

GREETINGS FROM THE PASTOR:

Our Sunday Evening Lenten Dinners begin with the First Sunday in Lent, which is Valentine's Day, February 14th. That would be a good time to focus on the love of God, and I'm sure we will have much to say about God's love; but our Lenten theme this year will focus on the nature of God's call. This is a year when Zion will enter the call process for the first time in fourteen years. I thought that we might enjoy a series that looks at the idea of God's call from several vantage points. Our first Sunday evening in Lent, with the temptation sequence from Luke serving as the Gospel, will examine our Lord's call. During the course of the Lenten season, we will look at God's call to the Apostle Paul. We will examine Luther's sense of call, or vocation. I will talk about my own sense of call to Christian ministry. Pastor Karl Biermann, the Assistant to the Bishop who will lead us through the call process, will join us during Lent, on March 6th, to be precise, to let us know what this process will look like when August arrives.

In addition to our Lenten focus on the call to Christian ministry, Lent also invites us to support a format for Lenten worship that has been a great success over the last fourteen years. We call it our *Sunday Evening Lenten Dinners and Devotions* program. All of us know that times have changed, and midweek Lenten services are not as popular as they were when we were kids. Here at Zion, with our focus on great food and simple services, we stumbled on a formula that kept attendance well above average for churches with special Lenten services. Last year during Lent we went simple, with soups and sandwiches taking the place of elaborate dinners; but the food we enjoyed was still delicious, and the services themselves were very well attended. There is a key to the success we've enjoyed over the years: it is called MUTUAL SUPPORT. We've been blessed with great groups that host our dinners. What "mutual support" asks is that the groups that host a dinner support the other groups with their presence at the other dinners. There is no shortage of reasons why we should honor our Lord with our worship during Lent. What we need is the will, the will to say Yes – 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.

As I said, we made a few changes last year, which we have decided to continue this year. 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. We will have sign-up sheets for persons who want to bring a crockpot of their favorite soup, chili, or casserole. 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. 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 14th. The Chancel Guild will host on February 21st, with the Youth of Zion taking the lead in hosting the Sunday evening of February 28th. As I said, Pastor Karl Biermann will join us on March 6th, and we will look for the whole congregation to help us host the Bishop's representative as we begin to take a look at the call process awaiting us. The focus all season long will be on the nature of being called by God to serve in the life of the church. That, in the end, and along the way, too, is the point of our Lenten journey, and not just the point of Lent. It is the point of life in Christ, living for God, and serving in the kingdom.

2015 FINANCIAL FACTS

When we look at the various balances listed with the financial facts for Zion, some have an obvious meaning, and other balances may not have as obvious a meaning. For example, running a monthly surplus and a year-to-date surplus have an obvious meaning, namely, that income exceeded expenses for the month and for the year, and that's a good thing. But what does the "accumulated surplus" mean? In 2016, we enjoyed a yearly surplus of \$291.18, which is quite small, considering we have a budget that called for over \$219,000 in annual expenditures. That's a razor-thin surplus. We have now run surpluses for eleven straight years, some very small, and some not so small. When you add up these surpluses over the past eleven years, we have accumulated \$14,008.27 in offerings given to support our operating budget over and above what we spent. While we make it a point to balance our budgets, it's nice to know that we have this cushion, just in case.

SOME FINANCIAL FACTS FROM 2015

December Income	\$ 23,757.42
December Expenses	\$ 23,706.30
December Surplus	\$ 51.12
Income through December	\$ 219,321.43
Expenses thru December	\$ 219,030.25
Budget Surplus for 2015	\$ 291.18
Accumulated Surplus	\$ 14,008.27
The Youth of Zion Fund	\$ 8,495.42
The Food Pantry Fund	\$ 8,039.27
Bicentennial Gifts Fund	\$ 13,402.78
Advanced Giving for 2016	\$ 12,700.00
Early Bird Giving in 2016	\$ 3,950.00

We thank you for your generous support!

BALANCE\$ AND MORE

The Youth of Zion Fund refers to money that is ear-marked for Youth programming. Some offerings are designated by members and friends. Some money comes from projects like the ACME Community Cash-Back Receipts. Much of it comes through the Craft Show and the sale of German dinners. The same is true of the Food Pantry Fund. Some contributions are made directly by members, friends, community groups and neighboring churches. Some money is given through direct appeals, and sometimes we have fundraisers for the food pantry. All of the money collected for these ministries is used to support these ministries.

The Bicentennial Gifts Fund refers to gifts given to pay for projects we identified as ways of celebrating our bicentennial anniversary. We used this fund to pay for our new faceted stained glass windows in the Sanctuary. We patched, sealed, and painted the parking lot, replaced the fire suppressant system in the kitchen, repaired the pillars outside the Narthex, and the parking lot overhangs, too. We still want to replace the outside door in the kitchen, re-hang the large doors leading outside from Luther Hall, finish revamping the kitchen with a three-compartment sink and a better source of hot water. We're hoping that carpeting for Luther Hall is in our future. Stay tuned as future developments continue to unfold.

Advanced Giving and Early Bird Giving are techniques we've employed to serve our members' giving patterns and balance out the way we experience expenses. Early Bird Giving allows members to shift end-of-the-year giving to earlier in the year. Advanced Giving allows members to use last year's giving for this year. It all adds up to a record eleven consecutive balanced budgets, and a healthy bottom line for the life of our church.

CHURCH COUNCIL NEWS

Council President Mark Votaw called our meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Jim Fider led with devotions. Also present were Carol Rossbach, Jayne Schrader, Dave Palumbo, Heather Hoffman, and Ron Tvorik. Unable to attend were Dale Jacobs, Todd Elsass, Randy Cizek, Janet Slease, and Howard Dansizen. We spent quite a few minutes making our way through the minutes for our November Council Meeting (on 11/10), our Special November Council Meeting (on 11/18), our Congregational Meeting (on 10/28), and our Special Congregational Meeting (on 11/29). The minutes were in order, with motions to approve, all seconded, and passed with unanimous approval and applause!

(For those who might not remember, the primary business at our October Congregational Meeting was the election of members to serve on Council, as Deacons, and among the Trustees. The Special November Congregational Meeting focused on the approval of all necessary expenditures for upgrading the sound system in the Sanctuary so that it will once again be up to a revised federal code. We enjoyed excellent attendance at both meetings; and for that we thank you.)

The Treasurer also saw double duty, in presenting both the November and the December Treasurer's Report for approval (pending the work of our Audit Ministry). The November Report showed a monthly surplus of \$17.43, and a year-to-date surplus of \$240.06. The December Report showed a monthly surplus of \$51.12, and a year-to-date surplus of \$291.18. We continue to enjoy a record number of consecutive budget surpluses, which, for the most part, are relatively small; but our aim is to create a budget that is within reach, while also making us reach a little to attain the faithfulness our ministry requires.

MORE COUNCIL NEWS

Parsonage News Update: The walls, upstairs and down, have been painted; the floors have been wiped clean with turpentine, oil, and cleaner; the kitchen floor has been replaced; the storm windows lubricated, the outside doors painted, and the siding power washed. We contracted with Bob & Pete's Floors to replace the carpeting in the great room, living room, hallways, stairways, and downstairs bedrooms. This will be installed February 4-5. We contracted with Dave and Mark's Custom Builders to replace the picture window, which will be done after February 9. Chris Thomas will install a new kitchen light, and double-check all the electrical outlets. We will also recheck all the plumbing fixtures. Then it will be time to test the rental market!

Christian Education Update: We are looking forward to a Festival of Pentecost Rite of Confirmation for Justin Dague, Jeremy Fox, Cassie Frank, Chrissy Nicholson, Emma and Jacob Parkomaki, Marcus Rhodes, and Casey Walters. The Festival of Pentecost is May 15. In the meantime, the Sunday School will work on an Easter Program during Lent. We were very grateful for the great programs our youth assisted with during the Advent season.

Worship Ministry: Lent is upon us; and that means Sunday Evening Lenten Dinners and Services. Our dinners will carry forward the soup 'n sandwich focus we established last year; and the services will focus both on the process God uses to call the baptized to serve and on the process the church employs to place pastors in congregations. Pastor Karl Biermann, the Assistant to Bishop Allende who will lead Zion through the call process (set to begin on the first of August), will be our Special Guest on the Sunday Evening of March 6th, when we are all invited to help prepare our Lenten dinner that evening.



GREAT NEWS FROM ZION'S SUNDAY SCHOOL

Happy Birthday to:

February 1st, Monday – Marissa Hilson

February 3rd, Wednesday – Austin Todich

UPCOMING EVENTS – MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Wednesday, February 10: The Lent Season begins with Ash Wednesday, Worship, 7:00 p.m.

Sunday, February 28: Our Youth & Youth Leaders host the Sunday Evening Lenten Dinner

Saturday, March 19: Children's Easter Program Dress Rehearsal followed by a Pizza Party!

Palm Sunday, March 20: Children's Easter Program during the 10:30 a.m. Worship Service

Easter Sunday, March 27: Our Children's Easter Egg Hunt for all ages during Sunday School

Festival of Pentecost, May 15: The Rite of Confirmation Celebrated at the 10:30 a.m. Service

Monday through Friday, July 11–15: Dates for Vacation Bible School at Zion Are Now Set!

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 crafts, puzzles, games and snacks.

We will also begin practicing for this year's Easter Program in February. Our plan is to pass out parts on Sunday, February 14th, at the end of Sunday School. We will then practice the last half of the Sunday School hour on February 21st and February 28th. Please join us. The Easter Program is for all of our Youth, ages 3 through High School!

THINKING AHEAD TO LENT AND EASTER

As the Lenten Season approaches this month, with Easter on its way, we are planning our traditional activities for our Sunday School children: the Children's Easter Program on Palm Sunday, which is March 20th, and the Easter Egg Hunt on Easter Sunday, which is March 27th.

We'll start collecting Easter candy and small prizes for the Easter Egg Hunt in February, and continue the call into March. We have lots of eggs to fill – over 500! Any donations are greatly appreciated. The older youth in our Catechism and High School classes will be filling the eggs. These items can be dropped off in the Church Office any time between now and Palm Sunday.

Zion's youth and youth leaders will be hosting the Lenten Dinner on Sunday, February 28th. We will be contacting families to make arrangements and finalize details for this dinner and service. Please watch your email!

HEAR YE! HEAR YE! A SERVICE PROJECT TO SUPPORT!

We need your help this month! The youth will be collecting bath towels this month to go along with soap and wash cloth bundles the kids made at VBS. Our goal is to collect fifty new bath towels, one to go along with each soap bundle. These items will then be donated to the *Urban Ark Ministry* in Canton, which helps many persons who are in need of these necessary everyday items. There will be a box in the Narthex to collect the bath towels. Please help us reach our goal!

THE WOMEN OF ZION

Servant-Shaped Soldiers is the theme for our study of Christian Community Citizenship 101, which happens to be the title of Session 2 in our Bible monthly study. Paul's letter to the Philippians provides our guide through Scripture. We live in a world where rugged individualism is the ideal many pursue in life. For Christians in Philippi, the main challenge when it came to "standing firm" and "not being intimidated" was not encouraging individual Christians to stand their ground alone, but exhorting believers to work well together in resisting the many factions that were sowing seeds for division. That's what Paul meant in saying, "Stand firm together with a unity of spirit, and be of one mind as you strive side by side for faith and the gospel." (1:27) This leads to that classic section in Philippians 2, where Paul invites us to have "the mind of Christ" and to live the love that makes life in Christ a community affair. As we learned during the *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*, we are a *people*, a *community*, a *holy nation*, called to show the nations of the world how to be *the people of God* – of one mind, of one spirit, one in Christ, in faith, and in love.

When it comes to understanding the movement of love in this epistle, the insights of Dr. David Frederickson of Luther Seminary are tapped. His interpretation of this entire letter views it as a classic Greek love song, or love poem, describing God's longing to be with us, to be with humanity, desiring communion and community. How can this not be the perfect Bible study for the month that contains the celebration of St. Valentine's Day? Love will be on our minds, and you are invited to join the Women of Zion as they gather in the Resource Center on Tuesday, February 16, at 9:30 a.m. All are welcome. Please join us.

MORE WOMEN'S NEW

Zion's Comfort Givers meet on the second and fourth Thursdays of the month, which will be the 11th and the 25th in February. As the old saying goes, "Many hands make work light." We hope that you will 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 host the second of our five Lenten dinners, this one on February 21st. While sign-up sheets will enlist the help of all members and friends when it comes to preparing a crock pot of their favorite soup, or a delicious chili, an interesting casserole, or fantastic side, the host group still has the responsibility of seeing that set up, serving, and clean up goes smoothly, that there are enough desserts, drinks, and sandwiches to go around, and that everything goes well. It is our heartfelt hope (our goal, and our prayer) that inviting everyone to contribute will help to enhance the sense of community we enjoy throughout this Lenten season.

PEACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

(3828 Cleveland Avenue South)

FISH FRY EVERY FRIDAY

February 12 through March 18

4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Entrée choices include fried fish, baked fish, fried shrimp, or baked chicken, your choice of baked potato or fresh-cut fries, plus applesauce, coleslaw, roll, dessert, and a beverage. A complete meal with dessert is \$10. Kid's meals are available for children under 12. For carry-out orders, please call ahead at 330-484-4400. Thanks.

MORE STUFF HAPPENING

LUTHERAN MEN IN MISSION – the Canton-Massillon Conference, Northeastern Ohio Synod, ELCA – will host their annual Winter Breakfast at Faith Lutheran Church (107 Ninth Street SW) in Massillon on Saturday, February 12th, with registration beginning at 8:30 a.m. and the breakfast at 9:00 a.m. There is no charge. A program will begin at 9:30 a.m., which tells the story of the *Society of St. Andrew*, whose ministry focuses solely and unrelentingly on ending hunger both around the world and in our neighborhood. A freewill offering will be collected, and 100% of every dollar that is collected will go to the *Society of St. Andrews*. You are invited to call, or email Ken Reinoehl at 330-866-2452, or reinoehlk@gmail.com with any questions.

CONFIRMATION EVENT – *How do we talk about race as people of faith?* On Monday, February 15th, which is Presidents Day, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., Confirmation youth, parents, teachers, and pastors are invited to attend a dialogue about race led by area pastors, lay leaders, and high school youth at the Richard E. Sering Center, 4515 Superior Avenue, Cleveland. This idea to facilitate a conversation about race grew out of the tragic shootings at Emmanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston, SC last summer. The shooter was from an ELCA congregation. The Senior Pastor and other victims were graduates of an ELCA seminary. We thought it time to find ways for us as a church to equip our members to talk about race in meaningful ways. This is an attempt to do that with our confirmation youth, who will soon make their promise *to strive for justice and peace in all the world*. Pastor Sherwindt will arrange transportation for those of us who would like to be a part of this effort to talk about race as people of faith. Call the Church Office with your interest.

MORE DATES TO REMEMBER

Special Anniversary to Remember: The first *Valentine's Card* ever written was on the day St. Valentine died, February 14, 269 CE. On the day he was sentenced to die, he left a little note to a dear friend thanking her for her friendship and love. He signed it *from your Valentine*. This note started the custom of exchanging love messages on Valentine's Day.

FEED THE NEED: A Stark County Hunger Walk
The need is critical. One in four area children lacks regular access to food. Hunger affects one in seven people in our community. That's why we will walk with friends and fellow believers on May 1st. Our partners at Community Christian Church are serving as hosts yet again. The date is May 1st. The time is 2:00 p.m. The aim is to raise funds for the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank. 100% of everything we raise goes to support the work of this award-winning foodbank. Mayors from North Canton, Canton, Alliance, and Massillon will be present to cheer us on. There will be live music, snacks, water, and food, too. It should be a fun afternoon for making the kind of difference God desires. So, that's Sunday, May 1, 2016, with registration at 2 p.m., a 2.1 mile walk at 3 p.m., and a hot soup social afterwards. Mark your calendars now!



ACME COMMUNITY CASH-BACK RECEIPTS:

Thank you for saving and turning in your ACME receipts and supporting our programs for Zion's Youth. This year we collected receipts totaling \$5,121.64 in Community Cash Back amounts. We receive 5% of that total, which means we will receive a check for \$256.08 to support the Youth of Zion. We are so grateful to everyone's support! We will pick up this program again next fall.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2015: THE YEAR-IN-REVIEW

January: It's always nice to balance our budget, and enjoy the gains that increase the balance of our various funds; but 2015 was particularly good to the stock market, and the strides we made in terms of giving were sweeter because the temperatures heading into 2015 were colder, snow-plowing bills higher, and utility bills a bigger challenge. We started strong in January, and finished in the black.

February: Both Senior Independence and Midwest Services ended their longstanding rental agreements with us; and the Betty Bixler Pre-School would soon announce that the 2014-15 school year would be their last. A cushion of rental income, which had grown to about \$25,000 annually, would grow much smaller moving forward. We spent the rest of the year making sure we managed this change.

March: We had struggled during Advent with disappointing attendance for our Sunday Evening Advent Dinners & Devotions; but with a strong push to show a little mutual support, average attendance for our Sunday Evening Lenten Dinners & Devotions shot off the chart, exceeding 80, with a little help from Dean Yoder, who invited the Rittman High School Steel Drum Band to join us for our finale.

April: Howard Dansizen bought the ticket to support the North Canton Lions Club, then donated it to Zion's Food Pantry as a gesture of good will; and lo-and-behold, his ticket was drawn, Cathy Harvey got her nephew Seth to race through the aisles of the Acme Fresh Market Grocery Store on North Main, harvesting free groceries for our food pantry that totaled \$820.74!

May: Zion decided to support our friends at Community Christian Church as they hosted their Second Annual "Feed the Need" Stark County Hunger Walk on the first Sunday in May. We recruited 25 walkers – and a dog – on our way to raising \$2,800 in contributions to support the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank. The total raised from the walk by all groups participating was \$12,673.37.

June: We enjoyed another successful Congregational Meeting with the ballot filled with members willing to serve on Council, as Deacons, and alongside Trustees. It also became clear that our parsonage possessed greater value to us as rental property. We passed on the idea of selling it, and approved the necessary funds for repairs that would get it ready once again for the rental market.

July: What could ever take the place of Vacation Bible School as the highlight of whatever month in which it was scheduled! This year's theme was *G—Force, God's Love in Action*. Between Debbie Fox's leadership and Laura Thompson's nieces, we had another great time, and another great year for the community outreach we call Vacation Bible School. It's one of our many great traditions.

August: It was great to reflect on recent graduates. Confirmands included Summer Heller, Kat Milek, and Mallory Rhodes. Danielle Frock Welnak graduated from Tufts University Medical School, Kelly Walters from Johnson & Wales University, and Emily Whalen from Ohio State University. High School graduates included Savannah Heller, Natalie Henderson, Max Jacobs, Kevin Walters.

September: We combined *Rally Day* with our *End-of-the-Summer Party* (without the dunk tank) and enjoyed our usual combination of unbelievably delicious food, incredibly effective fundraising, and a great start to a new program year for our Sunday School with Sunday School Classes for all ages.

October: The incredibly great fundraising continued with our 12th Annual Youth Missions Craft Show & Oktoberfest. Our thanks to Connie Frank & her Craft Show Crew, to Dale Jacobs & his Kitchen Crew, and to everyone of you who helped us sell a record number of German dinners once again.

November: There may have been many highlights worthy of mention, but the one that comes readily to mind is the wedding day for Anna Espe Sherwindt & John Hale Cordas on November 14th.

December: Advent dinners, Poinsettia trees, *Carols from around the World*, special music, Christmas Eve.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF SUSAN SCHRIEVER GEIB

(February 25, 1937 – January 29, 2016)

Sue Geib is a friend who loved the church, loved our Lord, and loved her family as she made her way, joyfully and faithfully, through this journey we call life. She made her presence felt, graciously and supportively, whenever the opportunity arose. At Zion that meant singing with the choir, working with the comfort givers, participating in Bible studies, supporting our efforts with Vacation Bible School, and living her support through her faithful presence at worship. She often came to the office to cheer me up during the week, and we sometimes talked on the phone about the things all of us care about when it comes to the goals of the kingdom and the work of our church. Life itself can raise many questions about God's grace and God's will, but none were as challenging as the questions raised by the events of these last couple of months.

When I saw her at Aultman Hospital after what I thought would be a routine procedure, I was shocked to find out that they removed part of her lung, and shocked again by the prognosis that this surgery uncovered. I found time to visit Sue and Carl at their home two Thursdays ago, and I was shocked to hear that hospice had been called in, and shocked even more to discover that God would call Sue home to heaven just seven days later. The pace at which these developments unfolded was simply breath-taking. I could see the same mystified disbelief in the eyes and on the faces of everyone with whom I shared this news at Zion. It's good that we can see a silver lining in Sue's being spared a slow decline and lingering dying; and it's good that we can be grateful to a gracious God for His wisdom and love in helping us through these difficult days. But none of us suspected. We didn't see it coming. It came so fast as to leave us in shock. Yet even in shock, we draw comfort from our hope that "because He lives, we, too, shall live."

We are now on the cusp of the annual transition that leads through Lent to Easter. Next Wednesday we will gather in church for Ash Wednesday worship, which includes the imposition of ashes, along with the celebration of communion. The ashes remind us of our mortality: remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return. Communion invites us to remember that because He lives, we, too, shall live. St. Paul reminded us that "if we have been united with him in a death like his" – and we have through baptism – "we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." That's our hope because it is God's promise, paid for with Christ's death and sealed with his resurrection. When I think of the music Sue loved, I can't help but recall the many hymns we sing that lift up these hopes with joy and confidence. Here's the one I just mentioned: "I know that my Redeemer lives! What comfort this sweet sentence gives! He lives, he lives, who once was dead! He lives, my ever-living head! He lives and grants me daily breath. He lives and I shall conquer death. He lives my mansion to prepare. He lives to bring me safely there."

Here's a hymn I recalled at the committal service: "When in our music God is glorified, and adoration leaves no room for pride, it is as though the whole creation cried, Alleluia! Let every instrument be tuned for praise! Let all rejoice who have a voice to raise! And may God give us faith to sing always, Alleluia!" The hymn that will ring to the highest heavens when I think of Sue's life is a classic we all know: "For all the saints who from their labors rest, all who by faith before the world confessed, Your name, O Jesus, be forever blest: Alleluia! You were their rock, their fortress and their might, You, Lord, their captain in the well-fought fight, You, in the darkness, their one true light: Alleluia!" A couple of verses about the battle, struggling on earth to be faithful, true and bold, standing with the saints who nobly fought of old culminate with these verses: "But then there breaks a yet more glorious day, the saints triumphant rise in bright array, the King of glory passing on his way, Alleluia! From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast, through gates of pearl streams in the countless host, singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: Alleluia!" This is the image I will have of Sue until that great day when life is forever victorious, love is forever ours, and the promises in which we trust are the reality that we will share forever ... in Jesus' name. Amen

A FINAL TALLY FOR OUR: