, Debbie Fox, Carol Rossbach, Council, Youth, Men of Zion and Chancel Guild; and thank you to Carl Geib, Verle Elsass, Richard Biggerstaff, Chris Thomas, Bob Lancashire, and Betty Tracy, too; and thank you to Dale and Max Jacobs, Brian, Suzanne, Kelly, Kevin, and Casey Walters, Carole and Ron Singer, Jon, Barb, and Julie Elsass, Pastor Sherwindt and Marilyn, Sue Geib, Joyce Gibeaut, Ed Hauck, Beth Heller, Helen Heller, Darlene Milavickas, Matt Slease, Linda Tvorik, and Linda Zumkehr. Because of all you do, Zion is blessed to enjoy a rich tradition that honors the season with all five senses: colors to see, music to hear, food to taste, flowers to smell, with God's love touching each heart, inspiring all of us to grow in love and service by grace. The angel's message on that first Christmas remains in full force still today: "Behold, I bring you good news of great joy for all people." May God be praised!

THE ADVENT FOOD REVIEW

We enjoyed four extraordinary dinners, beginning with the hot chicken sandwiches served by Zion's Chancel Guild on the Sunday evening of Thanksgiving weekend. Their effort was followed by Dave Palumbo's connection with Council and Divitis Italian sausage. Both dinners excelled with a mixture of delicious tastes and great resourcefulness, as the kitchen remained "out of service" due to delays in finishing the installation of our new, up-to-code fire suppressant system. That delay remained in place for the third Sunday evening in Advent, too, when the Franks and the Foxes were joined by Mark Votaw in the kitchen, along with the Dagues, the Rhodes, the Tvoriks, Smuckers, and Browns, the Thompsons, Panzarelllos, and Walters for pasta, a choice of exquisite sauces, along with garlic bread, salads, and desserts galore. Finally, on the fourth Sunday evening in Advent, with the Men of Zion preparing a mouth-watering pot roast, the kitchen was cleared for take-off; and what an inaugural dinner we were blessed to enjoyed! Our delicious dinner was followed by a musical extravaganza featuring instruments from around the world, with Beth Heller singing solos, Carole Singer leading the way, Tom Votaw anchoring the beat and everyone joining in the fun. The season began with Advent wreaths for all to accompany Pastor's sermon on the Advent Window. The next Sunday evening featured special music, with Ed Hauck on organ, Dale Jacobs, the Elsass family, and the Senior Choir. On the third Sunday in Advent, our Youth offered their version of *Christmas* at the morning service, and then told the story of Christmas through *Chrismons* in the evening. It was another great Advent season, culminating in a great Christmas Eve Service. Our thanks to all!



THE WOMEN OF ZION

Zion's Comfort Givers will try to get back to their regular schedule in January, when they will meet on the second and fourth Thursdays of the month at 9:30 a.m. in Luther Hall. That's **January 8th and 22nd**. 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, conversation, and the gratifying feeling that we are making the difference God desires.

The Chancel Guild had an active December because of the added responsibilities that accompany Advent and Christmas. We thank them for tending to our beautiful Poinsettia Trees, while also preparing for our extra Advent services and Christmas Eve, too. We also thank them for their quiet faithfulness in preparing a light but very delicious dinner on a Sunday evening when the kitchen was out of commission.

The Women of Zion meet for their monthly Bible study on **Tuesday, January 20th**, in the Resource Center, beginning at 9:30 a.m. This year's study is entitled *Transforming Faith and Life*, with January's focus on *Repent and Forgive*. Our theme verse is the familiar cry from Psalm 51:10, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." We begin with a look back on what God was doing with King David in 2 Samuel 11–12; and then we focus on how God's forgiving grace in the Old Testament sets the table for the life of the Christian community. The Apostle Paul lays out the challenge in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, there is new creation." Feel free to join us in the Resource Center on Tuesday, January 20th, at 9:30 a.m. You will enjoy the conversation and the company, too.

SENIOR INDEPENDENCE

Dear Zion Lutheran Church,

Senior Independence has operated our Canton-area *Adult Day Center* at Zion Lutheran Church for fourteen years (since 2001). Throughout the years it has been a challenge and a struggle to sustain this site financially with its very low census. It is truly with sincere regret that we inform you that, effective January 30, 2015, Senior Independence will no longer operate this Canton-area Adult Day Center.

This is a decision that was very difficult to make. Senior Independence and the entire staff of our Canton-area Day Care Center have enjoyed many great memories and wonderful times with each of you and your families over the years. Our connection with the Whipple-Dale Workshop is certainly unforgettable, as were the many leftover meals we enjoyed following your various church dinners. We will always remember your hospitality, and the services of healing with *the Ragman* on Maundy Thursday.

We will continue to operate our Akron-area Adult Day Center closer to home in Westminster Presbyterian Church, which is located at 1250 West Exchange Street, near our Rockynol facility on the west side of Akron. If there is any further help or assistance we can offer during this transition, please feel free to speak with Alex Scott (program coordinator) or Daphne Massaro (adult day center director).

Again, thank you for your support of our program over the years. We extend our heartfelt appreciation for everything.

Sincerely,
Sheila A. Flannery
Executive Director

GREAT NEWS FROM ZION'S SUNDAY SCHOOL



HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO:

UPCOMING EVENTS – MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

- Sunday, January 4:** The Schedule of Sunday School Classes for All Ages resumes at 9:15 a.m.
Monday, January 19: Let's Take the Time to Remember the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Sunday, January 25: Zion Hosts Its First Ever Lenten Dinner Summit during Sunday School!
Wednesday, February 18: Lent Arrives with Ash Wednesday, Worship 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 4th, when classes begin at 9:15 a.m. Same time, same places, same teachers, and all the same students! Everyone is welcome, even friends. The New Year has arrived, and we look forward to seeing everyone as Sunday School gets off to a strong start in 2015!

CHRISTMAS THANKS FOR "CHRISTMAS"

What a great program by the youth of Zion! It was a reminder to all of us that the true meaning of Christmas is the celebration of the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. The kids used each letter of the word "CHRISTMAS" to tell us what Christmas is about. The first time through the focus was on popular cultural traditions we associate with the holidays: *C*ookies, *H*olly, *R*udolph, *I*cicle lights, *S*tockings, *T*rees, *M*alls, *A*dvertisements, and plenty of *S*antas to entertain us. But after one time through, our youth realized that if they needed to spell "CHRISTMAS" again, but this time with each of the letters representing what we should truly be celebrating. We looked at different words, words that we drew from the story of our Lord's birth: *C*ensus, *H*ard journey, *n*o *R*oom at the *I*nn, *S*hepherds, *T*reasures, *M*agi, *A*ngels and *S*avior.

We extend a great big thank you to everyone who helped with this year's Christmas Program. It was a fun and meaningful program, and the kids did a fantastic job, as always! And what a great turnout! We hope you enjoyed this year's play, the music, and the cast of Zion's finest. A big thank you goes out to our Sunday School staff, to the parents and volunteers for all of their help in making this year's program such a success. We would also like to thank Suzanne Walters for her musical direction, and Brian Walters for taking care of the sound system. Let's add a special thank you to Casey and Kevin Walters for their beautiful voices. And let's also extend our thanks to an awesome stage crew – Emma & Jacob Parkomaki, and their mom, Chrissy, along with Summer & Savannah Heller, who helped with props and costumes. Everyone's time, dedication, and commitment are greatly appreciated! Thank You! Thank You! Thank you to everyone involved!



A BIG THANK YOU FOR A GREAT DECEMBER

December was once again a very busy month for Zion’s youth, and there are many persons whom we need to thank. First, thank you to everyone who generously supported Zion’s Giving Tree this year. It was again an amazing success! Not only were we able to collect all of the gifts for three families we were sponsoring, we were also able to collect lots and lots of \$25 gifts for many families who look to our food pantry for help with Christmas dinner. This year we distributed 72 Christmas hams, with all the fixings! That is truly a picture of what the Christmas season is about: sharing God’s love and helping families in need. It is so wonderful to know that Zion is such a compassionate, loving, and overwhelmingly generous congregation! A big THANK YOU also goes out to Dean Fox for putting up the tree and the lights for our Giving Tree. Everyone’s help helped a whole lot this year.

Next, we must thank the youth of all ages, and their parents, and our adult leaders who helped to wrap all of the Giving Tree gifts. This is always a lot of fun and everyone’s effort is greatly appreciated! We had a great morning of fun when we got together to practice our Christmas play on December 13th. Our hard work was followed by food, lots of it, treats, lots of them, and fun! We truly do appreciate everyone taking time out during this busy time of year. The rehearsal went very well, thanks to everyone’s cooperation and participation. So, we extend a huge THANK YOU to our Sunday School leaders, our parents, and everyone who helped with our practice, our pizza party, and the gift-wrapping that followed.

Finally, thank you to all of the youth and their families who helped with the Sunday Evening Advent Dinner and the Sunday Evening Advent Service that followed the morning of our Christmas play on December 14th. That was one huge day, and we really appreciate the dedication of our youth and their families, especially during the busy holiday season. When it comes to thinking about the really delicious dinner we prepared and served, a big thank you goes out to the Mark Votaw and to the Frank family for taking the lead in preparing our Advent Dinner. The pasta, the sauces, the salads, with garlic bread, and desserts galore 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 clean up afterward.

It cannot be said often enough, we are so lucky to have such a great group of families! They are always so willing to pitch in and help! Thank you, and thank you, too, to all the kids for their readings during the Chrismon service, and their hanging the handmade Chrismons on the Chrismon Tree. What a great evening to end such a busy weekend for our youth and families!

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.

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

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



LIVING CHRISTIAN UNITY

January 18-25, 2015 is our annual observance of the *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*. The theme for 2015 is found in John 4.7: "Jesus said, 'Give me a drink.'" We are invited to join Christians everywhere in praying *that they may be one*, the prayer our Lord offers with his high priestly prayer in John 17. This annual observance began in 1908 at the initiative of the Graymoor Ecumenical Institute in New York City. In 1966, the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission joined with the Vatican Council for Promoting Christian Unity and began collaborating in selecting a common text for worldwide usage. This year we focus on John 4 and the promise of living water.

Our partners at *Community Christian Church* on North Main in North Canton will host the kick-off meeting for this year's Stark County Hunger Walk: **FEED THE NEED**. Last year's inaugural walk had 269 participants, raised \$9,820.16 in funds and 767 pounds in food for the Akron Canton Regional Foodbank. We look forward to making an even more significant contribution this year in raising awareness and resources as we battle hunger in our community and across the country. The kick-off meeting is Tuesday, February 3, 6:30 p.m. The Stark County Hunger Walk is scheduled for Sunday, May 3rd, starting from Community Christian Church at 3:00 p.m.

(Since we have our partners at Community Christian Church in mind, we'd like to thank them for the support they offer in helping Zion's food pantry serve effectively in North Canton. Through their efforts, Zion receives donations in kind regularly, and over \$1,000 annually in cash through gifts from their Koinonia Class, from other church members and their personal friends. Christian unity is alive and well. Thanks be to God!)

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

We congratulate Ethan Frock for being the first recipient of a scholarship *Remembering and Honoring Doris M. Cogan*, offered on behalf of the Cogan family, with Joan Cogan providing a personal connection here at Zion. The scholarship celebrates the late Doris Cogan's twenty-three years of service in the Bacon Department at Sugardale Foods. Ethan graduated from North Canton Hoover high School in 2011, and has since been moving through Penn State University as a student in Engineering. The scholarship application challenged him to explain the development of his work ethic and to identify the disciplines that have enabled him to be fiscally responsible and focused on completing his degree. In convincing the scholarship committee that he was the best candidate, Penn State will be paid \$4,000 directly to reduce Ethan's college costs this year. We congratulate Ethan (and his parents), and thank the scholarship committee for honoring and remembering Doris Cogan in this way.

(FYI: Joan Cogan is very active in making scholarship resources available to students taking on the challenges of a college education. Please keep announcements about these scholarships in mind because they are actually awarded to people just like you!)

It's been more than a decade since we made the Sunday Evening Dinner & Devotions the format for offering special services during Advent and Lent. This format requires a lot of work and a serious commitment to make them work. *During the Sunday School Hour on January 25th in Luther Hall*, we are having our first ever Lenten Dinner Summit to determine how much support there is to continuing this dinner & devotions format this year. Please make every effort to attend.

THANK YOU'S TO ZION

To Zion's Food Pantry Volunteers,

Thanks so much for your help! A little kindness makes such a difference in the day. Your thoughtfulness certainly made a difference in mine.

*Thanks again,
Jessie Zarlengo*

Dear Members of Zion Lutheran Church,

The family of Audrey Miller acknowledges with grateful appreciation your kind expression of sympathy. Thank you, Pastor Sherwindt, for the beautiful service for our mother. It was a warm remembrance and the knowledge she is now experiencing a beautiful eternal life brings us peace.

Please extend our sincere thanks to all of the lovely women who provided the delicious luncheon afterwards. It keeps us talking about how much we enjoyed it. On behalf of Ellen, Kathryn, and George, and their families, thank you so much.

*Sincerely,
Marcia Miller*

To Pastor and Members of Zion,

Thanks so much for the heartfelt service you led for Michael. Your kind expression of sympathy is deeply appreciated and gratefully acknowledged by our entire family.

*Very sincerely,
Cherie Henson & Family*

We thank Dave and Renee Palumbo for the work Dave did in getting up on the roof twice to get the leaves out of the gutters, and for Renee's timely help in giving the Sanctuary a good cleaning in getting ready for Christmas.

Martin Luther King, Jr.
Civil Rights Leader

Born: January 15, 1929
in Atlanta, Georgia

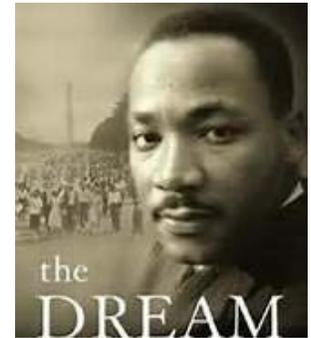
Died: April 4, 1968 in
Memphis, Tennessee

FORMAL EDUCATION:
Morehouse College (BA in Sociology, 1948)
Crozer Theological Seminary (M.Div., 1951)
Boston University (Ph.D. in Theology, 1955)

LEADERSHIP IN LIFE: He became a Baptist Pastor in 1954, led the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955, helped found the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957, helped organize the March on Washington in 1963 (where he delivered his historic *I Have A Dream* speech), received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee in 1968.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was awarded the *Presidential Medal of Freedom* and the *Congressional Gold Medal* posthumously. In 1971, a day set aside as a national holiday to mark his life and its meaning for America.

Congregations of our Northeastern Ohio Synod will host several Commemoration Services, including a service on **Sunday, January 18**, at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, 18615 Harvard Avenue in Cleveland, 3:30 p.m., with Bishop Abraham Allende, preaching. The theme will be *Unsung Women of Faith: Honoring Women of Faith in the Freedom Movement*.



IN LOVING MEMORY OF AUDREY MILLER

(March 2, 1924 – December 2, 2014)

Audrey Miller was among the nicest members of Zion I have had the good pleasure of serving as Pastor. Everyone spoke highly of Audrey, and everyone liked her. As often happens when we are blessed with a long life, we outlive our contemporaries, and issues of health and mobility take us out of circulation. So there are fewer and fewer persons who know how we've contributed to the organizations we've supported over the years. That's what happened to Audrey over the course of the last decade or so. Surgeries, hospitalizations, and rehab programs gradually took their toll as she got used to getting around less and less. Through it all Audrey remained in remarkably good shape. She was able to stay at home, and remained independent in some amazing ways.

Audrey lived the last fifty-seven years of her long life in the *Dogwood City*. About this connection with North Canton, her daughter Marcia wrote, "Often Mom would say how much she loved the 57 years of living in North Canton, thanking Grandma Miller for wanting her Canton home back, which triggered the move to North Canton. She loved being able to walk to Zion Lutheran Church every Sunday, single file, or in a group, down Werstler Avenue, across Portage Street, to Lindy Lane to faithfully sit in our pew on the left, eight rows from the back." Isn't that just how things were, and still are, with members pretty much knowing the pew that's theirs, in this case, on the left, eight rows from the back.

What I heard from members who knew Audrey resonated with the sentiments Marcia shared, in writing, "She had a beautiful disposition, solid, steady, with a gentle sense of humor, an example for all. She commanded respect, and you knew right from wrong. At the age of 84 she was summoned to jury duty, and George remarked, 'Mom, I would not want to go up against you!'" She was "a loving wife of 50 years to her husband George, and a loving mother to Marcia, Ellen, Kathryn, and George, in addition to multiple dogs.... Her loyalties ran deep and her interests were wide-ranging. She was tireless in making sure that she was home for us after school, and there with us as we grew older. We now know the many ways in which she devoted her life to us. She was a loving mother, a faithful wife, and a loyal friend to the end. We thank and love our mother for showing us what a well-lived life looks like."

Marcia's words reminded me of what Proverbs 31 says about women like Audrey. "A good wife who can find? She is worth more than jewels. Her husband trusts her with all his heart, and he doesn't lack anything good. She helps him and never harms him all the days of her life.... She dresses herself with strength, works with willing hands, opens up her heart to people who are hurting, and stretches out her hands to persons in need.... She carries herself with dignity, and smiles as the future unfolds. She speaks with wisdom, and teachings of kindness are on her tongue. She keeps a close eye on the conduct of her family, and she does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children and her husband stand up and bless her. They sing her praises, saying, 'Many women have done excellently, but you have surpassed them all!'"(31:10-12, 17, 20, 23, 25-28)

Audrey Miller was a wonderful mother, a great witness to the faith we share, and just plain nice to everyone who knew her. God blessed this world with her presence. She was a gift, the gift of showing how possibilities become realities through the commitment to care for others, with courage and consistency, loving with all her heart, one day at a time, to the very end. That witness is alive in our hearts; and Audrey is alive through the faithfulness of a God who has promised to love her with a love that will never let her go. This is the promise of the Resurrection, when Christ burst the bars of death to proclaim the victory of God's love over loss, and the triumph of God's life over death.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF MICHAEL HENSON

(February 7, 1948 – December 12, 2014)

I knew Mike, and like you, I liked Mike ... a lot. He was a good man, with a big heart, and an irrepressible sense of humor that would not quit. When I spoke with the family about memories that helped define their love for Mike, it was a conversation filled with laughter, lots of it, and from the heart. As they described some of their earlier memories dating back some thirty or more years, I would never have guessed the kind of character Mike was, but I could easily believe it, both because of the mischievous twinkle I could always see in Mike's eyes, and because of the undeniable affection that was clearly evident in theirs. Monica, I thought, summed up our shared sentiment perfectly: God had loaned us this gem of a man who came at the right time, who was a stand up guy, who stood with his family and left a lasting impression of joy and gratitude....

Mike was a stand up guy who stood up when duty called, and stood out doing it. He served three tours of duty in Viet Nam, and was in the midst of a fourth when combat took its toll and Mike's military service ended with a legacy of faithful, sacrificial, and heroic service. He honored the call to serve and did more than his share to make his country proud. He carried in his body the burdens of this service his whole life long, and especially during the last four or five years. These were the years when I got to know him – heart bypass surgery, kidney disorders, issues with Agent Orange, summed up with the code phrase *factor five*, which was the most severe level of progression, with multiple complications layered upon inexplicably connected health problems. Mike's is an American story, which involves all of us because he served *our* interests and paid a high price for his love, devotion, service, and sacrifice....

In the Second Lesson read today, Paul takes up the topic of resurrection and the reality it promises in 1st Corinthians 15. The entire chapter talks about resurrection; but I am primarily interested in the last paragraph, verses 51 to 57. "Let me tell you about a strange mystery and a wonderful secret. When we die, we will be given new bodies! It will happen in a moment, in the twinkling of God's eye, when the last trumpet sounds. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable; and we will all be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable; and this mortal nature must put on immortality. And when this happens, when the perishable is raised imperishable, and our mortal bodies are clothed in God's eternity, then the Scriptures will be fulfilled, 'Death is swallowed up in life's victory.' As it is written, 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' The sting of death is sin. The power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who has won the victory, and has given it to us through Christ our Lord!"

What a powerful ending God has promised! This is the ending we call to mind today, and this is the ending that means the most, for we are talking about that day when the trumpet sounds and the dead are raised imperishable, and we are given new bodies, uncorrupted by the plague of war and the ravages of time. On that day when the dead are raised imperishable, our bodies will be clothed in God's eternity. And when that happens, then will come to pass the saying that is written, the ringing endorsement that comes from the mouth of the King, the word of the Lord, saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant.... Enter into the joy of the Lord!" This is the Good News we celebrate today. We have been claimed and named by a God who loves us with a love that will never let us go. We have been embraced by God's grace with the promise that claimed us with baptism. This God who loves us with a never-ending love will bless us with His everlasting life. That's our hope, because that's God's promise, which is ours, both now and forever, in Jesus' name. Amen

