

“CHURCH BETTER TOGETHER”

PASTOR MICHAEL BASTIAN



Church of Reconciliation • Episcopal Diocese of Western MA
Zion Lutheran Church • New England Synod, ELCA



Joint Newsletter- March 2026

Dear members and friends of Church of The Reconciliation and Zion Lutheran,

This month I want to introduce you to a woman of great faith and great talents:

Hildegard of Bingen.

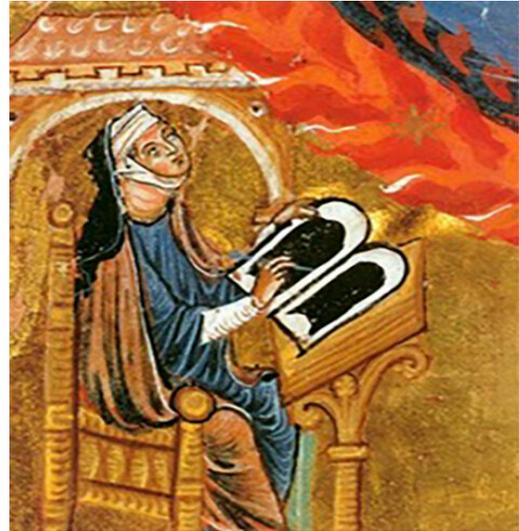
She had an extraordinarily brilliant mind. She was a musician, a composer, a medical doctor and herbalist, the head of two abbeys which she herself founded, a prolific author, and a consultant to bishops and kings. AND... most importantly for us

today... she was a mystic. What she was NOT, because she was a woman, was formally trained in the certainty of the religious, educational system of the Middle Ages.

Denying her a formal education ended up, however, being a gift which left her free to use her mystic vision to interpret the words of Jesus as they had been written in John's mystic Gospel. Unlike Nicodemus, she didn't need to un-learn a lifetime of learned theological certainty. Unlike Nicodemus, she didn't have to claw out of deeply ingrained dogmas. Hildegard was able to read John's mystical Gospel with a mystic's eyes, guided, as she described, like "a feather on the breath of God."

Without learned certainty getting in her way, Hildegard was able to understand from Jesus' words, what Nicodemus simply could not, that "The mystery of God hugs us, in its all-encompassing arms." Without having been taught "the right way" to wrap God up in a nice, neat, theological bundle, Hildegard could see that God sending Jesus into the world was not just some Divine afterthought. It was not something God did in order to fix a world that had gone unexpectedly wrong and it was not some sort of pass/fail test with eternal consequences.

Without the learned certainty, she could see that the mystical language in John's Gospel which talks about Jesus as the "Light that shines in the Darkness"... and the "Word made Flesh" was meant to present Jesus to all of Creation as the culmination of God's intention from before time began...



Hildegard said that “Every creature is a glistening, glittering mirror of divinity, for we are the image of God” and “if we wish to see God we need look no further than our souls and bodies, ourselves and our neighbors.” The take home from John's mystic Gospel is an invitation for us to let go of our learned certainties and see Scripture, our neighbors, and all of Creation through a mystic's eye. SEE, as Hildegard did, that “God, Who is Love, is with you, within you, and around you.”

Pr. Michael +

Admin's Corner

Hello Everyone!

My name is Maria and I am the new Parish Administrator at Zion Lutheran here in Oxford! Allow me to introduce myself! I live in Dudley MA, and have a Bachelor's degree in English Literature and Writing (as well as a Minor in Religious studies) from Anna Maria College. My Masters degree is from the University of Rhode Island in Library Science- and I have worked in numerous Libraries around Central MA before settling in at Nativity Episcopal Church Northborough MA as an Administrative Assistant there. I am pleased to be here at Zion Lutheran! I have been an Episcopalian for over 20 years and currently attend Good Shepherd Church (Formally Grace Church) down the Street- I am an active choir member, Audio/Visual volunteer, and play clarinet (10+ years). I will be here Mondays and Wednesdays.



Both The Episcopal Diocese and the ECLA Synod support that Lent and Holy Week are a time for repentance and a deeper look into one's self. As Jesus wanders into the wilderness of 40 days and 40 nights, we are also lost in our own wilderness during Lent. Common Lenten practices include fasting, prayer, and Almsgiving. Yet through my own wandering and misgivings (I am only human) I find the best way that I grow closer to God and out of the wilderness is through reading the Bible, praising Him even in the toughest of times, knowing that I was baptized in His image. So, remember this verse when Lent gets us all a little too lost in the forest. “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” -John 16:33

Wishing you all Peace and God Bless,
Admin Maria

Events and Going On: At Zion



ZION LUTHERAN WILL BE HOSTING ANOTHER MIDWEEK LENTEN SOUP on MARCH 11. Please sign up for soup or bread on the sheet in fellowship hall. We are encouraging you to bring your own soup mug or bowl to cut down on Styrofoam use. The other dates are March 18 at Reconciliation. March 25 at Zion. All soup suppers begin at 6:00 PM followed by Lenten devotions in the sanctuary.

“ZION STOUP COOKOFF!”

Our Fellowship Hall will be heating up once again this year, as we bring back our “Zion Stoup Cookoff!” In 2025 we had 16 varieties, and we’re anxious with excitement to see what’s in store for 2026! The event will be at Zion on Saturday, March 28, doors will open at 11:45am.

If you wish to enter a “Stoup” please contact Caitlin Seaman, 774-289-8404, or seaman.caitlin@gmail.com to register. All entries must be received by Monday, March 23. For competitors there is a \$30 entry fee, which also covers your afternoon of sampling! There is a \$7 admission fee for all attendees, which includes samples of all “Stoup” entries, and 2 voting tickets. Children under 5 eat for free!

Along with a unique variety of soups, stews, chowders, and chilis, bread and refreshments will also be available. All proceeds will benefit Zion Lutheran Church. Come and see...and taste!

OXFORD ECUMENICAL FOOD SHELF COLLECTION



The food shelf is in need of volunteers to make home deliveries. These deliveries are made to people who are unable to get to the food pantry. Deliveries are made on Thursday mornings at 11:30 AM or Thursday afternoons at 4:00 PM. If you are interested in helping, please speak with Laurie or Kirsten Larson. Thank you!!



LENTEN OFFERING

It's time to change the babies! Throughout Lent there will be jars in the back of the church so that you may contribute pocket change to help provide diapers for the Mampong Children's Orphanage. The home cares for about fifty babies whose mothers died in childbirth.

Without this care, many would not survive. The home stays in touch with the families of origin

and tries to reunite the babies with relatives as soon as it is practical and safe. Abandoned children are also cared for. If you would like to make this a family project, you are welcome to start a "change the babies" jar at home.



Easter Flowers

Please pick up an envelope from Ushers to make a donations Easter Flowers, donations can in any amount, and can be in memory or in thanksgiving of a loved one or family. Deadline for returning donations is Palm Sunday

Memorial Fund

A donation was given in memory of Margaret Heide by Mrs. Ann Simoneau

ZION'S 2026 CHURCH COUNCIL MEMBERS

Congratulations and thank you to Caitlyn Costello and Erika Blais who were recently elected to serve on Zion's Church Council. They are joining Isaac Gilliard, President, James Costello, Vice President, Caitlin Seaman, Secretary, Shirley Rossmeisl, Treasurer, Lee Elliot, Financial Secretary, and members at large Susan Pierce, Paula Clark, Mark Ide, Jonathan Costello, and Scott Zajkowski. Pastor Michael Bastian joins us at all meetings as well. Please include the Council in your prayers as we seek to determine God's will for our congregation. Please share your suggestions and concerns with any Council member. Council meets via Zoom the second Tuesday of each month. All are welcome to attend.



Church of the Reconciliation
Ash Wednesday-
February 18th, 2026.

February 18th, Ash Wednesday, coincided with the monthly Veterans Luncheon sponsored by Building Bridges at Church of the Reconciliation. Pastor Micheal provided “Ashes to Go” to the Veterans.



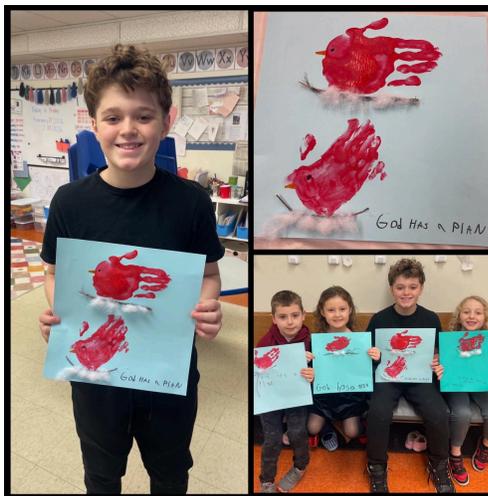
The Next Joint Service between Zion Lutheran and Church of The Reconciliation is **Sunday March 15th, at 10am.**



ZION SUNDAY SCHOOL SNIPPETS Submitted by Paula Kilian Clark

The short month of February was a busy one for our Sunday School children. We focused on local hunger and how feeding programs such as the Oxford Ecumenical Food Shelf work to help families with food insecurity get the food they need. A simple exercise of asking 3 out of 13 of our children to stand for a minute while others remained seated was eye opening. The standees represented the number of children in any classroom who regularly missed meals and didn't have healthy nutrition. Children were asked to do a few chores around their homes to earn money themselves to buy a can of soup for our annual Souper Bowl of Caring. We reviewed the miraculous story of Jesus feeding the five thousand with a boy's five loaves of bread and two fish. The children quickly concluded that Jesus can multiply small gifts and that everyone should share what we have. Great fun was had making Souper Hero capes to wear as they brought their cans of soup to the altar for the children's moments. The following Sunday they wore their purple Souper Bowl church to lead a cheer: "Jesus said...feed my people." They were excited to announce our gifts totaled 516 cans of soup!

The following Sunday our theme was "God has a plan." We also welcomed Nolan and Weston to our class to discuss the benefits of SNOW in God's plan for nature. Not only does snow look beautiful, it also provides drinking water to fill reservoirs, insulates plant roots for survival in the cold, blankets hibernating animals, and protects tiny animals from predators and, of course, creates many hours of fun outdoor play! Some were surprised to learn that every snowflake is unique, just as humans are. Next, the children brainstormed the many adaptations animals have to survive the winters in New England. The children's hands were smeared with red paint to create a cardinal print. Each handprint cardinal sat on a snowy branch. Surely, if God has a plan for these little creatures, He has a plan for us too!



Around Zion and Reconciliation

The First Soup Supper was held at Zion on February 24. Also on March 2nd, there was a Fellowship Luncheon at Point Breeze. See pictures below.



Food Shelf

Thanks to everyone who donated soup during January and February. Over 500 cans of soup were delivered to the Food Shelf. Thanks to Paula Clark for date checking all the cans and to Bud Fischvogt for delivering the soup. Current food shelf needs include, tomato sauce, rice sides, canned pasta, condiments (ketchup, mustard, salad dressings, maple syrup) and baking mixes. Thank you to everyone who generously donates!



ZION'S FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Members of Zion's family: Carl Bergeson, Jean Peterson, Shirley Rossmeisl, Lois Bernier, Carol Langer, Teresita, Karen, Tere, Priscilla Siemienkiewicz, Chris, David Bernier, Arthur Siegmund, Janet Abissi, Dave Olson, Pam Olson, Heide Smith, David Clifford.

Home-bound members: Karen Johnson, Barbara Munsch

Friends or family members: David Orisini, Malayna White, David S., Gail, Rick, Cade Dumas, Julie D., Thomas Lortie, Trinity W., Richard Orisini, Sam, Jo-Ann, Cathy, Paula J., Reese Mariano, Carol L. Linda B., Stephen Vogel, Richard Joubert, Karen Peterson, Katy, Roger Desaulniers, Manny Gurriere, Violet Strawderman, Antonio Santos, Beshoy.

THE CHURCH OF THE RECONCILIATION'S FAMILY AND FRIENDS Wanda, Claudette, Judy, Don, Tiffany K., Olivia, Michelle L., the Giro family, Loretta, Bruce, Connie, Maryjoe, Mary Alice, Baby Miller, James and his family, Beth A., Harry, Mother Judith, Beverly, Diana, Paul, Carole and Corey Reilly, Fitzgerald Sampson, Allison Sampson, Nancy, David Thomas, John K. David W. and Josh Olsen.

March Birthdays:

Zion:

Amy Peterson 17,
Tyler Olson 18,
Jenna Foy 21,
William Peterson 26,
Carol Langer 31

Reconciliation:

2 Gavin Southworth (child grandson of Vivian Nurse)
4 Bob VanSickle
9 John Kaliszewski
12 Shelley Christensen
15 Carolyn Pluff
21 Fayelinn Poplawski (young adult daughter of Tiffany Poplawski)
23 Sara Hibbard

Holy Week Schedule



March 29th: Palm Sunday: Zion Lutheran 8:45
Church of the Reconciliation 10:30



April 2nd: Maundy-Thursday- Zion Lutheran- Joint Service 7:00PM



April 3rd: Good Friday Noon: Stations of the Cross at Church of the Reconciliation
7:00PM Joint Service Church of the Reconciliation



April 05: Easter Sunday
Sunrise Service 6:30 AM Mark and Sherri Rogers home at 8 Ridgewood Rd. in Webster

8:45AM Easter Celebration Zion Lutheran
10:30AM Easter Celebration Church of the Reconciliation

Freedom Academy: March News



It's always busy downstairs at Freedom Academy! Despite some delays and snow days, our students continue to work hard and accomplish goals! We made bird feeders, hung them outside and watched many kinds of birds enjoy them. We had a fun Valentines Day party and celebrated friendship and love. We had Career Week and many of our parents came in and talked about their jobs! They were so creative in their presentations and the kids were so proud!

Our 2nd graders just finished their first research report, our Kindergartners just completed the A-Z phonics book and are starting to put letters together and read words, and our 4 year olds are writing their letters and numbers! We are proud of our school and are now enrolling for the 2026-2027 school year. At present, we have a total of 15 children registered! God is so Good!



Veteran's Luncheon Provided by Building Bridges



Wednesday of every month

NEXT DATE: March 18, 2026, 12:00 pm

At Church of the Reconciliation 21 N. Main Street, Webster, MA 01570

This is an opportunity for a complimentary meal and camaraderie with your fellow brothers and sisters.

Any questions please feel free to contact:

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Cpt., Inf. (Special Forces), Ret.

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