

Gathered, Empowered, Sent



GOOD NEWS from Zion's

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

November 2023

Dear Members and Friends of Zion's:

The week of Thanksgiving is an especially appropriate time to stop and say **"THANK YOU" for all the ways you support God's work** in and through our congregation. In a multitude of ways, we are living our mission of being "gathered, empowered, and sent to share Christ's love"; lives are being transformed through the ministries you support with time, talent, and money. Here's a snapshot of how your gifts are strengthening our community, raising and empowering disciples, and inviting more and more people to use their God-given gifts in the world.

In June, you helped support a joint **Vacation Bible School** week with Jonestown UMC. Together, we explored the question "Who is my neighbor?", supported JOY Pantry, and learned about hometown neighbor heroes including Good Samaritan hospital, Lebanon Co Christian Ministries, and our local congregations. One family remarked that they "haven't done the church thing in a long time", but, after experiencing the hospitality and welcome of VBS, are going to give it another shot.

Ten children and youth from our congregation participated in **Lutheran Camping ministries** over the summer, supported, in part by Zion's camp scholarships. These students experienced the Church beyond our walls, navigated the joys and challenges of living together in Christian community, and got to dwell in the glory of God's creation. One of our youth chose to spend his summer serving in the camp kitchen, where he learned "Serving can be fun!" We know that those who participate in outdoor ministry are more likely to become pastors, deacons, and active adult participants in congregations. By supporting camp scholarships, **you are helping raise up** the next generation of church leaders.



Much of the summer was spent preparing for our biggest **Back to School Blessings** event ever! With the consolidation of the Northern Lebanon elementary schools, this year's Back to School Blessings event was opened to every student in need in our entire school district! This tripled the number of students served, greatly increased the amount of funds and number of volunteers needed, and multiplied the impact we were able to have on our community in Christ's name. In the words of those who participated, "This is very nice. I didn't know people did this" and "This is such a blessing. Thank you so much for doing this. It takes a huge burden off of us" and

"God has blessed us with a wonderful community, and we are very grateful!" Our congregation has earned the reputation of being **"that church in town that helps people"**. On our community Facebook page, people regularly refer people in need to us, and also tell them to "call Zion's" when they have items to share. Our guiding principles state that we believe we are in Jonestown for a reason; it's amazing to see how our community is coming to believe that, too.

In the fall we completed **40 beautiful quilts** for Lutheran World Relief, packed **college care packages**, cleaned up a community member's **yard**, and donated over **500 pounds of food** to JOY Pantry! Our preschool kicked off a new school year, with a record number of students receiving tuition scholarships and/or support services through the IU-13. **Zion's Preschool stands out among our peers** for our commitment to inclusive learning, and to meeting the financial needs of our students. Our director has countless 'miracle stories' to share of students who begin the year with no verbal language or social skills, and progress in leaps and bounds through the love, and services, they receive at Zion's.



Together with the NL Ministerium, we were able to launch **Release Time** at the new NL Elementary School, after a several year hiatus. We navigated *many* logistics concerning transportation, finances, and combining four different curricula to welcome 70 third graders to this Christian Education program. It was quite an accomplishment and would not have happened in such a timely manner if Zion's had not taken the lead on convening the local churches for conversation and cooperation. The initial meeting we hosted in January eventually **birthed the NL Ministerium**, which is now a separately incorporated 501c3 that exists "to serve the physical and spiritual needs of the Northern Lebanon Community." We regularly meet for prayer and partnership with community organizations, and, in 2024, will be offering free new and gently used clothing through the **NL Clothing Closet** located in the former Jonestown Elementary building. We've known that clothing was a great need for several years, and **are so grateful** to finally have the partners, and space, we need to serve in this way.



We've also had the opportunity to care for our community through the **Blessing of the Animals service** (always well-attended by our Market St. neighbors) and the **Going with Grace Seminar Series**, which helps prepare people for end-of-life matters. Our Wednesday night meal and Rejoicing Spirits worship service continues to welcome new faces, including those who have struggled to find a church home for a variety of reasons.



Sometimes it's a little loud and chaotic, but **we are regularly reminded of the importance** of this ministry. Just this week, I knelt on the floor to ask one of the more spirited little boys if he'd fill out a leaf for our thankful tree. He grabbed a leaf and a marker and wrote "God Yay!" then looked me in the eyes and said, "I love God...and God loves me!" Through this ministry we get to proclaim God's unending love—and, through this ministry, God's people are coming to *believe* that this love is *for them*!

I am grateful for all the ways you support the special ministries listed above, and, equally importantly, the ways you support the ministry that happens day in and day out. We are able to do the incredible things detailed above because we are *deeply* rooted in faith practices: **thank you** for supporting and participating in worship (in person and online), Bible studies, Sunday School, prayer, committee work, property improvements, and all the ways you care for one another. Those are the bread-and-butter ministries that equip us for the work of reaching out into our community. **And, finally, thank you** for your financial support: without support for staff, our building, and program costs, ministry of this magnitude would not be possible. We literally can't do it without you. Financial support for our ministry is always appreciated: you can use this QR code, visit www.ZionsJonestown.org/giving or mail a check to PO Box 658, Jonestown PA 17038.



As St. Paul writes in Philippians "*I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now.*"

Thank you for your faith, your partnership, and your support. Happy Thanksgiving! ~ Pastor Caitlin Kurtz