

## **MARCH 2026 NEWSLETTER**

PUBLISHED BY: ZION UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST, PERU ALEX GARNCARZ, PASTOR

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Zion Church family and friends,

I look back on 2025 with gratitude. God was faithful. And so were God's people. This has been a good year.

One of the things I love about Zion is that we genuinely enjoy each other. And that matters. Zion Diners met each month for a meal together at a local restaurant. Nothing fancy. Just a chance to sit, visit, laugh, and stay connected. And those simple moments go a long way in building a healthy church family.

We also had some special gatherings that brought people together in great ways. The Women's Guild Ladies Tea was well attended and enjoyed by all. Thank you to the Women's Guild for making it happen. The Ice Cream Social was another highlight—good attendance, good fellowship, and the Peru Municipal Band did a wonderful job.

Zion has always been a church that believes faith is something you live—not just something you talk about. And we saw that again this year. We continued to provide a meal each month for the PADS homeless shelter. Thank you to every person who donated.

Harvest Home Sunday was November 23. We filled the sanctuary with food for Illinois Valley Food Pantry. What a joy to see the sanctuary filled like that... it tells a story. A story of generosity. Thank you.

Our Tuesday Evening Bible Study continued. We learned together. But it's not just learning. It's connection. And it's one of the ways Zion stays strong.

CREW (Sunday School) carried on under good leadership, and I'm grateful for the adults who invest time and energy into our kids. Your work matters more than you know.

Worship remains the center of our life together. Week after week, you came. You prayed. You sang. You listened. You supported one another. We held worship twice at Pilgrim Park. There's something special about worshipping out there. It reminds us that God's sanctuary isn't only inside four walls.

During Lent, our Ecumenical Lenten services were well attended, with eight local churches participating. I'm thankful for that spirit of partnership in our community. It's a good thing when the churches remember that we're on the same team.

One of the most joyful days of the year was New Members Sunday on May 25. We celebrated four baptisms, and we welcomed ten new members to Zion. New relationships. New energy. Let's

continue to be the kind of church that not only welcomes new members—but truly embraces them, includes them, and walks with them.

As you know, I was on sabbatical in June, July, and August. I am deeply thankful for that time. It was needed. It was healing. It was renewing. And I also want to say this clearly... Zion did well during those months. Attendance and finances were strong in my absence, and that says a lot about the health of our congregation.

A heartfelt thank you goes to Rev. Kay Harding for her good and faithful leadership during that time. Zion was cared for. Vacation Bible School was a success. Thank you to everyone who helped make VBS meaningful for our kids. Those are the kinds of memories that last.

We made an important improvement: the flat roof over the church offices was replaced. That's not the most glamorous thing a church does... but it's good stewardship. Thank you to all who contributed. We also had Grubby Sunday in the fall—when we tackled some cleanup projects, and we took care of our church home together. Thank you to everyone who pitched in.

Our Annual Cookie Sale was very successful once again. Thank you to all who baked, organized, worked, and bought cookies.

And I want to express my thanks to our leaders. Thank you to our 2025 Church Council for your service. You gave time, you made decisions, you carried responsibility, and you helped keep the ministry moving forward.

And thank you to the Women's Guild for all you do, all year long, to support the work of Zion. Your efforts touch far more than most people ever see, and it does not go unnoticed.

As we head into 2026, I do want to name something honestly: the coming year will not be without its financial challenges. We will be replacing the roof on the sanctuary this summer, at a cost of about \$30,000. To date, about half of that total has been raised, and our "Raise the Roof" fundraiser continues.

Let me end where I started... with gratitude—and with hope. Because here's what I believe about Zion. We are not a church that panics. We are not a church that gives up. We pray, we plan, and we pull together. God has carried us through a lot of seasons. And God isn't finished with us. The best is not behind us. God is still writing Zion's story—and I am grateful to be your pastor as we continue that story together.

With much gratitude, hope, and love,

Pastor Alex



Members present: Pastor Alex, Larry Grosenbach, Arnie Watkins, Marty Johnson, Jerry Koehler, Dinelle Freschi, Elecia Lindenmier, Lauren Knutson, Phyllis Bender

Call to order: Larry G.

Opening Prayer: Larry G.

Last month's minutes: Motion to approve by Jerry K. seconded by Phyllis B.

Treasurer's report: Motion to approve by Marty J. seconded by Arnie W.

President's Report: Erin Put a nice Thank you in the monthly newsletter- motion made to give Erin \$200.00 for a job well done. Pastor Alex made motion, seconded by Jerry K.

Christian Education: Lauren K. commended Elecia & Dinelle for a great job teaching.

Building and Grounds: Jerry to get pricing for a new pricing for a new P.C. needed for the office at the next meeting. Jerry K. looked up cost for Panic Bars for front doors by Nursery at \$175.00 each. Canopy is torn at the same entrance- going to replace. Copier was still jamming after service call; called again and replaced part with no service fee. Part was \$200.00.

Women's Guild: Final total for Cookie Sale: \$2884.00. Also provided new decorations for the church.

Minister's report (see report) -

New Business: Need to learn scope of all Jim has done for the church over the years in order to plan for events. Elecia recommended a Google Calendar page to keep track of the many things that need to be done. Help will be needed by the congregation.

Larry G. made a motion to adjourn meeting.

The Lord's Prayer: Pastor Alex

Respectfully submitted by: Marty J.

### *In Need of Ongoing Prayer:*

Kevin Kramer Family, John Dergance, George Siebert, Hubert Keutzer Family, Ed Lopeman, Stephanie Heilstedt, Larry Grosenbach, Karin, Chelsea, George, Arnie & Jan Watkins, Maxine, Karen Hauser, Steve Theisinger, Debbie, Ristau Family, Family of Gene, Dixie, Deb Cooper, Ryan, Cindy Harzheim, Paul Lewis, Marilyn Haslam, Ron Narczewski Family, Lauren, Shelly

Our deepest condolences go out to the family of Ron Narczewski. Ron passed away February 21<sup>st</sup>. Services were Friday, February 27<sup>th</sup> at Zion UCC with Pastor Alex officiating.



**Memorials** for Lois Wilmot were given by Marilyn Haslam and Karen Kradle. Memorials for Lois Wilmot were given by Donna Ostermeyer, Bill Johnson, Brian Guenther, Billie Jean Taylor

**The Altar Flowers** and Bulletin sponsorship February 8<sup>th</sup> were in Memory of Elizabeth Kivett and Jim Kivett, from Gary and Ellyn Hylla.



**Flower Charts** There are many open dates for Altar flowers. The dates are hung on the bulletin board outside of the Fellowship Hall. We have 4 months hanging at a time. If you would like to reserve flowers you may sign up on the chart or contact the church office to ask about availability. Altar Flowers will be seen on YouTube services, the weekly bulletin, monthly newsletter, and on the church website in the posted bulletin. The cost for flowers is \$25.00. Please be sure to include all names, first and last, and any information you would like added to announcement.

**Prayer Requests In the Bulletin** We are grateful for the privilege of praying for one another. To help us keep our prayer list current, each new request will be included in the bulletin for four weeks. After that time, we will remove it unless we are asked to continue sharing it longer. If you would like a request to remain, please let us know—we want to walk alongside you in prayer for as long as you need.

***A donation was made to the Illinois Valley Food Pantry by the Zion Church Choir in honor of James Greening!***

**A note of thanks from the Compassionate Friends Group River Valley Chapter:**  
*Thank you so much for allowing our group to use your facility for our monthly meeting. We appreciate your kindness!*

**Thanks from the Illinois Valley Food Pantry:** Zion donated 129 pounds of soup items during our 'Souper Bowl Sunday' collection. Thanks to all who gave!

**A note of Thanks from Erin Lewis:**

*Thank you, everyone, for the wonderful celebration, cake, and cards! I am truly grateful to have been Secretary at Zion for so many years. We are so lucky to have Brianna as the new Secretary! The church office is in good hands. I have said in the past that we are a small but mighty church. We are also mighty as individuals, and that is what will keep Zion going toward the future. Thank you again and see you Sundays! -Erin*



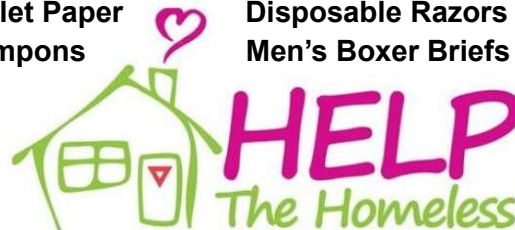
**We are looking to make this Lent more meaningful by giving to our neighbors in need!** Throughout Lent 2026 we'll be gathering supplies for our local homeless shelter. Your generous donations will be used to bring comfort to those in our community who need a helping hand and a caring heart. Let's share the gifts we have received from God this Lenten Season. Here is their current Wish List:

**Kool-Aid Drink Mix  
Disposable Bowls  
Laundry Soap  
Toilet bowl cleaner**

**Paper Plates  
Bottled Water  
Toilet Paper  
Tampons**

**Sugar  
Paper Towels  
Disposable Razors  
Men's Boxer Briefs (LG)**

**Men's Shower Shoes – L/XL or 10/11  
Ladies Shower Shoes – M/L or 8/9  
Cash Donations Also Welcomed**



Dear Zion UCC,

*Thank you all for making my first month here as the new church secretary a great experience. I truly appreciate how welcoming and patient everyone has been while I've been learning the job.*

*A special thanks to Pastor Alex and Erin for answering all my questions at any time of day and to Jerry for getting our email back up and running! Your help and support have meant a lot, and I'm very grateful to be a part of this church family. – Brie*



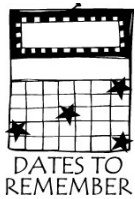


Listen to Pastor Alex at 8:25 every Sunday morning on 103.9 **WLPO**. Tell your friends!



**Join us for coffee fellowship after worship!** If you would like to sign up to provide coffee fellowship (most Sundays) after worship there is a sign up sheet in fellowship hall, or contact the church office.

If you would like to join choir or provide special music during worship, please contact Shelly Garncarz.



**Zion Women's Guild** will be meeting on Thursday, March 5<sup>th</sup> at 1:00pm in Fellowship Hall. All Women are Invited!!



### Join the CREW!

Our Sunday School program, **CREW**, is meeting again every Sunday at 9:00 AM. Kids in kindergarten through 5th grade are invited to join us for stories, games, crafts, and activities that help build faith and friendships. We're excited to see you this Sunday!



### Zion Diners

Diners met February 19<sup>th</sup> at Garzanelli's with Larry and Cheryl Grosenbach as Hosts. The Diners will meet next on Thursday, March 19<sup>th</sup> at 6:00pm, at Angelo's. Randy Fouth will be our host, All are welcome!



### Join Us for Bible Study!

**Bible Study** is on Tuesday evening. We start at 6:30pm and you can participate in person at the church or Zoom on-line. The Zoom link can be found on our WEB page, zionperu.org. We are discussing Season 4 of The Chosen. You can view episodes (and many other programs) by opening a free account on BYUtv. All are welcome!

Let's continue to grow in faith and community together. See you Tuesday! All are welcome!



## Ecumenical Lenten Services

Wednesdays at 7:00pm during Lent.

\*Ash Wednesday Service will be at Cherry UCC

February 25: Trinity UCC

March 4: Zion UCC

March 11: Spring Valley UCC

March 18: Waltham Presbyterian, Pastor Alex preaching

March 25: LaSalle Congregational

### Holy Week Services

Maundy Thursday...7:00pm... Zion UCC

Good Friday.....Noon.....DePue UCC

Easter Sunday.....10:15am.. Zion UCC



Easter Lily Order - \$10.00 per Lily  
Please turn in your order by March 29<sup>th</sup>

In Memory of: \_\_\_\_\_

In Honor of: \_\_\_\_\_

From: \_\_\_\_\_

# of Lilies: \_\_\_\_\_

## Easter Lilies

Orders for Easter Lilies are now being taken. The Deadline is March 29<sup>th</sup>.

The orders can be in Memory of those who have passed or in Honor of someone.



Please fill out the order form and send to the church.  
Contact the church office with any questions!

**Living Lord's Supper – March 29** Zion Church will host a special Living Lord's Supper on Sunday, March 29 at 2:00 PM. Come experience the story of Holy Communion in a meaningful, visual way as we remember Jesus' last meal with His disciples and reflect on His love and sacrifice. This service offers a powerful opportunity for worship, prayer, and remembrance for all ages. All are welcome—please join us!

**Feeding the Future** – The Illinois Valley Food Pantry launched a major fundraiser to fund their new building purchase, necessary renovations, and expanded food programs —so that we can continue to serve the growing number of individuals and families in need across our region. Local individuals, churches and businesses are joining together to make this vision a reality. Learn more or donate at [www.ivfoodpantry.com](http://www.ivfoodpantry.com) or by contacting the Pantry directly.



ILLINOIS VALLEY PUBLIC ACTION TO  
DELIVER SHELTER  
Established 1991

**\*\*HELP FEED THE HUNGRY!\*\*** Zion UCC is providing a delicious hot meal delivered to the **Peru PADS homeless shelter** each month. Every little bit helps us provide a nutritious meal each month through May. Write a check to the church and note "**PADS Meals.**" Or go online and donate through the Giving page on our website. Your donation helps provide a healthy, hearty meal to those who need it most. Thank you for your generosity and support in feeding the hungry!

**How You Can Help:Donate:** Every gift—big or small—ensures that we continue providing hearty, healthy meals.

**Ways to Give:** Write a check to the church with "PADS Meals" in the memo or donate online through the Giving page on our website.

**HELP  
WANTED**

**Ushers**

**Ushers:** We are building a new Ushers List. If you previously served as usher and would like to serve again, we would like to add you to the new ushers list. Previously ushers served for an entire month. Ushers now will serve when they are available to serve even for a single Sunday. You can let Larry Grosenbach know you will serve as usher or email [ushers@zionperu.org](mailto:ushers@zionperu.org) to be added to the ushers list.

**HELP  
WANTED**

**Evangelism**

**Evangelism:** We are updating our visitor information about Zion church and will be creating a visitor packet that will contain our new updated information about Zion Church and a thank you gift or two for them visiting. If you would like to help the Evangelism Team with the visitor project you can let Pastor Alex, Jerry Koehler or email [evangelism@zionperu.org](mailto:evangelism@zionperu.org).

### **THE CHURCH IS OPEN FOR SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP**

JOIN US LIVE ON YOUTUBE SUNDAYS AT 10:15

*HOW DO YOU GET THERE? EASY.....*

- 1) Go to Youtube.com
- 2) Click on "Search" box at top of the page.
- 3) Type in "Zion UCC Peru Illinois"
- 4) Click on the big purple circle with a "Z" in it.
- 5) Click on the video that says "LIVE"



*THAT'S IT! SEE YOU SUNDAY!* \*Bulletins available to view on our website!

**You can donate to Zion Church with a credit card or by bank transfer from your bank account. All you need to do is go to our web page and click "Donate" located on the right-hand side.** Also, here's the link to give to our church: <https://zionuccperu.breezechms.com/>

**You can also donate to Zion Church by Text to (815)-393-1954 :** Enter the amount you want to give to Zion in the Text box and send. If it the first time you are giving by text you will be prompted to set up your giving method. *Thank you for giving during these difficult times*



**COMMUNITY  
PROGRAMS**

**Live Life (Pre and Post Transplant Support Group)** meets the second Monday of each month at 6:30pm at Zion UCC.

**The Compassionate Friends Group** meets at Zion every fourth Thursday at 6:30pm. This meeting is open to any parent who has lost a child.

**Weight Watchers** meets every Saturday morning at 8:00. We're happy to provide space for this worthwhile service to our community.



### March Birthdays

2. Tim Breuning
3. Garrett Fouth  
Dave Jacobson
5. Janis Watkins
6. Gracelyn Watkins
7. Jesse Watkins
8. Evan Sprong
9. Bill Johnson  
Kelsey Grosenbach  
Madyson Zimmer
16. Ed Lopeman
18. Bettianne Kelly Casper  
Roman Freschi
19. Gary Hylla
20. Amanda Coutre?  
Isabelle Knutson
21. Duncan Casper
22. Elyse Boroski  
Elecia Lindenmeir
24. Paul Witczak
29. David Brown
31. Diane Gebhardt

### March Anniversaries

20. Leonard and Renee Lundeen



### April Birthdays

3. Tyler Martinez
4. Nate Trumpinski  
Keith Jarosz
6. Joel Bejster  
Shirley Lopeman  
Kenny Lindenmier
8. Gary Grosenbach
9. Rhonda Essl
11. Rich Ploch
13. Rev. Kay Harding
15. Heather Becker  
David Wilmot
16. Michael Breuning
18. Dean Wilmot
20. Kim Grant
21. Larry Butkus  
Jessica Rogel
22. Claire Baltikauski
23. Hunter Thurman
24. Tony Coutre?  
Leesa Tipton
25. Lori Rynke  
George Garncarz
26. Shelly Garncarz
27. Andrew Watkins  
Cody Essl
28. Brant Baltikauski
29. Pam Beck  
Nora Trumpinski



### April Anniversaries

6. Rich & Jodee Ploch
19. Doug & Cyndi Thurman
19. Russ & Maureen Lemmer
20. Gary & Ellyn Hylla
23. Gary Fouth & Kimberly Tracy
23. Jim & Connie Sprong
30. Charles & Elinor Lindenmeyer

# March 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p>1 <b>8:25</b> Pastor Alex WLPO  <b>9:00</b> CREW  <b>9:30</b> Choir practice  <b>10:15</b> Worship- Available on Youtube            Coffee &amp; Fellowship</p>	2	<p>3 <b>6:30 pm</b>            Bible Study</p>	<p>4 <b>7:00 pm</b>            Ecumenical Service            Zion UCC</p>	<p>5 <b>1:00 pm</b>            Women's Guild meeting   <b>6:30pm</b>            Choir practice</p>	6	<p>7 <b>8:00 am</b>            Weight Watchers</p>
<p>8 <b>8:25</b> Pastor Alex WLPO  <b>9:00</b> CREW  <b>9:30</b> Choir practice  <b>10:15</b> Worship- Available on Youtube            Coffee &amp; Fellowship</p>	<p>9 <b>6:30 pm</b>            Live Life group</p>	<p>10 <b>6:30 pm</b>            Bible Study</p>	<p>11 <b>7:00 pm</b>            Ecumenical Service            Spr. Valley UCC</p>	<p>12 <b>6:30pm</b>            Choir practice</p>	13	<p>14 <b>8:00 am</b>            Weight Watchers</p>
<p>15 <b>8:25</b> Pastor Alex WLPO  <b>9:00</b> CREW  <b>9:30</b> Choir practice  <b>10:15</b> Worship- Available on Youtube            Coffee &amp; Fellowship</p>	<p>16 <b>7:00 pm</b>            Church Council Meeting</p>	<p>17 <b>6:30 pm</b>            Bible Study</p> 	<p>18 <b>7:00 pm</b>            Ecumenical Service            Waltham</p>	<p>19 <b>6:00pm</b> Zion Diners   <b>6:30pm</b>            Choir practice</p>	20	<p>21 <b>8:00 am</b>            Weight Watchers</p>
<p>22 <b>8:25</b> Pastor Alex WLPO  <b>9:00</b> CREW  <b>9:30</b> Choir practice  <b>10:15</b> Worship- Available on Youtube            Coffee &amp; Fellowship</p>	23	<p>24 <b>6:30 pm</b>            Bible Study             PADS Meal</p>	<p>25 <b>7:00 pm</b>            Ecumenical Service            Lasalle Cong.</p>	<p>26 <b>6:30pm</b>            Comp Friends Group  <b>6:30pm</b>            Choir practice</p>	27	<p>28 <b>8:00 am</b>            Weight Watchers</p>
<p>29 <b>8:25</b> Pastor Alex WLPO  <b>9:00</b> CREW  <b>9:30</b> Choir practice  <b>10:15</b> Worship- Available on Youtube            Coffee &amp; Fellowship            2:00pm Living Lords Supper</p>	30	<p>31 <b>6:30 pm</b>            Bible Study</p>	Apr. 1	<p>Apr. 2 <b>7:00pm</b>            Maundy Thursday            Zion UCC</p>	<p>Apr. 3 <b>12:00pm</b>            Good Friday            DePue UCC</p>	Apr. 4