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**Encounter Christ    Grow in faith    Love as Christ loved    Tell the Story**

***The Year in Review***

My January newsletter article is always my yearend report – a review of our life as a congregation over the last year. Virtually everything about this year has been overshadowed for me by the events in my family. Sam’s illness and my mother’s death impacted me and my ministry, and thereby impacted the congregation.

There were some negatives as a result – I’ve felt less able to focus on ministry to the congregation and especially less able to do much in the way of visioning.

But there were also positives – you all and the folks at Zion have been enormously supportive of me. If the health of a congregation can be measured in part by how well they support their pastor in a crisis, and I think it can, then this is a healthy congregation. I also think that this last year will continue to have a profound influence on my faith and spirituality, and will likely therefore impact the congregation. So buckle up!

Here are the events, happenings, and other things to note from the past year.

**Pastoral Acts**

**Funerals/Deaths**

- Rose Agena – May 12. Rose was not a member of Bethlehem. Her son Randy lives in Davey and asked to have the funeral at Bethlehem
- Dennis Hanson – July 5
- Cliff Erickson – September 16
- Mary Grendahl died on October 1, but her memorial service will not be until spring

**Affirmation of Baptism**

Gareth Mills and Gabe Allen – May 20

**First Communion**

Makenna Hellerich – March 4

**Worship**

We finished up preaching through Luther’s Small Catechism just before Lent.

Our Lent study was from the Book of Faith series entitled *Lent Journey: Beyond Question*

Worship continues to be a vibrant part of our life together. Attendance has dropped some as we’ve had kids age out and some of the older folks have either died or become more homebound.

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## Education/Faith Formation

Beginning in the fall of 2017 we moved to an All-Congregation Sunday School model which incorporated part of confirmation, Sunday school and adult education. During the 2017-2018 year we moved through Luther's Small Catechism. In general, this went well. We had 5 confirmation students and their families, and one elementary aged student with family. There was generally a robust attendance, especially on the Sundays which were part of confirmation.

We've continued the same structure this year, but it hasn't worked as well. Attendance has been less. We have three boys who will complete confirmation class. Typically after confirmation, kids have not been a part of Sunday school. Most likely we will not have a traditional Sunday school time next year, but I'm committed to finding some way to help the two younger kids we currently have learn and grow in their faith. I will meet with parents in the next month or so as we begin to think creatively about things we might do.

In addition to the All-Congregation Sunday school, I have met with the confirmation students monthly. Last year this seemed to work well, but so far this year has perhaps not been adequate. We will switch some things in the format this semester so I'll have more time with the students.

**Youth** – This year we have not really had a youth group meeting. I'm hoping to meet with the middle and high school kids to begin to think about faith formation in these next years. The next ELCA Youth Gathering will be in 2021. That might be an option for us, but some other smaller trips might be an option, too.

## Service

This is probably the area that suffered the most from the things going on in my life, at least at the beginning of the year. I don't actually remember if we did a Lent project. One of my insights this year is that there should be more people besides me coordinating how we serve in God's world. In September, we had a brainstorming gathering to come up with some ideas for service. I've been working off of that as we've planned things for this year.

This fall, we did the Potato Bake in September with part of our proceeds going to the Village of Davey to buy Christmas lights.

In October we collected coats and other winter gear for Lincoln Public School's Bubba's Closet.

In November we collected toys and diapers for the Center for People in Need's Toyland Christmas gift give-away. A group of us volunteered at the event on December 8.

We continued to take worship to Saunders Care Center about quarterly

The quilting group has gotten smaller. They still meet and quilt and a box of quilts was shipped to Lutheran World Relief's ingathering.

Again, my deepest gratitude flows to all of you for your support in what has been a difficult year. A new year is always a blank slate and we never know what's in store. But we will continue to be the church and the bearers of God's love and grace in a world that sorely needs it.

## January Calendar

January 6	10:15 am—Epiphany worship at Grace
January 9	6:45 pm—Confirmation
January 13	9:15 All-Congregation Sunday school 10:30 am—guitar worship
January 20	9:15 am—All-Congregation Sunday school <b>10:45 am</b> —Worship with Holy Communion
January 23	6:45—Confirmation
January 27	10:30 am—Worship Annual meeting immediately following worship
December 24	9:00 pm—Christmas Eve Service of Lessons and Carols with Holy Communion

## Annual Meeting

Our annual meeting will be January 27 immediately following worship. Join us to help us begin thinking about our ministry in the coming year.

## 2019 Schedule for Saunders Care Center

February 17  
May 26  
August 25  
November 10

## January Helpers

Lector—  
Communion Assistant—  
Ushers—Jeff/Laurie Atkinson  
Cleaners—Wk 1/2—Jerri Daugherty/Peter Mills  
Wk 3/4—Theresa Lackey  
Altar—Atkinson