

Church History of Zion United Church of Christ

Zion – originally the name of the fortified hill of pre-Israelite Jerusalem: also used symbolically to refer to the religious capital of Israel.

Zion began in Germany where some people were united into one Evangelical church. In 1840, the Evangelical church of Germany began sending pastors to America to do missionary work and to form churches. From these German immigrants Zion German Evangelical Lutheran Church was founded.

Zion Evangelical Church, Peru, Illinois was organized on September 5, 1852. During the years 1852 to 1859, the church had three pastors who were called the “CircuitRider-Preachers.” They were Rev. Uhl, Rev. Rosenberger, and Rev. Mueller. The name of the church at this time was “The First German and English Evangelical Lutheran Church of Peru.” Services were held in both German and English.

The first officers of the congregation were: David Leininger, Henry Schlegel, Richard Sperber, Adam Dubter, J.A. Bushong, and William Knoblauch. The Rev. Wm. Uhl was its first secretary and kept the minutes in the English language.

Pastor J. Zimmerman (at one time, president of the Evangelical Synod of North America) served the congregation as its pastor from August 21, 1859, to 1862. On September 7, 1862, Pastor H. Siekmann became the pastor.

During the time of Pastor Siekmann, the first constitution was adopted and the property at the corner of Sixth and Grant Streets was purchased. This is now the site of the church and parsonage. Pastor Siekmann served the congregation until early 1866 when the present church was built.

On March 15, 1866, Rev. L. Austmann became pastor. It was while he was the pastor that the church was completed. At a special congregational meeting on June 4, 1871, they decided to add a tower to the church. In the summer of 1872 two church bells were installed into the tower, and for the first time in the history of Peru the people were called to worship by means of the clear ringing bells that were imported from Germany. Rev. Austermann served the congregation until 1874.

On July 12, 1874, Rev. W. Luer became pastor. He served until 1877 when Rev. O. Nietheimer took over the duties on November 25, 1877. It was during his time of service that the congregation bought its first organ in 1879.

On October 1, 1882, Rev. D. Ankele became the pastor and served until early in 1886. Rev. S.E. Hoffmeister assumed the post on May 2, 1886. In 1889, the congregation sold its old parsonage that was located across from the church on the southeast corner. A new home was built. In the summer of 1891, the old tower was struck by lightning and plans were started to replace it.

In the late fall of 1899 Rev. Hoffmeister became sick and Pastor Meritz became his assistant. On February 11, 1900, Rev. Hoffmeister passed away. Rev. Paul Brauns became the pastor. In 1902, the congregation celebrated its Golden Jubilee and extensive improvements were made, including the installation of water lines, and electric lights, and pebble dash to the parsonage. A third bell tower was also added, and a Building Fund was started for the enlargement of the church building.

In 1905 the congregation had a rededication service for the addition of thirty-two feet that was added to the north end of the church, giving more seating capacity and more room for the Sunday school work downstairs. At the same time a new floor was laid in the original building, a new roof was put on and the entire interior was redecorated. The Ladies' Aid purchased the new modern pews. The Young People's Society donated the wood carving on the organ and chancel. The Sunday school purchased a marble baptismal font.

On July 5, 1907, Rev. Paul Brauns called the first citizens' meeting for the purpose of organizing a hospital association as a first step toward a new and up-to date hospital for Peru. People's Hospital was formally opened in May 1914 and later became Illinois Valley Community Hospital (IVCH).

In 1922 a new pipe organ was installed, built by the firm of Hinners in Pekin, Illinois.

In 1927, Zion celebrated its 75th anniversary. The Ladies' Aid donated a new silver communion set and velvet draperies for the chancel and altar. The church and parsonage received a new coat of paint. Necessary repairs and improvements were also made. The Young People's Society, the Sunday school, and the Concordia Club made generous gifts to the Jubilee fund.

In 1929, a new Gothic Lectern was donated by the Young People's Society. In 1931, the Young People's Society paid for all repairs and painting of the steeple. In 1932, Zion celebrated its 80th anniversary. The Ladies' Aid and young People's Society donated the funds necessary for repairing and redecorating the entire church property. In 1934, the Evangelical Synod of North America unified with the Reformed Church to become the Evangelical and Reformed Church. On June 26, 1934, the Evangelical and Reformed Church was born at Cleveland, Ohio after several years of negotiations.

In 1937, Zion celebrated its 85th anniversary. The Ladies' Aid Society purchased the altar and pulpit draperies. The Young People's Society paid for all the redecorating of the inside of the church and making all necessary repairs to the entire church property.

On Easter Sunday 1941, Pastor Brauns, who served the congregation for forty-one years, presented his resignation to the congregation to take effect on the first of August. He preached his last sermon on Mother's Day, 1941; on June 9, 1941, he passed away. On June 15, 1941, Rev. C.E. Wierth from Peotone, IL was voted by the congregation to become the next pastor after delivering his guest sermon. He arrived in Peru on October 28, 1941. On Sunday, November 2, 1941, he was installed by the Rev. Walter Kleffmann of LaSalle, IL, who had been serving the congregation during the interim. The Rev. Wm. F. Rest, President of the North Illinois Synod, Elgin, IL, preached the installation sermon.

Many changes took place during the 1940s. The services, held mostly in the German language, were changed to English. The Good Friday service was still conducted in German at the request of the Pastor. The church constitution was translated and revised. The Sunday school grew from 60 to 131 members. An adult Bible class was organized with 25 members. A Brotherhood group was organized with 36 members, and the Ladies Aid Society had 156 members.

Individual membership was introduced at the annual meeting in January 1942. Now, both husband and wife could be listed as individual members and the children listed as individual members after their confirmation. Individual communion cups were also introduced and used for the first time on Maundy Thursday Evening. During 1942, Zion Church added 300 members. With the increase in membership, it became necessary in 1942 to conduct an Easter Morning Sunrise Service in addition to the regular 10:15 service and this was continued until 2008.

The year 1942 was the 90th Anniversary of the founding of the Zion Evangelical and Reformed Church. In preparation for the celebration, the exterior frame trim and steeple were added, and many other repairs were made. New front doors were also installed.

1943 brought additional updates to the church. New Intermediate Choir robes were purchased, and a drinking fountain was installed in the church parlors.

In 1944 improvements were made to the church parlors. Fluorescent lights were installed, a choir robe closet was added, and a new kitchen was built in the rear of the church parlors. A new stoker was installed in the church as well as in the parsonage. In 1945 an outdoor bulletin board was purchased through the efforts of the Brotherhood. In the summer the first picnic and outdoor service was held. This event was looked forward to in years to come.

Early in 1946 plans were made to purchase the Schulmerich Electronics Memorial Bells, an amplifying system and an automatic player. The speakers for the chimes are in the steeple. Church members were asked to donate money for the chimes. These plans were fulfilled in December when the chimes were installed and dedicated to the men of the church who served in World War II.

The chimes ring every day at 9:00 A.M., 12:00 P.M., 6:00P.M., and 9:00P.M. They ring during Sunday school, the Sunday worship service, and during weddings and funerals. If the funeral is at the church the bells ring as the casket is being taken out of the church. In the past, if a member of the church died, the funeral procession went past the church. The bells toll once for each year of the member's life. The chimes also ring during the Memorial Day service at Washington Park for the silent prayer. Most of Peru can hear the chimes. Zion Church is known as "The Church with the Carillon Tower Chimes."

In 1947 two religious paintings were added to beautify the sanctuary. They were gifts of Mrs. Lena Weissenburger and the William Bekermeier family. The artist, Mr. John Krogman, was present at the dedication service on April 27, 1947. In the same year new ceiling light fixtures were installed. Ornamental outside entrance lights were donated by Mr. and Mrs. Carl Splittstoesser in 1949.

Several major improvements were made in the sanctuary in 1951. The choir loft was extended forward, steps to the loft were altered and the altar platform was raised. New choir chairs were given by Mrs. Henry Willmeroth and Mrs. Ralph Weber in memory of their mother, Mrs. Albert Hasse. New carpet was laid which was purchased by the Ladies Aid and a new larger altar was purchased through the generosity of Miss Carrie Bierman in memory of her mother, Mrs. Augusta Papernick.

A new altar cloth was also given by the Papernick family in memory of Mrs. Papernick. The brass altar set was presented to the congregation by Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Colver.

The 1952 in preparation for the 100th Anniversary the church was completely redecorated. A new gas furnace was installed, and the month of October was set aside as Centennial Month with special services and activities arranged for the occasion.

By 1955, the membership had continued to grow. Plans were finalized for a new educational building and parsonage. The parsonage that was built in 1889 was initially going to be moved but was torn down instead. The third parsonage of the church was to be built first. This would be located to the east of the Sunday school addition.

In 1958 Rev. Wierth left the church. The Rev. William Brandon became pastor. Rev. and Mrs. Brandon were the first pastor's family to move into the new parsonage. In 1959, the educational building was finished and dedicated. Sadly, on the Sunday after Christmas the Rev. Brandon passed away. In 1960, the Rev. Philip Krause became pastor.

In 1962, Zion Evangelical and Reformed Church joined in the merger of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Congregational Christian Church to become Zion United Church of Christ. This was after the Evangelical and Reformed Church merged with the Congregational Church on June 25, 1957, at Cleveland, Ohio. In 1965, a Wick's 18 rank organ was installed: replacing the one from 1922. This was the third organ for the church.

In 1967, plans were started to renovate the church sanctuary, entrance, and fellowship room. The groundbreaking service was held during the morning worship on September 15, 1968. During the remodeling, Sunday school was held in the parsonage and church services were held in the Sunday school rooms. In 1968, Rev. Dennis Siebert became the first Zion church member to be ordained as a minister in our church. In October, Rev. Krause announced that he would be leaving the church and left the same month.

In 1969, Rev. H. Raymond Voss became pastor. In 1970, the renovation project was completed, and re-dedication services were held February 22, 1970. Rev. Clifford Wierth, Rev. Philip Krause, and Rev. H. Raymond Voss were present. The service was held at 3:30 P.M. with Rev. Dr. Erston Butterfield, Conference Minister of the Illinois Conference, United Church of Christ; Rev. Walter Kleffmann, Pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ, LaSalle; and Rev. Dennis Siebert, Pastor of Bethany United Church of Christ, Tioga, IL; and Rev. H. Raymond Voss participating. The reception and open house included tours of the sanctuary and fellowship hall and a picture display of some of the materials in the Education Building.

As part of this renovation project three stained glass windows were put in the Narthex.

Window Number 1 (left, facing out)

“Before Creation” – before man, the highest order of all living things is the center thought in the picture. Also pictured is plant and animal life, fowl, fish, flowers, and trees, and stars in their heavenly places; each in its simplicity and beauty; each a compliment to the rest as the Creator intended.

Window Number 2 (right, facing out)

“God Resting” – The viewer’s attention is drawn to the robed figure in the lower right-hand corner with head in hands. God is resting and pondering his creation and all its creatures of the earth, sea, land, and sky. Upward toward the peak, we behold the bright light, signifying illumination and revelation wherever God is present, speaking and relating to his universe.

Window in the Center

“The Consummation”- This is the central theme of the artist, Pierre Millous of Paris and Chartres, France. The creatures that God gave life are present; also the figures of man (Adam and Eve), beguiled by the Serpent; and then, the figure robed in glowing red represents Jesus Christ, God’s perfect man, the consummation of all life. This reminds us of the scripture, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of man.” (John 1:4)

The lighted pictures of “Christ, the Good Shepherd” and “Christ Knocking at the Door” were moved into the entrance from the front of the church.

The completed restoration in 1970 included a remodeled sanctuary with new fixtures and furnishings. The altar has three carved panels; the center circular shield contains the Greek letters ICXC. NIKA meaning “Jesus Christ Conquers;” and the side panels have grapes and wheat of the Holy Communion. Also included are the Cross, and the Greek letters, Alpha and Omega representing Jesus Christ, the Beginning and the Ending. The new balcony is tiered with five rows of pews. Seven years later Zion celebrated its 125th Anniversary.

In 1983, a new sound system and closed-circuit TV was installed so those who were unable to attend services in the sanctuary were able to participate in the fellowship hall. With the purchase of a three-octave set of Schulmerich hand bells in 1984, the hand bell choir started. In 1985, Rev. H. Raymond Voss retired from the ministry. The Rev. Virginia Anderson served as the interim pastor and in 1986; Rev. Jean-Paul Zenke became pastor.

In 1987, the sanctuary was air-conditioned and in 1988, the congregation was informed about the installation of an elevator. It would not be big enough to hold a casket for a funeral, but it would accommodate one wheelchair and one person or up to three people. It was decided that during the construction process of the elevator the fellowship hall would be painted and wallpapered as it had not been done in twenty years. A fund was set up by the Women’s Guild and Evening Guild to also buy new carpeting. The remodeling was completed in July.

In 1989, a mural was put up outside the church. A special mural fund was set up to help pay for it. Dedication of the bronze sculpture of the “Last Supper,” took place October 1, 1989, on Worldwide Communion Sunday. The dedication and communion were held outside in front of the mural.

In 1991, members of the church became involved with the PADS shelter. This was to provide shelter to homeless people in the area between October and April. The PADS shelter was housed at Zion Church in the youth room each Thursday night until

1998 when a permanent shelter was found. Workers and food were provided by Zion Church.

In 1992, Rev. Zenke announced his retirement at the annual meeting held in January. Rev. Edward Biegert served as interim minister from June to October 1992. In October of 1992 Zion celebrated its 140th Anniversary and chose Rev. Theodore Engelsdorfer for its eighteenth pastor; he arrived in January 1993. In 1993, new carpeting and painting was done in the sanctuary and airconditioning was added to the fellowship hall. Rev. Engelsdorfer organized the Illinois Valley CROP Hunger Walk and did so annually until he left. In 1994, the Sunday school rooms were remodeled along with the kitchen; a new garage was also built. In 1998, the church accepted with regret the announcement of Stephanie Heilstedt's retirement. She served as choir director for 47 years.

In 1999, new roofs were put on the sanctuary and office areas. The Montessori school that was at another church relocated to Zion Church. Land was purchased north of the existing parking lot to increase its size. Zion lost parking spaces to the south due to the building of the Women's Health Center across from the church. Zion Church and Illinois Valley Community Hospital worked together to complete this project.

In 2000, a new roof was put on the Sunday school building. The first Sunday in Advent, the congregation enjoyed new pew candles. The Montessori school left the church in December. Plans were started for the 150th Anniversary in 2002.

In January 2001, the 150th Anniversary committee met to start planning the 2002 events. Past ministers of Zion Church and their families were invited back during the anniversary year to be part of the worship service. Letters were sent to former members and present members explaining the significance of the 150th Anniversary. On March 25, 2001, after serving the church for nine years, Rev. Theodore Engelsdorfer resigned. A reception was held for Rev. Engelsdorfer and his family on June 24th after the worship service. He preached his last sermon on July 1, 2001. During May and June 2001, the east side of the church had to be repaired. The wall was cracked and leaking.

Rev. Jean Carmean served as interim pastor from July 2001 to April 2002. Pastor Sue Hamilton served from May through August 2002. During this time the search committee led by God's Spirit, brought to Zion the Rev. Dr. Jerold Garber who was called by the congregation in June and arrived on September 1, 2002. He was installed as Zion's nineteenth pastor on November 10th.

Pastor Sue Hamilton re-organized our Senior High Youth Group that met at 6:30P.M. every Sunday evening. A book study group was started by Rev. Garber that met on Sunday evenings and Wednesday mornings. A new Bible study was offered for 2003 by Rev. Garber. During the December 8, 2002, worship service the Chrismon Symbols were placed on the Chrismon tree by the Sunday school children as Rev. Garber explained each symbol. This started a new tradition in our church. A community Chrismon event was planned for 2003.

In 2002, Zion celebrated its 150th anniversary with six Sunday's honoring the 150 years of ministry. The history committee consisting of Vera Ferrari, Judy Flahaut, Abbie and Dorothea Gillmann, Dorothea Janz, Dona Ostermeyer, and Cornelia Scott provided picture displays of the pastorates being celebrated.

On March 10th, Rev. Sandra Leisher Mineau, who was confirmed at Zion and became an ordained UCC pastor, presented the message – “Amazing, The Blind See” as we celebrated the years 1852 through Pastor Paul Brauns ministry to 1941. On April 14th, Rev. Richard Brandon, son of former Pastor W.C. Brandon, delivered the message “High Hopes” as we celebrated the ministry of Zion during the pastorates of Rev. C.E. Wierth and Rev. W.C. Brandon. Rev. Brandon’s widow, Mrs. Betty Boyce was also in attendance. On May 5th, Rev. Dennis Siebert who was confirmed and ordained at Zion, delivered the message “Be Like Phil! (Krause)” to celebrate the ministry of Rev. Philip Krause and going into Christian Ministry. Unfortunately, due to health concerns Rev. Krause was unable to attend. A potluck dinner followed the service.

On September 22nd, Rev. Jean-Paul Zenke presented the message “Christian Responsibility” to celebrate Rev. H. Raymond Voss’ and Rev. Zenke’s pastorates. Also attending were Rev. Voss’ widow, Betty Voss and her daughter Karen and grandson Michael. New choir robes were dedicated during this service. On October 20th, Rev. Ted Engelsdorfer gave the message “Looking Back”, to celebrate the years of his ministry at Zion. His wife, Kris and children Katherine, Julie, and Emily also attended. A dinner was held after church with entertainment by the quartet, “Harmony Guaranteed.”

The last celebration Sunday was November 24th as Zion participated in its annual Harvest Home Festival. Rev. Dr. Ronald Wellner who was confirmed at Zion delivered a message “Storms of Life.” After the service a ravioli lunch was provided by the Stewardship Committee followed by preparing the church for the advent season as Zion moved into its 151st year.

In honor of the 150th anniversary of Zion Church the Women’s Guild gave cardigan sweaters with the anniversary logo to our shut-in members. In addition, the Guild in association with the 150th anniversary published a cookbook, entitled *The Best of the Bakesales*. The recipes, contributed by members and friends of the church, totaled nearly 500. This provided an opportunity to preserve recipes from the past and present that are important to members of the church; with astonishing success 600 were sold. Thanks to the 150th anniversary committee consisting of Abbie and Dorothea Gillmann, Jim Greening, Stephanie and Ralph Heilstedt, Gerald Koehler, Allison Miller, Debbie Miller, and Lois Wilmot for planning these events and providing coffee hour each of the Sundays. This committee also prepared and provided to the congregation a special 150th Anniversary booklet. Special thanks to Allison Miller whose history of Zion was used as the basis for this history.

During 2002 signs were installed at various locations in the church to aid visitors in finding their way to the fellowship hall, Sunday school, elevator, and sanctuary. A new floor in the Sunday school and handicapped accessible restrooms were also being discussed. The year also witnessed the installation of new awnings for the church and a new roof on the parsonage.

In 2003, Rev. Garber challenged the congregation to “think about how we grow as a community and find ways to implement that growth.” A milestone was reached when the church was able to pay off the remaining parking lot loan. This lot provides a service to Illinois Valley Community Hospital and Zion Church members. The ladies

working in the church kitchen were grateful to the donation by the family of Vera Ferrari for the newly installed dish washer.

The men of the Wedding Band gave the church a fresh look for spring by cleaning the yards and bushes surrounding the church and parking lot. The Women's Guild continued to serve supper for the Vacation Bible School participants. This year's theme for the VBS was "Scuba." This continuous tradition started in 2000.

The choirs of 2003 reflected their service to the church community with people singing from 2 to 60 years for a total of 624 years of singing. The bell choir contributed a total of 169 years of bell ringing among its members.

In 2004 the Renovation Fund was utilized to make major improvements to the church and parsonage. The minister's backyard was beautified with a new fence and a Granny Smith apple tree.

Important steps were taken to remodel the downstairs restrooms which made them handicapped accessible. Outside the church, the parking lot was landscaped, and a new flagpole was installed. On the first Sunday of the month parishioners were able to use the new communion ware purchased for the church.

The church council-initiated plans for a new driveway. As a fundraiser the Women's Guild sold mugs with the church logo on them. The Guild also continued to serve supper for the Vacation Bible School students. This year's theme was Lava, Lava Island.

In 2005 the Wedding Band contributed to the well-being of many people. They gave generously to the Hurricane Katrina and Rita relief fund. Church members' well-being will be monitored by the new blood pressure equipment provided by the Wedding Band group. Monthly screening will be available to the congregation. To celebrate the new lives of future church members the Wedding Band resumed in June 2005 the placing of a carnation on the altar for each newborn baby.

Plans were started by the Board of Christian Education to compile a library for the Sunday School students. It was decided to name the library "Cornelia's Closet" in honor of Cornelia Scott a long time Sunday School Superintendent. A computer was acquired with intentions to begin a Sunday School newsletter.

A major project was completed outside the church with a new driveway running from Grant to Sixth Street. Other work completed inside the church included new carpet being laid in the sanctuary, linoleum installed in the Sunday School rooms, and the organ was computerized. All these were made possible through generous donations. To complete the church projects the boiler system was repaired.

In December 2005, Rev. Garber announced his intention to resign.

During 2006 the Pastoral Search Committee along with the congregation focused on finding a minister for Zion Church. The Rev. Karen Karczewski served for a short time and Rev. David Kniker, as permanent intern, for the balance of the year, guiding our congregation through changing times.

For the convenience of church members, the installation began for a replacement elevator in the fellowship room to the narthex of the sanctuary. On the main floor hallway, a new water fountain was added. After two years the church finished purchasing new chairs for the fellowship room.

In July 2006, work began to install a new audio system which aided the participants of the Vacation Bible School whose theme was "Fiesta." As fall services started the congregation also enjoyed the new sound system.

In the fall a computer system was purchased for the minister's office.

In 2007, the Pastoral Search Committee was again active, diligent, and focused throughout the year in their efforts to identify a suitable candidate for pastor of Zion Church. During the year plans were made to hire Rev. Karen Karczewski as part-time youth minister.

The elevator installation was completed in the church. The lower rooms of the Sunday School were air-conditioned. The parsonage was updated with new carpet. A significant addition appeared in the sanctuary. The congregation was introduced to a new video projection system. Thanks to Rev. Kniker, Jerry Koehler, and Rhonda Essl it was a smooth transition into modern technology.

The youth group under Rev. Karczewski began their year with a bonfire kick-off event at the Fupler's followed by the CROP Walk in October, Harvest Home decorating, and Christmas Caroling in December.

Many in Zion Church were involved in the Illinois Valley CROP Walk in 2007. The church had the distinction of bringing the largest number of walkers and pledges to the event.

Rev. Gary Stillwell started the new year of 2008 off right by conducting his first service as the new permanent minister for Zion Church. Rev. Stillwell came to us from Janesville, Wisconsin. The Pastoral Search Committee put in many long hours to procure our new minister.

Our new youth minister, Rev. Karczewski had a very productive year with the young people. They began the year with an Epiphany Party and attended the ICYI MidWinter Retreat. Several of their activities centered on the community with participation at the Food Pantry, CROP Walk, and they served meals at the Good News Community Kitchen in Chicago and our local PADS shelter in Peru.

The Women's Guild continued to meet the first Thursday of the month September through June. Their Christmas Cookie and Bake Sale in December along with two minibake sales helped to fund their church and community projects.

The Board of Christian Education along with the children from Sunday School continued the Mitten Tree tradition for the Uhlich Children's Home. This year netted 41 pairs of gloves, 23 hats, 11 scarves, 6 sets of hats and gloves, and 8 outerwear garments for the Home.

The church fellowship hall was given a new look in 2008 with new paint paid for by the Women's Guild. New carpeting was also laid in the hall to add to its new appearance. The church office received a new copier.

For several people of our congregation January 2009 began in a very different way. For eight days they participated in a mission trip to Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, Mississippi. This trip was the result of the damage done to that area by Hurricane Katrina in August 2005.

Back home in Peru, air-conditioning was installed in the upper Sunday School rooms, and new Communion cloths were donated to the church.

The major event in 2009 was the rededication of the Sunday School Building on September 27, 2009. Its original dedication was held September 20, 1959. Leading up to the celebration, pictures, and events of local interest in the community and the church of 50 years ago were highlighted. A special pamphlet was made recognizing the Sunday School teachers and their students for the past 50 years.

Cornelia Scott, Superintendent of the Sunday School and Albert Gillmann, President of the Church Council in 1959 cut the special "birthday/dedication" cake in the fellowship hall following the morning worship service.

The congregation continued to support community programs such as the Food Pantry, CROP Walk, Labor of Love, and Relay for Life.

January 2010, diet resolutions were cast aside as the congregation indulged in a delicious spaghetti dinner. The rewards of this dinner were not in pounds gained but in support, both moral and financial, for Edna and Hannah Daugherty, Susan and Gary Stillwell, Debbie Cole-Larner, and Art Morrell. They travel later in January to Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, MS to work and rebuild houses destroyed by hurricane Katrina.

Hannah Daugherty continued in her work to help others by leading the Zion members to collect enough items to make 171 first aid kits. Zion acted as the collection point for kits from other churches; a total of 303 first aid kits were sent to Haiti to help those devastated by the earthquake. Hannah also made the decision to make a missionary trip to Haiti. To help her in this endeavor the church held a Hot Beef Lunch for Haiti in September.

In May a community prayer box was installed in front of the church. It has been a successful effort in helping individuals and families having their prayers heard and relayed to God on Sunday mornings. Another first for Zion was initiated by Hanna Daugherty, Tanya Ware, and Terri Kelly. They organized a spring tea held in May and raised funds for summer camp held at Pilgrim Park. The Wedding Band joined in the effort and together they provided enough funds to cover half of the cost for 14 of our youth to attend the program. Zion also was represented by six adults who served as counselors and camp directors.

June was the culmination of many months of hard work by the Zion Sewing Group; they completed 73 quilts to be donated to the Church World Service.

Zion Church took part in Peru's 175th anniversary celebration. On June 27, 2010, a history exhibit of Peru's past was held at Washington School. Zion's history committee assembled historical pictures, books, and literature of the church for its display. On July 3rd, a group of parishioners marched in the city parade and passed out literature for our church.

Several major work projects were completed in July. An audio mixer had to be replaced due to lightening damage during a July storm. Bushes in the parking lot were replaced with a five-foot fence, and the parsonage walls were painted. On July 19, two boilers were installed in the church. This was made possible by the "Warm and Toasty Fund," started January 31. The Women's Guild presented a check for \$5,000 on July 25th to Jack Hamilton, head of the fund. A total of \$22,000 was collected for the \$38,000 owed. An additional \$12,000 had been pledged over the next two years.

Thankfully, the July "High Seas Adventure" vacation Bible School was not in need of heating as their energy and enthusiasm kept spirits high.

In September Zion Church lost one of its most valued, loved, and dedicated members, Jean Greening. She was instrumental in making the church's Bible School program a success each summer. Through her efforts parishioners were able to keep track of their blood pressure after laughing at her creative church announcements, generally done "in costume."

Zion has continued to support our community and local causes. Two very successful Relay for Life teams joined the fight against cancer. Labor of Love, with donations and a work team of youth and adults, helped to fix a house in Oglesby. Harvest Home Sunday and donations of food and money helped the local Food Pantry. 1200 pounds of food and \$700 for turkeys along with summer donations helped the Food Pantry stay open through a very difficult year. In December the \$1,000 goal for the luminary project was exceeded with that money helping the Food Pantry. The Pantry was not only helped with supplies and money but also at Thanksgiving and Christmas Zion members made up a large percentage of the volunteers who packed the special baskets.

Rev. Stillwell advised the parishioners not to become entangled in the cycle of fear that brings defeat. The congregation listened to his advice and took hope and promise as their guiding message for 2010.

The message of hope and promise continued to feed the spirit of the Zion congregation in 2011. The benevolent giving of Zion nearly reached \$20,000 which equals approximately 14.4% of the total expenditures of the church.

One of the recipients of this giving was the children of Haiti. Hannah Daugherty Sprong undertook a pledge project among the congregation as the need for food for the children grew greater. This fund has collected over \$3,800. Hannah's calling from God and mission trip to Haiti in February 2011 has certainly inspired Zion to help Haiti's children.

The benevolence continues to help our community through the Harvest Home celebration, emergency relief here and abroad, support for efforts of justice, helping house people at PADS, and providing mittens, scarves, and caps to the Ulrich Children's Home.

In August, Zion members participated in the Relay for Life (American Cancer Society) at Hall High School in Spring Valley. The members used some of the props from Bible School to decorate their campsite.

Individual groups in Zion also carry out the giving spirit. The Women's Guild makes donations to the transient fund of Zion Church, Vacation Bible School, OCWM, Project Santa, American Red Cross, Food Pantry, Special Olympics, and the youth of Zion to enable them to attend Pilgrim Park Summer Camp. These donations are made possible with the money earned from the June Ice Cream Social, a general store in October, a thank you offering in November, and the Christmas Cookie and Bake Sale in December. The Zion Youth group has provided their services to several worthy causes. They have helped cook and serve meals at PADS, prepared Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter baskets for the Illinois Valley Food Pantry, participated in the CROP Walk, helped with Vacation Bible School, and the Ice Cream Social.

The Youth Group will be preparing for a very special event throughout 2011 and up to July 2012 when several of the Zion youth will attend the United Church of Christ National Youth Event at Purdue University in Indiana. Some of the Zion youth will also benefit from the "Pennies for Pilgrim Park" sponsored by the Board of Christian Education. The collection of pennies will help fund the new pool at summer camp in 2012.

Projects never end and neither does the work to keep Zion Church running. In 2011 the parsonage windows on the north and east side were glazed and repainted, gutters cleaned, and downspout extensions installed, and a new sump pump was added to the basement to alleviate water seepage. Work on the church included tuck pointing the north wall of the sanctuary, repair of an electrical service box, replacement of three valves regulating water heating to the church, and a touch up of painting in the fellowship hall along with carpet cleaning. A group of gardeners, led by Susan Stillwell weeded, mulched, and added various planting to help beautify the grounds of the church and parsonage.

The summer of 2011 would not have been complete without Vacation Bible School. This year's theme was "Pandomania" with pandas everywhere, even on T-shirts that helpers wore. Its success was due to the direction of Susan Stillwell and the many workers, both adult and youth who made sure it was done in a way that Jean Greening would have been proud of.

Summer faded into winter and 15 Zion members closed the year with Christmas Caroling at Liberty Village and Heritage Manor in Peru, the LaSalle Veteran's Home, and the homes of five members of the Zion congregation.

Change and transition were themes of 2012 for Zion UCC. During the summer the youth minister Pastor Karen Karczewski submitted her resignation. Her work with the youth was greatly appreciated. Soon after, Rev. Gary Stillwell submitted his resignation. Both the Church Council and a special meeting of the congregation voted to accept his resignation. His last service was on Christmas Eve, 2012.

Small but mighty, the Women's Guild spear headed its two major fund raisers with help from the congregation. The June Ice Cream Social with entertainment from the Peru Municipal Band was successful. Good weather blessed the December Holiday Cookie and Bake sale. Extra help from the congregation always makes this a fun and profitable event.

The Stewardship Committee hosted the annual "Kitchen Shower" to help re-stock supplies used in the kitchen and church facilities.

The Board of Christian Education oversaw several activities for the children of the church. Bible School, "Sky," was once again an all-church effort to make it a meaningful activity. Rally Day weekend was kicked off with a trip on Saturday to Blackberry Farm to see the lifestyle of the 1850s. On Sunday, Bibles were presented to eligible church school students. Students also helped with the Mitten Tree project and Harvest Home activities.

Promotion continues to be the focus of the Evangelism Committee using radio, newspaper, and TV to spread the word of Zion UCC. In addition, they provided DVDs of the Sunday worship service to shut-ins and nursing homes.

Zion hosted several musical events throughout the year, a performance of Cotton Patch Gospel, a flute and harp recital, flute recitals, and a recording of a patriotic CD by the Illinois Valley Flute Ensemble.

The culminating event of the year was the celebration of the church's 160th Anniversary on November 11, 2012. The celebration day for our anniversary began with an old-style church service. Ladies were encouraged to wear dresses, skirts, hats, and gloves, gentlemen suits, ties, and hats. Women sat on the left side of the church and men on the right. An old replica of a wooden song board was used to announce the hymns. The old silver candlesticks, chalice, and baptismal dish were placed on the altar. Early church altar chairs were placed in the front of the sanctuary to be used during worship. The Sunday school children sang "Jesus Loves Me" in German to commemorate the church's heritage.

After worship the congregation gathered in the Fellowship Hall for a dinner. Tables were lighted with candles, and the side scones added a mellow glow to the event. A cake honoring the occasion was decorated with pictures of the old and new church building. The day concluded with visiting, enjoying the fellowship of each other, and the distribution of a booklet of the church history and other interesting historical information.

The year closed with the congregation learning that an interim minister had been found to lead the church forward and the church prepared to call a new pastor.

In 2013 Rev. Katherine Harding answered the call to be Zion's interim minister with her first sermon on January 6th. She asked the congregation to pray for a year filled with loving and serving Christ; her request was fulfilled.

The congregation pulled together to support Rev. Harding and each other. Though small in numbers the Women's Guild had another successful year for the Annual Ice Cream Social and Holiday Cookie and Bake Sale in addition to their contributions to many charities and providing the picnic supper for the Bible School children and their families.

Bible School was successful with many Zion children and guests attending the activities. Rev. Harding led the opening and closing programs. "Standing Strong for God" and each other was the theme carried through the week as everyone rallied together to make it a meaningful event.

The spirit of standing strong was present all year as the congregation re-grouped to promote the church and activities within the community. Zion was pleased to welcome new members into our congregation, and they along with the rest of the church family, reached out to help and support members who had major health needs.

Zion's support of music continued in 2013. A performance by Garrison Doles, a traveling singer and messenger of God's word was enjoyed in the fall. Many youth and adults shared their musical talents as the church continued its tradition of music Sunday. The choir added to its members and along with individual vocal performers and instrumentalists provided beautiful music throughout the year and especially during the advent season.

The church also hosted a performance by Muriel Anderson, a world-renowned guitarist, in December. A violin and two flute recitals were also held in the Zion sanctuary.

The congregation of cooks at Zion outdid themselves at the October church picnic held in the fellowship hall. Families enjoyed a delicious variety of dishes at this popular Sunday event.

Sunday School children celebrated Rally Day and the return to Sunday School with special treats provided by the Christian Education Committee. The treats represented the theme of "Standing Strong for God" from VBS. Helium balloons supplied by Rev. Harding were distributed at the end of Sunday School.

The Board of Christian Education, after research, phone calls, and thoughtful discussion decided to focus on the needs of our local primary school and special needs children. The "Mitten Tree Project" held in October was replaced with the "Chest of Drawers Project." The congregation filled the drawers with undershirts, pants, and socks for boys and girls. The area grade schoolteachers indicated the need for these emergency supplies. The Committee decided that it was "time for a change" literally and figuratively and the first year was a success.

Zion's Church Council also decided to help the children of the community by making the church available for the dental clinic that serves the Head Start children. In 2013 Zion continued to participate in the Ecumenical Services held at Thanksgiving, Wednesdays during Lent, and on Good Friday.

Not only did the spirit of the congregation grow and improve during the year but physical aspects of the church were also a focus. A power door was installed at the back entrance to the church; this was made possible through the Elsie Engelhaupt Trust. The church continues to be a good neighbor by keeping its landscaping up to date and the grounds well maintained.

Generosity was foremost in the minds at Zion as donations of money, food, and volunteers helped the Food Pantry through our Harvest Home Sunday project at Thanksgiving. It continued with 110 luminaries purchased for Christmas Eve service with proceeds going to the Food Pantry. Even though generosity is the spirit of Zion the church struggles in these hard financial times and strives for fiscal strength and responsibility.

Our 2014 year encompassed a serious observation and evaluation of our church's strengths and weaknesses. Attention needed to be directed toward committees that still must be up and running to better serve our congregation and community. We have many strong individuals and leaders with the congregation pulling together for specific events and to help individuals. We need a strong consistency for day-to-day obligations of the church.

One of the duties of the Church Council was to put together a Search Committee for a new minister. They discussed the characteristics they would like to see in a committee, evaluated the volunteers to get the right mix and chose five to serve.

The Stewardship Committee conducted three programs during the year. The first was the "time and talent survey" to best assign individuals for various tasks that need to be performed on Sunday and committees that function throughout the year. Their second

project was the annual kitchen shower to collect paper goods and basic drink supplies for church functions. The third project was an anonymous survey of the congregation's "intent of giving" to help better prepare the church budget.

The Women's Guild with the help of the congregation held two major fundraisers. The Ice Cream social was the third Thursday in June with entertainment from the Peru Municipal Band. This year was one of the few occasions when the band was rained out. The second event on the second Friday in December was the Holiday Bake Sale. Once again, the congregation pitched in to help set up, bake, package, sell and deliver goodies to customer's cars. This year we had great group of young people to help with that job. One of the joys in 2014 was the re-activation of our Senior Youth Group. They met weekly, started to renovate the youth room, participated in worship services, and volunteered to help decorate for Harvest Home Sunday and Christmas. The young and old of the congregation work very well together.

One church group that blends very well together is the choir. Their voices were rejoicing as they added a returning member this year. Their practices are a wonderful time for enjoying musical fellowship and they continue to look for new members. Music was again a focus for the church as they hosted recitals for the Illinois Valley Flute Ensemble and welcomed them as they played for several church services. The church also hosted the second annual Muriel Anderson Harp-guitar concert in December. This was sponsored by Music Suite 408 and NCIARTworks.

When members of our church needed a little extra TLC the Pastoral Care Committee was there with visits to the shut-ins, special occasion cards, and Poinsettias at Christmas. Marriages, new arrivals, baptisms, and times of sorrow are also remembered by Pastoral Care.

The Board of Christian Education began the year with a successful distribution of socks and underwear to the elementary schools in LaSalle and Peru. The items were collected in December 2013, for our "Time for a Change, the Chest of Drawers Project." The Committee evaluated this event and thought it would better serve the needs of the children if we held the project during August and donated the clothes at the beginning of the school year. This change was made, and a generous supply was collected for the children. The Committee also sponsored Souper Bowl Sunday and collected soup for the Food Pantry. The youth group made and sold subs for people to enjoy as they watched the Super Bowl.

Our Sunday School youth participated in an Easter Egg coloring session, went horse-back riding, and enjoyed an afternoon of miniature golf. The Senior Youth also enjoyed table tennis with the table that was donated for the youth room.

The Vacation Bible School theme was "The Lord God Loves Them All." The youth were able to see and hear a falconer, veterinarian, guide dog owner, an animal rescuer, and a representative from IVAR on how we can be good stewards for animals and their environment. The Women's Guild sponsored the annual closing picnic supper. Rally Day, September 7th, brought major changes to the Sunday School program. After surveying parents, it was decided to hold Sunday School during the church service. Children would participate in the service through Children's Time," then they would proceed to their own room with their teacher. The theme for the year was "Explore with

Jesus.” The students learned the geography of the Bible stories, plus tracked the travels of Flat Jesus on Illinois, U.S. and world maps displayed in and near the Fellowship room. The congregation, friends, and family photographed Flat Jesus in their travels around the country. Photos were then placed on the maps in the appropriate locations.

On December 14th, some of the youth along with other church members enjoyed a trip to Peoria to see “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat”. Their year concluded with the reading of the “ABC’s of Christmas” on December 21st. The Christmas story was told by shepherds, angels, Joseph and Mary, and the Wise Men; each representing a letter of the alphabet. At the end of the service Prayer Dice were distributed to the church families.

In January 2015, our Search Committee was installed at our annual meeting. Their task was to evaluate the needs of the church and the congregation as they began their search for a new minister.

The Board of Christian Education started the year with a new project: “Snuff Out the Sniffles, Tissues for Teachers, and Sanitizer for Sages.” The congregation collected boxes of tissues and bottles of hand sanitizer to be distributed to the teachers at LaSallePeru Township High School. A total of 53 bags were prepared for the faculty for their classrooms.

Despite bad weather the Youth Group successfully sold and delivered the subs for the Super Bowl Sunday and the congregation donated cans of soup for the “Souper Bowl Sunday” which were then taken to the Food Pantry.

The Maundy Thursday service of Zion was a special event. A Seder Supper, a traditional Passover meal, was held and members of the congregation participated in the service plus the tasting of the traditional elements that were served. A meal of lamb, chicken, and side dishes was then served.

On May 2, 2015, Zion UCC hosted a meeting of Eastern, Western and Prairie Associations of the Illinois Conference. The speaker was Ray Shulte, the Managing Director for the Center for Parish Development. The Women’s Guild organized the hospitality, snacks, and lunch for the event. The Zion congregation received many compliments on its organization and hospitality.

During the spring the church began a “Brick Fund” to replace falling and crumbling bricks from the northeast wall of the original church structure. Those bricks had been in place for 110 years. There was a wonderful response from the congregation and the funds for the repair were met and exceeded the amount needed. The extra funds were used to replace canopies over the Sunday School building’s entrance doors and the Fellowship Hall door.

The June Ice Cream Social was a success. Even though it is sponsored by the Women’s Guild it becomes an entire church project and many hands made for light work and a good time. The workers were able to meet and chat with many familiar and returning faces who enjoyed the refreshments and the Peru Municipal Band’s performance.

From July 20th to the 24th the children of the church and their friends went back in time for Vacation Bible School. “A.D. 69, When Jesus Was Young,” introduced the children to the life and times of Jesus. All the activities were held outdoors as that is

where much of the life took place. The young people made leather pouches, wove belts for their tunics, fashioned oil lamps of clay, and constructed a Sukkoth booth. Before their treats of traditional dried fruits, melons, yogurt, hummus, and bread they said a prayer in Hebrew. They also learned songs in Hebrew and played traditional games. The week closed with an outdoor picnic with the food and help provided by the Women's Guild.

In early August the Search Committee and Church Council met with a facilitator from the Center for Parish Development to help establish goals and priorities they need to work on as they seek to revitalize the congregation and find a permanent minister for Zion. The Church Council worked through a series of materials called "Getting Ready for Renewal." A Renewal Leadership Team was formed and they introduced the program to the whole congregation.

The second new entity formed in 2015 was a chapter of ESA, a national service organization. It will provide opportunities to increase our community service and involve new people in our church. The group will try to focus on one project each month.

Rally Day, September 13th, 2015 was an all-church event. Sunday School children wore blue and participated in activities planned around the Deep Blue curriculum. The congregation dressed in blue, worshipped outside in the courtyard, witnessed a balloon launch featuring our Flat Jesus project, had a picnic lunch, and even watched the Chicago Bears and Green Bay Packers football game.

Christian Education has expanded to the adult level. Alex Garncarz led an adult Bible Study at 9AM in the fellowship room.

In October 2015, Zion was the host to a Church Choir Expo. Choirs from Zion, First Congregational-Peru, St. John's-Peru, St. John's on the Hill, and UCCs from Spring Valley, DePue, and Cherry presented their favorite anthems. The finale included all the choirs singing "Praise God."

Our Mission Team helped coordinate the "Feed His Children" project. The congregation donated over 120 boxes of cereal on "Cereal Sunday" which would help feed families for a month. The Pastoral Care Ministry continues to support the shut-ins and remember church members on special occasions.

Christmas Eve service 2015, provided wonderful music with the Story of Christmas through the scriptures, a long-standing tradition. An additional highlight was Silent Night played on the guitar. This recreated the first performance of the song when it was first written.

January 2016 was a busy month to start the year. The second year of Snuff Out the Sniffles collected 100 boxes of tissues and 100 bottles of hand sanitizer to be distributed to the teachers and administrators at LaSalle-Peru Twp. High School.

The Super Bowl provided the congregation with the opportunity to support the youth of the church with the purchase of subs for the Super Bowl. They also provided for the Food Pantry by voting for their favorite team with cans of soup for "Souper Bowl Sunday."

The Search Committee continued their work in finding a minister for Zion. God works in mysterious ways as they found him among our congregation. Alex Garncarz, president of the Church Council and soon to be lay-minister, applied for the position. After reviewing other applicants as well the church Called Mr. Garncarz. He preached his trial

sermon on April 17, 2016, and the congregation voted to accept Alex. He assumed his duties on August 1, 2016. He and his wife Shelly are living in the parsonage. They are lifelong residents of the LaSalle-Peru area.

May brought flowers to Zion UCC. The new ESA service organization planned a plant and flower sale to benefit St. Jude. For the first year it was an over whelming success with support coming not only from the congregation but the whole community. This was followed by another ESA and congregation success.

The chimes of Zion were no longer working and replacement parts could no longer be obtained. The church decided to replace the chimes with a new modern set. The cost would be \$14,000 with the congregation anticipating many fundraisers to pay for the project. The first effort was the Drive-thru- Barbeque Dinner. The date was set for November 10, 2016. The first set of chimes was established as a tribute to the Veterans and was installed in 1946 costing \$1,850. These chimes were later replaced by a Schulmerich Quarda bell installed in 1977, for about \$5,200. The church sold 450 tickets to their dinner plus received donations from the entire community and even out of state as they expressed their fondness of hearing the chimes as they grew up in the area. Miraculously, with only one fundraiser and the generous donations the church reached its monetary goal.

November and December provided opportunities for members to serve the community. They packed Thanksgiving and Christmas food baskets for the local Food Pantry. It is fast paced work but our members share in the good fellowship of other community volunteers. The Women's Guild held another very successful Cookie Sale raising almost \$4000 to help our church community.

2017 began with the entire area surrounding Zion hearing the newly installed chimes. The faculty and staff at LaSalle-Peru High School benefitted from the Board of Christian Education's Snuff Out the Sniffles campaign.

Pastor Garncarz was installed as the full time pastor and is working with the congregation on many positive projects. One of these is the establishment of the Community Clothes Closet. It is staffed with volunteers on Monday mornings and provides clothing to people of all ages who are in need.

Spring was celebrated with the ZSA service group conducting a beautiful plant sale for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. All the volunteers have a great time working together and are so thankful for the wonderful support from the entire community. Flowers were followed by ice cream, cake, barbeque and trimmings at the Women's Guild Annual Ice Cream Social in June. Summer was also highlighted by Vacation Bible School (July 24th to July 28th). The theme was "Super Heroes" led by Pastor Garncarz and his wife Shelly. Church volunteers helped to present the evening programs, science experiments, and craft projects.

The Board of Christian Education initiated two new projects in the fall of 2017. The first began on Rally Day, September 10th. It is called CREW and is an intergenerational Bible lessons on Sunday morning replacing the traditional Sunday School. Each member of the Board takes a turn leading the lesson which includes Bible verse study, stories, questions and discussions, activities, treats, and closing prayer.

The second new activity was holding a worship service at Pilgrim Park. The service was followed by a simple meal and activities for children and adults. The Board also held its Chest of Drawers project in September and October. The focus this year was on sweatpants

for boys and leggings or tights for girls. These were presented to the Oglesby Schools for students who have emergencies.

Another new event in November was the 1st Annual Free Thanksgiving Community Dinner. Thanks to the hard work of church volunteers approximately 50 people from throughout the community were served a delicious meal with all the trimmings.

Our church services this year were made more visually pleasing with the replacement of the Sanctuary projector. This was made possible thanks to special donations.

Under the leadership of Pastor Garncarz 2018 built on the achievements of last year. The Snuff out The Sniffles campaign delivered 100 boxes of Kleenex and bottles of hand sanitizer to LaSalle-Peru High School students and faculty. The church's food donations included soup, turkeys, stuffing and other holiday needs to the Food Pantry for the Thanksgiving and Christmas food baskets. Our members also helped to pack those baskets.

During Lent two carloads of everyday living supplies were collected and delivered to PADS, the local homeless shelter. A later spring activity was the annual ZSA flower and plant sale that once again benefitted St. Jude Research Hospital.

Significant growth was seen in the Community Clothes Closet and our 2nd annual Thanksgiving Dinner where over 100 individuals were served a fresh, hot meal. The attendance for "Rolling River Rampage" Vacation Bible School increased along with the turnout for the fall worship service at Pilgrim Park. The children who attended VBS were rewarded with a special treat on the last day. A huge waterslide was installed in the church courtyard where they enjoyed an evening of fun after a picnic supper.

The choir faithfully provided music for Sunday worship and highlighted the reintroduction of the Bell Choir formed by young people and adults. On February 25th Zion once again hosted the Church Choir Expo that highlights the vocal talents in the Illinois Valley.

Fall season saw a very successful 2nd Barbeque Drive Thru event followed by the Women's Guild Annual Cookie and Bake Sale. All the generosity of the groups and individuals enabled the church to install a new air conditioner and start live streaming the church services to reach more people.

One of the goals of Zion is to retain and care for the older and more seasoned generation in addition to attracting and retaining younger adults and families.

The Pastoral Care Committee has taken their mission very seriously through the years. It sends holiday and event cards to the shut-ins and at Christmas they receive poinsettias. Special occasion cards are also sent to church members.

Leadership, teaching, encouraging, giving generously, organizing, and volunteering were the rewarding qualities displayed by the Zion congregation in 2019. These have always been present but they are reaping benefits for Zion and the community.

Not all improvements can be done by the congregation as the Sunday School building was fitted with new windows, new special application wide gutters were fabricated and installed on the main church building, and all entrance doors to the church were painted. Bathroom improvements were made to the parsonage along with new windows and gutter guards being installed.

Snuff Out the Sniffles delivery was delayed till February 8th due to snow, cold, and school cancellations. The ZSA Annual Flower Sale was another success with a very

meaningful conclusion. Several Zion volunteers were able to personally deliver our proceeds to the St. Jude Office in Peoria.

The Women's Guild made Valentines for the area Nursing Homes in February and followed that in June with their ever-popular Ice Cream Social with entertainment by the Peru Municipal Band. They also generously gave to the Rebuild, Restore, and Renew fund for our church repairs and maintenance. A new activity for the group was to provide the funds for one dinner per month for the residents of our local PADS, a homeless shelter.

The choir continued to incorporate the newly revived Bell Choir into our worship service. The February 24th Choir Expo with six choirs filled the sanctuary with beautiful music.

The Board of Christian Education experienced a very encouraging problem. Because of the growing population of our younger children, it was decided that the church needed to reconvene the nursery on a regular basis.

Vacation Bible School, "A Peak Experience," incorporated mountain climbing and camping activities into lessons. A special treat on the last day was a large water slide. CREW was launched once again on Rally Day, September 8th. The theme for the young people was "You Are a Piece of God's Plan," with puzzle activities to highlight learning. As school came back into session the Chest of Drawers project donated sweat pants, leggings, gloves, scarves, and winter caps and coats to the Oglesby Public Schools.

The year closed with the 3rd Annual Thanksgiving Dinner to those in need in our community. The Women's Guild held their Annual Cookie and Bake Sale in December. These events bring all congregation members together for good times and wonderful fellowship.

The year 2020 barely started when the United States came to a halt in March due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. All businesses, services, and institutions were closed unless they were an essential service. This meant no church services or activities at Zion UCC. Thankfully the technical team had already begun to live stream our church services for those who live too far away to attend or those close by unable to get to Zion. Our members learned how to connect to You-Tube on their home technology to watch the weekly church services led by Pastor Garncarz and a small number of volunteers. While the congregation was not present Pastor Garncarz bore the responsibility of caring for his flock during these very trying times.

The Church Council had to plan how the church would be sanitized, how people would be spaced and seated in the pews, where hand sanitizers would be placed, the mask wearing and making sure people would not congregate in groups before or after church, after gatherings were allowed to resume. In recent history, these were challenges the church had not had to face.

In 2021 challenges were still present at Zion as COVID went through various surges and rules and regulations changed. In person worship was resumed but our You-Tube congregation remained and continued to support our church financially and with their prayers.

Some of the church groups were able to commence their activities, The choir began practicing and singing during the services. Zion Diners were out and about and the Women's

Guild gathered for a meeting. Throughout all of this the Church Council continued to meet monthly with the use of Zoom. In October after a great amount of work the new elevator was installed.

Unfortunately, the CREW group was ready to start Sunday School when a new surge of COVID hit, affecting the younger population. The Board of Christian Education wisely postponed the start of this program. To close the year of uncertainty Zion thankfully was able to hold an in-person Christmas Eve Service.

By 2022 people were learning to live and manage their lives around the COVID Pandemic. Church services, choir practice, and CREW were back in action. The Women's Guild began meeting in August. The congregation once again pulled together to finish raising funds for the elevator. The project costing \$37,000 was paid off in March!

As 2022 progresses Pastor Garncarz and the congregation look forward to getting back to normal.