

# ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH CENTENNIAL HISTORY

## 1913-2013



This history is a compilation of several other earlier histories and anecdotes that have been collected over the past 100 years. The authors have been numerous but the primary authors of this work are Ms. Eileen Vickers, Mrs. Carol Kreutzer, and the Rev. James DeLoach. Mr. Anthony Splittgerber was the general editor. This history was included in a special centennial publication with historical photographs and a congregational photodirectory.

Zion Lutheran Church  
2421 Avenue C, Kearney, NE 68847  
308-234-3410  
[www.zionkearney.org](http://www.zionkearney.org)

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## THE BEGINNING YEARS (MISSION WORK PRIOR TO ORGANIZATION)

The year was 1889. The unrelenting winter winds blew across the Nebraska prairie. It was the third Saturday and Pastor Schabacker was making the 40 mile trip from his mission church in Luce to Kearney. He tried to keep warm with “a sheep bag for his feet, a badly worn buffalo coat and a fur cap for head protection”. These were his only defenses against the elements. He was coming to Kearney for the sole purpose of holding worship services for the small group of Lutherans.

Upon his arrival, he would stay at the home of Fred Lebhart. Then he would conduct a worship service for the people close to Kearney. Later in the afternoon, Pastor Schabacker would have another worship service at a farmer’s home which was 20 miles from Kearney. Following that worship service, Pastor Schabacker would return to Luce. It was important to him to return to home by Sunday evening so he could teach on Monday.

How long this missionary work continued is unknown. There is no recorded history of this small group of believers for the next 23 years. Yet the Holy Spirit continued to increase their faith and their desire to have a church of their own.

In 1911 Rev. A.C. Baumann of St. John’s Lutheran Church, south of Poole, was petitioned by Kearney area Lutherans to begin worship services. The new church would be considered a mission church. A mission church status was the first step to becoming an independent church.

The Mission Board of the Nebraska District surveyed the area with the aim of establishing a mission at Kearney. Pastor Miessler of Columbus, a member of the District Mission Board, completed this task.

On November 16, 1911, a call was extended to Pastor Bauman to be a missionary at Kearney. Pastor Baumann accepted the call on November 24<sup>th</sup>. The following week he moved to Kearney. His residence was at 222 West 21 St. Housing cost was \$25 a month.

Rev. H. Wilken, Secretary of the Nebraska District Missionary Board, conducted the installation service of Pastor Baumann (1911-1915) on December 3, 1911.

Thirteen people were present. The service was held at the Swedish Lutheran Church at 17<sup>th</sup> Street and Avenue C. The service was conducted in German. That evening, Rev. Herman Schaefer from Shelton conducted a service in English.

Those present for the first installation were the Otto Wiederaender family, the Herman Peterson family, Erick Oslund, H.M.Kazler, Randolph Nuttelman family and Herman Meyer.

Since Zion did not yet have its own house of worship, it rented the Swedish Lutheran Church at a price of fifty cents per Sunday. Zion's services were held in the afternoon for three weeks and one Sunday a month a morning service was permitted.

Within a year, Zion members were asked to find another place to worship. Some older members of the Swedish Lutheran Church were attending Zion's services in place of their own church services. Later in 1912, Zion members moved to the Congregational Church.

The small congregation was blessed to have as its organist, F. Deyke. He was a Kearney State Normal student. The church's first hymnals were in English and German. They were donated by the family of Otto Wiederaender.

Offerings to the church totaled \$150 in 1912 and \$173 in 1913. This money paid for church and parsonage rental. When times became difficult, the pastor and his wife rented rooms to college students. Then in 1914, the Nebraska District allotted sufficient rental funds.

Zion continued to grow in numbers with the addition of the George Bantel and Frank Husemoller families and Mrs. Evan Van Buren. Mrs. Van Buren organized the first choir and became the second person to be the organist.

The first Sunday school was started by Walter Kamprath, a Kearney Normal student. Thirteen students were enrolled. Mr. Kamprath also organized the children for the first Christmas service. He also served as organist for two years.

## THE FIRST 25 YEARS: 1913-1938

Zion became an official congregation on September 14, 1913. The church constitution was signed by Randolph Nuttelman, Herman Peterson, Edward Knielbaum, Walter Baumann and Rev. A.C. Baumann.

The name Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church was suggested by H.M. Kanzler, but when it was translated from German to English, the name was Evangelical Lutheran Zion Church. The name remained that way for 44 years! Finally, in 1957, the Articles of Incorporation were amended to Zion Lutheran Church, Kearney, Nebraska.

Toward the end of 1913, Zion had to make a decision about which language would be used in their worship services. Members realized the advantage of English services. Unfortunately, the Congregational Church did not share those feelings. Members of the Congregational Church thought they would lose members if Zion's services were in English. Again, Zion was asked to leave.

What seemed like a step backward really became a step forward. Zion was forced to purchase its first piece of property, which was then owned by the Christian Church. The cost was \$1317.50 and was located at 25<sup>th</sup> Street and Avenue C.

The old building on the site was in dire need of renovations. The following improvements were made: running water, modern lights and +the digging of a basement for a coal furnace. The price tag for the remodel was \$2400. The congregation raised \$500. The remainder was borrowed from the District Church Extension Fund.

The church sanctuary was also improved. Through the winter new pews, a new pulpit, altar, and a new organ were installed. The first organ had to be pumped by hand. This became the responsibility of one of the boys in church.

Four hundred people attended the formal dedication of the church on March 15, 1914. Three services were held. Rev. H Schaefer of Shelton delivered the morning address in German. Pastor Hoffman, of Poole, preached an English sermon in the afternoon. The evening service was conducted in English by Pastor E.O. Potratz of

Big Springs, Nebraska. The congregation now numbered 120 baptized, 150 confirmed, and five voting members.

Several Sundays later, Pastor Baumann and the church conducted its first funeral. Rudolph Nuttelman was its oldest member.

Zion's first confirmation was held in 1915. Confirmands were Harry Wolf, Oliver Wolf, Ethel Wolf, Jess Rose, Minnie Rose and two unidentified confirmands.

In the summer of 1915, Pastor Baumann started a summer school for fifteen children. Classes were held in Pastor's home. This school was called "Gemeinde Schute" meaning summer school.

On May 9, 1915, Pastor Baumann received a call to the Lutheran High School in Deshler, Nebraska. He accepted the call and preached his last sermon July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1915.

Zion's next pastor was Pastor William Jiede of Bozeman, Montana. He accepted the call to be Zion's next shepherd. Pastor Baumann installed Pastor Jiede on August 28, 1915 in an English speaking service.

Zion's membership continues to grow. In the beginning, basket dinners were served for new people joining the congregation. Eventually, this practice came to an end because of the large numbers of people joining Zion. It became impossible to continue.

In 1919, the first adult confirmation brought this family of brothers to Zion Fred, William and Louis Kahle. Anton Berger, John Wolf Jr., and Matthew Geisert also became members.

In 1920, Zion's membership increased when Ernest Hemmann, J. Billiar, Henry Scheppler, C.J. Hartman, Louis Lade, E.G. Lade, G. Ruwe, H. Brandhorst and Harm Bunger became members.

Since the beginning, Zion had been renting houses for their pastors. Now in April of 1920, the rental house would no longer be available. The congregation decided to solve the problem by purchasing its first parsonage.

The house and extra lot they chose to purchase were located at 208 East 27<sup>th</sup> Street. The total cost was \$4500. The congregation raised \$1500 and the remainder was borrowed from the District Church Extension Fund.

Church services in 1920 were very different from worship services in 2012. Here is a brief description of a 1920 worship service. People came into the church through double doors and hung coats and hats in the narthex. When entering the nave the men would sit on one side of the church while the women and children sat on the other side of church. The church was heated by a pot-bellied stove. The worshipers would fold their hands in prayer. When the music started, a hymn book would be opened but only words were in the book – no notes of music.

On Sundays with communion, men communed first and then the women. At the time for offering the Klingel-Beutel was passed. It was a velvet pouch trimmed in velvet with a gold tassel. It was fastened to a long handled pole. The handle was long enough so the usher could stand in the aisle and pass it the length of the pew.

After the church service, the treasurer counted the money. If not enough money has been collected, he would contact each voting member for his additional contribution.

Pastor Jiede received a call from Ontarioville, Illinois, in November of 1920. He was given a peaceful release for health reasons. Pastor Jiede was asked to stay till after the Christmas holidays. His farewell service was held January 9, 1921.

On November 28, 1920, Zion extended a call to Pastor Rudolph Staehr (1921-1919) of Keeling, Wyoming. During the Christmas holidays, Zion received notice that he would accept their call. Pastor Staehr was installed January 30, 1921, by Rev. William Hofies of Amherst. The growing congregation now numbered 150 souls, 89 confirmands, and 20 voting members.

Zion, as a mission church, made the decision to join the Missouri Synod. During the District Synodical meeting in Lincoln in August 1921, Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church was accepted as a member of the Missouri Synod. Zion remained under the Mission Board until 1925 when it became self-supporting.

Pastor Staehr started a variety of organizations for Zion members. He started the Walther League in 1923, a ladies organization called Concordia (Having hearts together in peace) and Saturday religious instruction classes for school-age children before they start confirmation.

The late 1920's brought growth and prosperity to our country and to Zion. The church membership was 240 souls, with 45 voting members. Congregational leaders looked to the future possibility of building a new church.

On June 29, 1929, voters decided to buy the house and lot west of the church for \$4500. After some renovations the house would be used for the future establishment of the first Christian Day School. It would be used for that purpose for three years.

September of 1929 brought the peaceful release of Pastor Staehr and the installation of Pastor E.O. Potratz (1929-1959) of Tobias, Nebraska, on December 1, 1929.

A Christian Day School became a reality on April 18, 1930. A special meeting was held regarding the starting of a new school. The voting members passed the resolution to open a Christian Day School. The voters also decided to call a male graduate from Concordia Teachers College in Seward. That spring, Mr. Alvin Brandhorst became Zion's first Christian Day School teacher. The house bought in 1929 was the first school building.

Progress came to Zion when they began to broadcast their worship services over the radio on station KGFW. Zion was often referred to as a "pioneer" among Nebraska Lutheran churches. Broadcasting the worship services required wiring the church to accommodate connecting a microphone to a telephone wire leased for that purpose.

At first, Zion was given free time on the radio. They would broadcast sermons in both English and German. Later the Methodist church began to broadcast their services. Zion was now given one hour and the Methodist Church could use the other hour. Later, the free time was reduced to only one hour. Then the two churches would alternate Sundays. Eventually, First Lutheran and First Christian churches were given broadcast privileges. These arrangements continued until January 20, 1957, when a newly opened radio station, KRNY, broadcasted Zion's services free of charge. Now members of Zion sponsor the broadcasting of the worship services.

Sunday School has always been an integral practice of the Lutheran faith. To bring up a child in the knowledge of our Lord is a privilege and a right. In 1931 the number of children belonging to Sunday School increased from 56 to 84.



Zion wanted to bring the Word of God to the community. Pastor Potratz made arrangements with the State Tuberculosis Hospital to conduct Sunday School classes for the children hospitalized at the institution. They started with 20 children. The classes continued until 1940 when child patients were no longer admitted.

The Holy Spirit continued to work in the hearts and souls of Zion members. The goal of building their own school was reached in July of 1933. A committee met with the Nebraska District Mission. The results were that Zion could construct a building 32 feet by 50 feet at a cost of \$2720, without the cost of labor. Zion could borrow \$2000 from the Church Extension Fund and then the congregation would raise an additional \$500.

The country was in a severe depression but the faith of the Zion members overcame the challenges of that time. Many members were unemployed or only worked sporadically. These events made it possible for many of these same members to donate weeks of free labor to the construction of the new school. The carpenter was the only full-time employee. Women from the church were helpers too and not just by bringing food. Since lumber from the old school was going to be used, the ladies helped pull nails out of the boards before they would be used in the new school.

The 1933 school was amazing. Within 70 days, the school went from a suggestion, to completed building and finally dedication. The final cost for the two-room school was \$2704.13. The congregation raised \$704.13 and owed the Church Extension Fund \$2000. The new school was dedicated September 17, 1933. Zion organizations now had rooms for meetings. Mr. Altenburg donated a reed organ to the school.

Economic times were difficult in the 1930's. The District cut the congregations subsidy by 50 percent. They reduced the pastor's salary by \$200 and the teacher's salary by \$100. Pastor Potratz and Mr. Brandhorst offered to do the janitor work to save money that could be used to pay other bills.

The ladies of the Concordia society helped the church with gifts of money and labor. They also helped by purchasing the kitchen appliances with money they raised from bazaars and quilting.

The Walther League raised money by performing plays at the college auditorium, the Kearney Opera House and the school basement. The profits provided building materials for a choir loft, school supplies, folding tables and a mimeograph machine.

Even if times were difficult, there was still time for fun. Zion members would gather for picnics at Fort Kearney and White Ridge Park on Wood River. There would be band concerts performed by students from the State Industrial School.

Sports helped fill the summer hours and softball was always a favorite. The Zion men would play softball against other local teams. Sometimes they would also play “fat man tug-of-war”. The hours watching and participating in these activities helped bring happiness to otherwise desperate times.

## THE SECOND 25 YEARS: 1938-1963

The year is 1938. Zion had grown from renting a space in which to worship to having their own house of worship. They began as a mission congregation and they were now a part of the Missouri Synod. They grew from a membership of six families to a membership of 330 souls, 224 confirmands and 54 voting members. The Sunday School enrollment increased from 13 to 74. God had certainly blessed Zion.

It was decided to celebrate 25 years of blessings with special worship services. Pastors William Jiede, Rudolph Staehr, and A.C. Baumann were the preachers for the morning and afternoon sermons on June 21, 1938.

December 7, 1941, brought the beginning of World War II. Many young men from Zion were called to duty or volunteered to serve their country. The church members wanted their service men to know they were supporting them. The Walther League sent care packages and letters. The ladies of Concordia baked cookies for the local USO and they also sewed clothes for the Red Cross. Back at Zion, the men's and women's choir became a women's choir only.

German prisoners of war were brought to Kearney. They were held at the NYA building (formerly the St. Luke's Home). Pastor Potratz and the school's teacher, Mr. Blassig, conducted worship services in German for the prisoners each Sunday evening.

Zion also contributed to the war effort through the purchasing of War Bonds. Since no building materials were available at that time, all monies collected for the Church Building Fund were invested in War Bonds. A booster picnic was held to jump start the drive. By the end of 1944, \$7000 had been collected and invested.

The power of the Holy Spirit was indeed working at Zion. The membership had increased and there was a need for two worship services. The afternoon German worship service was dropped due to lack of attendance.

The school continued to grow. Mr. Brenner was now the teacher. The ladies of the congregation took turns cooking the food for the hot lunch program. Meals cost 15 cents. The school enrollment was 39 children. Miss Lorna Bergt was the first primary teacher.

In May of 1946, a group called the “Lutheran Hospital and Welfare Association” felt there was a need for another hospital in the Kearney area. Zion and the other Lutheran churches participated in fund raising campaigns. The old NYA building was purchased.

The building was remodeled and equipped for patients beginning in July of 1950. It closed its doors in February 1952 due to lack of financial support. It was sold to the Evangelical Good Samaritan Society of Fargo, North Dakota. It was used as a home for the aged.

The Lutheran Layman’s League, the men’s organization, had its beginning on January 8, 1947. James Larson was its first president. The L.L.L. sponsored many projects. They sponsored the Boy Scouts for many years. They also raised money for home and missions by serving chili and oyster soup suppers and having pancake feeds. They also organized the Father-Son Picnic.

1950 brought new growth for Zion Lutheran Church. This time, Zion members would be building a new church. The building fund had reached \$60,000. Now the Building Committee could go forward with the hiring of an architect. They hired Hellberg & Hellberg to draft plans for the new church. Bids were let on May 16, 1950 and J.E. Kaufman became the general contractor.

The 1933 church was moved to the back of the lot. Ground breaking took place on May 29, 1950. The cornerstone was laid August 17<sup>th</sup>. Worship services were held in the old church until the new basement was finished. Church was then held in the basement of the new church it was completed.

The old church was sold to Mrs. Johanna Elliot for \$1317. She planned on moving the structure and to use it for a dwelling but overhead wires prevented the move. So the church was torn down and the lumber removed. The old altar was sold for \$50 to St. Paul Lutheran Church, Shelton.

Dedication services for the new church were held September 9, 1951. Pastor Rudolph Staehr of McCook preached in the morning and Pastor A.F. Wegner, the Southern District president, gave the afternoon address. Trinity Lutheran Choir of Grand Island gave a concert in the evening.

As Zion's membership increased, the contributions to the church debt fund continued to increase. The debt began with a 15 year loan of \$7956 in 1951. Yet by December 27, 1955, the entire loan had been repaid. The entire plant, as of 1955, was valued at \$140,000. A service of gratitude was held May 20, 1956. Dr. Lawrence Acker of Omaha was the speaker.

Through the years several young men have served as vicars at Zion. Vicars in the 50's were Luther Vogel, Walter Chelmo, Lester Boehm, Robert Eckelman, Roy Hasbargen, Paul Steinke, James Heslin, and Emory Hingst. These young men assisted the pastor in a variety of ways. They conducted services at the Boy's Training School, at the T.B. hospital and St. Luke's Home.

Christian fellowship is always fun and in May of 1954, a social group called "80 and Out" was organized. The group was limited to couples whose combined ages equaled less than 80. After a while, the age limit was dropped and so was the name. "80 and Out" became the Couples Club.

By 1955, Zion had seen another growth spike in its membership. More than 140 children participated in the Christmas Eve service. Then by 1962 almost 300 children were part of the Christmas worship.

By 1958 many women were working outside the home and raising small children. They wanted to belong to a Christian women's organization. At an October 1958 Voters Meeting, a new group was organized. They chose the name Mary-Martha Guild. Their meetings would be in the evenings.

At a February 1959 Voters Meeting, a resolution was passed to build a new parsonage on the site of the old house. A second house was purchased for Pastor Potratz to live in until his retirement, September 1959.

When construction on the parsonage began, many materials for the new home were recycled from the old house. The general contractor was Roeder Brothers Construction Company. The bid was \$15,791. The final cost of the parsonage was \$20,000. The parsonage was dedicated October 25, 1959.

Pastor Potratz served Zion Lutheran faithfully for 30 years. During those 30 years, the congregation grew from 240 souls to 900 souls, a Christian Day School was started and a new church was built.

The Rev. Max E. Heinz (1959-1966) of Forest Park, Illinois, became Zion's next pastor. He was installed on August 30th.

The fall 1959 Voters Meeting brought a resolution to organize a junior congregation. The resolution passed. There would be mid-week morning services, bi-monthly communion services and worship services for Advent.

The membership of Zion was continually growing. At a July 1960 Voters Meeting, a resolution was passed to ask the Mission Board of the Southern Nebraska District to purchase a tract of ground in northwest Kearney for a mission church site. Then in 1961 the voters requested the Mission Board to survey the need for a second congregation in Kearney. A Mission Building Committee was established.

The growing congregation brought about the need for a second full-time pastor. Pastor Donald E. Blume (1961-1964) was called. He was installed September 17, 1961.

At a March 1963 special meeting, the Planning Council passed a resolution to expand the Sunday School and Christian Day School facilities. They also made plans for the development of a mission church in northwest Kearney.

At the close of Zion's fifty year history, Zion's membership numbered 1348 souls, 909 communicants, 341 in Sunday School and Bible Study with 31 teachers. There had been 748 baptisms, 762 confirmands, 354 marriages and 157 burials.

Zion celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on September 22, 1963. Three services were conducted. Dr. Oliver Harms, president of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, was the speaker.

## THE THIRD 25 YEARS: 1963-1988

April 14, 1964 brought the ground breaking ceremony for a mission church in northwest Kearney. The church was named Holy Cross Lutheran Church. Its address was 3315 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

Pastor Blume was granted a peaceful release from Zion as an assistant pastor. He continued his ministry as the full-time campus pastor. A retired minister, Pastor Hoffman (1964 -1965), became the assistant pastor.

At the end of 1964, Zion's membership was 1395 souls, 941 communicant members and 351 in Sunday School. When Holy Cross started worship services in 1965, Zion's membership decreased about 20 percent.

Pastor Heinz left Zion April 1966. Pastor Eldor Meyer (1966-1968) was the pastor. On July 7, 1968, Pastor Carl W. Brueggemann (1968-1984) was installed as pastor of Zion.

In 1969 the church bought a new organ. It was a Rodgers Model 660. Mr. Victor Peter, an organist at Trinity Lutheran Church, presented a concert on the new organ.

Pastor Martin R. Greunke (1969-1970) became the assistant pastor in May of 1969. He served Zion till 1970.

1970 brought change to who could vote at the Voters Meetings. From 1913 to 1970 only confirmed male members of the church could vote. At an October meeting, women were finally given the right to vote.

In January 1973, Zion purchased the Apco service station which was located east of the church. The cost was \$35,000. The building was first used as a nursery school then in 1975 it was demolished so construction could begin on the Christian Life Center.

New radio broadcasting equipment was installed in May 1973. The control systems were moved to the balcony. Stanal Sounds did the installation. Rodney Peterson helped build the sound booth. For the first time the engineer and the announcer could see and hear the church service. They could also give explanations to the listeners and add commentary without interrupting the worship service.

Zion started redecorating its chancel in 1974. A new oak cross was designed by Ray Schultz, an associate college professor. It was manufactured by Schottler's Modern Fixtures of Beatrice. It was financed by Ruben Hartman memorials. The macramé wall hanging was designed by Randy Harrison, in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Wolf. There was also the addition of a communion rail and kneeler. Dedication of the completed project was February 2, 1975. Pastor Carl Brueggemann, Rev. Wayne Schroeder officiated. This worship service also marked the 1000<sup>th</sup> broadcast over the radio station KRNY.

A building committee was formed in July 1974. The committee was formed to investigate the possibility of building an education wing adjoining the church. Architects Boyer, Biscup & Bonge had their plans accepted by the church at a meeting on April 29, 1975. A fund raising campaign was organized by H.P. Demand and Associates. By June 13, \$191,607.34 had been pledged.

At the October meeting, 100 of the 117 members voted in favor of construction. Fast Construction Company of Hastings was the general contractor. Bamford Plumbing and Heating of Kearney wired the structure. The kitchen contract went to Cornhusker Supply of Grand Island.

Ground breaking for the Christian Life Center was November 16 and the cornerstone was set in place on August 22, 1976.

1976 also saw the beginning of the Bethel Bible Series, organization of the Altar Guild and installation of air conditioning.

"Come Ye Children, Praise and Pray" was the theme for the Zion Lutheran School's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Many gifts were given to the church in thankfulness to God for His many blessings. Mr. and Mrs. Herb Jiede presented a three octave set of Schulmerich handbells, complete with cases, tables, pads, table covers and music holders. Their gift of money was used to elevate the balcony floor and install a new railing.

In 1981 voters decided to make the change to new hymnals. *Lutheran Worship* hymnals would be purchased with memorials from the Heiden and Riedel families. Four sets of altar paraments were purchased with funds from Elizabeth Riedel's memorial.



Pastor Brueggemann retired in 1984. Zion extended a call to Pastor John Hafermann (1984-1993) of Winside, Nebraska. The call was accepted.

In the fall of 1984, a group was organized for older Zion members. It was called Senior Citizens. It provided Christian fellowship and opportunities to share God's Word.

Rev. Donald L. Pohlers (1986-1993) was installed June 1986. Pastors Pohlers and Hafermann both served Zion.

In the late 1980's, three new groups were organized. The Kingdom Workers was an organization whose purpose was to give members opportunities to serve the church. The Zion Prayer Fellowship prayed for Zion ministries and individuals. They even held Prayer Vigils. The last group organized was the Zion Lutheran of Kearney Foundation. The monetary gifts the foundation received would be used to assist the church and school.

Planning for new stained glass windows was started in June of 1987. The Duda Glass Company of Grand Island was contracted to help with the design of the windows and the installation. Final designs for the 23 windows were drawn by Lynette Johnson and Ray Schultze. Two windows were installed for first viewing on Easter Sunday, 1988. All other windows were in place by the end of 1988.

The 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Zion was celebrated in 1988. More than one special service was planned. One pastor who preached was Donald Erickson. He is the son of Albert and Nora Erickson. Donald was a member of Zion Lutheran, attended Concordia Teacher's College in Seward and Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri.

Another Zion member to become a pastor was Duane N. Maas. His parents are Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Maas of Elm Creek. Duane became a confirmed member of Zion in 1966. He graduated from Concordia Teacher's College and the seminary in Fort Wayne in 1978. He preached at a September 25, 1988 worship service.

Other former and present members of Zion who have been called to serve are Alvin Lade, Charles Krutz, Ellen Griesse, Marie Hasbargen, Verleen Gentry, and Lavonne Peterson, Rev. David Kahle, Rev. Nathan Sherrill, Vicar Chris Nuttelman, and preseminary student Matthias Wollberg.

## THE LAST 25 YEARS: 1988-2013

In the late 1980's, four new groups were organized. The Kingdom Workers was an organization whose purpose was to give members opportunities to serve the church. The Zion Prayer Fellowship prayed for Zion ministries and individuals. They even held Prayer Vigils. The Young Adults was organized as a group to provide fellowship and Bible study for those out of high school. The Reverend John Hafermann led the group and later, Principal Igor and wife Kathy Skrastins took over the Sunday evening meetings at their home. The last group organized was the Zion Lutheran of Kearney Foundation. The monetary gifts the foundation received would be used to assist the church and school.

According to the Pastor's Message in the Annual Report of 1990 the year began with "a spirit of joy and anticipation. The long-standing debt had been paid off in December of 1989." Also of note, the stained glass project was nearly complete and the Zion Foundation had more than doubled its assets.

A Dialog Evangelism Banquet kicked off the 1990 year and a part-time Evangelism Secretary was hired. The Zion Foundation started a Christian Resource Center (Book Nook) made possible by the Edd Loschen Memorial Fund. A planning Committee was established to explore future needs of Zion as well as insure that current projects are completed as planned.

As the decade progressed, the confirmation program for Zion's 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students returned to a classroom lecture format because the Board of Education felt it was more beneficial than the individualized tape program. The Adult Library was opened in 1991 and was located in the Fellowship Hall. Books and videos were available for members to check out. The library was supported by gifts from members and the Adult Bible Class.

The 1990's found even more changes at Zion Lutheran. Gay Lea Hafermann and Joyce Gloystein resigned from their teaching positions and were replaced by Ann Fattig and Linda McNeil. Pastor John Hafermann left to accept a call to Taylor Ridge, Illinois and also in 1993 Igor Skrastins, Connie Lantis and Debra Tietz resigned from the school. Verleen Gentry and Margaret Smith changed from contracted

teachers to called teachers. David Bliss was hired as the principal and Marcia Bliss as the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. The congregation also started to look into options for the school when the public schools would take the 6<sup>th</sup> grade into the middle school. The Reverend Donald Pohlers also resigned from his call at Zion Lutheran in 1993.

The Reverend Thomas Von Hagel accepted a call to serve at Zion in 1994. He continued in that capacity until 1997. The Reverend North Sherrill accepted the call to serve Zion in 1997. Zion celebrated with Lavonne Peterson as she observed 40 years in the teaching ministry in 1998. The decade drew to a close as Zion held a farewell reception for David and Marcia Bliss and Rebecca Cheney on June 20, 1999. Becky Rathke was hired to teach at Zion Lutheran School and Jim Knoepfel was hired to be the new head teacher. His wife Lisa was also contracted to teach at Zion. In 2003 Verleen Gentry retired and Amber Fountain was hired to teach kindergarten and prekindergarten.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century saw Zion beginning some new traditions. Each summer Continuing Education for Pastors is held at Zion Lutheran Church under the direction of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. The congregation hosts visiting pastors in their homes and also provides food for morning breaks and noon meals. Zion high school youth have also attended Higher Things, a conference offering confessional teaching and fellowship for young people.

The church had a building project that culminated in 1998 and added 4 classrooms, removed the courtyard, replaced it with three offices, new restrooms and converted the former chapel area to a fellowship hall and beautiful new kitchen. It also allowed for the school to expand to grade 8.

When Jim Knoepfel resigned his call to accept a call to Trinity Lutheran School in Fremont, Nebraska, the church searched in a different direction. Reverend Ryan Wendt was called to be the head teacher and assistant pastor. Pastor Wendt was newly ordained and served in this capacity for two years until he was called to Billings, Montana in 2006, the same year in which Zion's longest serving church worker, Miss Lavonne Peterson, would formally retire. Miss Peterson would continue to teach part-time until 2008; she continues to teach nursery age Sunday School. Anthony Splittgerber was called to serve as Zion's head teacher; Mr.

Splittgerber and his wife Lisa both were teachers at Trinity Lutheran School in Greeley, Colorado. Mrs. Splittgerber was also hired to teach part-time in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Margaret Smith retired in 2007 and Traci King received a call to serve at Zion as its new first and second grade teacher.

In 2008 Pastor Sherrill announced that he would be retiring and leaving Zion. The Reverend James DeLoach was called to serve Zion. Pastor DeLoach and his family arrived from Louisville, Nebraska where he served at Immanuel Lutheran Church. 2010 would mark the end of Miss Sandy Heiden's tenure as church secretary. In 2011, under the guidance of the church council, the congregation moved to one Divine Service on Sunday at 9 am. This move was made to better foster community and unity among its members and has been largely successful in this endeavor. In 2012 a Wednesday Divine Service was added to accommodate those members who were unable to attend on Sundays.

The past few years have been especially good for both the church and the school. In 2012 fiscal year Zion had its first balanced budget since the building of the school addition; this was made possible through difficult cuts, insurance changes, increased enrollment, generous member gifts. In school successes, Mr. Splittgerber would officially change his title to principal after completing his master degree in school administration in 2010. Shortly thereafter, the school would formally adopt a classical model of education and became members of the Consortium of Classical Lutheran Education. Under this model, a more rigorous curriculum has been implemented and Latin is now taught in grades three and up. Enrollment continues to increase as the middle school is added back into the program after a brief hiatus and as the school's early childhood programs continue to expand and flourish. Zion Lutheran School's early childhood program was just awarded the title of "Kearney's Best Preschool 2012" by the Kearney Hub, as based on community votes. This caps a great comeback from 8 preschoolers in one class in 2005-2006 to a record of 84 preschoolers in six sections in 2011-2012! The school currently has a total of 143 students in preschool through seventh grade.

## A REFLECTION ON THE LAST 25 YEARS BY PASTOR DELOACH & MR. SPLITTGERBER

While Zion's past shows numeric growth during its first three quarters, the last 25 years could be characterized as a time of struggle and spiritual growth. It is tempting to paint only a rosy picture of Zion's history, but that would not provide an accurate portrait of our life together as the body of Christ. God has blessed Zion throughout her existence. At times, however, the Lord's blessings are hidden under the cross.

In the early 1990's doctrinal divisions grew in the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod and the battle intensified against secular influences on the Church, particularly in the areas of worship and pastoral practice. It was within that context that Zion's pastoral staff felt compelled to confront what they perceived to be false teaching and practice taking place among some of the congregations and pastors of our circuit and district. Understandably, this conflict impacted Zion; but due to the influence of the devil, the world and our sinful nature, severe discord erupted amongst Zion's members and her called servants. Sadly, a very large Zion congregation saw the exodus of over half of her members and the resignations of several of her called servants including a principal, several teachers, and the pastors. Financial strain and relational pain remained for many years to come. At this point trying to place blame benefits no one. Instead, such experiences teach us to daily confess our sins and cherish the healing balm that Jesus has died for all of the sins that we have committed against others and for all the sins that others have committed against us.

Acknowledging this painful part of our history also teaches us to pray that the Lord would have mercy and save this congregation from ever experiencing the like again. Despite the wounds of old, we trust that “all things work for the good of those who love God and have been called according to His purpose” (Ro. 8:28). We also rejoice that, by God's grace, a faithful remnant has remained at Zion and that her members have emerged stronger after enduring this spiritual battle. The Lord has also

provided faithful pastors and teachers to guide and teach his people in the years that have followed and a new Zion has arisen which clings to God's Word.

In many respects the struggles of the past 25 years have helped the saints at Zion to solidify our identity as a Lutheran Christian congregation and to clarify our purpose in our homes, community, and the world-at-large. Just as God, in his divine mercy, taught the wayward Israelites to rely wholly on him, so has he done for Zion. This side of eternity we will always wrestle with questions of right doctrine and practice, faithful teaching and worship, along with our place in a world and culture that is increasingly at odds with Christ's teaching. But we firmly believe that our crucified and risen Savior, Jesus Christ, is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Him (Jn. 14:6). We maintain a high view of the Holy Scriptures, including the historic lectionary and Lutheran liturgy, because the words of our risen Lord are spirit and life. We trust that through His Word our Heavenly Father delivers Christ and His gifts as it is read, proclaimed, and distributed in means that our Lord has instituted. We also prize our Lutheran Confessions because they are a faithful exposition of God's Word. We esteem the saints of old and seek to build on the foundation that they have laid, with Christ as the cornerstone.

By God's mercy, the future is bright for Zion Lutheran Church and School of Kearney, Nebraska. The Lord has granted us improved stability and unity over the last several years, while prospering His work among us. We pray that He enables us to remain grounded in His Word and Christ-centered in our preaching, teaching, worship, and life together. As our Lord strengthens our faith in Him and our fervent love for one another, it is exciting to consider how God can use us to impact future generations along with our own. We pray that He helps us to sustain the work we do together, while also increasing our capacity to care for our members and neighbors in word and deed. We draw confidence from knowing that Jesus is praying for His Church and that He will sustain us in the one true faith to the Day of His coming. Our human nature tempts us to look back over the last century and sing our own praises, but that would be to forget the hard lessons that have been learnt here – and one of those hard lessons is that it's not about us! The Lord reigns over Zion. If we are to prosper, then it will be His doing. Zion's history is a story of God's enduring

love revealed in Christ Jesus and the grace that he bestows on us wayward children, whom He has made His own. All praise to our Triune God for having preserved us these past 100 years! May He continue to make good use of us for many years to come until He calls us to His heavenly Zion, which is our greatest goal. “The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations, praise the Lord!” (Ps. 146:10)

### **Entrust Your Days and Burdens**

by Paul Gerhardt (1607-76)

*Our hands and feet, Lord, strengthen;  
With joy our spirits bless  
Until we see the ending  
Of all our life's distress.  
And so throughout our lifetime  
Keep us within Your care  
And at our end then bring us  
To heav'n to praise You there. (LSB 754:6)*