

## **WORDS FROM THE PASTOR: THE YEAR IN REVIEW**

**JANUARY:** The year began on the high note of having erased a year-long budget deficit with a very generous December. The surplus for December was \$5,506.30, which allowed us to wind up in the black by \$1,670.03. The boiler has been adding to our winter heating bills these past few years, and it has taken the entire year to overcome the budgetary hole created by humongous heating bills. We hope that will change with the installation of our new HV/AC systems. Time will tell, but so far this expectation seems to be on track. In any event, along with the good news of starting the year with a surplus, Tina Beaber took the lead in setting records for our support of the Souper Bowl, a project spearheaded by our youth, which raised cash and in-kind donations to help families in northeast Ohio with shoes and toys, along with coats and clothing. This was our second year at the Souper Bowl, and we raised \$527.64 for this great cause.

**FEBRUARY:** Lent arrived early, with Ash Wednesday on February 6<sup>th</sup>. We hardly had time to catch our breath before jumping in feet first to another series of Sunday Evening Lenten Programs that offered delicious food, great dramas, and exceptional fellowship. One of the surprises of the season came with our Sunday Evening Lenten service on February 24, when we heard that Steve Dague had fallen in his garage, severely bruising his spinal cord. A serendipitous suggestion that we use the offering from our Sunday Evening Lenten Service to assist the Dagues during this time of family and financial crisis wound up setting the stage for a series of homegrown miracles. Beginning from an impromptu collection of \$185, we have gone on to raise almost \$30,000 in local support for Steve and Darla! With God all things are possible!

**MARCH** was a month filled with Lenten preparations for Holy Week and Easter. Palm Sunday featured the Children's Program, *Harriet's Easter Hunt*, which began a week of outstanding choral anthems (to be revisited later in the month). Our Maundy Thursday Service of Healing, the Good Friday Tenebrae, a Baptism at the Easter Vigil, with Easter Festival Worship proclaiming the Good News of Resurrection: Holy Week involved all five senses in celebrating our faith. The culmination of this celebration came the following week, when Suzanne Walters assembled all of our choral resources, and more, the Senior Choir, Zion's Praise Team, friends, members, and neighbors, to host a Benefit Concert, our singing an Easter cantata, *Who Is This King?*, to raise money for Steve Dague and his family. That was a night none of us will ever forget, faith active in love, God's love alive among us, dispelling doubt, and giving rise to hope.

**APRIL:** Steve's rehab was just beginning at precisely the same time as Zion's operating budget deficit would peak. The worst of winter was now over as we moved ahead into spring. The Boiler Task Force began its work on a report that would lay out quite a challenge for us as we looked ahead to replacing a fifty-year-old boiler with a heating and cooling system that could serve our church for the next fifty years! April was a transitional month, for the Dagues and for Zion. Change was in the air. Improvements were coming. Aggressive goals would characterize the order of the day. The Steve Dague Fund continued to astound the families Dague and Zion. There was no shortage of challenges: Steve would regain movement, take on therapy, and begin to walk; Zion would address needs for property improvements, plan for mission trips, and work through support staff transitions. We were in store for some wonderful surprises, especially when it came to trusting God's grace, living Christ's love, and following the Spirit's lead.

## **THE YEAR IN REVIEW, CONTINUED**

**MAY** means the Mother's Day Breakfast, and this year's edition was better than ever, thanks to the Singing Chef, the Men of Zion, those long-stemmed single red roses, and a roomful of great Moms! May is also a month for graduations, which hit home for the Sherwindts with Austin's big day in Boston. Other graduates included Matt Slease (Stark State), along with high school graduates Becca Coulter, Todd Cizek, Corey Beaber, and Chase Weinman. We celebrated Steve Dague's return home, and ended the month with a celebration of the Festival of Pentecost, which meant Confirmation for Marissa and Ronda Keating, Matt and Ben Mathie, Ashley Porter, Brooke Roman, and Kelly Walters! While their journey in faith was just beginning, we reflected as well on the many to whom we would say goodbye in 2008: Catherine Elsass (January), Eileen Johns and Margaret Snyder (February), Ila Mae Givler (April), Fred Elsass (June), Marge Woodside and Cora Lanzalotta (August), Bob Leed and Aleene Heist (October).

**JUNE** began with our Congregational Meeting called for the specific purpose of approving plans for replacing our old boiler with a new HV/AC system. The price tag would approach \$120,000 (with half of this amount coming from legacy gifts in our Merrill Lynch account, and half coming from new giving through pledges) There was no hesitation whatsoever. The plans were clear. The will was there. The votes were cast. Zion was resolved to move forward, which we did. Pledges were made, exceeding \$60,000 over two years; and these pledges were given, many up front and in full, placing the exclamation point of resolve on a long-term, lingering problem soon to be just a memory! We took some time to express our gratitude for the wonderful difference Suzanne Walters had made as our Music Director. In fact, we thanked the entire Walters family for their leadership in transforming the look, feel, and sound of worship at Zion.

**JULY** returned Zion's focus to youth. We welcomed home a great group of youth and adult leaders upon completing the third edition of our commitment to *Help New Orleans Heal*. Fifteen of us connected with *Lutheran Disaster Response* in our desire to make a difference. We continued this theme of making a difference by arranging two service days with *Habitat for Humanity of Greater Stark and Carroll Counties*. This focus continued with our annual production of Vacation Bible School, a ministry that once again offered all sorts of opportunities for service – at home, with friends, in the neighborhood, and for the community. Celebrating Christ's love in *God's Big Backyard* did not disappoint, as \$450 was collected during our daily offerings for *Zion's Food Pantry*, and another \$500 was collected and given to *Habitat for Humanity*! We extend our thanks to everyone who helped to make *God's Big Backyard* a huge success.

**AUGUST** was hardly a vacation month at Zion, with work proceeding at breakneck speed in the Sanctuary and on the HV/AC system. New air-conditioning units were complete in the Sanctuary, Luther and Memorial Halls, Senior Independence and the Church Offices. New lighting in the Sanctuary would complement the new sound system we had installed the previous year. The east windows got a makeover. New liturgical paintings adorned the west wall. There was no vacation on the financial front either. Collections continued to come in for the Steve Dague Fund, reaching \$27,000! The HV/AC Fund approached \$30,000 in one month's time! What is more, the Operating Budget deficit, which had peaked at over \$12,500 in April, had begun its descent with successive monthly surpluses May, June, July, and August!

## **THE YEAR IN REVIEW, CONCLUDED**

**SEPTEMBER** began with the *Third Annual Rally Day Pig Roast*, hosted by the Men of Zion, enjoyed by all of our members and friends, with the return of the fundraising Dunk Tank that helped to raise \$3,000 for some new carpet to go with our new HV/AC system! Sunday School got off to a great start, and plans for the *Fifth Annual Youth Missions Craft Show* were officially underway. Momentum was building as the congregational family began to realize that 2008 was a very special year for Zion. Our search for a new choir director was gaining momentum. The boiler portion of our new HV/AC system was installed and connected. Chris Thomas saved us \$2,250 by devising his own route for removing the old boiler through the basement window, and another \$10,000 by serving as the onsite project manager and all-purpose electrician for the installation of our HV/AC system. We're closing in on an historic year at Zion, thanks to you!

**OCTOBER** began with the celebration of *Blanket Sunday* for the Women of Zion, and continued with an amazingly successful *Youth Missions Craft Show*, setting the stage for the Festivals of Reformation Sunday and All Saints Sunday, which completes our *Communion Class for Kids*, with Charlie Danner and Debbie Fox leading the way to all sorts of new insights into what it means to bring a *believing heart* to the Sacrament of the Holy Communion. 19 blankets, 64 comforters, 64 Health Kits, 78 School Kits were collected for *Lutheran World Relief* on Blanket Sunday; \$4,675 was raised for youth ministries through the Youth Missions Craft Show; after yet another excursion into congregational dining excellence, the 2009 Proposed Budget was handily approved; October continued our string of surplus months for the Operating Budget.

**NOVEMBER** brought with it the celebration of great news with the dedication of our Sanctuary Renovations on the Festival of Christ the King Sunday. Brian Walters led the way in offering special thanks to Armand Lenarz, along with so many others, who helped us save \$65,319 on our way to spending \$27,825 on the improvements we brought to our worship space: painting the walls, replacing the candelabras, coverings for music stands and piano, handrail by the lectern, overhead screen and projector, new lighting, wiring, and computer controls, liturgical paintings, beautiful window treatments, all applied with lots of love and an eye for beauty. The Operating Budget, after spending all year in the red, popped its head above water with a generous five-Sunday month, with all sorts of turkeys finding their way from the generous hearts we bring to worship to the dining room tables of families throughout our community.

**DECEMBER** offered several heartwarming looks at the Christmas story, with Sunday Evening Advent dinners, crafts, and devotions, the Sunday School production of *Beyond Christmas*, an enjoyable evening singing Carols from around the World with Carole Singer and carol singers, two Christmas Eve services, the Chancel Guild Christmas Dinner, the Men of Zion Prime Rib Christmas Dinner, and our Advent Giving Tree that generated presents galore for local families, along with fifty \$25 gifts of Christmas dinner for the families we serve through our Food Pantry & Clothing Closet. While the final figures are not in yet, it is quite clear that December will cap off a year that solved the decades-old problem of our old boiler, made phenomenal changes at worship, including the hiring of our new choir director, dazzled with a responsive outpouring of assistance to friends in need, and met the bold demands of our 2008 church budget. Well done, good and faithful coworkers, serving so faithfully in the work and ministry of our church!

## **AN OVERVIEW OF BENEVOLENCE FOR 2008**

When the year began, Zion established as our benevolence target the goal of giving 15% of our offering income to ministries other than our own operating expenses. That amount, based on our best estimates, should have been \$27,345. That's what we approved with the 2008 budget. Instead, our commitment to benevolence turned out to be well in excess \$55,000. That is simply incredible! It is an amount that is far greater than even the 15% we regard as our fair share of the work of the wider church. Words cannot describe what a phenomenally generous response this was during a year, which, for many, has been quite a challenge, financially speaking. *Thank you* will have to do. All of us in church leadership are both proud of and grateful for your effort.

\$19,200	Our primary commitment to the work of the wider church comes through the support we give to the Synod. We gave \$19,200 to the <b><i>Northeastern Ohio Synod</i></b> in 2008. Our Synod keeps about 50% for local efforts here in Ohio, and sends the other 50% to the <b><i>ELCA</i></b> , which extends the reach of the church across the nation and around the world. This was an increase of \$700 over last year's support.
\$ 1,200	We also contributed an additional \$1,200 to the <b><i>ELCA Global Missions</i></b> , which was used to support the Schmalzle family and their missionary work in Kenya. Their work in Kenya was brought to a close following the domestic strife and tribal rivalries that unexpectedly disrupted life in Kenya in 2007 and into 2008.
\$ 542	Through the Women of Zion, we helped to contribute to the work of the <b><i>Women of the ELCA</i></b> , and additional monies and supplies to Lutheran World Relief.
\$18,533	Our major commitment here at home in North Canton during 2008 focused on the special needs that arose with <b><i>Steve Dague</i></b> 's tragic fall in February and the rehab that has followed since. God has really blessed our ability to respond, and between special fundraisers, an overflow of generosity from members and friends, along with some Matching Funds from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, our response to these needs exceeded anything we might have imagined. Another of our local commitments, one which we have sustained for going on eight years,
\$ 8,377	is Zion's <b><i>Food Pantry and Clothing Closet</i></b> . Everyone got in the act this year, the Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, and sister North Canton churches, including Community Christian Church, Trinity Baptist Church, Northminster Presbyterian Church, St. Paul Roman Catholic Church, and the list goes on. In addition to weekly donations, our generosity also includes such efforts as the annual <b><i>Turkey Give-Away</i></b> and our <b><i>Advent Giving Tree</i></b> , which provides gifts for children and food for families during the Christmas season. Locally, we were also
\$ 500	able to raised \$500 for the <b><i>Habitat for Humanity</i></b> through this year's Vacation Bible School. With the help of the Youth of Zion, the Men of Zion, and Lutheran
\$ 1,500	Men in Mission, we contributed \$1,500 to the <b><i>Lutheran Disaster Response</i></b> in our desire to <b><i>Help New Orleans Heal</i></b> . The Youth of Zion helped us raise funds
\$ 528	for <b><i>the Souper Bowl</i></b> , contributed to two sister congregations on our way to
\$ 700	Helping New Orleans Heal, <b><i>St. Andrew and First Lutheran Churches</i></b> , with yet
\$ 2,200	another \$2,250 used to offer help to local families right here in North Canton,
\$ 2,002	plus an additional \$2002, which we spent sending our missionaries to New Orleans.
<b>\$55,282</b>	<b><i>Total Benevolence in 2008, more than double what we set as our original goal!</i></b>

## CHURCH COUNCIL NEWS

Our meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m., since half of our Council was already on hand enjoying the delicious Christmas dinner hosted by the Chancel Guild in Luther Hall. So, in addition to Carol Rossbach, Betty Tracy, Tina Beaber, Mary Humbert, Steve Ross, and Pastor Sherwindt, Jayne Schrader, Dave Palumbo, Linda Lancashire, Chris Thomas, Dale Jacobs, and Mark Votaw were present. Our meeting was short, to the point, and focused almost entirely on the Good News that we had moved from the red into the black for the year, extending our string of positive balance months to seven, with monthly income ahead of monthly expenses in May, June, July, August, September, October, and now November, and finally moving into the black for the year!

The remainder of our meeting was spent focusing on a very busy and challenging December. The Sunday Evening Advent Services were already under way, and we offered our thanks to everyone who has had a role to play in making our Sunday evenings successful, in terms of both delicious dinners we've enjoyed and the great attendance we have experienced. We also reveled in the wonderful additions of color and balance that grace our Sanctuary. Thank you to all!

### ZION'S NOVEMBER FINANCIAL FACTS

November Income	\$21,710.17
November Expenses	\$17,480.13
<b>November Surplus!</b>	<b>\$ 4,230.04</b>
Income thru November	\$227,476.76
Expenses " November	\$223,999.44
<b>Surplus thru November</b>	<b>\$ 3,477.32</b>
<b>Our 2008 YTD Surplus!</b>	<b>\$ 3,477.32</b>
<i>The 2007 YTD (Deficit)</i>	<i>( \$ 3,479.45)</i>

***We thank you for your generous support!***

## WORSHIP NEWS AT ZION

All four Sunday Evening Advent programs received great support from our church family. Church Council hosted the first Sunday Evening Advent dinner, featuring Italian fare prepared by Dave Palumbo. Carol Rossbach designed the family craft, Advent wreaths for home use, and our devotional service highlighted how Lutherans started all the interest we now have in Christmas trees and Advent wreaths. The Men of Zion hosted the second Advent dinner, serving Christmas hams and gourmet macaroni & cheese, a Dale Jacobs' signature creation. Megan & Mason Meyer joined Dale Jacobs in anchoring a very delightful *Lessons & Carols Service*. Zion's Chancel Guild took charge of the menu for our third Advent dinner, with Carol Rossbach leading us through our family craft, which focused on Chrismons, yet another Lutheran creation! The Advent Service used the voices of children to tell us the story of salvation through Chrismons, which were then used to decorate Zion's Christmas tree. Zion's Youth (and their parents) served as hosts for our fourth Advent dinner, with a delicious pork roast taking center stage at our serving table. Carole Singer then led us on a journey of singing *Carols from around the World*. The Singers provided the instruments and Zion's worshipers contributed their joyous rhythms to combine for a memorable evening. On Wednesday, we gathered in our beautifully renovated and nicely decorated Sanctuary for two truly beautiful Christmas Eve services. At the early service, Brian, Suzanne, and Kelly Walters combined to tell the story of *Silent Night* through music and art! At our traditional Candlelight Service, the pews were filled and our hearts overflowed with joyous praise as we listened to the story of Jesus' birth, a story that keeps us forever young with the holy wonder of pondering the mystery of the Word made flesh.

## **GREAT NEWS FROM ZION'S SUNDAY SCHOOL**

### **UPCOMING EVENTS – MARK YOUR CALENDARS!**

**Sunday, January 11:** Sunday School Choir Practice begins at 9:10 a.m. in the Choir Room

**Sunday, January 18:** Sunday School Choir Practice begins at 9:10 a.m. in the Choir Room

**Sunday, January 25:** Sunday School Choir Practice begins at 9:10 a.m. in the Choir Room

**Sunday, March 1st:** Practice for this year's Children's Easter Program begins with March

**Saturday, April 4th:** Dress Rehearsal for Children's Easter Program and Pizza Party!

**Sunday, April 5th:** The Children's Easter Program, Palm Sunday at the 10:30 a.m. service

### **PRE-K THROUGH THE SIXTH GRADE**

Great news! Starting Sunday, January 11<sup>th</sup>, the Children's Choir will begin practicing again. Practice will start at 9:10 a.m. in the choir room with Megan Meyer. This will include all of our kids in Pre-K through 6<sup>th</sup> grade. The kids will practice each Sunday before Sunday School, and will sing once a month during the 10:30 a.m. service. We are looking forward to hearing their beautiful voices this month. Sunday School will begin at 9:30 a.m. following choir practice, and finish around 10:20 a.m. We have one change to the Sunday School classes. We will now have a third class for our Pre-K students led by Connie Riffle. Janet Slease will continue to teach the first and second grade class. Mary Humbert will teach the fourth through sixth grade class.

### **THANKS FOR ALL YOUR HELP WITH *BEYOND CHRISTMAS***

What a wonderful journey we enjoyed as Zion's Youth led us on a trip that took us *Beyond Christmas* this year! What an amazing journey, and a delightful experience, beginning with the birth of our Savior, as we witnessed the holy family gathered together in the manger in Bethlehem, then, following the journey further, we watched as Jesus grew older in Nazareth, beginning his ministry, offering his teachings and performing many miracles. From there it was a view of his death and resurrection, and finally, our journey came to a place where you and I were invited to see how the spirit of Jesus might live through us in our daily lives of worship and service. We saw that the culmination of God's plan for Jesus was Jesus alive among us.

*Thank you* to all of the youth for their hard work and for doing a terrific job! We are so proud of our young members, and we truly enjoy watching them grow up in our midst over the years! *Thank you* to our older youth for participating in this year's production of *Beyond Christmas*, and *thank you* to the parents for sharing your children, and for your flexibility and dedication to our practice shedule.

## **MORE GREAT NEWS FOR ZION'S YOUTH**

### **MORE THANKS FOR *BEYOND CHRISTMAS* (continued)**

In addition to our youth, their parents, the older youth, and Debbie Fox, we would also like to thank everyone else who helped make this year's Christmas Program such a great success! *Thank you* to Tina Beaber, Vicki Givler, Mary Humbert, Connie & Melissa Riffle, Janet Slease, and Corlene Coulter for your support and help during our practices, the program, and our Christmas party. *Thank you*, as well, to Megan Meyer for leading the music, and to Brian Walters for engineering the sound system. Everyone's time, dedication and commitment to our kids is so greatly appreciated! *Thank You! Thank You! Thank you* to everyone involved!

### **THANK YOU TO OUR YOUTH FOR A GREAT DECEMBER**

December was a very busy month for Zion's youth, and there are many *thank you's* to share! First, *thank you* to everyone who supported Zion's Advent Giving Tree this year. It was once again an amazing success! Not only were we able to collect over forty gifts for several of our pantry families, but we were able to collect fifty \$25 gifts for each of the families we serve in order to insure that they would have a Christmas meal! That is truly a picture of what the Christmas Season is about – sharing God's love and helping those in need! *Thank you* to everyone for making such a wonderful difference!

A *big thank you* also goes out to Brooke & Taylor Roman for putting up our Advent Giving Tree this year, and helping to hang the tags; and *thank you* to everyone who shared their links of thanksgiving that helped to decorated the tree! Next, we must thank our youth of all ages and their adult leaders for helping to wrap all of the Advent Giving Tree gifts. This is an enormous undertaking, and all pitched in with great enthusiasm! A *big thank you* also goes out to everyone who baked cookies and donated them for the pantry families. We had a great afternoon of fun and service on Saturday, December 13<sup>th</sup>!

Finally, *thank you* to all of the youth who helped with the Advent Service that focused on Chrismons (December 14), as well as the Advent Service that was hosted by our Youth and their families (December 21). We really appreciate the dedication of our youth and their families, especially during the busy holiday season. A *big thank you* goes out to Brian & Lisa Kay, Doug & Lisa Roman, Steve & Linda Ross, and Tina Beaber for heading up the Youth Advent Dinner. The meal was delicious and enjoyed by all. We thank everyone who had a role to play in helping to prepare and serve the meal.

We took time during our Sunday Evening Advent Service to thank three of our now college-age youth – Corey Beaber, Todd Cizek, Chase Weinman – for offering their service at worship as acolytes throughout their high school years. We were happy to celebrate the many activities and programs we organize to help get us *Beyond Christmas*: the Souper Bowl, our Mission Trips, Service Days with Habitat for Humanity, on-hands help with the Food Pantry & Clothing Closet.... *Thank you* to our Youth Leaders for their vision for service and love for our youth.

Looking ahead, we are hoping to plan a *youth ice skating event* in January and a *family tubing event* in February. Details will follow once dates and times have been set for these events.

## WIDER CHURCH NEWS

**God Has Come to Lighten Earth:** You are invited to join in an Epiphany Service of Lessons & Carols with Holy Communion, on Tuesday, January 6, 2009, 7:00 p.m. This is a joint service of congregations from the *Canton-Massillon Conference*, and is hosted by Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (2551 55<sup>th</sup> Street NE). Many Christmas carols and other hymns celebrating the light of Christ will be a part of this grand finale service of the Christmas season. The offering that evening will be used to support broadcasts of the *Conversation* radio program of the *Canton Area Lutheran Ministry*. A light reception will follow the service.

**Northeastern Ohio Synod 2009 Bible Bowl:** Be a part of the 2009 Bible Bowl, when we will focus on our knowledge of the Gospel of John. Grace Lutheran Church in Wadsworth will be our host on February 28, 2009. Teams should express interest by contacting Judy Hoshek of the Synod staff. Her email address is [jhoshek@neos-elca.org](mailto:jhoshek@neos-elca.org)

**Master Builders, Lutheran Men in Mission:** Get ready for the *Annual Men's Winter Breakfast*, which is set for Saturday, February 7, beginning at 8:00 a.m., at Abiding Savior Lutheran Church, which is located at 1845 Sawburg Road in Alliance, Ohio. Pastor Walt Jordan will lead us in Bible study. Music will be provided by the *Town Sound Quartet*. You can RSVP to [jsavarin@aol.com](mailto:jsavarin@aol.com)

Martin Luther King, Jr., born on January 15, 1929, will be remembered on January 21. His was a witness inspired by the life of our Lord Jesus. Here is one of his many memorable quotes: "Hatred paralyzes life; love releases it. Hatred confuses life; love harmonizes it. Hatred darkens life; love illumines it." Amen

## A THANK YOU TO ZION

*Dear members of Zion's church family,*

I just wanted to thank you for the wonderful gifts you shared during the Christmas season. Your cards were heart-warming, every one, and the many gifts of Christmas cookies and tree ornaments, chocolates, Starbucks cards, and restaurant certificates that Marilyn and I received, are already being put to good use.

Perhaps most evident throughout the season has been your strong support for the many programs that have become a part of our preparation for the celebration of Christ's birth ... both in our world and in our hearts: the Sunday Evening Advent dinners and devotions, the Advent Giving Tree, Zion's Food Pantry & Clothing Closet with our turkey give-aways and Christmas hams, the Children's Christmas Play, dinners hosted by the Chancel Guild and the Men of Zion, and, of course, our Christmas Eve services.

So many invest so much in keeping the life of Zion strong, vibrant, and faithful. For your every gesture of mutual support and active initiative, we are deeply grateful. The Lord has blessed us with a wonderful congregational family here at Zion. Every facet of our life together has become an opportunity to grow in love and service by grace.

*May God's richest blessings be yours,  
Pastor Sherwindt & Marilyn*

# THANKS!

## THE WOMEN OF ZION

The Chancel Guild's Christmas Dinner on Tuesday, December 9 lived up to our highest expectations. The food, the fellowship, the service, and the great company made for a delightful evening. Food was back on the front burner the following Sunday, when the Chancel Guild hosted our Sunday Evening Advent Dinner on December 14. December is a busy time for the women who serve with our Chancel Guild, and we are thankful for the extra service that is extended with additional communion services during the season, and for the extra care that is given in tending to the many poinsettias that add so much in the way of color, love, and meaning to our worship.

All women are invited to join us for our *monthly Bible study*, which meets in Luther Hall on the third Tuesday, which this month is *January 20, at 9:30 a.m.* January's lesson continues our study of the hidden hand of God in the Wisdom stories from Ruth, Daniel and Esther. Session 5 will focus on *Daniel: Trial by Fire*. Last month, we met Daniel and his three friends, young noblemen deported from Jerusalem to Babylon. This month, we turn to the trial by fire that awaits them. In our look at Daniel 3, we will see how God's *lovingkindness* leads the three young men to take the heroic risk of defying the idolatrous decree King Nebuchadnezzar. For the sake of proving faithful to the *lovingkindness* of the Lord our God, our three witnesses are willing to walk into the fire with no guarantee that God will deliver them. (See Daniel 3:17-18) It is interesting to note that rather than taking the men out of the furnace, God's presence accompanies them in it. (See Daniel 3:25) Luther called this the theology of the cross. Plan to join us for January's study. You'll be glad you did, and so will we!

## HEY, DID YOU KNOW?

*The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* begins on January 18. This year's theme is "that they may become one in your hand." (Read Ezekiel 37:15-19, 22-24a.) The past year has been the centenary celebration of this tradition, dating back to 1908, when in the chapel of a small Atonement Franciscan Convent of the Protestant Episcopal Church, on a remote hillside fifty miles from New York City, this new prayer movement caught the imagination of other Christians beyond the Franciscan Friars and Sisters of the Atonement to become an energetic movement that gradually blossomed into a worldwide observance involving many nations and millions of people around the world.

During the course of the last one hundred years, one of the more powerful symbols and most effective tools for nurturing a sense of unity among our many church traditions has been the very ordinary observance of what we know as the *Revised Common Lectionary*. A *lectionary* is a list of texts from Scripture arranged for reading during worship. Since at least from the fourth century, Christians have organized lists of Scriptural readings for worship according to the church calendar. In the mid-1970s, conversations began among ecumenical colleagues seeking a common lectionary. The Consultation on Common Texts began its work in 1978, with pastors and scholars from the Episcopal, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and United Methodist churches. This group followed the lead of Roman Catholics in choosing three texts – Old Testament, Epistle, and Gospel – in the format of a three-year lectionary cycle. Achieving ecumenical agreement was challenging; but in 1992, the results became known as the *Revised Common Lectionary*. We at Zion use it, as does the entire ELCA!

