

GREETINGS FROM THE PASTOR:

Our Sunday Evening Lenten Dinners are on! That was the result of our first ever Lenten Dinner Summit on January 25th, and then our second Lenten Dinner Summit the next Sunday. In fact, this newsletter was delayed, awaiting the results of this decision. Our focus was on improving attendance that comes with mutual support, an absolute necessity for successful programming. The Sunday Evening Dinner & Devotions format has been a great success during Advent and Lent over the last twelve years. All of us are well aware of the fact that times have changed, and special Lenten (and Advent) services are not as popular as they once were. Yet, Zion, with this focus on great food and simple services, stumbled on a formula that kept attendance well above average. Last year during Lent we averaged ninety at these extra services. I can still taste the delicious food we served; and the services themselves created some unforgettable memories.

But MUTUAL SUPPORT is required to sustain this success. We have been blessed with great groups that host our dinners; but the groups that host a dinner must support the other groups with their presence. Members must value the effort put forth by fellow members as we enjoy special music, some dramatic moments, and an occasional insight into life and faith, all in our desire to honor the season that marks the sacrifice God has freely given ... for us. There is no shortage of reasons why we should worship. What we need is the will: the will to say Yes to God's call, and Yes to Zion's challenge to live the mutual support that makes us a church family called to grow in love and service by grace. This was the substance of our two Lenten Dinner Summits, to ask that we remember the need to respond to God's call and take up our challenge to turn Advent's complacency into renewed commitment during Lent to support one another with our presence at the dinners we serve and the worship we offer on Sunday evenings.

With our discussion lively, and participation widespread, we decided to make a few changes. Lent calls for sacrifice; so we will give up the great feasts and focus on soup and sandwiches. We also want to invite more persons to participate. So we will have sign-up sheets for persons who want to bring a crockpot of their favorite soup. Our different groups will still host the individual dinners, organizing set-up, serving, and clean-up, as well as making sure we've got plenty of desserts and drinks for all. Zion's Chancel Guild, our Youth and their leaders, the Senior Choir & Praise Team, the Men of Zion, Zion's Church Council, even the Pantry Crew will get in the act: we will find ways for all to participate, while making room for new folks who want to join in the celebration of mutual support we hope will be the norm this Lent. Simpler meals, a livelier sense of invitation, seeking wider participation and better attendance: these are the goals we've set as we prepare for five Sunday Evening Lenten Dinners.

Church Council will take the lead for our first Sunday Evening Lenten Dinner on February 22nd. The service that follows will feature our youth in the role of readers as they introduce the Passion Narrative of Mark, with a few dramatic twists, which will include special music offered by Ed Hauck on organ, with the help of Zion's Senior Choir, as we use this Lenten season to grow in our appreciation for the theology of the cross, that iconic symbol that holds center stage in the center window, the third of five newly installed faceted stained glass windows on the east wall of our Sanctuary. Make it a point to join us. You'll be glad you did; and so will we.

CHURCH COUNCIL NEWS

Mark Votaw called our January meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Jayne Schrader, Caring Ministry Elder, led devotions. Also present were Carol Rossbach, Dave Palumbo, Dale Jacobs, Todd Elsass, Jim Fidler, Randy Cizek, Pastor Sherwindt. Heather Hoffman and Renee Keith were excused. We were focused and busy, concluding our meeting with adjournment at 7:56 p.m.

We reviewed details related to our financial accomplishments in 2014: another monthly budget surplus in December; another budget in balance for the year; healthy balances in the Food Pantry Fund, the Youth Fund, and the Bicentennial Gifts Fund; another great year of appreciation in the value of funds held in our Merrill Lynch portfolio; great performance in controlling expenses; generous support of members and friends.

Every year begins with a new set of worries about what the new year will bring; and our January meeting raised similar concerns. What will the costs of winter be? How will the departure of Senior Independence affect our budgetary outlook? How will losing rental income from the parsonage affect our financial outlook? What kind of special property projects are on the horizon this year? Are there programming or staffing costs that might alter our financial plans?

SOME FINANCIAL FACTS FROM 2014

Budget Surplus for 2014	\$ 2,469.59
Accumulated Surplus	\$13,717.09
Advanced Giving for 2015	\$11,000.00
The Youth of Zion Fund	\$ 7,441.97
The Food Pantry Fund	\$ 6,842.89
Bicentennial Gifts Fund	\$13,421.78

We thank you for your generous support!

MORE COUNCIL NEWS

The month of December greeted us with an incident at the parsonage that involved Zion, Midwest Services, the North Canton Fire Department, and concerns about fire safety for the men who live there. As it turned out, faulty venting with the clothes dryer resulted in a mystery smell in the basement that took some time to track down; but in the aftermath of our heightened concerns, we reviewed procedures in place for making sure that an ordinary maintenance schedule was in place. Conversations between Zion and Midwest ensued. While we were all confident that the personal safety of the men living in the parsonage was our highest priority, it became increasingly clear to Midwest that moving into a conventional apartment setting would serve the men best at this time. We agreed that February would be a transitional month, with a move to be completed by the end of the month.

We have recognized over the course of the past year that the physical needs for indoor and outdoor maintenance at the parsonage were growing, while the number of volunteers available to work on these needs was decreasing. We have hosted meetings in Luther Hall on Sundays to provide updates on the challenges we face. We now have an opportunity to speed up the pace of these conversations as we think about what the next chapter for the parsonage will be.

Should it be returned to use as a parsonage? Should we seek to rent it again? What about the sale of the parsonage? Are there deed and title restrictions? Are there limitations related to congregational preference? These are the kind of questions we will want to talk about over the course of the next few months. We'll keep everyone informed.

OUR BICENTENNIAL PROPERTY PROJECTS UPDATE

Last year at this time, following our first Sunday Evening Lenten Dinner, we scheduled a Congregational Meeting where we approved three property projects as a way of celebrating our Bicentennial Anniversary: (1) resealing, and re-striping the parking lot, (2) repairing the parking lot canopies, and (3) targeted improvements in the kitchen, with a focus on installing a new, up-to-code fire suppressant system. We anticipated total costs at \$45,000; and were right on target.

The parking lot project was the first project completed, with a final cost exactly as forecast, \$15,387.00. Vasco Asphalt of Massillon, the company that did this work the last time we did it back in 2002, did a great job again this time. The job called for repairing and resealing our parking lots on the west, south, and east sides of our church, as well as the parsonage driveway, and then re-striping the parking spaces. The resealing and re-striping cost \$10,987.00, and needed repairs cost \$4,300.00. Job accomplished!

Repairs to the two parking lot overhangs, otherwise known as canopies by the companies that built them, Canton Flooring, working with the Brad Bonsky Sheet Metal Company, on a project designed by Ken Dansizen, former member and present brother of Jim Dansizen, were projected to cost \$15,000.00. It took a little longer than we had hoped; but it came in under budget, a tad under \$12,500.00! The work involved replacing some of the underlying foam core, relocating a few squirrels that had taken up residence in the Lindy Lane canopy, repairing the gutters to make sure water drains properly, with a couple of special coats to give the stucco a great finish.

Targeted improvements to the kitchen involved installing an up-to-code fire suppressant system, replacing two small sinks with three industrial-sized tubs, relocating hot water closer to the kitchen, with other details emerging as the project proceeded. We originally estimated that this work could cost up to \$7,500.00; but the fire suppressant system alone cost \$16,400.00! It was more involved than earlier bids projected, and the North Canton Fire Inspector had a more active role in requiring alterations along the way. Finally, when everything was approved and certified, we placed the ovens, stoves, and fire suppressant system into service on December 17.

Between our new faceted stained glass windows, along with repairs and improvements related to the fire suppressant system, the canopies, and the parking lot, we have thus far spent close to \$75,000 on these bicentennial property projects. Some of the money was appropriated from the Master Plan Fund held over at Merrill Lynch; but most of the money was raised through new donations given by members and friends, in large amounts and small. We are, without doubt, deeply grateful for the generosity that was shared by so many. As we reach the one-year anniversary of our Congregational Meeting to approve these projects, we offer our thanks to God and to you for the faithfulness shown and the commitments honored. May God be praised!

Along the way, the Bicentennial Task Force raised and spent almost \$9,000 in hosting special services and guest speakers, with prime rib dinners, end-of-the-summer parties, commemorative plates, bicentennial ornaments, gifts to two synods, daily devotional guides, video narratives: all as our way of saying thanks to the generations of faithful who made two hundred years possible.



GREAT NEWS FROM ZION'S SUNDAY SCHOOL

Happy Birthday to:

UPCOMING EVENTS – MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Wednesday, February 18: The Lent Season begins with Ash Wednesday, Worship, 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, February 22: The Youth of Zion lead worship with the Passion Narrative, 6:15 p.m.

Sunday, March 15: Zion's Youth & Youth Leaders host the Sunday Evening Lenten Dinner

Saturday, March 28: Children's Easter Program Dress Rehearsal followed by a Pizza Party!

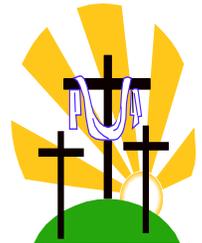
Palm Sunday, March 29: Children's Easter Program during the 10:30 a.m. Worship Service

Easter Sunday, April 5: Our Children's Easter Egg Hunt for all ages during Sunday School

SUNDAY SCHOOL: PRE-KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE 6

Sunday School will continue on its normal schedule during February. As a reminder, Sunday School begins at 9:15 a.m. each Sunday, and ends at 10:15 a.m. Our classes will continue to learn important lessons from the Bible along with much fun and learning for all with crafts, puzzles, games and snacks. Please join us!

During the month of March, our Sunday School classes will continue to meet at the regularly scheduled time, namely, 9:15 a.m. We will have both class time and practice for our Easter program during the Sunday School hour. Please join us!



THINKING AHEAD TO OUR YOUTH AND THE LENTEN SEASON

Think *Mutual Support*: that is the phrase for the season, the substance of our Lenten discipline. We want all of our groups, and our members, too, to support the groups that are hosting each Lenten dinner with their presence. We have done it before; and we can do it again. On the first Sunday evening in Lent, Zion's Youth will read Mark's Passion Narrative. That is a change from the usual routine, because we want to remember going into the season where we're going.

Then, on March 15th, the Youth of Zion will host their Lenten Dinner. The kids and their families will serve a wonderful meal, with fabulous desserts. Since all of the groups have been supporting one another every Sunday, we hope to expect good attendance! There's plenty of time between now and then. So we'll be contacting everyone with more details about dinner and the worship service, too. We will need lots of help and we appreciate everyone's support!

A REMINDER ABOUT ACME COMMUNITY CASH-BACK RECEIPTS

Thank you for turning in your ACME receipts. Please continue to bring in your ACME receipts. Our collection jar is located outside the office in the Narthex. We will get credit for all receipts dated between September 18, 2014 and February 4, 2015 that show a community cash back amount at the bottom of the receipt. ***Please bring in all of your ACME receipts to church by Sunday, March 1, 2015.*** Thanks again for all of your support!

THE WOMEN OF ZION

Transforming Life and Faith is quite a challenge, both as a course of study and a way of life. Session 6 continues with our focus on ***Making Conversion Last***. Stories of conversion are fascinating and engaging. Hearing about what others experienced when they were called to faith can encourage us to stay the course and keep the faith. In Acts 8, we meet Philip, one of the new Greek-speaking evangelists chosen in Acts 6:5, now taking the good news to the mostly non-Jewish population of Samaria. Remember the woman at the well? That Samaria! Philip converts a powerful Ethiopian eunuch who had been entrusted with the “entire treasury” of his African queen. This is not an ordinary experience in everyday life; but the Book of Acts wants us to know that, regardless of religious background or national origin, both Jews and Gentiles can recognize good news when they hear it. The rich and responsible Ethiopian is brought to his knees to receive the gift of true life through baptism. Acts 8 also introduces us to a man named Saul, who will become the Apostle named Paul. Now there is a conversion that surely did last! What proves to be most important about this brief introduction and the conversion that will follow is that, while baptism is personal, it is not a private matter. Baptism initiates us into life in Christ, which is the creation of a new community that will transform the world!

Yes, Christianity will transform the world; but in the process, it will take root in our lives through the communities we know as congregations. That’s how it all began; and that’s how the story of God’s love alive among us continues. You are invited to join us as we talk about what God wants to do through us. We’ll meet in the Resource Center on Tuesday, February 17, 9:30 a.m. All are welcome.

MORE WOMEN’S NEW

Zion’s Comfort Givers meet on the second and fourth Thursdays of the month, which in February will be the 12th and the 26th. Snow and cold in January kept us from resuming a full schedule. Perhaps February will treat us better. The old saying still applies, “Many hands make light work.” Consider joining us as we enjoy coffee, conversation, and the feeling of knowing that we are helping others in need through the good that we do. We meet in Luther Hall, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

Zion’s Chancel Guild will meet on Monday, February 9th, for our Chancel Guild dinner, this year around the theme of Valentine’s Day. A social half-hour begins at 5:30 p.m., with dinner served at 6:00 p.m. Kay Davis, Jane Fairman, and Darlene Milavickas have taken the lead in serving as our hosts. The menu includes chicken and pasta, red skin potatoes, California blend vegetables, rolls, butter, with apple dumplings for dessert. Chuck Danner will provide the background music for entertainment. We thank Chancel Guild members for their faithful service, and hope that this evening together displays the gratitude we share and the fun we can have.

While we have food on our mind, this is a good time to remind our women that the soup and sandwich menu for Lent will be ours to prepare for the Second Sunday in Lent. The Chancel Guild will host the Lenten Dinner on March 1st. While sign-up sheets will enlist the input of other members in providing a crock-pot of their favorite soup (including chili), each of our groups will continue to make sure that we’ve got everything we need on the menu, and also see to set-up, clean-up, and serving. Mostly, it is our hope that all of our hosting groups will support one another with our presence for dinner and at worship. We look forward to everyone joining us.

OUR "SOUL KEEPING" STUDY GUIDE FOR LENT

Our Lenten journey will include a turn inward as turn our attention to studying God's gift of our soul. This word is often used as an adjective to describe things like soul food or soul music. I'll be the first to admit that soul food is very comforting, and soul music is deeply moving. But many no longer make the connection with a biblically-based sense of spirituality referring to the gift of true life and the promise of salvation. We need to get back to talking about this word that has a prominent place in the Bible. A word study of historical usages would tell only part of the story; and we're not going to take that route on our Lenten journey. We live in a helter-skelter world, moving at so hectic a pace that it is hard to keep up with ourselves. Our Lenten journey will ask us to take a break. Take a breath. Exhale. Let's learn about the true life Jesus promised when he declared in John 10:10 that he came to give us life, true life, life in abundance.

Our guide will not be John's Gospel; but it will be someone with the same first name, John Ortberg, the Senior Pastor at Menlo Park Presbyterian mega-Church in, Menlo Park, California, which is in the San Francisco Bay area. His guide was the late Dallas Willard, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern California, who became better known for his writings in the area of Christian spiritual formation. In this regard, he emphasized the importance of choosing to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, which the Scriptures refer to as walking with Jesus, learning to be like him. Following Jesus, learning to be like him, involves learning about activities that can help us grow in the fruit of the spirit, namely, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." (Galatians 5:22-23)

We are following a course of study and conversation that unfolds in six sessions. The introduction to Session 1 provides a pretty good summary of our focus. "Our soul is like an inner stream of water, which gives strength, direction and harmony to every other element of our life. When that stream is as it should be, we are constantly refreshed and exuberant in all we do, because our soul itself is profusely rooted in the vastness of God and his kingdom; and everything within us is enlivened and directed by that stream of living water. Therefore we are in harmony with God, reality, the rest of human nature, and the whole of creation." This quote is found in the study guide we will be using, given free of charge to all participants.

Each class will begin with a 25-minute video presentation featuring John Ortberg, followed by 25 minutes of discussion. Our weekly themes are: (1) What Is the Soul; (2) The Struggle of the Soul; (3) What the Soul Needs; (4) The Practice of Grace; (5) The Practice of Gratitude; (6) The Practice of Growth. While we will provide informal introductions during class on the Sundays leading up to Lent, we will begin in earnest on the First Sunday in Lent, which is February 22nd. These classes will take place in Luther Hall, from 9:15 a.m. to 10:15 a.m. While our guide (John Ortberg) and his guide (Dallas Willard) are not Lutheran, we are confident that our uniquely Lutheran insights will prove to be extraordinarily dynamic in creating just the right context for learning what our Lord desires to give with his promise of true life.

Please make time to join us as we take the time to drink the living water that promises to provide peace for our souls and strength for the journey of growing in love and service by grace.

A SAD FAREWELL TO SENIOR INDEPENDENCE

It was surprisingly sad saying goodbye to our fourteen years with Senior Independence and the ministry they offered to seniors with their adult day service. Sure, it was a business, and a complicated one at that. They have been at the frontlines of our society's attempts to find less expensive alternatives to nursing home care of our seniors. Don't get me wrong, we are not talking about your grandfather's nursing homes. Retirement communities offer facilities that are very comfortable, quite impressive, and downright attractive. It's just that full-time, on-site nursing home care is a very expensive option for persons who can remain at home and prefer to do just that. Planning for one's later years has become complicated and, in many ways, kind of scary, financially speaking. Ministries like Senior Independence have expanded both to meet the needs that exist and to create newer, less expensive alternatives along the way.

Over the years Senior Independence has pursued the skill and training to become a hospice provider. They have won grants to purchase a small bus to provide transportation for clients, and not just to and from this center, but to and from doctors' appointments and for a whole host of community events, activities, and meetings. They offer a full range of home-based services, including physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, and home health care. They expanded their holiday presence with huge family feasts for Thanksgiving and Christmas, along with lesser holidays, like Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, the Fourth of July... Like us, they didn't need a holiday to prepare a special meal. There can be no doubt that we shared both a kitchen and a vision for using it to fill our lives with good food and great memories.

There were many ways in which we shared more than our facilities. Members have provided DJ services, offered concerts, and served as volunteers. Their clients and staff joined us regularly for a Service of Healing at Noon on Maundy Thursday. They, too, came to love *the Ragman*. They joined in supporting our Craft Show, sometimes as crafters, but always as shoppers. Due to their efforts in working with *MyCareOhio* in reaching out to seniors living on fixed and limited incomes, we were able to make a connection through the ministry of our food pantry, which helped us broaden our ability to help folks who needed the food assistance we could offer. I'm sure than many would agree that it's hard to count the many blessings we shared by sharing the experience of being located at the corner of Lindy Lane and Portage Street.

Most of us can still hear the boisterous reminders Dick Findlay would offer as he announced just about every Sunday morning that he had spent his whole week at the church during those early days when Senior Independence worked with Whippledale in setting up a workshop here at our site. But over the years, the personal connections between Zion and Senior Independence grew. In a way, I'm happy to say that we will never be the same with the loss of Senior Independence and the friendships we've formed. I am thankful for the service they have offered and the love we have shared through they're ministry. We thank God together for the rich sense of outreach that thrives among God's people. And so it is with great pride, colored with more than a little bit of sadness, that we say farewell, God's speed, and many blessings as we part company but continue the journey of growing in love and service by grace.

