

Gathered, Empowered, Sent



GOOD NEWS from Zion's

a quarterly update highlighting God's work in and through our congregation

March 2022

Dear Members and Friends of Zion's:

As we wrap up the season of Epiphany and enter the season of Lent, we give thanks for all the ways that Christ's glory is revealed in scripture *and for the ways Christ's glory continues to be revealed* through the Holy Spirit in our lives and world. I wanted to share these stories of God's work in and through our congregation over the past three months, stories that testify to God's everlasting love and care for this world and God's commitment to working through ordinary people like you and me.



In December, your generosity provided **Christmas gifts** of clothing and toys to three local families (including twelve children) in our community...totaling at least 84 packages! These gifts undoubtedly share the JOY of the Lord, celebrate *generosity*, and are a tangible sign of our community's love and care, especially for families who live on the margins. You also helped to sponsor 24 **Baby Care Kits** for Lutheran World Relief (LWR) and a Thrivent Action Team card provided funding for another 10. We are grateful that two of our members have the "spiritual gift of shopping" and were able to secure deals at department and thrift stores that stretched your dollars as far as they could possibly go. These Baby Care Kits were then transported to the LWR distribution

warehouse in Maryland, where our humble offerings are combined with the gifts of countless other congregations and shipped to families in need around the globe. This is one way our smalltown congregation is connected with the larger Church and sent to share Christ's love with the world.



We celebrated the Good News of Christ's birth on **Christmas** with two indoor worship services featuring beautiful special music, an outdoor time of caroling and cookies, and an online worship service that reached nearly three times as many people as our typical Sunday morning livestream. There were several Jonestown residents out walking dogs that night who stopped by to enjoy the

luminaries, caroling, and brass; what a privilege it was to "Go Tell [the Good News] on the Mountain" in such a public way on the night we remember our Savior's birth.

Zion's Touching Tomorrow Endowment had the great joy of **awarding \$43,000 in grants** to local and global organizations committed to serving our community. This year's grant recipients included **Zion's Preschool** (scholarship money for families in need and COVID relief funds to accommodate reduced class sizes for 2021-22), **Rooted and Free Preschool** (located at Camp Kirchenwald, for play space repairs), **Lebanon County Developmental and Disability Services** (a local organization we usually support through an annual dance, which has been twice canceled due to COVID), **Zion's Seminarian Michael Johnsen**, **Brittany's Hope** (supporting food programs in Ethiopia), **Lutheran Campus Ministry** at Penn State, **Halcyon Activity Center** (an organization that supports mental health needs in our community, to help repair their minibus), **Compeer** (a Lebanon County organization that also provides mental health support, to offset budget cuts), **Lebanon County Christian Ministries** (which helps address food insecurity in our community), **Northern Lebanon Fire and**

Emergency Services (support for their annual fund drive), **Water for South Sudan** (to provide clean drinking water to nine families of four), **Zion's Back to School Blessings** event (to provide local students in need with clothing and school supplies for the new school year), and the **American House** (a personal care home for low-income individuals in Lebanon County, to provide brand new bedding and towels for 71 residents) Recipients of these grants expressed deep thanks, saying "I know [this grant] will help a lot of people in South Sudan" and "Thanks so much to you and the Endowment Committee for making this happen for so many organizations and folks!" and "...the gift from Zion's will help Compeer serve Lebanon Countians recovering from mental illness through programming and friends".



While each of these grants testifies to God's work and provision in its own way, **I want to highlight two stories that especially testify to how God's Spirit is constantly opening new possibilities for ministry.** Zion's first became acquainted with the work of the American House through our 2021 Ministry of Healthcare

Encouragement (also partially funded by Zion's Endowment); one member was particularly moved by the mission of the American House and inquired about other needs. There, she learned of the need for new bedding for every resident and submitted a 2021 Endowment grant application. Through her frugal shopping skills and the generosity of the Endowment, we were able to purchase bedding, pillows, towels and washcloths for every resident. Then, as a part of our "It's all about LOVE" February Christian Ed event, we made cards that said "You are loved" and put together bags of candy, as a small token of JOY. Another one of Zion's members encouraged his student to



apply for an Endowment grant for an organization about which she has expressed great passion (Water for South Sudan), she applied, received the grant, and expressed interest in sharing more about the organization. We are thrilled to welcome her to April's ALL CHURCH Event, where she, and her teacher, will share more about the water crisis around the world, and how this Endowment grant will help provide relief.



In February we had the **privilege of putting together individualized care packages** for women living at the Agape Family Shelter in Lebanon. These packages included feminine hygiene products for women of all ages, some pampering soaps and lotions, as well as delicious chocolate and a note of encouragement. In conversation with the Director of the Agape Family Shelter, we learned that

feminine products are rarely, if ever, donated, and yet are a real, and expensive need that can be difficult for women in crisis to afford. She remarked "I just have to tell you—whatever is happening at your church in Jonestown is phenomenal. To have people concerned about humanizing the women living here and actually using the terms menstruation and menopause is amazing. Please tell your women **thank you**".

As I said at the beginning, these stories are but a **snapshot of the work God is doing** in and through our congregation as we seek to love and serve our neighbors, near and far. As I reflect on the past several months, I'm in awe of the ways the Spirit is leading us from one thing to the next, weaving together people's passions and generosity, and deepening relationships within the congregation and community. **Thank you** for your partnership in ministry and openness to all the ways Christ's glory, and call, is being revealed.

In hope, *Pastor Caitlin Kurtz*