

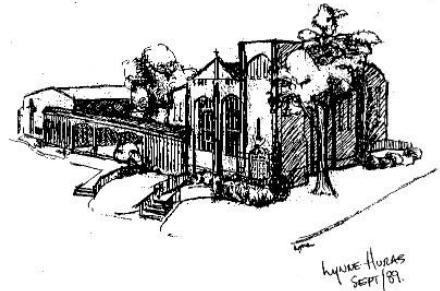
ZIONNEWS

FEBRUARY 2026

A publication for the family of Zion Lutheran Church
202 Erie St., Stratford, ON N5A 2M8

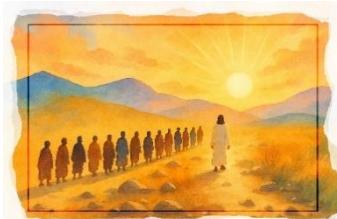
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PASTOR'S DEVOTIONAL

“When the days drew near for [Jesus] to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.” – Luke 9:51.



While driving on Highway 401 may not be the most pleasant motoring experience in Ontario, one advantage it offers are the OnRoute rest areas that are located along the entire length of the roadway from Windsor to the Quebec border. These rest stops offer amenities such as washrooms, restaurants and convenience stores, and gas stations to take care of the needs of travelers on the most heavily traveled highway in North America. While I have taken many long-distance trips along the 401 and other major roadways in Canada and the USA, I am finding that it has become increasingly important for me to take advantage of these rest areas to get out of the car, stretch out my body, and take a break from the concentration necessary for driving these busy highways. I often plan my trips so that such rest areas are always located in good places for my break times as I drive to my desired destination.

One of the features of OnRoute and other rest areas are highway maps that inform travellers as to where they are at the present time and how far it may be to their destination. I have found these maps especially helpful when I am travelling on a new and unfamiliar road; while I always plan my trips in advance, it is good to know where I am on my journey and how far I have to drive to reach my destination. It helps me understand how I have arrived at my current location and where I still need to travel to reach my intended final stop.

A major portion of the Gospel of Luke features our Lord Jesus Christ on the journey to the destination that is not only on his personal itinerary but is the place where he will fulfill his purpose in being the Saviour of all humanity. The Evangelist tells us that this journey began when Jesus “*set his face to go to Jerusalem*” (Luke 9:51), and for the next several chapters of this journey our Lord continues to travel to this destination, with stops along the way for teaching, preaching, and healing. Jesus will visit with Mary and Martha in Bethany, teach his disciples about prayer through Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer, share his famous parable of the Prodigal Son, and call Zacchaeus the tax collector down from the sycamore tree so that our Lord might proclaim that “*today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost*” (Luke 19:9-10). His journey reaches his destination when he enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, and through what we know as Holy Week Jesus will share his Last Supper with his disciples, pray at the Garden of Gethsemane, be arrested and condemned to death by Pontius Pilate, die on the cross on Good Friday, and be raised from the dead on Easter Sunday. The Gospel would not be “good news” if Jesus had not taken this journey to the destination where through his death and resurrection all who have been baptized in his name have been “*given a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*” (1 Peter 1:3).

As we remember Jesus’ journey to the destination where he freed us “*from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and his innocent suffering and death*” (*Small Catechism*) during the holy season of Lent which begins this year on Ash Wednesday, February 18, we are also invited to remember his journey and to consider our journeys as his people in this time and place. Here in Stratford, we will again gather for our Lenten Luncheon series for six Wednesdays beginning on February 18. This beloved annual tradition invites people from our community to gather for lunch and worship at Immaculate Conception Roman Catholic Church where this year we will hear sermons on the theme “*How did you get here? Where does the church in community go from here?*” As Jesus’ ministry was defined by his journey to the place where he fulfilled God’s Will for all humanity, we will be invited to consider how our journeys have brought us to this time and place, and where we see the journey of our church in this community and in our world going from here. Our preachers will include members of the Stratford and District Council of Churches Executive; I will have the privilege of preaching on Wednesday, March 18.

As we gather for these times of fellowship and worship, we are also thankful to the people of Immaculate Conception and especially the members of the Catholic Women’s League for their gracious hospitality to hosting our Lenten Luncheons for many years. Sadly, this will be the last year that we will be meeting at Immaculate Conception as the parish will be closing later in 2026. We are thankful to God for the ministry of this parish in our community and pray for

the people who have worshipped and served among us as we look forward to where our journey as God's people in Stratford will take us in our future.

As the snow is falling outside, I am planning trips in the warmer months of the year that will include stops at rest areas where I will undoubtedly check the maps to see where I am and where I will need to journey. As we follow our Lord in the way that leads to the Cross and the joy of Christ's resurrection, let us journey together in the presence of our Lord who has been "*our help in ages past, our hope for years to come; our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home.*" (ELW Hymn 632).

Your fellow traveller,
Pastor Jeff Laustsen

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE DECEMBER 10, 2025 CONGREGATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING

HIGHLIGHTS



The December 10, 2025 Congregational Council Meeting was held in-person in the Parlour and by Zoom.

Pastor Jeff, on behalf of the Worship & Music Committee, was pleased to advise that a new Interim Minister of Music, namely Stéphane Potvin commenced his duties at the beginning of December.

The eavestrough from the handicapped parking lot to the ramp has now been repaired. Both inclined platform lifts have been installed and have passed the Technical Standards & Safety Authority (TSSA) inspection. Training on the operation of the lifts has commenced with the ushers. In due course, training will also be offered to other individuals. Regarding the proposed crosswalk at Erie and St. David Street, we have now been informed by the City of Stratford Engineering Department that since Erie Street is a provincial highway, installation of a crosswalk will also require provincial approval. Therefore, the completion date is uncertain at this time.

The next coffee hour is December 14 and will be hosted by the Sunday School. The first coffee hour for 2026 will be Sunday, January 11, 2026 and will be hosted by Congregational Council.

A fundraising concert is being organized for Sunday May 31, 2026, in the sanctuary, 2:00 pm – 4:30 pm. More information will follow in the coming months.

Seventy people enjoyed the December Seniors' Luncheon. The first Seniors' Luncheon for 2026 will be Friday, January 9, 2026.

Donations/offerings, can continue to be completed via our Church website, including additional options for QR Code and E-Transfer, in addition to the PAR program, mailing cheques or dropping off donations either at the Church office weekday mornings or in the locked mailbox at your convenience.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE JANUARY 21, 2026 CONGREGATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING



The January 21, 2026 Congregational Council Meeting was held in-person in the Parlour and by Zoom.

The two inclined platform lifts have been installed, inspected and are being used.

The January 11, 2026 Coffee Hour hosted by Congregational Council was well attended. The extra food provided by Fred Riehl was much appreciated. The next Coffee Hour will be Sunday, February 15, 2026.

Posters and tickets for the May 31, 2026 Concert in the Sanctuary are being prepared. More information will follow in the coming months.

The December Seniors' Luncheon was well attended and very positive comments have been received. The February Seniors' Luncheon will be held on Friday, February 13, 2026.

The Income Budget for the Current Fund for 2026, which was recommended by the Finance Committee, was approved as presented. The Expense Budget for the Current Fund for 2026 was approved at the December 10, 2025 Meeting. More details to follow at the Annual Congregational Meeting.

The 2026 Annual Congregational Meeting will be held on Sunday, March 8, 2026.

The 2026 Seniors' Birthday Party will be held on Friday October 23.

Donations/offerings, can continue to be completed via our Church website, including additional options for QR Code and E-Transfer, in addition to the PAR program, mailing

cheques or dropping off donations either at the Church office weekday mornings or in the locked mailbox at your convenience.



Treasurer's Message

As the year-end has now come and gone once again, on behalf of the Finance Committee and the Congregational Council, I extend a “sincere thank you” to our members who responded to our request to assist us financially in reducing our deficit in the Current Fund. It has been very much appreciated. The amount of funds from Internal Ministry (income from our Endowment Fund) to cover the shortfall in the Current Fund, that was approved at the Annual Meeting last year, was less than what we had budgeted. This was due to the increased offerings during November and especially December. Of course, more details in this regard will be supplied at our upcoming Annual Congregational Meeting in March.

We continue to be in challenging times financially, due to escalating expenses coupled with offerings not increasing at the same pace, but even though this is our reality, we, the Finance team continue to be inspired by your continuing faithfulness to the ministry here at Zion Lutheran Church.

Gerald Cook, Treasurer
On behalf of the Congregational Council & Finance Committee

UPDATE – INCLINED PLATFORM LIFTS



We are very pleased to advise that the two Lifts at the main entranceway to the Church are now operational.

This has been a long time in coming for our Church, so this is a “milestone moment” for Zion Church. These two Lifts will greatly assist members, entering the Church at the main entranceway, in gaining access to the sanctuary as well as gaining access to the Fellowship Hall and Washrooms once inside the building.

We are now in the process of training the Ushers in the operation of the Lifts. In due course, other members of the church will be trained as well in the operation of the Lifts.

For those members unable to enter the Church at the main entranceway, it is to be remembered that gaining access to the sanctuary from outside the building is the same as before the Lifts were installed, namely, using the ramp off of the Handicapped Parking Lot at the rear of the Church.

As we continue to embark on this journey, we advise that plans are being formulated presently as to the dedication of the Inclined Platform Lifts sometime in the future.

We extend our sincere appreciation to Tim Iredale, Chairperson of the Accessibility Advisory Committee, for overseeing this very important project for our Church over the past few years, but especially this past year as the Lifts came to fruition. Appreciation is also extended to Darrell Renecker for all his involvement as a member of our Property Committee.

SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS



There is NO Sunday School on Sunday February 15h.

Paula McNaughton,
Sunday School Coordinator

PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY



February; the shortest month of the year that feels like the longest.

The winds, ice, freezing rain and snow feel interminable and isolating.

The Prayer Shawl group continues knitting and crocheting; providing items of physical warmth and comfort to people in Zion's midst; those with shelter and care, and those braving the cold.

We are blessed to be able to do so. Thank You!

Prayer Shawl Ministry Member
Nancy Schaff

“SENIORS’ LUNCHEON REPORT”



The “December” Seniors’ Luncheon was attended by 70 people each enjoying a delicious Christmas meal of turkey, mashed potatoes, veggies, gravy, salad, buns and cherry cheesecake for dessert.

Following dinner a Christmas Carol Sing Along was well received with Marilyn Wells accompanying the Carollers on the piano.
“THANK YOU” Marilyn for making us sound so good!

A big “THANK YOU” to our volunteers: Irene Ehgoetz who attended to the door; Dianne Mann and her kitchen helpers and servers: Sheila Wittig, Laurie Snow, Marie Ehgoetz, Sonya Fischer, Wendy Hansen, and Marilyn Neumeister. Congratulations to all on another successful luncheon! A special “THANK YOU” to Dianne Mann for her lovely table centerpieces! And to Irene Ehgoetz and Heidi Hohendorn for their hard work in making crocheted cone Christmas trees!



The “January” Seniors’ Luncheon was attended by 57 people who enjoyed another delicious meal of roast beef, roasted potatoes, corn, gravy, salad, buns and fruit tarts to top it off.

Terri Philpott, Support Coordinator from “One Care” gave a very interesting and enlightening talk on the services offered to Seniors by One Care.

Once again a big “THANK YOU” to our volunteers: Irene Ehgoetz who attended to the door; Dianne Mann and her kitchen helpers and servers: Sheila Wittig, Laurie Snow, Marie

Ehgoetz, Sonya Fischer, Carmen Beck and Marilyn Neumeister. Congratulations to all on another successful luncheon! A special “THANK YOU” to Dianne Mann for her lovely table centerpieces!

SAVE THE DATE



The next Seniors' Luncheon will be held on **Friday, February 13, 2026 from Noon until 2:00 PM.** The cost of the luncheon is \$20.00.

Come out and “Discover what is a friend?” February 14th is Valentine’s Day. There will be a discussion about why friends are important for seniors. Come and find out the answers. Hope you can join us!

A reminder to enlighten you on how the process for the Seniors’ Luncheon works.

Please remember that if you say that you will attend the luncheon, your name is added to the list of participants. On the Tuesday before the luncheon being held on the Friday, the number of participants is called in to the caterer to order that number of meals. It is at this time we are committed to pay for the number of meals we have ordered.

INVITATION

Members and Friends of Zion Lutheran Church Invite you to Zion's next

SENIORS' LUNCHEON

On FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 13TH 2026

Starting at 12:00 Noon

202 Erie Street – enter off Erie Street

519-271-8527

Wheelchair accessible

On the Queensland bus route

\$20.00

Entertainment: “What is a Friend?”

Worship on Sundays is at 10:00 A.M.

Everyone Welcome!!!

THE SEASON OF LENT

The Season of Lent begins with **Ash Wednesday, February 18, 2026**. Each year the Stratford and District Council of Churches together with the Kiwanis Club hosts Lenten Lunches which are held the six (6) Wednesdays in Lent beginning with Ash Wednesday.

Below is the information we have been provided and are sharing with you in case you wish to participate.

Stratford Council of Churches & Kiwanis Club presents the 2026

LENTEN LUNCHES

Every Wednesday of Lent

Immaculate Conception Church

50 Well Street, Stratford

12:00 - 1:00pm

\$15 / person at the door

Speaker Schedule:

February 18 - Will Kramer (*1st and 2nd St. John's Lutheran Church*)

February 25 - Pamela Wideman (*New Hope Community Church*)

March 4th - Bruno Hacquebard (*Jubilee Stratford Church*)

March 11 - Sarah McIntyre-Roy (*CMHA Connection Centre*)

March 18 - Jeff Laustsen (*Zion Lutheran Church*)

March 25 - Charlie Swartwood (*Bethel Pentecostal Church*)



Got questions about Lenten Lunches?

John Patterson (519-273-3523)

Charlie Swartwood (519-272-7111)



Do You Want To Fast This Lent?

In the Words of Pope Francis

- Fast from hurting words and say kind words.
- Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude.
- Fast from anger and be filled with patience.
- Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope.
- Fast from worries and have trust in God.
- Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity.
- Fast from pressures and be prayerful.
- Fast from bitterness and fill your hearts with joy.
- Fast from selfishness and be compassionate to others.
- Fast from grudges and be reconciled.
- Fast from words and be silent so you can listen.



STRATFORD CONNECTION CENTRE

Please see the list below for the latest “**much needed**” items. Whatever help you can provide is greatly appreciated!

STRATFORD CONNECTIONS

URGENT NEEDS

**Volunteers for
Tuesday, Thursday, Friday**

Razors

Toothbrushes

Basic t-shirts (medium)

Ground coffee

Packaged grab & go snacks!

Deodorant



Please Note: Due to limited space, Stratford Connection Centre is not able to accept donations of clothing. If you have clothing to donate, please take it to Goodwill as this is where Stratford Connection takes their homeless for clothing.

HOWEVER, donations of socks, underwear, hats, scarves and mittens (preferably water proof mittens) are needed and accepted at Stratford Connection. Thank you!

**Please drop off donations in the bins located at the
back of the Sanctuary
or inside the office entrance door.**

**The sandwich makers for the Connection Centre would greatly appreciate
donations of food gift cards from Walmart or Food Basics. Any support you
are able to provide is most welcome.**

Thank You!

A NEW COMMAND
I GIVE YOU:
Love One Another

AS I HAVE LOVED YOU,
SO YOU MUST LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

— JOHN 13:34 —

Valentine's Day Word Search

H	E	A	R	T	G	H	N	K	W
K	D	X	O	N	J	U	L	A	Z
V	C	K	S	S	J	G	I	F	T
B	U	I	E	S	P	B	L	O	H
C	P	S	S	P	A	Q	J	Q	Y
O	I	S	W	E	E	T	I	D	D
K	D	X	H	W	A	W	N	E	A
M	L	U	K	O	P	A	F	M	T
A	W	D	Q	L	C	L	O	V	E
D	Y	D	K	B	Z	K	V	W	T



LOVE
SWEET

HEART
ROSES

CUPID
KISS

CANDY
GIFT

DATE
HUG



FEBRUARY

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

Date	Greeters	Readers	Usher Captains	Altar Guild	Counting Captains
February 1	Wayne & Linda Faulhafer	Tom Waschkowski	Jerry Terhaerdt	Shirley Whittaker	Irene Ehgoetz
February 8	Darrell & Judy Renecker	Murray Scholl	Darrell Renecker	Ellen Wolfe	Irene Ehgoetz
February 15	Tom & Joanne Cosstick	Aline Kouhi-Klemencic	Tom Cosstick	Carmen Beck	Audrey Miller
February 22	Ron & Nancy Hesas	Stephen Fischer	Brian Coe	Sister Jean	Audrey Miller

“THANK YOU” to our Volunteers for giving of your time!

Worship would not be the same without you!!

