



Almena UMC Newsletter

December 2007/January 2008
269-668-2811

Have a very Merry Christmas. †

Greetings to my Friends in Christ,

On my mind this month is the great responsibility we have as a church to be and to build disciples of Christ. Whether they are the littlest of children in our midst, or the most grown up of adults, each has room to grow into a more Christ like person. Together we can be a more Christ like church. Even Jesus came as a baby and grew into his role as teacher, friend and Savior. He devoted much energy to coaching others so that they might share his love with a hurting world.

This month and next we have an opportunity to take a step of growth by exploring how God has uniquely gifted each person to help accomplish his purpose in the world. I invite you all to attend the class "Developing your SHAPE to Serve Others". It will run Tuesday evenings from 7 – 8:30 PM on Dec. 4, 11, 18 and Jan. 8, 15, and 22. Elizabeth Gordy will lead the class, and it will meet in the lower level meeting area.

The workshop leads participants through examining our motives to serve; assessing our spiritual gifts and natural abilities; and recognizing how our personality, desires, and experiences shape us to serve in specific ways. Perhaps you have a desire to serve, but you aren't sure where you fit in. Maybe you have tried some ministries, but they just don't seem to fit. Or maybe you didn't even know that God has prepared you to serve in settings that are just right for you. Come and check out what God has in mind for your next step of growth.

Speaking of growth, we desire to help our children grow into fully devoted followers of Christ too. In the next few weeks the members of Ad Board will be having conversation with church members in regards to the possibility adjusting our Sunday morning schedule to make it more family friendly. Details can be found later in this newsletter. I just want to encourage all to prayerfully consider a later start time (9:45 for Sunday School and 11:00 for worship during the school year). Let's truly seek God's best choice for the good of our whole church family, and for the good of our wider, un-churched community.

May you experience the hope, love, joy and peace of the Christmas season throughout the whole year.

Grateful to be in Christ's Service Together at Almena UMC, Pastor Donna

Almena Quilters:

The quilting group will meet on **Tuesday, December 4th, at 7:00 pm.** Please bring the quilt blocks we are working on, and any Christmas items you have been working on for show and tell. The quilting group received a very nice gift last month from Delores Leach, age 91, from Paw Paw, a fellow quilter. She gave us a new sewing machine and large quantity of material. She is moving to the east side of the state into an assisted living facility. Her gift is much appreciated and will be put to good use making items for charity organizations. See you on Tuesday! Diane Ross

Bea Ellis's Corner

Spartan update ~~~Thanks ~thanks ~thanks ~Found the bonus on the bulletin board of 250 UPC 's. Keep 'em coming! Now have 700, only need 300 for our next \$20 into the children/youth program. Trimmed to include the name Spartan and UPC # is much appreciated by the fast failing eyes.

Happy Thanksgiving to all the Church family ~~ Our family is feeling especially blest that the N. Calif. fires didn't get to a daughter/family although they were evacuated a couple of days. Then a son in S. Calif. escaped the Fallbrooke/ San Diego fires although they had a week of evacuation.

So much to be thankful for !! But we wish those stricken to receive the best help possible. Then Bea's improving health and able to make a trip to Clarksville, Tenn. for Thanksgiving with granddaughter, Angie. We are so blessed again. Praise the Lord for all His help !

THE NEIGHBORHOOD ECUMENICAL BIBLE STUDY GROUP by Shirley Huffman

Our group has had a wonderful start this fall. We finished the study of Joshua and are now approaching the story of King David in Samuel II. We meet at 10 a.m. every Monday morning and the place to meet is announced each week (Please refer to the church bulletin).

In October we took another Mystery Trip and found ourselves in Dowagiac having lunch at the Round Oak restaurant and from there we continued to the Russ Woods enjoying a color tour on the way. We toured the 1800s Newton home with the guidance and expertise of two Cass Co. Historical Society representatives. On the way back home we stopped for ice cream. We invite those who wish to partake in these fun trips. For information contact a Bible study person or phone 657-4300. Our attendance runs from 12 to 15 people and we have taken five trips so far in the past two years.

On December 2nd the group will meet in the Paw Paw High school auditorium lobby at 3:30 to attend the Paw Paw choir concert. Afterwards we will gather at the Village Inn for dessert if weather allows.

On December 17th at 9 a.m. we pack baskets for shut-ins. We will be meeting at the Almena church and we invite you to enjoy this time with us. We will deliver the baskets on the same day after the workers have a Christmas lunch.

Starting in January we will again gather to study God's word. January 7th we will meet at the Almena U.M. church ~ January 14th we meet at the Outpouring Armstrong Corners.

And on the 21st we will meet at the Larry and Pat Conolly home. The next meeting is December 3rd meeting at the Huffman home, 42nd Ave. Come and join us any time!

Faith cometh by reading the word, reading the word of God. Romans 10:17

Missions by Lois Richardson

Just a note on last months Thanksgiving Baskets. We put together 11 baskets, all of which contained a turkey and all of the traditional Thanksgiving day food items. Three were delivered to local families and eight were brought to Bethany Christian Services and were delivered by them to some of their client families in this area. The needs were great and all the recipients were most thankful for your generosity.

As regards our December mission projects, there is a famous Dr. Seuss story called How the Grinch Stole Christmas. Toward the end of the story, the Grinch's heart grew three times larger and he was able to overcome his stingy ways and bring Christmas items to the people in Whoville. A similar story is unfolding this year at our church in Almena. Only our heart for missions, which was already strong and active, has grown not three times but five times larger this Christmas season. Allow me to explain.

As part of the monthly mission assignments, the committee had decided nearly a year ago that the December projects would be the United Christian Services in Paw Paw and the Angel Tree. But recently an unusual thing started happening. Several people came to me with suggestions for additional projects. However, my first response was that we already had two excellent organizations that we would be supporting and we couldn't ask people to give to more. But then one of these people gave me some wise insight when she said, "Why don't we take all the limits and boundaries off from God and allow people the choice of several worthy projects? Let's see what He can do through us."

About this same time Pastor Donna and I were made aware of Jesus' words in Acts 1:8 which states that "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." After considering and praying about both those thoughts and the new suggestions coming to me, we have decided to expand our goals for the December mission giving to five projects that will correlate with the verse in Acts.

1. Witness to JERUSALEM-United Christian Services in Paw Paw. We supported this worthy organization last year. It's funded by donations from many local churches. It covers various needs of people; help with rent, gas for cars, home heating fuel, utilities, medicine and medical supplies are some examples. Money donations can be made to the children's mission globes in December or by checking the mission box on your offering envelopes and listing the donation amount.

2. Witness to JUDEA-in the last few years we have had requests to have an Angel Tree again. So this year we are working with the Department of Human Services in Hartford to supply new Christmas gifts for twelve children in Van Buren Co. Angel Tree cards will be available on November 25. The gift range is \$15-\$20. The gift suggestions from the parents are precious, especially the one regarding a little 3 year old girl. The suggestion was for a baby doll. In parenthesis is the statement, "She really wants a doll." All gifts should be unwrapped with the angel card attached and placed under the Christmas tree by Sunday, December 9.

Missions continued.....

3. Witness to SAMARIA-we offer two projects in this category. First, Decatur Human Services' Clothing Center. They are asking for donations of warm outerwear to give area residents in need. They are seeking gently used and clean boots, gloves, mittens, hats, coats and other warm clothing in all sizes for men, women, children and infants. The second project is one being held by Stockbridge UMC in Kalamazoo. They are sponsoring a huge community outreach project that will include serving a Christmas dinner and allowing kids to play while parents shop for and wrap their gift selections. They are collecting winter outerwear. But they are also asking for new or used toys in good condition. Since we are giving winter outerwear to the Decatur project, Ann Field will be working with the children in Sunday School and their families to donate toys for this need. Selecting and giving a toy that belongs to them should be a great experience for these children of learning how to put Jesus love in action. The Stockbridge church is requesting help in sorting and getting the donated items ready for their big party to be held on December 23. If you would like to help in this big task, let me know. Both the clothing and toys for these two projects should be brought to the Fellowship Hall from December 2 through Dec. 16.

Witness to the ENDS OF THE EARTH-by collecting coins for the Society of St. Andrew, an interdenominational agency that gleaned produce left after the harvest in farmers' fields. Farmers also donate goods which St. Andrew delivers to agencies working with the poor. Coin banks and Advent Devotional Booklets will be available on the first Sunday in Advent, December 2. The coins gathered at home in the banks should be returned by January 13.

God is doing a great work through His people at Almena. Each family can select the projects that most speak to them to support. It will be exciting to see what unfolds. And thanks to those who made suggestions and encouraged me to get past, "We've never done it this way before."

We've also never had an offer of matching funds. But this year a friend has stepped up with the generous offer of matching all funds donated to United Christian Services. The donor will also match the number of gifts given to the Angel Tree project with new toys for the Stockbridge UMC program. A big thank you goes to this donor. God is good!

To start off the year of 2008, our mission project in January will be in Lane 6 for Local Conference Ministries. There will be a 1/3 split between these needs:

1. Golden Cross-Up to 50% may be retained for local church health and welfare ministries. The balance is used by the conference for these programs over and above the budget.
2. Rural Life-Strengthens the work of ministries in town and rural areas of concern within the West Michigan Conference.
3. Christian Education-Undergirds the work to provide training in Christian Education within the conference.

Let's continue to work together to make our missions giving successful, for it really is the Lord's work being done through us.

Financial Committee & Treasurer News

I have received the new Dell Computer and we have joined the new-age. The 2008 budget that was in the last newsletter was presented to the Ad-Board and was passed. We have paid to date 91% of our ministry shares to the conference.

I was concerned about our investment with the United Methodist Foundation, so I invited Dr. Wayne Barrett down for a meeting on 10-29-07. It was not very well attended, but it was very informational. I didn't know much about the Congregational Pooled Fund and our account had not been performing well for three months, the market is very volatile right now so red flags went up in my mind. Dr. Barrett answered my questions and I feel our investments are in good hands. I want to share some of the information that I learned. We have been with the UMF since 12/12/03. Our risk is moderate because we are in a balanced account. The UMF socially screens funds for United Methodist Values, the fund maintains a balance between equities and fixed income securities and they provide low management costs, because the UMF is a not for profit organization. Over the last 20 quarters we made money in 15 of those quarters. Our 2007 year to date is 8.34% and on June 30, 2007 we had an average annual return of 5.7%. We are on track with our budget and our long term goals.

Our year is coming to an end, if you have any receipts that you need to be reimbursed for please get them in. Tax deductible donations need to be in by Sunday December 30, 2007. Thank you for your consideration.

In your service, yours in Christ.

Sue

Youth Group News by Deidre Sweet

Our youth group has been lead in a different direction. Praise God that His hand has been in on it!!!

We have recently joined with other area UMC's to create one youth group together. The first meeting was held here at Almena in our youth room on Nov. 18 and was attended by 22 youth. We had a huge bon fire with hot dogs and marshmallows and played some fun games together.

The next meeting will be on Dec. 16 at the Gobles UMC 5:00 - 7:00 PM. We invite any youth that would like to join in on the fun! Youth group is for teens in grades 7 - 12. For more information contact Deidre Sweet. Thank you to our church family for their support and prayers for our youth. Also a big thanks to Steve Keyte and Dave Field for coming early and getting that bon fire going!!

Newsletter/Ad Board by Jerry

Our last Ad Board Meeting was November 26th and very well attended. Thank you. The next newsletter will be out February 3rd. The deadline for articles will be January 30th. I welcome contributions from everyone, anytime, even before the deadline!

The way you are is no accident! God designed your unique mix of gifts, natural ability, personality, values and life experiences to plan an essential part in his kingdom. A six week session titled; **“Developing Your *SHAPE* to Serve Others”** will begin on Tuesday, December 4th from 7:00-8:30 p.m. in the Youth Class Room (downstairs).

- ❖ **S**piritual gifts
- ❖ **H**ear
- ❖ **A**bilities
- ❖ **P**ersonality
- ❖ **E**xperience

Session #1: You Are God’s Masterpiece

December 4th

- Goals of the session~
 - ✚ To realize that each of you is uniquely designed by God
 - ✚ Understand that God wants to use your design for his good purpose

Session #2: A Servant’s Heart

December 11th

- Goals of the session~
 - ✚ Understand what it means to have a true servant’s heart.
 - ✚ To renew your commitment to serving others as Jesus did for us.
 - ✚ To set a goal for personal growth over the next thirty days.

Session #3: Discovering Your Gifts

December 18th

- Goals of the session~
 - ✚ To understand that every believer has essential gifts and abilities to offer the body of Christ.
 - ✚ To become more aware of how God has gifted you.
 - ✚ To help others discern your gifts and abilities

Session #4: Your Unique Personality

January 8th

- Goals of the session~
 - ✚ To better understand and appreciate your own personality
 - ✚ To better understand and appreciate the personalities of others in your group.
 - ✚ To commit to serving in your group in a way that fits you.

Session #5: Serving from Experience

January 15th

- Goals of the session~
 - ✚ To discover how your past experiences can be used to serve the Lord.
 - ✚ To share some of the experiences that have shaped who you are today.

Session #6: Serving with Your Whole Heart

January 22nd

- Goals of the session~
 - ✚ To discover an area of service you’re passionate about
 - ✚ To commit to an area of service

Submitted by: Elizabeth Gordy; Group Leader

EDUCATION UPDATE

Dear Church Family,

You may recall a few months ago we circulated questionnaires regarding Sunday School and Worship Service. The Education and Worship Committees have each met a couple of times and thoroughly gone over the opinions stated in the questionnaires and have prayerfully considered all possible options with the main focus being, “*What is God’s Best Plan for Almena to help us fulfill the Great Commission given by Jesus?*” After much prayer and thoughtful consideration, the Education Committee made a recommendation to the Ad Board at the November 26th meeting to consider changing the Sunday School starting time to 9:45 A.M. and the Worship Service to 11:00 A.M. The Worship Committee Chair concurred they too had discussed this possible change and would be willing to consider the change if it would benefit our church families and increase our Sunday School attendance. After a lively and thorough discussion, the Ad Board felt more prayer from the church family as a whole was needed before considering such a big change. The topic has been “Tabled” until December 16th when a special Ad Board Meeting has been scheduled to further discuss the matter.

YOUR HEARTFELT PRAYERS ARE NEEDED! Throughout the Book of Acts (which is the beginning of the Church) when the disciples faced any problem they prayed “*with one accord,*” (with one mind, unanimously). I would like to encourage every one who reads this to look up, read, meditate on, and let your faith get stirred-up by the following scriptures regarding praying “*with one accord*”: Acts 1:14; 2:1-2; 2:42-47; 4:24-31; 5:12-14; 8:5-6 and 1 Corinthians 1:9-10. When the early church prayed like-minded there were signs, wonders, miracles and multitudes of people were saved. The integrity of God’s Word is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. If we as the “*body of Christ*” will pray as Jesus prayed in the garden, “*not my will Father, but YOUR WILL BE DONE*”, I have no doubt we will arrive at the same place and that is **GOD’S BEST PLAN FOR ALMENA.**

Please spend this next week praying and seeking God’s will in regards to this matter. Then, next week please share with others what God has shown you and what direction he is leading you.

In Christ’s Love,

Ann Field,
Education Superintendent

REMINDER TO ALL KIDS - IT’S NOT TOO LATE TO GET INVOLVED IN OUR CHRISTMAS EVE PROGRAM!!

Practice and rehearsals will take place during Sunday Worship Service (after Children’s Time). There are many parts to be filled so invite your friends....(no part is too big or too small, they are all important). Call Ann Field at 657-2522.



The Harvest Dinner committee would like to thank everyone that helped make this years dinner such a success!!

Many hands make light work - and we are so very thankful to all the hands that helped set a new record time for clean up after the dinner!

We would also like to again thank the following businesses for their donations to the Harvest dinner.

When visiting these businesses be sure to thank them for their support of our church and community!

D.Coy Ducks
 Husted's Farm Market
 Jan's trailside Cafe
 Mac Kenzie's Bakery
 North Oakland Commodities
 Paw Paw Shopping Center

Speedway of Mattawan
 Sysco food service
 Verhage Farm
 Wagoner's Grocery of Mattawan
 Walmart
 Bistro 120

Christmas Crossword

Make all the words fit into this crossword.
 Each word is only used once.

JOY
 LORD
 MARY
 JESUS
 KINGS
 GLORY
 PEACE
 JOSEPH
 ANGELS
 CHRIST
 MANGER
 SAVIOUR
 SHEPHERDS
 BETHLEHEM