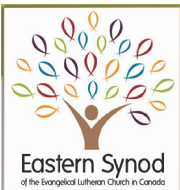


## PASTOR'S DEVOTIONAL

***"Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers."*** – Romans 12:13

Throughout his letters, St. Paul stressed the unity of the Church of Jesus Christ throughout the world. While Christians gather in local congregations, these assemblies are not independent outposts with no connection to believers in other communities; the Church from its very origins saw itself as *"the body of Christ and individually members of it."* (1 Corinthians 12:27). Paul urged his readers to make *"every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (Ephesians 4:3) and encouraged them to contribute to the needs of the "saints" (which includes all who have been set apart through Holy Baptism) so that throughout the world all Christians might see themselves as a people united in *"one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all."* (Ephesians 4:6).

For Lutherans in North America, our unity in Christ has been expressed through our being organized into *synods*, which are "assemblies" of congregations that support one another in our common mission and ministry. Our congregation is a part of the Eastern Synod, one of five synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. Our synod is geographically very large, with congregations from Sault Ste. Marie to Halifax. Through our benevolence offerings, Zion and congregations throughout the synod support each other and the ministries that we share, believing that *"God calls the whole church through the Gospel to be engaged in mission in response to the needs of others, celebrating what God has done and continues to do through us."* (Eastern Synod Vision for Mission).



Because the size of our synod often presents challenges in sharing in our common mission and ministry, the Eastern Synod is divided into seventeen Ministry Areas where local congregations share resources and cooperate in living out our calling as God's people. Zion is one of fourteen congregations of the Nith Valley Ministry Area, which includes congregations in parts of Perth and Oxford Counties and the Waterloo Region. In its first years of existence, the people of the Nith Valley

Ministry Area have met together on several occasions for worship and sharing of resources; have worked together in Vacation Bible School and youth programs; and are in conversation on future partnerships among congregations in the area. The area's mission statement boldly declares that we are *"Fourteen Congregations: God's Love in Action."*

On February 9, Bishop Pryse appointed me to serve as Dean of the Nith Valley Ministry Area, succeeding Pastor Bonnie Schelter-Brown, who had served as Dean since the founding of the ministry area. In this role, I will be providing leadership and support to both the clergy and congregations of our ministry area, as well as attending occasional meetings with other Deans and the synod staff. This is the third time in my ministry to serve as a Dean; I had previously served as Dean of the Hamilton-Niagara Conference of our synod and the Southwest Nassau Conference of the Metropolitan New York Synod. I am looking forward to working with our partners in ministry in Nith Valley and will be inviting you to share in the opportunities that God is giving us to work together *"to serve all people, following the example of our Lord Jesus"* (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Affirmation of Baptism*). In the coming months, there are two events that I would especially encourage you to attend:

- On Sunday, April 8, the youth of Nith Valley will be coming to Stratford for our annual Swan Parade, meeting at Zion at 12:45 p.m. and spending the afternoon along the parade route.
- On Thursday, May 10, there will be a Nith Valley worship service that will celebrate the ministry of Dean Bonnie Schelter-Brown and officially install me as Dean. The service will be held at Trinity Lutheran Church in New Hamburg beginning at 7:00 p.m.

For St. Paul, the marks of a true Christian are seen in the way in which we live together as God's holy people: *"Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers."* (Romans 12:9-13). In our community, in the Nith Valley Ministry Area, in our synod, our church, and our world, may we continue to faithfully live and serve together so that all may know Christ's love!

Yours in Christ,  
Pastor Jeff Laustsen

## VICAR'S DEVOTIONAL

I recently completed an assignment for the Seminary where I was asked to do a survey of the socio-economic culture of Stratford. Having already experienced the shops, restaurants, theaters, and parks of Stratford, I had a pretty good idea about the sort of things that I would report. It was easy

for me to observe that Stratford had a wonderful mix of small town rural with a vibrant arts scene. There are also a number of large employers in town, and a healthy industrial area, not to mention the hundreds of surrounding farms. Driving down the streets on either side of the river and through the many residential neighborhoods, there are a variety of large, very large, and more modest sized homes, but in general there seems to be a very good standard of living here.



So, as I started to do my research, I was very surprised to learn that over half of all households in Stratford were reporting an annual family income below 60,000 dollars a year. And a staggering 16 percent of all children in Stratford, nearly 1000 children, are living in poverty. (‘What it takes to make ends meet in Perth Huron 2010’, a report by the United Way of Perth Huron).

Coming from cities like Kitchener and Toronto, it was hard for me to understand how poverty could be so prevalent, and yet so hidden. Certainly, in the larger centers there is a level of poverty that remains unseen, but there is also a great amount that spills out in to the streets, and parks, and is always present for anyone with eyes to see it. Jesus once warned us that we would always have the poor with us (Matthew 26:11), but we often think of poverty as a problem over there in some distant land. But the poor are here among us too.

The poor will probably include some of us or members of our families; some of the people we see in line at the grocery store; or perhaps the young woman with kids in tow through the aisles of Walmart. They may be our elderly neighbour next door, or the person always sitting at Tim Hortons without any coffee in their cup.

But while the prevalence of poverty in Stratford was a surprise to me, it seems the people of Zion have been working for generations to help alleviate the problem. In 2017, Zion Lutheran Church partnered with the Salvation Army, House of Blessing, Meals on Wheels, Huron-Perth Center for Children and Youth, Shelter Link, and the Emily Murphy Center just to name a few. 2017 also saw a new vegetable garden planted on the church grounds for the first time which provided six bushels of fresh vegetables to the Stratford Food Bank system. And perhaps the most vibrant ministry at Zion is the Friendship Meal, which is entirely financed and operated by the congregation and joyfully served over 700 meals last year to the people of Stratford.

Jesus once said, “Who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:27, NRSV).

The poor are always with us, but so is Jesus; the One who blesses, the One at the table, the One who serves.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM CONGREGATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING



Zion Congregational Council held its inaugural meeting (post the Annual Meeting) on February 20<sup>th</sup>. It is the one and only time of the year that Pastor Jeff chairs the meeting as the primary element of the agenda is the election of church officers. For 2018-2019, your council executive is as follows:

Chairperson	- Kevin Tuer (Property Committee)
Vice-Chairperson	- Liz Bomasuit (Congregational Life Committee)
Secretary	- Judy Stanley (Congregational Life Committee)
Treasurer	- Gerald Cook (Finance Committee)

The other Council members are as follows:

- Ron Deichert (Finance Committee)
- Paul Hansen (Property Committee)
- Alison Johnston (Property Committee)
- Tom Cosstick (Property Committee)
- Elizabeth Forrest (Worship & Music Committee)
- Ellen Wolfe (Worship & Music Committee)
- Lois Lemon (Congregational Life Committee)
- Rev. Jeffery Laustsen (Pastor, Ex-Officio)

As a council, we will pick up the business of the church where the last Congregational Council left off with one of the highest priority items being the continuation of the Bridgebuilder program. Please pray for each of these council members as they serve in their respective capacities and please make every effort to contribute to the life, mission and operation of Zion when opportunities present themselves or you are asked to serve.

SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS



We will be having a craft Sunday, on April 29<sup>th</sup>. Susan Laustsen has been busy working on a craft for all of our grades. Your child will not want to miss this. We will be taking a break on Sunday, April 1, Easter Sunday so our teachers and helpers can worship with their families.

Sunday School Co-ordinator, Paula McNaughton



## ZION WOMEN OF FAITH

**120 years 1898-2018**

**Monthly Meeting:** April 25 at 7:30 PM; Speaker to be announced

**Executive Meeting:** Wednesday, May 3 at 10 AM

Our project for our Anniversary is going to involve collecting for CLWR. More details to follow.

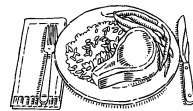
Respectfully Submitted, Joanne Young, WOF President

## FRIENDSHIP MEAL



Our Friendship Meal continues to serve people in need in our community. We are now serving around 100 people a month which unfortunately indicates that things are difficult for some people. Friendship Meal will be Friday, April 27 at 5 PM. Volunteers are needed to prepare, cook, serve, and clean-up. That could mean you and you are welcome to help out. Indeed, we need you! Questions? Please call Sister Jean Widmeyer (519-273-6810).

## ZION TABLE FOR SENIORS



Our next gathering of Zion Table For Seniors, will be on Tuesday, April 24 at 12 noon. Rev. Kathy Urbasik-Hindley, the chaplain of our local hospital, will be sharing information regarding a new program coming to Stratford General. Come and join us for a great meal and fellowship. Please let Doris Bartlett (519-271-9622) or Rita Mueller (519-271-6539) know by noon, Tuesday, April 17 if you can attend. Lunch cost is only \$12.

## STEWARDSHIP THOUGHT



To desire more than we possess is a timeless human struggle. Whether a desire to possess someone else’s good looks or a house in the best neighborhood, humans swing with the pendulum from desire to contentment. We know this about ourselves. And yet, here we find ourselves in the twenty-first century with the same old longings and leanings. At our fingertips are myriad methods for practising gratitude, mindfulness, and apps that coach us to embrace the moment. Whether modern or ancient, we humans lose our focus, become itchy in our lives, and are prone to wander from what we profess and value most.

Paul and Jesus knew all of this about us too. That’s why Paul instructed his readers to “take hold of the life that really is life.” For the same reason, Jesus became known for teaching “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear.” When we are focused on the gifts of the present moment directly before us, everything changes. The ordinary becomes a miracle. And life becomes life in the fullness of God.

As you worship today and in the coming weeks, be mindful about celebrating the gifts of the moment. How is God calling you to let go of your worries and modify your desires so that you can become more generous?

## APRIL VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers assist with our Sunday morning worship services. Listed below are those who serve in April as a reminder and as a thank you for serving.

Date	Communion Assistants	Greeters	Readers	Usher Captains	Counting Captains
Apr 1	Marilyn Sylvester & Sister Jean Widmeyer	Gerald & Isabel Cook	Brian Wilker	Wayne Yundt	N/A
Apr 8	N/A	Merlin & Angela Leis	Sister Jean Widmeyer	Ed Illman	Tom Cosstick
Apr 15	Wayne Young & Linda Weitzel	Bob & Heather Wickenheiser	Marilyn Sylvester	Wayne Yundt	Tom Cosstick
Apr 22	N/A	Klaus & Linda Springer	Linda Weitzel	Jerry Terhaerd	Liz Bomasuit
Apr 29	N/A	Jim & Judy Stanley	Marilyn Wells	Jerry Terhaerd	Liz Bomasuit