

Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church Pastoral/Council Letter

April 2025

- 1. *Holy Week 2025 – Invitation to Communion***
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- 1. *Invitation to Communion*** - Zion congregation invites you to attend Holy Week and Easter services this April and participate in Holy Communion (a list of all services is included). The weekly celebration of Holy Communion at Zion is at the centre of our congregational life. Communing during Holy Week and the Easter season, the pinnacle of the life of the Christian Church, can be a particularly meaningful affirmation and renewal of our openness to God’s unfailing Grace, celebrating our redemption through the sacrifice and resurrection of our Saviour Jesus Christ and the ongoing work in us of the Holy Spirit.

We invite you to extend this invitation to loved ones – parents, children, grandchildren, spouses, partners, and friends – and enable them to attend and commune. Zion practices open communion, inviting all who are baptized to commune and all others to receive a blessing during communion. We also invite you to speak with Pastor Bestvater about baptism for infants, children and other family members, or about any other Pastoral or congregational ministration or assistance.

- 2. *Zion’s “circle of responsibility”*** – Zion, 106 years after its founding, has a large and wide circle of spiritual responsibility including both members and non-members. Zion continues to minister and to offer support to this diverse group through regular Sunday services, pastoral services for baptisms, marriages, funerals, visitation and counselling, and opportunities for participation in congregational ministries, projects and activities. If you or family members have attended, been baptized, confirmed, married or buried through Zion, even if you haven’t been to Zion in a long time or have left Zion but haven’t officially joined another church, you are part of our circle of responsibility. Zion “moved by the love and grace of God, welcoming, worshipping, and working together” in witness to Jesus Christ is committed to supporting you and your loved ones. We invite you all to an active life of worship, communion, giving, and service. We always want to be here for you. However, Zion may have reached a critical juncture in its existence.
- 3. *Amalgamation consideration*** - Zion has been involved in exploring potential options for amalgamation for the last several years with several fellow local Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada (ELCIC) congregations. No decisions regarding amalgamation have been made to date. Zion, at this time, continues to offer a wide range of services, mission engagement, and activities, through the efforts of our pastor, staff and volunteers and the magnificent heritage of our large, flexible, downtown space, available not only to the congregation but to many other worthy groups (see letter insert). This is an important perspective to include in any discussion regarding Zion’s continued existence, individually or as part of an amalgamation. So, too, is the reality that only about 50 people are in attendance in person at Sunday service each week on average (representing perhaps 125 - 150 regular worshippers) with a similar number on average joining the service via livestream. Fewer than 150 adult members, many advanced in age, regularly supported the work of the congregation in the last year, with about 65 providing the bulk of the volunteer and financial support necessary to maintain a viable congregational life in its current form. Zion’s existence going forward as an active, sustainable, individual congregation in its current location with its current pastoral and support staff configuration and physical infrastructure to maintain may be untenable.

Three Saskatoon ELCIC congregations are engaged at this time in the amalgamation discussions - Zion, Redeemer and Resurrection - led by a joint amalgamation committee. A summary document considering possible options has been released by the committee. Copies are available in the narthex of the church. Full details of the amalgamation discussions to date are available by contacting our church office.

4. *Upcoming congregational vote* - Amalgamation would require relocation and sale of physical assets for some or all of the congregations, including potentially Zion. To enable constructive deliberations to move forward, the amalgamation committee has requested indications at this time from the memberships of the three sponsoring congregations regarding the preferred physical location of a potential amalgamated congregation. **A Zion congregational meeting will be held on Sunday, April 27, 2025, immediately after the 10:30 am service** to discuss this issue and provide an opportunity for members to indicate, through a non-binding vote, their individual preferences regarding the physical location of a potential amalgamated congregation. Attendance at the meeting on April 27 is open to all. Formal voting participation will be restricted by Zion's constitution, clarified by council decision, to confirmed members who have communed and given a donation to Zion's treasury recently, underscoring the importance of the invitation to commune during this Easter season. Communion participation can include recent participation at a funeral or wedding, in hospital, or in your home or care facility. As this congregational meeting does not involve the disbursement of funds, an age of majority requirement does not apply. While we strongly encourage attendance at the meeting to vote, a request can be made to the Zion office in person, by telephone, by mail, or by email to receive the ballot questions, with your vote to be returned to the office by May 10, 2025.

In addition to the formal active members' vote, Zion invites additional commentary from members and all those in our wider circle of responsibility. Signed written comments on the specific ballot questions or on the wider amalgamation exploration are welcome to be submitted at the April 27 meeting or to the Zion office prior to May 10, 2025.

5. *Updating of Church Records* - We ask that you provide your updated contact and family information for church records. Please also pass this letter to family members and others you know who have a Zion connection, and provide the church office, where you can, contact information for family members who do not reside with you. If you have become a member of another church, please trust that we truly rejoice with you! We would appreciate you letting us know so we can transfer the information we have from you in our membership database to the congregation you have joined. Records of all Pastoral Acts (baptisms, confirmation, marriages, deaths and burials) are kept permanently in our Church Record book.

Please feel free to reach out to the Pastor, our Council Co-Chairpersons, or Zion's representative on the Amalgamation Committee listed below. We would be very happy to hear from you and will do the best we can to answer your questions or address your concerns.

May you have a Blessed Holy Week and Easter Season.

Sincerely,

Andrea Cameron, Zion Church Council Co-Chair

James Lokken, Zion Church Council Co-Chair

Alice Barth, Zion Representative on the Amalgamation Committee

Ron Bestvater, Zion Pastor

Zion Lutheran Church - 323 4th Ave S, Saskatoon, SK S7K 1N3; zion.office@sasktel.net; 306-653-2442 (ext. #2); office hours: 9 am to 3 pm, Monday to Friday

Livestream: search for Zion Saskatoon on YouTube or go to Zion's webpage: zionsaskatoon.com