**ZION’S MESSENGER**

**December 2020 + Zion Lutheran Church + 269-367-4817**

**Pastor Becky Emergency Phone: 616-265-2862**

**Email Address:** **pastorbecky@zionwoodland.org**

This is certainly not the way that I expected to be celebrating this Advent and Christmas season. Back in March, I felt certain that we would be getting “back to normal” by now but unfortunately this is not the case. We will be having at least our first two Advent services either as drive in or just online and, at this writing, I have no idea what will be our situation beyond that. It is hard. We have struggled so much and lost so much during this pandemic. I really miss seeing all of you in the ways we normally see each other. And it’s hard to keep living with changing circumstances and living with unknowns. It’s really hard to plan even a week ahead for some things.

However, it is Advent and Christmas will come. That is a certainty. That is a given. How we will celebrate these seasons is still uncertain, but we will find a way. If we have learned nothing else in this time, we have learned to be flexible and find new ways of doing things.

It is my hope that we will find a way to celebrate Christmas, even if we might just gather in the parking lot to sing carols and hear the Christmas story. Flameless candles have been ordered so that we can have candlelight, however we will gather to worship.

Our prayer for the Advent season is for Christ to come. Our celebration at Christmas is that Christ has come. Perhaps we will experience this reality more deeply this year, as so many of the external things that can get in the way of really preparing and celebrating the coming of our Savior

will be scaled down a lot this year. Perhaps we will find ourselves less busy and have more time to wait and wonder and experience the wonderful gift that God has given to us.

I find it to be a special comfort in a stressful time to have the certainty that God is with us. Christ is Emmanuel. In spite of all that we are each dealing with, let us turn our hearts and minds to remember that God has everything going on in our world, in our country and in church and in our lives, in God’s powerful and loving hands.

I have always loved the season of Advent and try to keep it a time of quiet reflection in the midst of what is usually a very busy and hectic season. I always find tension in the balance to keep the seasons of Advent and Christmas separate as our world always starts to celebrate Christmas earlier and earlier. This year I will embrace this season as a time to hang on tight to the promise of God’s presence and find joy in both seasons because I know God’s love is real!

I end with a reflection on a verse of an Advent hymn, “Comfort, Comfort Now My People” to give you words of comfort in this season.

“Comfort, comfort now my people; tell of peace!” So says our God. Comfort those who sit in darkness mourning under sorrow’s load. To God’s people now proclaim that God’s pardon waits for them! Tell them that their war is over; God will reign in peace forever.” Winkworth

The calendar this month has scheduled events and you will be kept informed about changes to our services and other events, such as the Longest Night services.

Blessed Advent and a Joyous Christmas to you all!

 Pastor Becky +

**COUNCIL UPDATE**

Council had a very good and thoughtful discussion on continuing worship in the sanctuary.  The discussion was prompted by a letter from Bishop Satterlee recommending that in-person, indoor services be suspended due to the rising number of COVID-19 cases across the state.  Council decided to continue in-person, in-door services with caution on a week-by-week basis. Since the Council meeting, it was decided that due to the Governor’s recommendations and the Public Health Department’s new rules for the next three weeks, indoor worship in the sanctuary would be suspended for at least the next three Sundays and worship will return to drive-in services.

Council will continue to monitor the guidance and requirements from the state to determine when worship in the sanctuary can resume. The Pastor is continuing to post the message on Facebook.  Paul Meade is leading efforts to obtain needed equipment and internet services to broadcast the service from the sanctuary so that more worship elements and music can be included.  If possible, we hope to offer this option by Christmas.

Council recognized with appreciation the ongoing support and faithfulness of the congregation as we look for ways to worship during these unprecedented times.

Pastor Becky reported the new confirmation class is on hold. She has had conversations with the families, and they prefer to wait at this time.

Due to limited opportunities to travel and pastoral responsibilities, Pastor Becky was not able to use two of her vacation days in 2020. Council moved that these two vacation days be carried forward for Pastor to use in 2021.

Council approved recommendations from the Personnel Committee regarding salaries for 2021. Salaries for 2021 will remain at the 2020 level for the Pastor and Secretary, with adjustments made for increases in benefits as necessary. Council approved continuing to pay the utility bills for the parsonage in 2021.

Tom Krikke shared information on the bid from Lakewood Heating and Cooling to replace the air handling unit near the pulpit in the sanctuary. It was agreed to bring this bid to the annual meeting in January to request congregational approval for the expense to replace the unit. Funding will come from an anonymous gift and several memorial gifts.

Paul reported that the church lawnmower needs to be replaced. Building and Grounds will explore mower prices and prepare a recommendation to bring to the congregation at the annual meeting.

Council had lengthy discussion about the 2021 budget and church boards and committees. The council believes the best plan at this time for the church budget is a continuing budget that would fund boards and committees at the same level as 2021.

Council requested that Martha work with the Nominations Committee to reach out to all those whose terms are expiring on boards and committees to see if they would be willing to serve an additional term or at least an additional year.

The Council continued discussion of possible Constitutional changes for boards and committees. The discussion focused on creating language necessary to remove boards and committees from the constitution and create them by policy instead. This would create more flexibility in the number of active boards and committees each year, the size of the committees, and ability to add or inactivate boards or committees as needed. Draft language was reviewed. The draft follows language in the model constitution which creates the nominations committee, call committee and audit committee in the constitution and calls on the Council to create other boards and committees as needed.

Council discussed the annual meeting and agreed that we definitely need to have an annual meeting as there are a number of things that require a congregational vote. Council discussed possibly offering the option of attending either in person or via Zoom.

Discussion was held on funeral remembrances for members during the pandemic. It was decided that a contribution would be made to the memorial fund in lieu of sending flowers to the family. A letter will be sent from the Pastor to the family to let them know of the contribution.

The washing machine at the parsonage has stopped working. Pastor will call for repairs and it will be paid from the maintenance budget.

**CURRENT FINANCIAL PICTURE**

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR FAITHFULNESS**

Year to date giving for current expenses is down by $4,440, which does not include the funds received from the Payroll Protection Program. Expenses are $2,100 lower than last year. Currently there is a need for $885 to meet the annual budget for Benevolence. Considering the challenges of this year and that we were not able to worship at the church for several month, this is a very good report. Thank you to all the faithful members of Zion for your continued support during this past year. Even though worship has been done differently, you have continued to support the work of our church and operating expenses with your gifts and offerings.

The $8,900 Payroll Protection Program loan received by Zion was used for salaries and benefits. This loan had the ability to be forgiven. Paperwork requesting the forgiveness was prepared and submitted. Our Treasurer, Karen Heise, has reported that she was notified the loan has been forgiven and will not need to be repaid. Thank you to Karen for her outstanding work on Zion’s behalf this past year. Karen continued to ensure Zion’s financial books and obligations were taken care of throughout the shutdown and during the months that have followed. We are so appreciative for her work and contributions.

**CHANGE IN MAILING ADDRESS**

**FOR THE CHURCH**

The mailing address for the church has changed. The mailbox at the church has been removed and the church is now receiving mail from a post office box. If you mail offerings and other information, you will need to use the new address. Please note this address change in your church directory:

Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

P.O. Box 14

Woodland, MI 48897

**NOMINATIONS FOR \**

**BOARDS AND COMMITTEES**

It is time for the Nominations Committee to begin work to create the slate for election at the January 2021 Annual Meeting. Because boards and committees have not been able to be active this past year and it is anticipated to will continue through much of 2021, Council has requested the Nominations Committee ask all those whose terms are expiring to consider serving another term or at least another year. During this time, it is hard train new members and current members have not had the opportunity to do much the past year. Please give this request consideration when the Nominations Committee contact you. If you are not currently serving on a board or committee and would like to, please reach out to a member of the nominations committee. Our nominations committee is Jerry Engle, Deb Elenbaas, Mary Makeley, and Martha Yoder serving as Council Representative.

**CALLING ALL KNITTERS!**

**REPLENISH OUR**

**PRAYER SHAWL MNIISTRY**

If you are a knitter, we need you! As the cold weather sets in and you have more time inside, consider knitting prayer shawls to replenish our supply of Prayer Shawls. During the past year, three prayer shawls were distributed. We would like to replace these and add to the shawls that are available for distribution. If you need a pattern or assistance with materials to knit a shawl, please contact Martha Yoder. Thank you!

**LONGEST NIGHT SERVICE**

Last year, we had our first Longest Night services as an opportunity to acknowledge grief and losses in the Advent season when celebrating is difficult. They were well received and very meaningful for those who attended. We still have two times for this service on the calendar for Wed. Dec. 16 at 1:00 and 7:00. As we get closer to that date, a determination will be made regarding having in person services again.

**LAY PREACHERS NEEDED FOR 2021**

As we did last year, some of Pastor Becky’s off Sundays will be led by supply pastors and some by our own lay leaders.

Here are dates where lay leaders are needed as we start the new year. There will still be unknowns as to how we will be worshipping early in the new year but best to have people on board!

January 24

February 21

April 18

Please let Pastor Becky know of your availability for these dates! Thank you! Our lay preachers are appreciated very much!

**ZLCW INFO**

The ZLCW wishes to thank everyone for the generous donations for our Thankoffering Service.  We collected a total of $610.00.  These funds will be sent to the Women of the ELCA to help support their many programs.  The afternoon Bible Study group was able to meet 2 times this fall.  The donations of $125.00 have been sent to our synodical women's organization to help with their programs.

This year continues to be a challenge, but we still keep helping in our community. The ZLCW has made two donations this fall.  When the board members learned that the Lakewood Community Council would not be collecting food items from the school and churches this year, we decided we wanted to send a donation of $2,000.00 for the Christmas Basket Program. We decided to take a vote by contacting all the women of Zion via the internet or by phone. Everyone was eager to say yes.  We have received a thank you letter from Kay Barcroft, their treasurer.  She stated that financial donations are so very much appreciated this year to purchase food and other necessities as well as meat/dairy gift certificates. The LCC had made adjustments this year for the safety of all the volunteers and recipients. The Christmas Baskets will be delivered on Dec. 12th.

We also made a donation of $200.00 to Snacks for Kids at Lakewood Schools.  Retired teacher, Libby Kinsey, leads this cause through her church, Hope Church of the Brethren.  She has already taken a small number of snacks to the schools for children who tell their teacher they are hungry.  She was very thankful and pleased to receive our donation.  This donation was approved at the ZLCW general meeting earlier this year.  We also contacted Feed the Need, led by Tammy Brodbeck.  She said they are still sending home food packs but do not need a financial donation at this time. This program provides bags of easy meals and snacks for children to take home for the weekend. She will contact us if the program becomes low on funds.

Once again, thank you for all your support and donations.

**MEN’S WEDNESDAY COFFEE**

The men’s Wednesday coffee is canceled until further notice due to the rise in Covid 19 cases.

**LAKEWOOD COMUNITY COUNCIL CHRISTMAS BASKET PROJECT**

            Please remember folks in the Lakewood area are zeroing in on the yearly Christmas basket project.  Zion has been asked to provide gifts for youngsters.  These gifts and warm mittens are being provided by a grant from Thrivent Financial.  In addition, there is a need for hats, additional warm winter mittens/gloves and socks. The box for these items is placed in the vestibule at the west entrance.  Also needed is cash to purchase meat certificates and food.  Cash may be added to your offering envelope, earmarked for Christmas Basket Project.

            If you wish to help in the packing please email

 LakewoodCommunityCouncil@gmail.com or call Barcroft, 269-945-4518 to reserve a spot. Delivery volunteers on Saturday, Dec. 12 will not be limited in number but may need to wait to allow for delivering to doorsteps from 9 a.m. to noon.

            If you have questions please contact Claude or Mary Smith. **Thank You!**

**SPECIALS IN DECEMBER**

**Anniversaries**

02-Mike & Roxanne Johnson

07-Charles & Chris Farlee

18-Gene & Donna Beyer

**Baptisms**

12-Donna Beyer

15-Mary Makley

22-Irene Ames

26-Deb Elenbaas

**Birthdays**

01-Leelu Rutledge

01-Fergus Rutledge

01-Spencer Rutledge

03-Judy MacKenzie

04-Phil Brodbeck

07-Bryant Makley

09-Linden Fisher

13-Harry Hetchler

16-Tristen Makley

20-Grayson Bite

21-Michael Holland

24-Carol Morgan

27-Claude Smith

31-Doug MacKenzie

**SERVING IN DECEMBER**

**(All Schedules subject to change as we monitor the Covid-19 situation.)**

**Altar Guild**

Carol & Jerry Engle

Mary Makley

Doug Makley

**SUNDAYS IN DECEMBER**

**December 6- Drive-In Communion**

Pastor Becky Ebb-Speese

Elder: Paul Meade

Trustee: Tom Krikke

Offering Counters: Jerry Engle, Brenda Bite

**December 13- To Be Determined**

Pastor Becky Ebb-Speese

Elder: Jolene Griffin

Trustee: Jerry Engle

Offering Counters: Doug Mackenzie, Mike Johnson

**December 20- To Be Determined**

Pastor Becky Ebb-Speese

Elder: Dan Utterback

Trustee: Claude Smith

Offering Counters: Mary Makley, Martha Yoder

**December 24- To Be Determined**

Pastor Becky Ebb-Speese

Elder: Paul Meade

Trustee: Tom Krikke

Offering Counters: Jerry Engle, Brenda Bite

**December 27- To Be Determined**

Pastor Becky Ebb-Speese

Elder: Jolene Griffin

Trustee: Jerry Engle

Offering Counters: Doug Mackenzie, Mike Johnson