

The Glory of Zion

Christ's Light Shining Among Us

Newsletter of **Zion Lutheran Church, School & Preschool**

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January 2026

Happy New Year!

As we turn the page on the calendar and step into a new year, it is natural for our minds to drift toward fresh starts, clean slates, and hopeful resolutions. January has a way of making us reflective—looking back on what has been, and looking ahead to what, God willing, may yet come. For Christians, however, the new year is never simply about novelty or optimism. It is about faithfulness. It is about walking forward once again under the promises of a God who has already proven Himself faithful in every year before this one.

This year feels especially weighty for us as a congregation. After many years of patient planning, careful stewardship, generous giving, and persistent prayer, we stand on the edge of a moment long hoped for: the prospect of finally putting spade to earth and breaking ground on the expansion of our beloved school. For some, this has been a vision held since the earliest conversations. For others, it has been something you joined along the way. But for all of us, it has required endurance—the quiet, unglamorous kind of faith that keeps showing up, keeps giving, and keeps trusting even when progress feels slow.

Scripture often reminds us that God delights in such faith. The people of God are no strangers to long waits. Abraham waited decades for a son. Israel wandered for years before entering the promised land. The early church labored, suffered, and prayed long before seeing the fruit of their witness spread across the world. God's work is rarely rushed, but it is never wasted.

As we enter this new year, and as the ground before us prepares to be broken, it is worth remembering what this moment truly represents. This is not simply a construction project. It is not merely an expansion of classrooms or facilities. It is a tangible confession of faith. It is a declaration that we believe God is still at work among us, still calling children to be formed in wisdom and truth, still using ordinary people and ordinary means to accomplish extraordinary good.

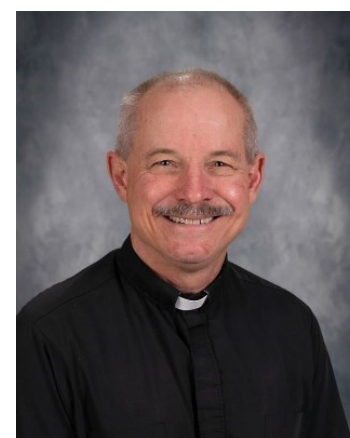
Breaking ground is, in its own way, an act of trust. Once the earth is opened, there is no pretending we were only dreaming. There is commitment. There is vulnerability. There is the acknowledgment that what grows from this labor will be entrusted to God's care long after our own hands have done their work. In that sense, this moment mirrors the Christian life itself. We live by planting seeds we may not fully see mature, confident that the Lord of the harvest is faithful.

A new year also invites humility. We do not know all that lies ahead. There will be challenges, unexpected delays, and moments when we are reminded again that we are not in control. Yet that, too, is grace. God does not ask us to know the future—only to trust Him in it. The same God who has sustained this congregation through years of patient preparation will sustain us through the work that now lies before us.

So as we step into this year, let us do so with gratitude for the past, courage for the present, and hope for the future. Let us give thanks for every prayer prayed, every dollar given, every meeting attended, and every quiet act of faith that has brought us to this point. And let us remember that the true foundation of our school—and of our church—is not concrete or steel, but Christ Himself.

May this new year find us grounded in His promises, confident in His timing, and ready to rejoice as we watch Him bring good work to completion among us. Grace and peace to you in Christ, now and in the year to come.

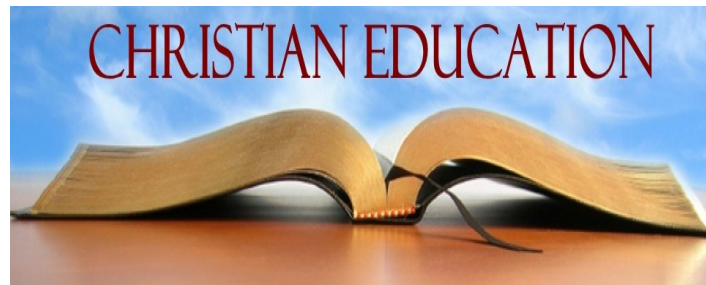
Pastor Schulte



MINISTRY FOCUS: Shaping Faith, Learning, and Community at Zion—Christian Board of Education

By Patrick Fitzgerald

Zion's Board of Christian Education plays a vital and far-reaching role in the life of our congregation, school, and preschool. In fact, it is hard to find an area of Zion's ministry that is not touched in some way by the work of this dedicated board. Through prayerful leadership and thoughtful planning, the Board of Christian Education helps ensure that Christ-centered learning remains at the heart of everything we do.



As its name suggests, the Board of Christian Education oversees Zion's educational ministry in all its forms. The board establishes objectives and sets policies for a wide range of programs, including Sunday School, day school, preschool, before- and after-care, youth and adult Bible classes, and Vacation Bible School. In doing so, the board helps maintain a strong, consistent vision for faith formation at every stage of life.

Beyond programs and policies, the board is deeply committed to supporting the people who serve in Zion's classrooms. It provides for the spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of the school administrator, teachers, and preschool staff through regular communication, encouragement, and annual performance reviews. The board also actively supports professional growth by encouraging participation in conferences, conventions, workshops, and continuing education opportunities, ensuring that Zion's educators are equipped to serve with excellence and confidence.

The Board of Christian Education also carries important responsibilities behind the scenes. These include developing job descriptions for the school administrator, teachers, preschool director, and secretary; overseeing curriculum and textbooks; monitoring accreditation requirements at the federal, state, and private levels; and working closely with the Parent-Teacher League. In addition, the board reviews tuition and childcare rates and recommends the calling or contracting of new teachers, always with prayerful consideration and Zion's mission in mind.

Zion is blessed to have the following members serving on the Board of Christian Education: Casey Raby (President), Karen Malone, Bruce and Gayle Prentice, Pat Jessen, Aime Rose, Carol Turner, and Amber Pourier. Ann Solinsky (Principal), Hope Genzlinger (Preschool & Day Care Director), Lorien Petersen (DCE), and Pastor Bryan Meadows serve as Ex Officio members, providing valuable insight and collaboration. If you would be interested in joining Zion's Board of Christian Education, please reach out to Casey Raby or Ann Solinsky.

Through faithful service and thoughtful leadership, Zion's Board of Christian Education continues to nurture an environment where students grow academically, spiritually, and emotionally- grounded in Christ and prepared to serve in His world.

Zion Counters Needed!

Zion is always looking for help with counting offering throughout the year. Each team is made up of about three people, and your team will count about four or five times a year.

Teams that are scheduled to count the weekend around a holiday or special service, are asked to help with counting the offerings from special services as well as the weekend offering.

If you are interested in helping us out with this or have any questions, please contact Camron Ottenbacher.



DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS: Handbell Choir

By Kate Meadows

Zion's handbell director, Mike Beason, likes to tell people he rings bells in the South. That's because he has participated in handbell choirs in South Korea, South Carolina and, of course, South Dakota.

"I always thought bells were rinkydink little things," he said. "I learned differently. It's a challenge."

Beason is in his second year of directing handbells at Zion. More ringers are needed – and both men and women are welcome.

"I tell people who played music that they will enjoy the challenge of ringing bells and figuring out when their two notes play," he said. "New ringers can handle it because I'll teach them how to read music. I'll teach them how to find their notes."

There is likely no better teacher when it comes to handbells. Beason himself has been ringing handbells for 40 years. He started in Germany, through a military chapel, when he served as a U.S. Air Force fighter pilot.

"I'm the only fighter pilot who's also a bell ringer," he likes to say.

Beason has made Rapid City his home for the past 31 years. He also directs handbells at Faith Lutheran in town, an ELCA congregation. He started program there about 28 years ago. He was a founder of Bells of the Hills, a Black-Hills-wide handbell choir. He still serves a substitute ringer for Bells of the Hills when needed.

At Zion, Beason chooses music based on the number of ringers. The bell choir practices on Mondays, from 5:45-6:45 p.m. To learn more or get involved with the handbell choir (they could use you!), please call Beason at (605) 484-6689.



STEWARDSHIP MINUTE: "Thanks-living"

By Kevin Aker

November is a month where we are reminded of all the blessings and gifts God has given us. We take time to thank God for our family and friends, food and drink, for our homes and other blessings. We practice an attitude of gratitude for some of the less obvious things too. Things like coffee, chocolate, and if you've ever been stuck in the woods, toilet paper! This month we were given a real-life reminder to say thank you for some of the things we often take for granted, things like electricity and stop lights. Thanksgiving is a holiday dedicated to being grateful and saying thank you for the amazing love God pours out on His creation.

God gives us so much more than we deserve. He provides food when we're hungry and water when we're thirsty. He heals us when we're sick and He comforts us when we're sad. The Bible tells us that He is an ever-present help in times of trouble. Because of all God has done for us, we need to say, "Thank you."

But He's done so much! Just saying the words doesn't seem adequate. This year, instead of simply celebrating Thanksgiving, let's take it to the next level and celebrate "Thanks-living." Let's glorify our Lord and Savior and show our thanks by the way we live. "Thanks-living" is looking at the many ways God has blessed us and thanking Him by sharing His blessings with others. Share your time, share your talents, share your treasures and celebrate Thanks-living not just this week, but the whole year long.

Idea modified from www.sermons4kids.com



SCHOOL FOCUS: Meet Señora Burke

By Hanne Burke

Even though it seems like I have been at Zion my entire life, I was actually born in Bridgeton, NJ. My parents, Richard and Kathie Wold, had moved there shortly before my birth so my dad could run a nuclear power plant. My family returned to Rapid City when I turned four. I then attended Sunday School and K-5 at Zion when it was on 5th and Quincy. I was in the last class confirmed at Zion in 1999 and graduated from Central High School in 2003.

When I was little, I was going to be a teacher, a florist, or a lawyer. By the time I reached middle school, however, I knew that I was called to be a teacher. I loved working with little kids and helping them stretch their minds and try new things. I attended Augustana College in Sioux Falls and received a degree in 2007 in Elementary Education with endorsements for middle school. Through all my time in classrooms during college, I decided that middle school was where I wanted to be. After graduation, I married my high school sweetheart, Devon, became Mrs. Burke, and taught at Dakota Middle School for five years. After it closed, I continued teaching at East Middle School for two years.

I loved everything about being in the classroom, but in May of 2014, I was ready to make some changes. I now had two small children, Haley and Jenson, and I wanted to be home with them more. As I was considering my options, I saw in the bulletin that Zion was looking for a new Spanish teacher. The program was new and had had two different teachers in two years. I told my husband that I knew enough Spanish to be dangerous and contacted the principal about the position. Since she was my third-grade teacher, I was hired!

I added my last child, Holland, during my first year at Zion. She is currently in fourth grade here, and I am somehow in the middle of my twelfth year of teaching Spanish. In that time, I've added lots of different activities and responsibilities, including being the full-time lunch lady and PTL secretary. I feel blessed to be part of such a wonderful school and to work with such wonderful students and staff!



¡Bienvenidos a la clase de español en la Escuela de Zion Luterana! (Welcome to the Spanish Class at Zion Lutheran School!)

By Señora Burke

Zion students are fortunate to receive Spanish language instruction during their early elementary years. This is especially important as this is the time that their brains are wiring for language. Public school students are not able to take any foreign language until high school!

If a student is at Zion K-5, he or she receives instruction similar to a high school freshman. They learn greetings, colors, numbers, weather, clothing, food words and much more. By fourth and fifth grade, students are conjugating regular present-tense verbs, something many high school students find challenging!

Many former students who have gone on to take high school Spanish have said that the foundation they received at Zion set them up for success. Some even called it easy!



Miss Birkmire's Fourth Grade Class

Epiphany is about Jesus being revealed. What is the first thing you would reveal to someone who doesn't know anything about Jesus?

Cadence—I would tell them he is real.

Grayden—Jesus is born.

Sage—He died for us.

Caroline— Christmas is Jesus' birthday!

Tatum—The first thing I'd tell them about is that He died on the cross for all of us to save us from our sins. I'd also tell them that Jesus rose from the dead.

Madilyn—I would reveal that He died on the cross for everyone's sins.

Cody—Jesus never leaves us. "Never Alone!" (a quote from the book *The Door Within*)

Adley—He died on the cross to save us from our sins.

Holland—I would tell them that God is our Savior and died on the cross for our sins.

Vanessa—I would tell them that He is my Savior, and He sacrificed Himself for us to save us from our sins.

Ben—I would say, "God's with you."

Kolbie—I would tell them about how He was born and then about everything else that I know.

Ella—I would tell them that He forgives our sins and that if you believe in Him, you will go to Heaven.

Olivia—I would tell them Jesus died for us all.

Emmett—I would tell them that He is our Savior.

Scotlyn—Jesus died on the cross to forgive our sins; three days later He rose up from the dead, and He left the tomb. What a miracle!!

Ezra—I would tell them that Jesus died on the cross for our sins.

Patrick—He is our Savior.

Russell—He is our Savior.

Tucker—Jesus is our Savior.

Luniko—Jesus is God's son, and He forgives you.

From the Principal's Office...

Wise Men Still Seek Him

Zion School and Preschool continue to share the mission given by our Lord in the Great Commission to share the Good News of God's Love in Jesus Christ. As the students and staff begin this New Year, we will continue to focus on Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

There is nothing more important that we can share with our children than the love of Jesus, His death and resurrection, and our assured hope for the gift of eternal life. Like the Wise Men, we too will seek to know Him more deeply and share this good news with all who are touched by our lives.

Zion Lutheran School will celebrate its 68th year being a mission of Zion Lutheran Church. We have so much to be thankful for, and so much to look forward to, as we walk through this New Year with our Lord!



Christmas Programs

Zion Lutheran School joyfully celebrated the Christmas season with two student programs that shared the true meaning of Christmas. Our Preschool, Kindergarten, and 1st Grade students delighted families with God's Gift: A Joyful Retelling of the Christmas Story, sweetly reminding everyone that Jesus is God's greatest gift to the world. Students in Grades 2–5 followed with Gettin' Ready for the Miracle, using song and acting to joyfully proclaim the true meaning of Christmas and prepare hearts for the miracle of Christ's birth. Both programs beautifully reflected the faith, joy, and hard work of our students and teachers as they shared the message of God's love with our school and church family.

Boys Basketball

We will be starting boys' basketball practice and games in January. If you are interested in helping to coach or be a referee this year, please contact Ann Solinsky or Lindsay Reule!

Cheerleading

Cheerleading practice will be starting in January for 4th & 5th grade girls. Miss Lorien and Ms. Dani will be coaching the cheer team this year!

NEW MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: Jacob Knodel

By Phyllis Martens

Jacob Knodel grew up in the small town of Avon, SD, hearing stories from family members about what went on in the field of corrections. Now as a young adult, he lives his own stories within the correctional walls, as a corrections officer at Rapid City's minimum-security prison. One of those stories: Once, an inmate escaped. Jacob learned about the plans the inmate laid out to carry out the escape.

Working as a corrections officer in Rapid City is a job Jacob has held for three years – and his main reason for moving to the Black Hills. Jacob attended Zion's new member class this fall and was officially welcomed to Zion as a new member on December 7.

It is the second "Zion" where he has been a member. Jacob grew up attending Zion Lutheran in Avon and was baptized there. His church home in Avon felt like family, he said. The feeling is familiar at Zion in Rapid City.

Jacob's parents still live in Avon. His twin brother lives in Amour and his younger sister is in Harrison – both rural South Dakota towns east of the Missouri River. After graduating from Avon high school, Jacob attended Mitchell Technical School, graduating in 2017 with his degree in Business Management. After graduation, he worked as a night supervisor at County Fair grocery store in Mitchell. One of his favorite duties at County Fair was catering events.

Now, Jacob shares his home with two cats. When he's not working, he exercises his penchant for cooking and sourdough baking. His colleagues get the benefit of his bread baking, since a loaf of bread is a lot for one person to enjoy. Jacob also enjoys fishing of all kinds, hiking, camping and other activities that encourage him to connect with God and nature. He is a Kansas City Chiefs and Kansas City Royals fan. Last summer, he played on Zion's men's softball team.

Jacob said he is interested in joining small group events. Twelve-hour shifts in the corrections department makes it harder to be more involved and sociably outgoing.

So far, Jacob's most memorable moment at Zion, Rapid City, is his first time attending. Pastor Bryan came up to him, introduced himself and made him feel so welcome, he said. That welcome was a familiar feeling – like the "family" belonging he knew growing up at his "first" Zion.



Want to Join Our Zion Family?

We offer new member classes yearly in October. We welcome you to worship with us Saturdays at 5:30pm or Sundays at 8am or 10:45am. If you have any questions about joining our family or about Zion in general, please contact one of our pastors or the front office at info@zionrc.org.

Pastor Meadows: bryan.meadows@zionrc.org

Pastor Schulte: gary.schulte@zionrc.org



CONGREGATION MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: The Sawatzky Family

By Peggy Hettick

Making the move from Sioux City, Iowa, to Rapid City, in 2019, was an easy decision for the Sawatzky family. For Sarah, it meant moving closer to home and for Corey it meant more opportunities for outdoor activities such as camping, hiking, fishing and hunting.

Sarah was born and raised in South Dakota. She grew up on the family farm around the Midland area and graduated high school in Fort Pierre. She attended SDSU in Brookings, where she met Corey, who was also an SDSU student.

Besides being a full-time mom, Sarah works from home as a retirement accountant who specializes in helping clients with retirement income planning, tax strategies, managing retirement accounts, navigating taxes and more.

Corey grew up across the South Dakota border in a small town in Minnesota. He majored in engineering at SDSU. He works for the U.S. government as an engineer with Indian Health Services, building and renovating hospitals. The job is challenging at times, Corey said. He oversees four states: South Dakota, North Dakota, Iowa and Nebraska.

Corey and Sarah have three children. Aiden, the oldest, is a sophomore, at St. Thomas More. Carter, who attended Zion for 4th and 5th grades is now a sixth grader at Rapid City Christian School. Olivia, the youngest, is a third grader at Zion. The kids are active in sports and keep both Corey and Sarah busy with their various schedules. As a family they enjoy being outdoors in the hills – hiking, camping, fishing and hunting.

The Sawatzkys became members at Zion in 2021. The school was a big drawing factor in their decision to join. Both Corey and Sarah are involved with and have been valuable assets to the Capital Campaign. Corey, with his skills as an engineer, has been instrumental with planning and designing the new addition. Sarah assists with the planning and also coordinates communication for the “Continuing in Faith” campaign. Both have a special interest in the Capital Campaign and look forward to Zion’s vision of a new school’s addition becoming a reality.



Women’s Ministry

WICKS (Widows In Christ Know Salvation)

Join us for our next fellowship on Sunday, January 18, 12:30 PM, at 2038 Promise Road. Bring a salad, main dish or dessert to share and your own drink.

LWML Meeting

Zion’s Lutheran Women in Mission (LWML) will meet on Saturday, January 10, at 10:00 a.m. in the narthex. The theme for January is Meals on Wheels. We will have a speaker from Meals and the ingathering will be a cash donation for that organization. Also, Pastor Schulte will continue his Bible study of "What the LCMS teaches" and there will be a business meeting. Refreshments will be served. All women of Zion who are confirmed are members of Lutheran Women in Mission. We invite you to be an active member and join us at our meetings.



Random Question with...Dennis Lively, Board of Lay Ministry

Share a Picture and Tell Us About it.

Many of you know me as a motorcycle enthusiast, but what many of you probably don't know about me is that I am an avid scuba diver. I have been diving for about 33 years and have been a scuba instructor for more than 30 years. Although I have dived all over the Caribbean, and even one trip to Fiji, Pactola Lake remains one of my favorite dive locations. I have worked with more than 1,000 dive students over the 30 years with more than 2,500 dives—most of them being in Pactola. The most common question I get asked is about the town of Pactola at the bottom of the reservoir. There is no town at the bottom. All the buildings were either torn down or moved out before the reservoir was flooded in the early 1950s. I have dived most of the 14 miles of shoreline and have found remnants of the town like a parking lot, concrete steps, rock walls, an old cistern and a root cellar, and even old Highway 385. But no town. Some say the best part of South Dakota lies underwater.



Dennis and his wife, Peggy, diving in the Bahamas. Peg prefers the warm water compared to the cold water of Pactola!

Christ's Way: Continuing in Faith Updates

Craft Fair

We have much to be thankful for at Zion Lutheran! God blessed us with a beautiful weekend for the 20th Annual Zion Craft Fair, held on Saturday, November 22!! Thank you to all who helped with set-up, tear down, kitchen and bake sale work, greeting, and getting the word out to others! And a special thank you to all who brought in the amazing baked goods for the sale! Because of the record amount of donated baked goods and your support of this event, we made \$5337.97!! When you add the \$2500 that Thrivent Financial is dedicating to this event, we will have a total of \$ 7837.97 going toward the Christ's Way building fund!! Great job Zion!!

Commitment Celebration

Thank you to everyone who help with and/or attended our Commitment Celebration on Sunday, December 14! It was a blessing to see all of you there. We have received tremendous support so far with our Continuing in Faith campaign. On December 14, we had over \$300,000 committed by congregation members and school families! The week prior, on December 5, we had over \$700,000 committed at the Lead Donor Appreciation!

Thank you all for your ongoing support in the growth of Zion Lutheran Church, School, and Preschool!

Upcoming Important Dates

January 2—Youth Late Nighter @ Zion 6:00-11:00 PM.

January 5—Zion Staff Christmas Party @ Robbinsdale Bowling Alley 2:00-4:00 PM.

January 6—School Resumes & RaiseRight orders are due.

January 7— Cheerleading Practice Begins

January 10— LWML Meeting @ Zion 10:00 AM.

January 12— PTL Meeting @ Zion 3:15 PM.

January 15— Newsletter Deadline

January 17-18— First Gifts for Christ's Way: Continuing in Faith Campaign.

January 18— WICKS Meeting @ 2038 Promise Road 12:30 PM.

January 19— Martin Luther King Jr. Day—No School or daycare. Office closed.

January 20— RaiseRight orders are due.

January 24-25— Noisy offering weekend.

January 27— Blood Drive @ Zion starting at 2:30 PM.

January 30— J.A.M. @ Zion 5:30-7:30 PM.

