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**PASTOR’S DEVOTIONAL**

**“See what love the Father has for us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.” – 1 John 3:1.**

Every February, approximately 150 million Valentine’s Day cards are exchanged, making Valentine’s Day the second most popular card-sending holiday after Christmas. The commemoration of Valentine’s Day – which also includes giving flowers, candy, and other tokens of affection to that special person in our lives – dates back to the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, when Pope Gelasius declared February 14 the day in which the church honors St. Valentine, who was martyred for the faith in A.D. 270. Valentine’s Day began to be popularly celebrated in Great Britain in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, and by the 18<sup>th</sup> Century it became a day for friends and lovers to exchange small tokens of affection or handwritten notes, which were eventually replaced by printed cards. In my school days, we exchanged small Valentine’s cards with our classmates; today, it is a day when people offer cards and gifts as an expression of the love that they share with each other.

Even though Valentine’s Day was originally established as a feast day in the church, it is not an occasion that we celebrate officially in worship (although it is an occasion in which couples are married, no matter what day of the week February 14 might fall in a particular year). But the theme of love that is at the center of this day’s celebration is one that is at the heart of the Christian Gospel,

which proclaims that *“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”* (John 3:16). Of course, the “love” of which the Gospel speaks is not the equivalent of the love that is celebrated on Valentine’s Day; while romantic love (identified by the Greek word *eros*) is a gift of God that is celebrated in the celebration of Holy Matrimony, the steadfast, limitless, unconditional love of God (*agape*) is the central message of the Christian faith, the good news that God’s love is so strong and steadfast that even human rebelliousness could not destroy it. As St. Paul teaches in his letter to the Romans, *“God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.”* (Romans 5:8). The Cross – originally a Roman instrument of suffering and death – was transformed by Christ’s death into the symbol of God’s steadfast love for us; it is *“when I survey the wondrous cross on which the prince of glory died”* that we witness God’s love that is truly *“so amazing, so divine.”* (ELW Hymn 803).



As we give thanks for the love that God shows us in Christ, the question is: how do we show our love for God? The hymn that invites us to “survey the wondrous cross” ends with the declaration that this *“love so amazing, so divine demands my soul, my life, my all.”* But how do we show such love in response to God’s love for us? It is a question that the people of God asked that is recorded in the book of the prophet Micah:

· *“With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?’* He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” – Micah 6:6-8.

Our proper response to God’s love is not in a gift that can be placed in an envelope or wrapped in a box; it is in the way in which we live our lives that express how God’s love has transformed us and blessed us. Martin Luther teaches in the *Small Catechism* that as God’s blessings are bestowed on us *“out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness of mine at all ... For all this I owe it to God to thank and praise, serve and obey him. This is most certainly true.”* As God’s love for us is limitless and unconditional, the manner in which we show our love for God is by living according to Christ’s commandment: *“Love one another as I have loved you.”* (John 15:12).

As February 14 approaches, many people will be visiting our local greeting card shops, florists, and candy stores to purchase gifts for their special Valentine. Restaurants will be filled with couples enjoying romantic dinners, and some couples will even be visiting jewelers to purchase engagement rings (and perhaps even calling their pastor to arrange a wedding date!). While all of these are appropriate expressions of our love, the greatest gift we can offer on this day and every day is the gift of our selves, our love and devotion that embodies the love that we share. It is this active, living love which is our call as God’s people in response to all that God has done for us; may our faith be active in love every day so that all may know that love of God that is ours in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Yours in God’s love,  
Pastor Jeff Laustsen

**CALL TO SPIRITUAL RENEWAL - Part 1**



I have been thinking about the spiritual renewal of Zion for the last few months, perhaps triggered by the book *Living Lutheran* (by Dave Daubert) which Pastor Jeff and I have been reading and discussing together with the congregational council. More discussion is in the works too, as Pastor Jeff has been planning to expand discussions to members of the congregation, and asking questions of

ourselves such as, “who are we?” and “why are we here?”

I also did some online searching regarding spiritual renewal and found a resource document on just that topic on the ELCIC website (<http://elcic.ca/CSR/default.cfm>). It is titled, *Call to Spiritual Renewal – ideas for individuals*. The document encourages readers to join others in “striving for deeper discipleship as we live out our baptismal covenants.” Aspects addressed are:

- ✓ regular attendance at worship;
- ✓ daily prayer and scripture reading;
- ✓ yearly involvement in a program of study;
- ✓ regular service in the community (not just the congregation);
- ✓ regular and proportional giving; and
- ✓ commitment to sharing the good news with those around us, beginning with our family and friends.

A simplified list reads: **Pray, Read, Worship, Study, Serve, Give, and Tell**

I would encourage you to have a look at the info on the ELCIC website but I will present a few of the suggestions from each category over the next couple of issues of the Zion newsletter. This month - **Pray, Read, Worship**; and next month - **Study, Serve, Give, and Tell**. *Descriptions and suggestions have been taken from the Spiritual Renewal document.*

**Pray** – *We are called to daily prayer. Whether this is an area you are completely comfortable with or something you have struggled with, the following are some ideas on how to include daily prayer in your life—and get you walking and talking in the right direction. Remember, there is no one way to pray, nor is there any one time to pray. Pray whenever and however you feel comfortable. Try one or more of these ideas and if it doesn’t work for you, try something else!*

- Set aside a bit of time each day (either as little or as much time as you would like) and devote that time to prayer.
- If you don’t already pray at meals, consider starting this as a tradition. Don’t know where to start? Try “Jump Start your Prayer Life.” ([archive.elca.org/prayer/resources/jump.html](http://archive.elca.org/prayer/resources/jump.html))
- Try also returning thanks at the end of a meal with something like *O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever* (Psalm 136:1).
- Pray together with your family. One person could offer a prayer each time you are together or you could have everyone offer a petition or prayer so that everyone feels included.
- Use a bell or chime, a candle or other tangible signs of calling yourself or your family to brief times of prayer in the home, especially with children.

**Read** – *We are called to daily reading of the Bible. Here are some ideas for incorporating reading the Bible into your daily life.*

- Set aside a regular time and place for reading the Bible. Perhaps you have time while sitting on the bus on the way to or from work, or in the evenings after dinner.
- Use the ELCIC’s *Eternity for Today* resource, or a similar devotional that includes a short portion of scripture and a written prayer.
- Listen to the Bible on CD while doing the dishes, driving or walking.
- Read the Bible together with your family or with a friend (don’t be afraid to highlight, underline, and write in your Bible)
- Try the One-Year Bible. This will involve reading larger portions of scripture every day.

**Worship** - *We are called to regular attendance at public and communal worship. Consider ways that you can increase your participation in a regular worship; the following are a few ideas to get you started.*

- Commit to attending worship regularly.
- Deepen your participation at church: sing in the choir, pre-read the lessons, assist as a reader or with communion, greeting, or the offering. You can also get involved by participating on your congregation’s worship committee.
- Work with others to enhance some aspect of worship in your congregation: visual art and expression, movement, children’s experiences, other sensory expressions.
- Talk with family or friends over coffee or lunch following worship about what you felt, learned, sensed, missed, shared in worship.

*To be continued in next month’s Zion newsletter...*

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Submitted by Vicar Albert Romkema

## ANNUAL MEETING: FEBRUARY 12



We are at the time of the year when our congregation holds its annual meeting. This year our meeting will be held on Sunday, February 12 beginning at 11:15 AM. This meeting is important as it allows all members to review the year that was and to plan for the future. An annual meeting is always essential as it allows us to work out together how we can best be the church of Jesus Christ. Please exercise your privilege as a member of Zion Church and plan to attend the meeting. All confirmed members have voice and vote... **P.S. Annual reports will be available a week before the meeting, so please pick one up and read it to prepare for the meeting.**

## LENTEN WORSHIP

Barbara Brown Taylor, a well-known Anglican preacher, once likened the season of Lent to a “springtime for the soul”:

“Forty days to cleanse the system and open the eyes to what remains when all comfort is gone. Forty days to remember what it is like to live by the grace of God and not by what we can supply for ourselves.” (*Home by Another Way*)



### LENTEN SERVICE SCHEDULE

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, which this year falls on Wednesday, March 1. We will gather for worship here at Zion at 7:30 p.m. to begin this holy season by confession our sins, receiving the imposition of ashes in remembrance that “*you are dust, and to dust you shall return,*” and recommitting ourselves to walk with our Lord.

Our Lenten Midweek Worship Services will commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation by focusing on Martin Luther’s central teachings in the *Small Catechism*, which he wrote as a teaching tool of the Christian faith, not only within the church but also in the home, which Luther believed was the place where faith is first shared and taught. Each week, will focus on one of the five

major sections of the Catechism:

March 8:	The Ten Commandments
March 15:	The Creed
March 22:	The Lord’s Prayer
March 29:	Holy Baptism
April 5:	Holy Communion

Our order of worship will again be *Holden Evening Prayer*, which has become a beloved part of our Lenten worship tradition here at Zion. We invite you to join us for these times of worship and reflection on what it means to be a Christian and how Lutherans continue to be called to walk as sisters and brothers in Christ during Lent and in all seasons.

## SALT FOR REFUGEES UPDATE

The Stratford Anglican Lutheran Team (SALT) for Refugees welcomed the Alta-eh family to our community in June and has been working to help them settle into their new home. The family recently welcomed a new child, and the older children have been enjoying their first year in school here in Canada. Many volunteers from our four congregations (St. James, St. Paul’s, St. Stephen’s, and Zion) have devoted many hours so that the family might be able to establish themselves and feel at home

in their new country.



One need that the family is now facing is for disposable diapers for their newborn child. We invite you to bring packages of diapers to church, which will be distributed to the family as they are needed. Plans are also being made for a barbeque in Upper Queen’s Park in the spring or early summer where members of the four congregations will be able to get together with one another and the Alta-eh family. More information about this will be shared as soon as a date is set.

We are looking for a person from Zion to serve on the SALT Coordinating Committee, which meets regularly to discuss the family’s ongoing needs and to assist them in their continuing settlement. Please speak with Pastor Jeff for more information.

Thank you to everyone who has participated in this ministry of hospitality that we are sharing with our sisters and brothers in Christ in the Anglican Churches of Stratford.

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM CONGREGATIONAL COUNCIL



There are four Congregational Council members whose terms are concluding as of the Annual Meeting. They are Andrew Ehgoetz, Brian Gropp, Linda Weitzel and Nancy White.

Congregational Council will be attending a one day Council Retreat likely in March 2017 where we will review what we have been reading and discussing at the beginning of each Council meeting over the past eight months. We have been using the book “Living Lutheran: Renewing Your Congregation” to prepare for crafting a purpose statement and guiding principles to bring forward to Zion Congregation.

The Property Committee has reviewed and prioritized the assessment received from a local waterproofing company regarding the overall water issues. They recommend that the most pressing work be done in the Spring and that two more quotes be obtained.

A motion was passed that maintenance records, including quotes, drawings and invoices for renovations and repairs be kept in the Church office under the guidance of the Property Committee.

Three quotes should be secured for an additions, repairs, or renovations that would not be considered day to day upkeep of the Church property.

We congratulate Vicar Albert on his call to St. John’s Lutheran Church in Petawawa. Our thoughts and prayers will be with him and we wish him every success.



## WOMEN OF FAITH NEWS

On behalf of the Women of Faith, I would like to thank everyone who so generously provided cookies for the shut-in baskets. Also, thank you to all the ladies who helped pack and to the confirmands for delivering the baskets.

Thank you to Irene Ehgoetz who made 10 beautiful tablecloths and altar cloths, assisted by Ellen Wolfe. Thank you for volunteering so much of your time. We thank Kathy Schellenberger who is retiring as our secretary. Kathy we appreciate your honesty and integrity as an executive member and will miss you. Thank you and welcome to Joyce Dietz, who has accepted the secretary position.

We are sorry that Beryl Horst had to resign from Outreach & Fellowship. Beryl we thank you for your many, many years as a faithful worker. You have been a true example to us all. Wishing you all the best and hope you are feeling better soon. We appreciate the willingness of Brenda Pearson, who is going to take over for Beryl.

World Day of Prayer - Friday, March 3 at 2 PM hosted by Zion but being held at **Avon Mennonite Church, Greenwood Court** because of our unfinished renovations.

2017 Executive - President - Joanne Young  
 Treasurer - Ellen Wolfe  
 Secretary - Joyce Dietz  
 Chair of Outreach - Rita Mueller  
 Program Coordinator - Darlene Illman

I would like to thank all the WOF for their hard work and dedication throughout this year. We were able to accomplish many good works for Zion and community.

Next regular WOF meeting will be held in March.

We always welcome new members.

WOF President, Joanne Young

**+ FUNERALS +**  
**Ruth Illmann, on November 23**  
**Charlotte Scholl, on December 8**

## THANK YOU

A heartfelt thank you to the following for donating to the Christmas Flower Fund.



**Judith Hammond, Ken & Mary Helen Dale, Brian & Barb Gropp, Elfreida Zimmermann, Don & Eva Wagner, Richard & Anne Graul, Wayne Faulhafer Family, Noreen Wilker, Wayne & Joanne Young, Robert & Bev Keutsch, Doreen Graul, Jean Weir, Bruce Mitchell & Ellen Wolfe, Bill & Irene Ehgoetz, Lynnette McLeod, Elsie Dahm, Margaret Wolfe, Violet Cook, Brian & Pauline Schade, Richard & Jean Winter, Bob & Heather Wickenheiser, Gordon & Elaine Steed, Allan & Phyllis Jeffery.**

## ZION'S FRIENDSHIP MEAL



COMMUNITY DINNER

Zion will host the Friendship Meal on Friday, February 24 at 5 PM. At that meal we will host guests from the Stratford area who are in need of fellowship or a good home-cooked meal. In order to serve our guests well, volunteers are needed who can serve for the event or for an hour or two to prepare for the meal. Help is appreciated to set tables, prepare the food, serve tables or help with clean up. Please contact Sister Jean Widmeyer (273-6810) if you can help.

## FEBRUARY 2017 VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers assist with our Sunday morning worship services. Listed below are those who serve in February as a reminder and as a thank you for serving.

Date	Communion Assistants	Greeters	Readers	Usher Captains	Counting Captains
Feb 5	Darlene Illman & Barbara Higgins	Brian & Sharyl Coe	Kurt Gough	Ed Illman	Alison Johnston
Feb 12	N/A	Gerald & Isabel Cook	Dianne Hiller	Wayne Yundt	N/A
Feb 19	Ed Illman & Fritz Steigmeier	Tom & Joanne Cosstick	Susan Iredale	Wayne Yundt	Brian Gropp
Feb 26	N/A	Ron & Deb Deichert	Anne Cooper	Jerry Terhaerd	Lynnette McLeod