

A WORD FROM THE PASTOR

We enjoyed another year of incredible generosity, allowing us to balance our budget for what is now *the eleventh year in a row*. Thank you for an incredible run of generosity and support! Thank you for another strong December and another strong year, as we head into the New Year with all of our bills paid, almost \$13,000 in Advanced Giving for 2016, and a down-payment of \$500 in *Early Bird Giving* as we look to keep pace with the arrival of winter. There is no doubt that we were blessed by Mother Nature with a very mild December, moderate temperatures, low utility bills, no salting, and snow-plowing bills! That will certainly change as we greet the new year. Please keep *Early Bird Giving* in mind as we take on winter in northeast Ohio.

While all ended well, 2015 was a challenging year, financially speaking. The loss of rental income required greater vigilance when it came to controlling expenses. As I said, Mother Nature helped; but Church Council also helped. We trimmed wherever we could. Mission Support suffered a bit, as we focused more on local efforts demanding our attention and support: our own food pantry, the Stark County Hunger Task Force, local assistance, the Stark County *Feed the Need* Hunger Walk, and similar efforts. We also stuck with volunteer help around the office to cover the many clerical needs that arise. As we head into a transitional year, looking ahead to a call process, all of us realize that we are going to need to provide more in the way of Church Office assistance and Church Office presence.

We understand that a 2015 operating budget surplus of \$290 doesn't cover a lot of commitment to Church Office assistance. So we'll start slowly and cautiously. Carol Rossbach has been volunteering around the office for years. As Vice-President, she is also the Council member in charge of job descriptions and personnel issues. Carol will be spending more time around the office as we begin to reassess what kind of office assistance we need, and how much of it we need. We'll keep everyone apprised of how we're doing as we add more costs to the operating budget. Carol is not becoming our Church Office Secretary. She is helping us re-evaluate what is needed, as we get a feel for how monthly income responds to increases in monthly expenses. We're taking things very slowly as we prepare for the pastoral transition that awaits.

One area where we hope to have a positive impact on income is getting the parsonage back on the rental market. It is a huge house, with lots of privacy, good neighbors, great security, in a very desirable community. Interior walls have been painted, repairs have been made, new carpet will soon be on the floors, and we'll be closer to testing the rental market again. We've learned a lot in moving through the process of wondering what the next chapter for the parsonage should be; and we are thankful for everyone who has shown an interest and has lent a hand in moving forward. We all owe a special debt of thanks to Dave & Renee Palumbo for all that they have done to help spruce up the parsonage with love. The Thursday Morning Retirees have also been very generous with their time and their talents in helping us move things along.

2016 promises to be a year when much changes, while many of the basics remain the same: God's gracious love embracing us, the work of the kingdom awaiting us, and the generous support of God's people at Zion, sharing their time, their talents, and their treasures, all for the sole purpose of making progress as we grow in love and service by grace.

CHURCH COUNCIL NEWS

Council Meetings in November addressed regular business (11/10) and special business (11/18). Mark Votaw called our regularly scheduled meeting to order on November 10 at 7:00 p.m., and led our devotions, too. Also in attendance were Carol Rossbach, Jayne Schrader, Jim Fidler, Heather Hoffman, Dale Jacobs, Janet Slease, Ron Tvorik, and Pastor.

Our first order of business focused our attention on celebrating the unanimous approval of our 2016 Proposed Budget Guidelines. The Treasurer’s Report reinforced this good news as we continue to maintain a small operating budget surplus heading into the generous months of November and December. Income exceeded expenses by \$131.52 in October; our year-to-date surplus stood at \$222.63.

November’s figures showed a surplus of \$17.43, increasing our year-to-date surplus to \$240.06. While we haven’t yet had time to review the figures for December in great detail, we have been able to conclude that our monthly surplus for December was \$51.12.

SOME FINANCIAL FACTS AT ZION

October Income	\$ 16,155.27
October Expenses	<u>\$ 16,023.75</u>
<i>October’s Surplus</i>	\$ <i>131.52</i>
November Income	\$ 16,280.41
November Expenses	<u>\$ 16,262.98</u>
<i>November’s Surplus</i>	\$ <i>17.43</i>
December Income	\$ 23,757.42
December Expenses	<u>\$ 23,706.30</u>
<i>December’s Surplus</i>	\$ <i>51.12</i>
<i>Budget Surplus for 2015</i>	\$ <i>291.18</i>
<i>Bicentennial Gifts Fund</i>	\$ <i>13,402.78</i>
<i>The Youth of Zion Fund</i>	\$ <i>8,495.42</i>
<i>Zion’s Food Pantry Fund</i>	\$ <i>8,039.27</i>

We thank you for your generous support!

IT NEVER GETS OLD!

Resource Ministry: We are now well-practiced in the 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 raising awareness about our need for *Early Bird Giving* has done great things for us the past four years. Regardless of whether we call this up-front giving *Advanced Giving* or *Early Bird Giving*, we will start 2016 with \$13,200.00, which we can begin applying toward the expenses that winter will bring. We are grateful for this cushion because it means that we can meet our expenses on firm financial footing.

For the eleventh consecutive year, we have been able to celebrate another budget in balance. It might sound monotonous to some; but I must confess that it never gets old! So, let’s do it again. Your *Early Bird Giving* is invited so that we can continue the trend of operating from ahead all year long.

- 2005** Zion’s Budget in Balance: Yes!
- 2006** Zion’s Budget in Balance, again
- 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** Zion’s Budget in Balance, again
- 2015** Yes! Our budget is balanced again!

CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

A special need was called to our attention after Council had met in November. So, we decided to schedule a special meeting of the Council for the next week. We had a need and an opportunity to get the wireless aspect of our sound system up to snuff and in line with federal regulations. Several years after we improved the sound system in 2007, federal regulations changed; and we needed to shift our wireless microphones to another frequency. Brian Walters is the one who handles these matters; and he recommended that we move on this matter. The cost would exceed \$5,000.00, which requires that we seek congregational approval at a congregational meeting. We met to schedule this meeting for the First Sunday Evening in Advent on November 29th.

We decided to make our entire congregation the host of our first Advent Dinner. We invited everyone to join in the fun of making sure that our tradition of delicious food continued. MUTUAL SUPPORT would be the secret word for the dinner and the meeting, too; and that was exactly what happened. We enjoyed a delicious Advent dinner, along with great attendance at our Congregational Meeting. We authorized Council to spend \$10,122.52 to get the wireless aspect of our sound system in compliance with federal regulations, to add new body packs and receivers with handhelds, and to replace damaged equipment. The resolution passed with unanimous approval! Mutual support was on full display. What a great way to usher in the new church year! We extend our thanks to Zion's Chancel Guild, Council members, and our whole congregation for taking the time during a busy Thanksgiving weekend to meet, eat, and greet the new year with a strong expression of church unity.

MORE COUNCIL NEWS

Worship Ministry: The Search Team in place as we look for an organist and a Senior Choir Director continues to include Dale Jacobs (Worship Ministry Elder), Carol Rossbach (Mutual Ministry Convenor), Darlene Milavickas (active with our Senior Choir, Praise Team, Worship Ministry and Chancel Guild), Mark Votaw (Church Council President), and Pastor Sherwindt. With the recent closing of Bethel Lutheran Church, we invited their musician to serve as our substitute at the 8:00 a.m. service. Natasha Musaelyan has been a pianist from childhood, and learned to play the organ while serving at Bethel. She is originally from Azerbaijan, and emigrated from there to the United States in 1991. Feel free to meet this delightful and talented musician as she joins us for the early service throughout the month of January.

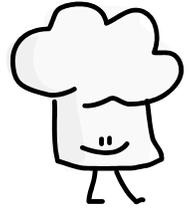
Property Ministry: Our two main interests in December focused on moving forward with the parsonage and getting ready for the Christmas holiday season. Getting ready for Christmas involves planning Sunday evening Advent dinners and Sunday evening Advent services, and making sure that our Chancel Guild is ready for all of our extra services; but it also involves lots of volunteers to put up our Poinsettia trees, make sure the Advent wreaths are in place, and reassemble our illuminated outdoor crèche. Our Thursday morning retirees offered great assistance in this regard, and we thank Carl Geib, Richard Biggerstaff, Clarence Givler, John Brokloff, and Verle Elsass. These men were also instrumental in assisting with the parsonage, as were Carol Rossbach, Betty Tracy, and Pastor Sherwindt, and, of course, let's not forget Dave & Renee Palumbo for the work they've done and the leadership they've shouldered. Our thanks to all!

CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS

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, our Thursday Morning Retirees, 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 Christian Ed. Director – and her family – who make 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, Dean, and Jeremy Fox, members of Council, Zion's Youth, Men, and Chancel Guild; and thank you to Dale Jacobs, Brian, Suzanne, Kelly, Kevin, and Casey Walters, Carole and Ron Singer, Jon and Barb Elsass, Sue Geib, Joyce Gibeaut, Vicki Givler, Beth Heller, Helen Heller, Darlene Milavickas, Carol Rossbach, Pastor and Marilyn, Matt Slease, Linda Tvorik, and Linda Zumkehr. Because of all you do, Zion is blessed to enjoy a rich tradition that honors the season in so many ways: the colors of Christmas come alive with poinsettias, wreaths, and so much more. The sounds of the season come alive with the songs we sing and the music we offer. The food we share makes our mouths water and taste buds sing, 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." Thanks be to God!

ENJOYING ADVENT, TOO!

Another thing that never gets old, in addition to balancing budgets, is the annual ritual of enjoying great food on the Sunday evenings of Advent. Our First Sunday of Advent featured the congregation as our hosts, with lots of help from Zion's Chancel Guild and Church Council. The soups, chilis, and sandwiches were delicious, as were the sides, salads, and desserts! This effort was followed by Dave Palumbo's connection with Council and Divitis Italian sausage. This connection with Akron's north end never gets old; and the Praise Team's special music offerings during worship were truly exceptional! The following Sunday featured our youth from morning 'til night! What a day ... and what a night! The food was scrumptious; and the service was another fine performance put forth by a troupe of exceptional readers. Listening to the story of Jesus told through Chrismons was a great way to complement the morning focus on learning to see Jesus in the traditions our world has developed to celebrate the season. The fourth Sunday evening in Advent, with Zion's Men taking the lead, is always the perfect ending to an Advent season that really does get us ready for Christmas. It wasn't Christmas ham; but the "other white meat" – roast pork – could not have been more delicious! Orange ginger-glazed pork loins, oven-roasted herb redskin potatoes, stir-fried vegetables, and desserts that featured cream pies from Grinders and fresh-baked cookies from Linda Tvorik's oven: heaven came down to earth a few days early this year! Then, with worship, Beth Heller's singing and Carole Singer playing led the way, with everyone joining in a night of special music and special fun. It was a great Advent season, culminating in a great Christmas Eve Service. Our thanks to all!



GREAT NEWS FROM ZION'S SUNDAY SCHOOL



HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO:

UPCOMING EVENTS – MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Sunday, January 3: The Schedule of Sunday School Classes for All Ages resumes at 9:15 a.m.

Monday, January 18: Let's Take the Time to Remember the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES: PRE-K THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL

This is just a reminder: we will resume our normal class schedule on Sunday, January 3rd, 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 2016!

GOOD NEWS WITH THE “TWELVE SYMBOLS OF CHRISTMAS”

Once again, the youth of Zion gave us a great Christmas Program this year! We got to enjoy a mom and her children decorating for Christmas in our program, *12 Symbols of Christmas*. It was a reminder to us all that the true meaning of Christmas is the celebration of the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and that the ordinary decorations we use each year – like the tree, the ornaments, the wreaths, the presents and the cookies – all have meanings that lead us to Jesus, and these meanings were reinforced with Bible verses. For example, the evergreen tree is ever green: it does not become dormant in the winter as other trees do; and the color green represents new life, with the needles of the evergreen always pointing up toward heaven. It symbolizes our everlasting life with Jesus Christ. We should be as the evergreen tree – always full of life, never becoming dormant in our life with Christ as our arms are lifted heavenward.

The program also offered the wish that we all slow down, remember the meaning of Christmas and what Jesus did for us, and enjoy each and every moment we spend with our families and friends. We extend a big thank you to everyone who helped with this year's Christmas Program. It was an awesome program, and the kids did a fantastic job, as always! We truly hope you enjoyed this year's play, the music and a cast of Zion's finest as much as we did. A big thank you goes out to our Sunday School staff, parents and volunteers for all of their help to make our



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. A special thank to our awesome stage crew – Emma, Jacob & Chrissy Parkomaki and David Panzarello, who helped with props and setting up & tearing down our makeshift stage. 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

As always, December was a very busy month for Zion’s youth, and there are many *thank yous* to share! First, thank you to everyone who generously supported Zion’s Giving Tree this year. It was an amazing success! Not only were we able to collect all of the gifts for five families, but we were able to collect \$25 for many families to ensure they would have a Christmas meal. That is truly a picture of what the Christmas season is about – sharing God’s love and helping neighbors 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 & Jeremy Fox for putting up the tree and lights for our Giving Tree this year.

Second, thank you to the youth and their families who donated much needed items to the food pantry and for the donations to this year’s *Santa’s Table*, which is organized by our Clothing Closet. Everyone of the items donated is greatly appreciated by the families we are able to help during the holiday season.

Next, we must thank our youth of all ages, along with parents and adult leaders who helped to wrap all of the Giving Tree gifts. This is always a lot of fun and your participation is greatly appreciated! We had a great afternoon of fun, food and practice on Saturday, December 12th! We truly appreciate everyone taking time out during this busy time of year. The rehearsal went well thanks to everyone’s cooperation. Also, a huge thank you to our Sunday School leaders and parents who helped with play practice, and then with the pizza party, and still had time to join in organizing the gift wrapping we needed to do that day.

Finally, thank you to all of the youth and their families who helped with the Youth Advent Dinner and Advent Service on December 12th. We really appreciate the dedication of our youth and their families, especially during the busy holiday season. A big thank you goes out to our kitchen crew, the Franks, Laura Thompson, the Tvoriks, Loretta Panzarello, the Mileks, John Rhodes, and all of our youth for all of their hard work. The sloppy joes, mac-n-cheese, salad, and desserts were delicious and enjoyed by all. Also, thank you to everyone who helped with set up, contributed food, helped serve the meal, and stuck around for clean up afterwards. We are so lucky to have such a great group of families who are always willing to pitch in and help! And, thank you to Zion’s youth for reading and hanging the ornaments for the Chrismon Service. It was a great evening and a great way 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! As we begin the New Year, look for some fun events that we will be planning for the youth and for our families! We are busy putting a plan together, 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!



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 14th and 28th**. If you would like to be a part of this great tradition of service, just join us. The women love the company and we 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 helping to prepare a very delicious dinner on the Sunday evening of our Special Congregational Meeting.

The Women of Zion meet for their monthly Bible study on **Tuesday, January 19th**, in the Resource Center, at 9:30 a.m. A new format of shorter Bible studies from a variety of authors continues with our winter Bible study, which is entitled *Christian Citizenship 101*. E. Louise Williams, Executive Director Emerita of the Lutheran Deaconess Association, and the Rev. Phyllis Kersten, retired and living in a suburb of Chicago, will help us study *Philippians*. Session 1 focuses on *Confidence in God's Beginnings and Endings*. The authors write, "Philippians is a wonderful book. What do you already know about it? Who wrote it? Who founded the Christian church in Philippi? Can you find Philippi on a map? Do you have a favorite passage from Philippians?" Philippians 2:6-11 is a classic; but Philippians 4:4 is also a favorite.

CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP

Christian Citizenship 101 is a four-session study, which lays out a path for discovering more about the church in Philippi, the challenges it faced, and the context of some of its most beloved passages. A major emphasis of this epistle focuses on what it means to conduct our lives as citizens of the commonwealth of Jesus Christ. "What is that?" you ask. The commonwealth of Jesus Christ is that space in our world, and in our lives, where the gospel reigns.

In 356 B.C., Alexander the Great's father, Philip II, took over much of what is modern-day Greece and established the city of Philippi, naming it after himself. Philippi and the surrounding areas were taken over by the Roman Empire around 167 B.C. The town became famous in 42 B.C. as the place where Marc Anthony and Octavian defeated the two assassins of Julius Caesar, Brutus and Cassius. The Apostle Paul established the Christian church at Philippi during his second missionary journey, which lasted from 49 to 52 C.E.

Whenever Paul came to a new town, he generally sought out a synagogue to begin his outreach among the Jewish community. He found no synagogue in Philippi, only an open air place of prayer, with women, not men, who gathered there. In Acts 16:13, we read that when Paul and his companions came across this place, they "sat down and spoke to the women who had come together." With this simple gesture we catch a glimpse of the revolutionary character of the Christian community, where women are approached, enlisted, and commissioned to become fellow members, co-workers, and even leaders in a movement that would change the world. Join us on January 19th. You'll be glad you did; and so will we.

LIVING CHRISTIAN UNITY**JANUARY 18 - 25, 2016**

January 18-25, 2016 is our annual observance of *Our Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*. The theme for 2016 is found in 1 Peter 2:9. Peter writes that we are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that we may proclaim the mighty deeds of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.” This year’s theme is *Called to Proclaim the Mighty Acts of the Lord*. The initial work on this year’s theme was done by a very diverse group working together in Latvia, which included prayer ministries, youth ministries, television ministries, as well as traditionally recognizable groups like Lutherans and Catholics.

In the verses we’ll be studying, St. Peter tells the early Church that in their search for meaning prior to encountering the gospel they were *not a people*. But through hearing the call to be God’s *chosen race* and receiving the power of God’s salvation in Jesus Christ, they have become *God’s people*. Baptism opens up an exciting new journey of faith, uniting each new Christian with God’s people throughout the ages. In the shared sacred texts of the Bible, we hear of God’s saving acts in salvation history: leading his people out of slavery in Egypt through the exodus, and the greatest of God’s *mighty acts*: the raising of Jesus from the dead, opening new life to all. As Christians seeking the unity of the Body of Christ we are all called to recognize the *mighty acts* of God in our own lives and the life of the church.

The relationship between baptism and proclamation, and the calling of all the baptized to proclaim the mighty deeds of the Lord are the inspiration behind this year’s theme. At Zion, we will use Sunday, January 24th, to focus on the theme of Christian unity and its importance for Christian faith and life.

Monday, January 18: What are the events and circumstances of our lives that make us lock ourselves in the grave, so to speak, in sadness, grief, anxiety and despair? What keeps us from accepting the promise and joy of the gospel? How ready are we to share our experience of God’s mighty deeds with others?

Tuesday, January 19: What smothers our sense of joy in the world and in the church? How might working with other Christian churches instill a joy within us and among us that can enhance our witness to the gospel?

Wednesday, January 20: How do we regard Christians from other traditions and denominations? Should we seek forgiveness for historic divisions? From whom? For what?

Thursday, January 21: How might denominations competing for members and false assumptions about other Christians obscure our proclamation of the gospel?

Friday, January 22: What is our experience of encountering one another in different denominations as brothers and sisters in faith through Christian fellowship, shared meals, and common prayer? How can we support and encourage these opportunities?

Saturday, January 23: What does it mean to place our own dreams for Christian unity at the feet of Christ? In what ways does our Lord’s vision of unity call churches to work, serve, and pray together?

Sunday, January 24: How can we promote mutual support and Christian hospitality among congregations in our locality?

Monday, January 25: What are some of the disappointments that can isolate us from other Christian denominations? What are the gifts that we can receive from other Christian communities?

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 Friends at Zion,

Thank all of you for the prayers you offered so faithfully on my behalf. Your prayers worked and allowed me to get home quickly, and then to travel to California to be with my son, a trip that was planned months before my brief hospital stay at Alliance Community Hospital led to a few complications, which, as it turned out, were quickly resolved.

*My thanks to all,
Joyce Gibeaut*

To Pastor and Members of Zion,

Many thanks for visiting me at University Hospital in Cleveland last month when I had my aortic valve replaced. What a difference this procedure made! Also, many thanks to Zion for your thoughts, cards, and prayers.

*In Christian love,
Kay Davis*

Dear Members of our Zion family,

On behalf of my family, I would like to thank everyone who remembered us at Christmas with some of the things that mean so much to me – Starbucks coffee, delicious sweets, fine wines, and good food! These are gifts that will help us to savor the season well into next year. They are gifts that bring great joy to the service we've been privileged to offer.

*Our heartfelt thanks,
Pastor & Marilyn*

Martin Luther King, Jr.
Civil Rights Leader

Born: January 15, 1929
in Atlanta, Georgia

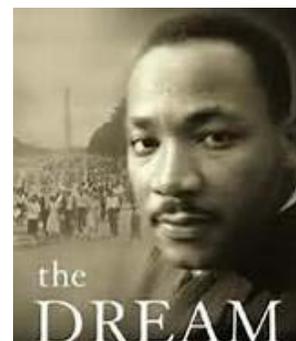
Died: April 4, 1968 in
Memphis, Tennessee

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 was 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 17**, at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Westlake at 3:30 p.m., with Pastor George Hrbek preaching, and Bishop Abraham Allende speaking. The theme will be *Remembering the Journey*. Prince of Peace is located at 28455 Center Ridge Road.



IN LOVING MEMORY OF ROSALIE BABICH

(March 17, 1925 – December 23, 2015)

Rosalie Babich lived a long and full life, with family that loved her, lots of laughter, and many adventures that brought great joy to the people she loved and those who loved her. We knew Mike and Rosalie as faithful, friendly, fun-loving people, who loved the Lord, this church, and each other. But it's been some time since they joined us as regulars on Saturday evenings, or Sunday mornings. Mike and Ro were each other's second marriage; and both agreed that they were a match made in heaven. They hit it off, and it just continued to work. Ro called Mike the love of her life; and she was a big reason for this match made in heaven. She knew how to make things better. She might have been the model Proverbs had in mind, "A good wife who can find?" Certainly Mike would agree! "She is worth far more than jewels. Her husband trusts her with all his heart.... She helps him and never harms him all the days of her life.... She dresses herself with strength, and works with willing hands." (Proverbs 31:10-13)

We haven't seen this Rosalie much for the last four years, and more; but, as many know, she was the inspiration behind *Ro's Custard Creations*. They say the secret to success is 10% inspiration and 90% perspiration; and Ro was the hard work that made a go of their soft-serve ice cream stand on South Main.... Mike and Ro were charter members of a club of *seekers* we formed back in 2002, which was spelled SEECers for the *Saturday Evening Entertainment Club*. We'd use Entertainment Cards one Saturday a month after our Saturday evening worship service. At least once a year we would follow dinner with dessert at *Ro's Custom Creations*, compliments of Mike and Rosalie. We all loved *Ro's Custom Creations*, thanks to Mike and Ro. Over the years we all saw aging take its toll on Rosalie and Mike. There's another passage in the Old Testament that talks about growing old with images that can bring smiles to our faces. It's a passage in Ecclesiastes 12:1-8.

"Remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the troublesome days of aging arrive ... when the sun and light are darkened with clouds...." This is often taken to refer to what happens with the arrival of cataracts as we grow older. The Preacher speaks of those days when "those who look through windows see dimly" and the "doors to the street are shut". Our eyes and ears simply don't work as they once did. My favorite reference is to "the almond trees that blossom", which, for those who have seen almond trees blossoming, is a great visual for our hair growing white. Aging is not for the faint of heart: "The silver cord is snapped, the golden bowl is broken, the pitcher is broken at the fountain and the wheel is broken at the cistern; and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and our breath returns to God who gave it. Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity."

The Preacher is talking about mortality. In Ro's case, Alzheimer's exacted a heavy toll, stealing her slowly, at first, with memory lapses, which early on could find cover with catch phrases and an attentive spouse; but before long, it became too much for an attentive care-giver to bear, and then too painful for loved ones and friends, too. There is nothing quaint or poetic about Alzheimer's rout of mind and memory, which took from Ro more than mobility, as her very identity gave way to the disintegrating effects of aging under Alzheimer's assault. The only saving grace we could claim was the expanded role of hospice in providing the continuity of care and companionship. This expanded role has been a welcomed development as an approach to providing end-of-life care. And yet, even with the saving grace of this much needed blessing, we know that no matter how much better we become at knowing how to care and what to anticipate, we are never ready for the sadness and shock that death brings. The Gospel tells us that God intended more, desires more, promises more, and delivers more. Easter proclaims the victory of life over death forever, and Christmas makes this promise personal. May this Good News be the joy we celebrate with this season, and on this day.