

## ***The Zion Flame January 2024***

### **Zion Lutheran Church**

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**Pastor Becky Langholz**

Dear church family,

Here's something a little embarrassing about me: I love my day planner. I still use a paper version, and I carry it with me almost everywhere I go. I especially love the start of a new year when I get to use a new planner. I picked my 2024 one out a few months ago, and I have been excited to start using it. I decided to go with a new version this year—one that features the month rather than the week. (We'll see how it goes!) There is something thrilling to me about the fresh start of a new year, the blank pages, the opportunity to, once again, do my best to be a good steward of the time and talents God has granted me. I look forward to learning and growing in the year ahead.

Many squares on my planner are already filled in for the month of January and many of them church activities. January brings the festival of Epiphany on January 6<sup>th</sup>. This end to the traditional twelve days of Christmas honors the visitation of the magi to young Jesus and highlights the bright star of God's light that guided them and continues to guide us today. The Church Council and committees are meeting this month to discuss and plan. We are also tending to church business this month at our Annual Congregational Meeting on Sunday, January 21<sup>st</sup>. January is typically a time to take stock of the year that has ended, make reports and set goals for the coming year.

There are also some special calendar items I want to note. A new "Just for Fun" (or "JFF") event starts in January. All are welcome to meet for lunch out at a local restaurant on the fourth Tuesday of the month at noon. The first gathering will be on Tuesday, January 23<sup>rd</sup> at the Silver Reef Casino. One strength of our congregation is community-building. We hope Zion can be a place where people can build close friendships and connect with others. We know these strong social ties are so important to our well-being, but sadly, so many in our community are lonelier than ever these days. I invite you to go against the tide and get out this month and join others in your church family for lunch. Contact Sue Flaherty for more details.

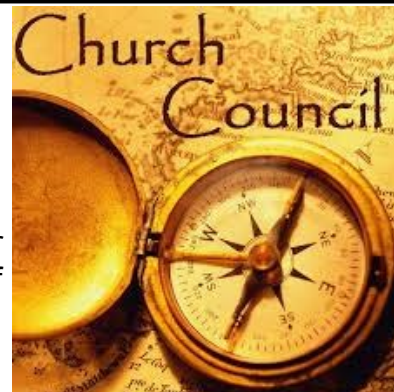
On Saturday, January 27<sup>th</sup> from 10-12pm Matthew Ames-Woolsey will offer the congregation an interactive workshop on getting to know our various "workstyles." Matthew is an executive coach and expert in organizational dynamics. He'll teach us about the "DiSC" model that identifies four main styles: Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness/Compliance. (Spoiler: There is no one "right" or "best" way to be!) As we learn more about ourselves and others, we'll be better able to work together on the mission that God has set before our congregation. Everyone is welcome, and Church Council members are especially encouraged to attend. Look for a sign-up sheet in the back of the sanctuary.

Special events for a special new year! Each day is precious as we walk with God, care for one another and build communities where God's justice and peace are made known. May God's love, joy and provision be with you in 2024. Together, as the Body of Christ, may we live out God's will for us in the year ahead.

New Year blessings,

*Pr. Becky Langholz*

**Zion's Church Council will meet on Thursday, January 11<sup>th</sup> at 4:30pm.** Direct questions or congregational needs to President Harry Shearer.



**Inclement weather notice:** Winter weather is upon us. We will alert of cancellations via email (no email means worship or the event is still "on"). We will also make phone calls to those who do not have access to email. Please take precautions if you do not feel comfortable going out. Also, please let us know if you need a ride.

**Did you know you can give to our church online?** You can even set up automatic withdrawals or give to specific special funds. Check out our church website: [www.zionlutheranwhatcom.org](http://www.zionlutheranwhatcom.org) and the "Give" tab for more information.



**Our Annual Congregational Meeting will take place on Sunday, January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024 immediately following Sunday worship.** Our Annual Report for 2023 and Meeting Agenda will be available by Sunday, January 14<sup>th</sup>. We will be approving a budget for 2024, electing new church Council members, electing representatives to the NWWA Synod Assembly (May 18, 2024) and considering a plan to finish replacing exterior church windows.

**Pr. Becky will be out of the office on Monday, January 15<sup>th</sup> in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Day.**

#### Financial info (through November 2023)

General Fund: \$37,540.13  
 Special Funds: \$16,265.71  
 Thrivent Mutual Fund: \$23,396.55  
 Receipts YTD: \$114,541.63  
 Expenses YTD: \$98,690.15  
 Net: \$15,851.48

## Stewardship

*is heart work*



Pr. Becky is in the church office Mondays and Thursdays from 9-12pm. She also works from home and can be reached on her cell phone: (360) 393-6630 or via email at [pastor@zionlutheranwhatcom.org](mailto:pastor@zionlutheranwhatcom.org). Fridays are her day off; only emergency or prayer chain calls/texts on Fridays, please.



# Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

## Outreach and Missions

### Zion's on-going collections:

- Non-perishable food items
- Household items and toiletries

We partner with local non-profits to get these items to community members in need. Thank you for your generous contributions! Zion also will collect your aluminum cans for recycling. Proceeds have funded many church improvements over the years. Drop off cans in the bin by the basement ramp door. Speak to Brenda Bannerman for more details.



**We'll gather to clean the church on Saturday, Jan. 6th at 9am.** Cleaning and maintaining our church are volunteer efforts, and many hands make light work. Come out for an hour of vacuuming, dusting and generally sprucing up our beloved church building.



**Thank you to the hard-working volunteers** who decorated the church for Advent and Christmas.



**Thank you to all who contributed to the Holiday Giving Tree this year!** We were able to provide all the gifts that we committed to and more. Families came to "shop" for gifts at First Congregational Church in Bellingham before Christmas. It is good to be mindful of those in need during the holiday season.

**The Evangelism Committee will meet on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024 at 2pm at Zion.** Speak to Rosemary Meyers for more details.



**Your prayers make a difference!**

If you would like to activate our church prayer chain, please contact Pr. Becky (360) 393-6630.

**Our prayers as a congregation continue:**

- ♦ For all in need of healing and consolation, especially Bethany (friend of Robin Ogmundson), Nina and Donna (friends of Joyce Dippold), Gaylie (mother of Matthew Ames-Woolsey), Max (great-grandson of Anne Hansen), Joyce (sister of Donna Pollman), Lily Rose (relative of Al Dalrymple), Debbie and Ken (relatives of Pat Ehrhart) and Jeff (son of Wyburn and Brenda Bannerman).
- ♦ For all battling cancer especially Kinsley (friend of Joyce Dippold), Al Dalrymple, Pat Ehrhart, Dave (brother of Bob Ogmundson) and Jenny (daughter-in-law of John Veleber).
- ♦ For these ministries: Lutino Adunu in Gulu, Uganda, Sol de Justicia church in Grecia, Costa Rica, Hogar Irekani in Michoacán, México, African S.M.I.L.E in Tanzania, Family Promise of Whatcom County, World Relief of Whatcom County, Blaine CAP program and our partner ELCA congregations in Whatcom County.
- ♦ For an end to warfare and for peace throughout our world.

**January Birthdays**

7 Sharon Bradford, Diane Cordrey  
 10 Ryan Lockwood  
 14 Levi Swanger  
 18 Amy Ping  
 22 Carol McCormick, Aimee Day  
 31 Elisha Ping

**Zion Lutheran Church Mission Statement**

Since 1903 The beloved, forgiven people of God. **Called** to spread the Good News so as to build up the body of Christ. **Gifted** to share the healing love of Jesus Christ with our hurting world. **Empowered** by the Spirit to be a caring country congregation for ministry to one another and the larger community.

**Zion's Relational Covenant**

In our life together, we will...

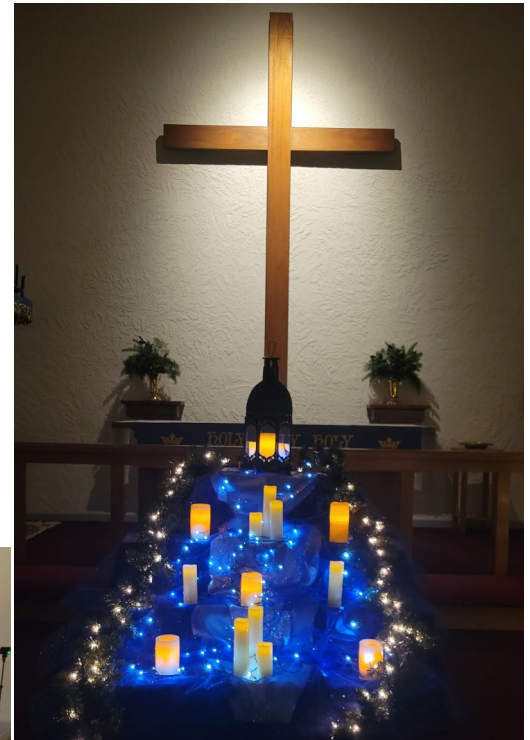
Give thanks to God for the gift of our church and each other. Honor and respect our diverse opinions, perspectives and work-styles. Take responsibility for our own feelings and deal with issues directly. Ask clarifying questions and avoid making assumptions. Speak up honestly in the proper time and place. Make decisions in a transparent manner. Support decisions made by the group. Pray for unity in our congregation.

## ***Worship***

**Connect with Zion online:** Resources for worship and reflection are available on our church [YouTube channel](#).

**We celebrate that Dennis Holm joined the congregation and Lars Holien was baptized at Zion in December.** It is awesome to witness the Holy Spirit at work. Let us pray for these brothers in Christ as they continue their faith journeys!

**The Worship/Altar Guild Team will meet on Thursday, January 25<sup>th</sup> at 10am at church to start planning for Lent.**



Pictures of the beautiful candles, lights and folks enjoying the Carols by Candlelight event on December 13th.

## ***Opportunities for Education***

**The Men's Breakfast and Bible Study will not meet in January but will gather again on Saturday, February 10th starting at 8:30am.** Come together for good food, fellowship and Bible Study.

**Monday Bible Study starts up again on January 22<sup>nd</sup>.** We will be reading and working through the book Blessed Contradictions: How the Bible Contradicts and Completes Itself by Rev. Michael Anderson. Copies of the book are available in the church office. We meet from 12-1:30pm. (If you are interested in a Sunday morning meet-up to study this same book, let Pr. Becky know.)



**From the Spirit****January 2024**

I was listening to the news a few days ago when I heard that Israel had bombed Gaza using artificial intelligence called “The Gospel.” I thought at first that I had misheard. Surely an AI program designed to bomb people is not named “gospel.” But, horrifically, I had heard correctly. As Steve Inskeep from NPR’s *Morning Edition* reports on December 14, “The system is called The Gospel. And basically, it takes an enormous quantity of surveillance data, crunches it all together and makes recommendations about where the military should strike.”

Pause right here and read the above paragraph again. I mean it. Read it again.

A weapon of war is named The Gospel. Dear Beloveds of Christ, I cannot emphasize enough how bone-chilling and nauseous it makes me feel that a word designed to bring hope and love and peace and joy to this world – *Gospel* – is being used to kill.

I don’t know who first named this system “gospel.” I don’t know what marketing expert or even what acronym “gospel” might mean in the AI world. I could not find the origin. But what I do know is that this system is now being used for something horrendous. This is so contrary to the first words from the gospel of Mark, “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” As you might be aware, the word gospel is translated into English as “good news.” When Martin Luther was struggling about the laws of God and feeling that he was a sinner beyond redemption, he recounts in many of his writings how his understanding of God changed as he read Paul’s letter to the Romans. He suddenly realized that it was not up to him, but up to God. God was the one who redeemed. God was the one who forgave. Luther suddenly experienced what God through Jesus does for all of us: Through Jesus Christ, God provides comfort for the terrified, forgiveness for the sinner, and faith for the doubting. Martin Luther was overwhelmed with God’s grace and was immersed in the Gospel.

Following this earth-shattering understanding of the Good News of Jesus, Luther taught, preached and wrote about this insight every chance he got. In 1521, Philip Melanchthon condensed Luther’s insight to this provocative sentence: “The gospel is a promise.” To this day, Lutherans continue to bear witness to the whole church and world that the gospel is a promise, truly good news of God’s mercy and love in Christ, received by faith alone.

In these days when words are manipulated by those in power, when evil seems to be gaining ground, when neighbor turns against neighbor, may we remember and experience God’s grace. May we be enveloped in God’s love. And, in response, may we, in our words and actions, move against the forces that are contrary to all that Jesus stands for.

For we are called, my dear Beloveds, through God’s grace towards God’s promise of wholeness and true peace. *This is the Gospel*. As the prophet Isaiah proclaims of God in chapter 42, “I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

May it be so. May it be so.

We look towards 2024 in faith, holding God’s promise of Gospel.

+ Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee

[bishop@lutheransnw.org](mailto:bishop@lutheransnw.org)

**From the Veep****January 2024**

"When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy." Matthew 2:10

We have a tradition in my family that we began when the children were young, about 25 years ago. Each year, we choose a different country and research their Christmas celebrations and traditions. We learn about the typical holiday fare and do our best to recreate a traditional Christmas meal. Not only has this practice been fun, it has been educational and enlightening, as well. One of the things we learned over the years is that different

people celebrate different aspects of the Christmas story and they celebrate at different times. Christmas, after all, is a season not a day. Some cultures have special celebrations in the days leading up to Christmas day. St. Lucia's day in Scandinavia and Las Posadas in Latin America are some examples. Others focus their festivities on the twelve days following Christmas and leading up to Epiphany or Three Kings Day on January 6. In countries in the southern hemisphere, Christmas occurs in summer, so their traditions look a little different than we experience in our more northern climes – picnics and barbecues rather than cocoa and cookies. This tradition has opened us to all the different ways Christians express the overwhelming joy of a God's abundant grace incarnate.

One of our favorites was the year we learned about the traditions in Poland. I had a dear friend, now departed, who shared the traditions of her heritage with us. Celebrations begin in Poland on December 6, the Day of Saint Nicholas. The major meal is held on December 24 after a morning of fasting. The feast begins when the first star is spotted. My friend Sue shared that in her family, it was always the youngest child that was tasked with keeping their eyes peeled and, on overcast days, they used a flashlight to make sure the feast could go on. We also set an extra place at the table in case a lonely wanderer should be in need of food. The twelve-course meal that follows is a real treat. Every time I remember that year, I remember Sue and her generosity of spirit. As we enter January, right in the middle of the Twelve Days of Christmas, what are your traditions? Is your tree already down and the ornaments put away? Are you just getting started and looking forward to the twelve drummers drumming in a few days? Do you have a Twelfth Night party planned? Are you looking forward to the season of Epiphany? However you celebrated, I pray that your Christmas season was filled with overwhelming joy and the perfect love that casts out fear. In the words of John Lennon:

So this is Christmas  
And what have you done?  
Another year over  
And a new one just begun...

A very merry Christmas  
And a happy New Year  
Let's hope it's a good one  
Without any fear

As an aside: We actually began this tradition because my brother-in-law wanted to make tamales, so we started our world tour with Mexico. Ironically, when he discovered what a time intensive process tamale making is, he pivoted to purchasing that particular treat. Luckily, over two decades later, my daughter brought into our family a wonderful woman of Mexican descent who has helped us all make tamales as she has merged her traditions with ours.

Kay Edgerton, Vice President of the NW Washington Synod  
[veep@lutheransnw.org](mailto:veep@lutheransnw.org)





Above:

Delicious and beautiful treats at the Carols by Candlelight Event on December 13th.



Above: Rev. Kathleen and Cadi.

Left: Matthew and Rosemary.

## Upcoming in January

**“Just for Fun” Lunch Group:** Another round of JFF will start in January. All are welcome to meet for lunch at a local restaurant on the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of the month at 12pm. **The first meet-up will be at the Silver Reef Casino on January 23<sup>rd</sup>.** Look for a sign-up sheet in the back of the sanctuary after the first of the year. Contact Sue Flaherty if you have questions or would like to share a ride.



**Getting to know our “workstyles.”** Save the date for **Saturday, January 27th from 10-12pm.** **Matthew Ames-Woolsey** will offer the congregation a **workshop** on the "DiSC" model which profiles four primary workstyles: Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness/Compliance. In Zion's relational covenant, we say that we will “honor and respect our diverse workstyles,” and this workshop is a great way to learn how to better do this. All are welcome to come and learn! Look for a sign-up sheet in the back of the sanctuary at the beginning of January.