

*Gathered, Empowered, Sent*



## Zion's Lutheran Church

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Reverend Caitlin Kurtz, Pastor

December 14, 2020

Dear Members and Friends of Zion's:

God's grace and peace be with you this day! During Advent, we watch and wait for the coming of Jesus—remembering with thanksgiving His birth over 2000 years ago, trusting His daily presence in our lives right here and now, and anticipating His return at some point in the future. This year, of course, Advent looks and feels different, and we may find holding on to these promises difficult. With you, I am grieving the loss of beloved traditions and time with family, and worried about the health of our congregation and friends and family. Some days the news is simply overwhelming. But week in and week out, I also get to witness **God's incredible work in and through our congregation**; work that assures me of Jesus' presence and love *right here and right now*, and work that fills me with hope for God's coming Kingdom. During these Advent weeks of waiting, as we approach the end of 2020, I wanted to take a moment to **share these stories of GOOD NEWS** with you, praying that they will encourage and fill you with hope, and say **thank you** for your financial and prayerful support that helps make these ministries possible.

This fall our Congregational Care team packed **care packages** for our college and seminary students, as well as for members of our congregation who are currently serving with the military away from home. One of our college students responded to the package by writing, "These times are definitely crazy, but I am so glad to be connected to such a caring church."



As COVID cases, and hospitalizations rose, we wanted to do something to encourage and thank local healthcare workers. Through your generosity, **we were able to provide eighty handwritten cards and notes, together with bags of freshly baked cookies and care packages filled with comfy t-shirts and fuzzy socks**, to Wellspan Good Samaritan's COVID units, the emergency department and environmental services. A member who works in administration at Wellspan

says these were a huge source of support at just the right time. We plan to continue outreach to healthcare workers into 2021.

We held our annual "Fill-A-Sill" campaign for JOY Pantry during the month of November, **collecting nearly 400 pounds of food** including lots of items for holiday baskets and this cart full of hams! (The hams were purchased with a \$250 Thrivent Action Team card...if you are a Thrivent benefits members and still have 2020 Action Team cards to use, *please* contact me so we can brainstorm a project or two before the year is over!)



Through your generosity to the **COVID Compassion Fund**, we were able to offer two weeks pay to hourly workers who were quarantining because of COVID and unable to work. Many people who are part-time employees have no, or little, sick leave, and yet are on the frontlines caring for some of the most vulnerable in our community. It is a blessing to have these funds available to share as needed. We were also able to provide a coat and blanket to someone who needed them.

As I write this, **Angel Tree gifts** are being returned, together with contributions to purchase soap and personal protective equipment through **Lutheran World Relief**. Thank you, thank you, thank you, for your generosity to our local and global neighbors in these challenging times. We also continue to facilitate the Power Packs program at Jonestown Elementary School, serving about 18 families each week.

Last month we **launched the funding phase of our Renew, Restore, Remain Capital Campaign**, which was approved in January 2020 as an \$80,000 endeavor to replace all three A/C units in the sanctuary, install an efficient heating/cooling unit in the Pastor's Office, re-coat the Social Hall roof, repair and paint the cracked molding on the sanctuary ceiling, and pay off the \$25,000 of debt that remained on the Social Hall renovations completed a few years ago. **Many THANKS to all who returned a commitment form; your gifts to date, and commitments for the next three years totaled just over \$39,000**, bringing us halfway to our goal! Your contributions will help ensure Zion's building is safe and hospitable now and for generations to come.

Last week, **Zion's Touching Tomorrow Endowment Fund awarded \$17,979 in grants** to 12 organizations and causes including: Zion's Preschool's scholarship fund, the Lutheran Camping Corporation, Compeer, Al's Bike Drive, Lebanon County Christian Ministries, Brittany's Hope, medical bills, support of our seminarian, Zion's Capital Campaign, Northern Lebanon Fire and Emergency Services, a 2021 project to encourage healthcare workers, and Zion's Back to School Blessings event. What a gift this endowment is!

To date, **we have offered over 40 online worship services and about 100 Evening Prayer opportunities**. We recently debuted a new camera set-up in the sanctuary which seems to be working very well—I encourage you to check out our YouTube channel “Zions Jonestown” if you haven't already! We continue to meet weekly on Zoom for Rejoicing Spirits worship, and inside and outside (yes! we are still meeting outside!) for worship following all CDC and PA COVID precautions. This is not how ANY of us wanted, or imagined 2020, might be, but by the grace of God and the creative power of the Holy Spirit, **the work of God through the Church has continued, and even grown**. I give thanks to God every day for the work God has entrusted to our care.

**And, I give thanks to God for YOU:** your prayers, your flexibility and willingness to make sacrifices out of care for our community, your faith in *being not afraid* to live into this new reality, and for your financial support that has enabled us to adapt our ministries so quickly. **If you would like to make an end-of-year gift to our General Fund, Capital Campaign, or to the COVID Compassion fund**, we would welcome, and be so grateful for, your partnership. Contributions can be brought to Sunday or Christmas Eve worship, made online (visit [www.zionsjonestown.com/giving](http://www.zionsjonestown.com/giving)) or mailed to Zion's Lutheran Church, PO Box 658 Jonestown PA 17038. A reminder that 2021 Offering Envelopes are available for pick-up on Sundays or in the gray tote outside Zion's kitchen doors, and, if you are experiencing financial difficulty because of COVID, we do have financial support to share with you. Please be in touch with me; we would be glad to help in this way.

**I pray that this snippet of GOOD NEWS brings you HOPE today.** Even as we watch and wait for Christ's coming among us, we know that He is already here in our midst—sharing love, offering peace, creating community, and building the Kingdom of God on earth. I look forward to continuing this ministry with you in 2021 (and pray that some of it may return to ‘normal’!) and hope to worship with you in some way on Christmas Eve. Our worship services that day will include:

- A Traditional Service available all day on YouTube or by calling 1-844-912-3488
- Christmas Under the Trees: Noon Worship Service in Zion's Parking Lot
- Christmas Under the Stars: 5 PM Worship Service in Zion's Cemetery

May the peace of Christ fill your hearts and home this Advent and Christmas season.

In hope,

*Pastor Caitlin Kurtz*