

## **FEBRUARY 2026 NEWSLETTER**

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

Phone: 815-223-2671 Email: [office@zionperu.org](mailto:office@zionperu.org) [www.zionperu.org](http://www.zionperu.org)

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Dear Zion Family,

As we approach February—a month that we associate with love and connection—I’ve been reflecting deeply on the changes that continue to take place in our Zion family. I’ve also been thinking about what gives me life in ministry, and what calls us forward as a church.

There are so many moments in this calling as your pastor that fill me with purpose and joy. Preaching. I love to preach. Walking beside our people in seasons of joy and struggle. Ministering to children as they grow in faith. Gathering around a table—whether it’s Communion during worship, when we have meals together, or good conversation during Fellowship Time—and remembering that this church is truly family. These are sacred, life-giving parts of who we are together.

But I’ve also felt the weight of things that drain us: when communication breaks down, when trust is eroded, or when fear prevents us from sharing leadership and inviting others into the work. Most of all, the thought of Zion Church ever closing its doors is deeply painful to me. Not because I fear change—but because I believe so strongly in the Spirit-filled community we’ve built here, the close-knit family we’ve become, and the ministry we still have to do together.

That’s why our visioning process matters. It’s not just about logistics or programs—it’s about life. About naming what really and truly brings us energy and hope. About letting go of what no longer serves us. And about dreaming courageously for a future where Zion continues to be a lighthouse of love, faith, grace, and hospitality for many generations to come.

I invite you to reflect on this with me. What brings *you* life in this church? What kind of church do you dream of us becoming? What will it take—from each of us—to make that vision real?

With Lent, a season of reflection and renewal right around the corner, I am hopeful. I am grateful. And I am ready to keep walking this road with you—toward a future filled with possibility. The best is yet to come if we keep our eyes on Jesus, the head of our family!

With love and deep gratitude,

Pastor Alex



**ZION UCC**  
Loving God, Loving People



Members present: Pastor Alex, Larry Grosenbach, Marty Johnson, Jerry Koehler, Dinelle Freschi, Elecia Lindenmier, Alice Tostovarsnik, Jyll Janz, Lori Rynke

Call to order: Larry G.

Opening Prayer: Lori R.

Last month's minutes: Motion to approve by Jerry K. seconded by Alice T.

Treasurer's report: Motion to approve by Marty J. seconded by Jerry K.

President's Report: Received invoice from Insurance Board for Building- approx. \$16,000 annually. Will pay quarterly.

Christian Education: Teachers: will have children sing 3 songs for Christmas on 12/21- 1. Away in a Manger 2. Joy to the World 3. We Wish You a Merry Christmas.

Evangelism: Bible Study to start up Jan. 6, 2026. Finished second half of cards for December- Jan. cards on track.

Stewardship: Keith Jarosz to be guest speaker on last Sunday of December -12/28/25.

Pastoral Care: Poinsettias were delivered to shut-ins.

Missions: Harvest Home went well. Groceries picked up by Pantry. Had excess of 125 people at Thanksgiving dinner.

Building and Grounds: Boilers still working okay. Need to fix south doors by office. Chris doing a good job with snow removal.

Women's Guild: Unofficial total from Cookie Sale: over \$2000. Thanks to all who helped

Renewal Leadership Team: Discussion of Town Hall Meeting: What draws people to Zion? Need a photo of Pastor Alex & family. Jerry to update website.

Minister's report (see report)

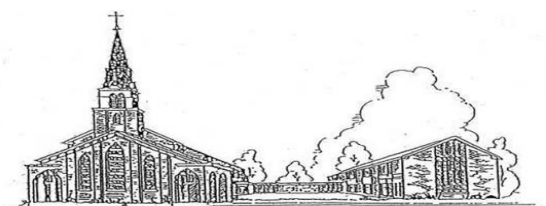
Old Business: Will serve communion elements the previous way beginning Jan. 4.

New Business: Marty would like to thank the Women's Guild for the Christmas Gift. Thanks to Phyllis, Mary, and all who helped put Fellowship Hall and Kitchen back in order after the Cookie Sale.

Marty J. made a motion to adjourn meeting.

The Lord's Prayer by Pastor Alex.

Respectfully submitted by: Marty J.



Zion United Church of Christ  
"The Church with the Carillon Tower Chimes"

### *In Need of Ongoing Prayer:*

Kevin Kramer Family, John Dergance, George Siebert, Hubert Keutzer Family, Lois Wilmot Family, Ed Lopeman, Stephanie Heilstedt, Larry Grosenbach, Karin, Chelsea, George, Arnie & Jan Watkins, Maxine, Crosby Family, Karen Hauser, Holly and family of Bob Antkowiak, Steve Theisinger, Debbie, Ristau Family, Family of Gene, Dixie, Dawn & Ron Narczewski, Deb Cooper, Ryan, Cindy Harzheim, Paul Lewis, Marilyn Haslam.



Our deepest condolences go out to the family of Lois Wilmot. Lois passed away December 29<sup>th</sup>. Services were Saturday, January 10<sup>th</sup> at Hurst Funeral Home in LaSalle with Pastor Alex officiating.

Our deepest condolences go out to the family of Hubert Keutzer. Hubert passed away January 4. Services will be January 24<sup>th</sup> at Hurst Funeral Home in LaSalle with Pastor Alex officiating.

**Memorials** for Lois Wilmot were given by Holly Antkowiak, Barry & Leian Breuning, Anita Albert, and Shirley Janz & son Bill.

**A Memorial** in Loving Memory of David Splittstoesser was given by Georgia Splittstoesser.

**The Altar Flowers** December 28<sup>th</sup> were In Memory of Andrew Kelly, with love from Mom and Dad, Bettianne, John, Duncan and Josephine.



**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.

*Thank You*

**Giving Tree Update**-We're delighted to share that all the gifts for our adopted family have been purchased, wrapped, and delivered! Thanks to the incredible generosity of our Zion Church family, four children will experience a brighter and more joy-filled Christmas this year. Your kindness and giving spirit truly reflect the love of Christ at work among us. A special thank-you to Terri Kelly for coordinating this wonderful effort and ensuring everything came together so beautifully. Thank you all for sharing God's love through this project!

### **A note of thanks from the Illinois Valley Food Pantry:**

*The total weight collected from the Harvest home Food drive was 748 pounds! Thank you all so very much for having the food so well organized and packed. It really saved a lot of time to put everything in its place to distribute. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!*

### **A note of thanks from the Northwest Social Work Team:**

*To the Parishioners of Zion Church who helped our students have a Merrier Christmas- Please know how grateful we are for the love and kindness you've spread this holiday season. Hope you have a very Merry Christmas!*

*Dear Zion UCC,*

*Thank you so very much for the honor and privilege of being your secretary for the last 11 ½ years. I am extremely grateful to all of you for your help, advice, and grace during my time in the church office. When I stepped through the door for my interview in June of 2014, I had never been here before and did not know anyone who went to church here. Pastor Kay, who was Interim Pastor at the time, Pastor Alex, who was Church Council President, and Jack Hamilton greeted me with warm smiles of welcome. Pastor Kay offered me the job that day and I did not hesitate when I accepted. The first time I came to worship, I was again joyfully greeted with, "We're so glad you are here!" We sang "All are Welcome" and "Sweet, Sweet Spirit." Songs I had never heard before. It was a beautiful summer day that I will never forget. I did not know at the time that I had found my Church Family. God's Love is truly in each person here and each brick of this building.*

*Special thanks to Pastor Alex & Shelly, Pastor Kay, Jim, Larry and the Church Council, Jerry, Rhonda, Barry, and The Women's Guild. I could keep going but I would be listing the entire church directory from the last decade. So, I will end my letter with a quote from my predecessor, Armetta, "Love you all and see you Sunday!" -Erin*



**Welcome Brianna Kupperschmid to Zion UCC! Brianna has accepted the position as the new Secretary. Welcome to the church office, Brianna. We are thrilled to have your talent!**

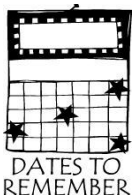


Listen to Pastor Alex at 8:25 every Sunday morning on 103.9 **WLPO**. Tell your friends!



**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 not be meeting in February. The next meeting will be Thursday, March 5<sup>th</sup> at 1:00pm in Fellowship Hall.





### 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 December 18<sup>th</sup> at Liberty Restaurant for the Zion Diners Christmas Party with Dixie Tonozzi as host. The group met again on January 15<sup>th</sup> with Bill & Phyllis Bender as hosts. Everyone had a great time at both events. The Diners will meet next on Thursday, February 19<sup>th</sup> at 6:00pm at Garzanelli's. Larry & Cheryl Grosenbach are your hosts. All are welcome!



### Join Us for Bible Study!

**Bible Study** is underway again Tuesdays! Our Tuesday night Bible Study will resume this week. Class starts 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](http://zionperu.org). We will be discussing Season 4 of The Chosen. You can view that episode (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!



**New Member Sunday** will be January 25<sup>th</sup>. If you are considering becoming a member, please see Pastor Alex. He would love to discuss it with you!

**Souper Bowl Sunday** will run Jan. 25<sup>th</sup> – Feb. 8<sup>th</sup>. Everyone is asked to bring cans of soup to worship and use them to vote for the team they think will win the Super Bowl, or the team they hope will win. The Sunday after the game, those who voted for the losing team are asked to bring one can of soup for every losing vote they cast. Jim Greening also says those who voted for the winning team should bring more soup to celebrate their team's victory. All the soup will be given to the Food Pantry. So who are you going to vote for?







**Ash Wednesday** is February 18<sup>th</sup> and marks the beginning of the Lenten Season.

"God, may your rhythms become my rhythms. May I not be afraid when you correct my ways and reorient me in your direction. Amen." —Ann Kansfield

### **Ecumenical Lenten Services**

Wednesdays at 7:00pm during Lent.

\*Ash Wednesday Service will be at Cherry UCC

March 4: Zion UCC

March 11: Spring Valley UCC

March 18: Waltham Presbyterian, Pastor Alex preaching

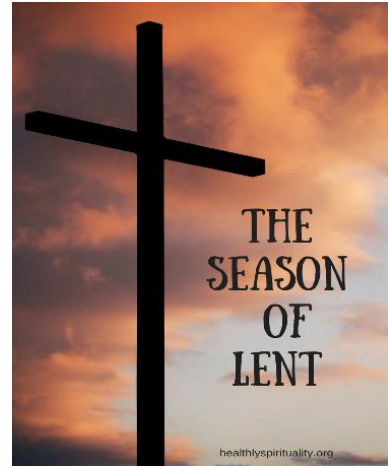
March 25: LaSalle Congregational

### **Holy Week Services**

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

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

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



**The Annual Meeting** will be held on Sunday, February 22<sup>nd</sup> after worship. If you have a report, please turn it into the office by Friday, February 13<sup>th</sup>.

**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.



**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.



**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*

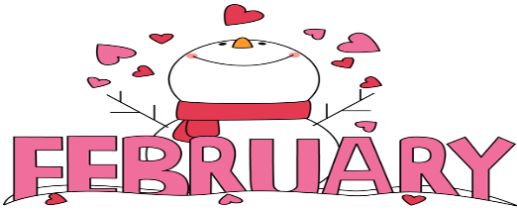


**Live Life (Pre and Post Transplant Support Group)** meets the second Monday of each month at 6:30pm at Zion UCC.

**COMMUNITY  
PROGRAMS**

**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.



### **February Birthdays**

3. Harry Wilmot
4. Brooklyn Bejster
8. Todd Harzheim
9. Josephine Louise Casper
10. Collin Ward  
Phyllis Bender  
Abbey Gardner
12. Sue Ryan
14. Emmy L. Reid Trumpinski
16. Dick Tostovarsnik  
Tatum Watkins
17. Matt Tipton  
Dwight Brown
20. Lindsey Gardner  
Tanya Ware
22. Bentley Bejster
23. Gary Fouth  
Dixie Tonozzi
24. Linda Fetzer
27. Alexis Beck
28. Jim Sprong
29. William D. Janz (son)



### **February Anniversaries**

12. Ed & Shirley Lopeman
14. Francis and Kari Baker

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(See Exodus 34) 02-07-2003  
I WAS JUST MESSING WITH YOU ON THAT LAST ONE ... CHOCOLATE AND PIZZA ARE STILL OK



### **March Birthdays**

2. Tim Breuning
3. Garrett Fouth  
Dave Jacobson
5. Janis Watkins
6. Gracelyn Watkins
7. Jesse Watkins  
Tom Kaszynski
8. Evan Sprong
9. Bill Johnson  
Kelsey Grosenbach  
Madyson Zimmer
16. Ed Lopeman
18. Bettianne Kelly Casper
18. 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

Book of Timothy





# February 2026

| Sunday  | Monday   | Tuesday  | Wednesday  | Thursday   | Friday  | Saturday   |
|---|--|--|--|--|---|--|
| <b>1. 8:25</b> Pastor Alex WLPO<br><b>9:00</b> CREW<br><b>9:30</b> Choir practice<br><b>10:15</b> Worship-<br>Also available on You Tube & Coffee Fellowship                              | 2  | <b>3</b><br><b>6:30pm</b> Bible Study                      | <b>4</b><br><b>6:30</b> Choir practice                                       | 5  | 6   | <b>7 8:00am</b> Weight Watchers meeting                                |
| <b>8. Souper Bowl Sunday</b><br><b>8:25</b> Pastor Alex WLPO<br><b>9:00</b> CREW<br><b>9:30</b> Choir practice<br><b>10:15</b> Worship-<br>Also available on You Tube & Coffee Fellowship | <b>9</b><br><b>6:30pm</b> Live Life Group meeting          | <b>10</b><br><b>6:30pm</b> Bible Study                     | <b>11</b><br><b>6:30</b> Choir practice                                      | 12   |  | <b>14 8:00am</b> Weight Watchers meeting<br><br><i>Valentine's Day</i> |
| <b>15. 8:25</b> Pastor Alex WLPO<br><b>9:00</b> CREW<br><b>9:30</b> Choir practice<br><b>10:15</b> Worship-<br>Also available on You Tube & Coffee Fellowship                             | <b>16</b><br><b>7:00pm</b> Church Council Meeting          | <b>17</b><br><b>6:30pm</b> Bible Study                     | <b>18</b><br><b>Ash Wednesday</b><br>7:00pm Ecumenical Service at Cherry UCC | <b>19</b><br><b>6:00</b> Zion Diners                           | <b>20</b><br>Newsletter info Due  | <b>21</b><br><b>8:00am</b> Weight Watchers meeting                     |
| <b>22. 8:25</b> Pastor Alex WLPO<br><b>9:00</b> CREW<br><b>9:30</b> Choir practice<br><b>10:15</b> Worship-<br>Also available on You Tube<br><b>Annual Meeting</b>                        | <b>23</b><br><b>6:00pm</b> Renewal Leadership Team meeting | <b>24</b><br><b>6:30pm</b> Bible Study<br><b>PADS Meal</b> | <b>25</b><br><b>7:00pm</b> Ecumenical Service at Trinity UCC                 | <b>26</b><br><b>6:30pm</b> Compassionate Friends Group meeting | 27  | <b>28</b><br><b>8:00am</b> Weight Watchers meeting                     |
| <b>March 1</b><br><b>8:25</b> Pastor Alex WLPO<br><b>9:00</b> CREW<br><b>9:30</b> Choir practice<br><b>10:15</b> Worship-<br>Also available on You Tube & Coffee Fellowship               | March 2  | <b>March 3</b><br><b>6:30pm</b> Bible Study                | <b>March 4</b><br><b>7:00pm</b> Ecumenical Service at Zion UCC               | <b>March 5</b><br><b>1:00pm</b> Women's Guild meeting          | March 6   | <b>March 7</b><br><b>8:00am</b> Weight Watchers meeting                |