



Almena UMC Newsletter

February/March 2008

269-668-2811

www.almenaumc.com

Sunday School/Adult Bible Study: **9 am**

Sunday Church Services: **10 am**

Greetings friends,

Earlier this month I attended a *ReThink* conference at the Cornerstone UMC in Caledonia. It was actually broadcast via satellite from the Crystal Cathedral in California. *ReThink* was a gathering of dozens of thinkers, innovators and leaders from the Christian and global arenas. From politics to media, medicine to sports, religion to business, the speakers shared their perspectives on ReThinking who we are as a nation, and ReThinking how our gospel message can be shared in a way that the receiving culture can hear it. One of the common refrains that came through was that if we've got the faith, God's got the power and creativity to lead us to accomplish his vision. I hope to share some of those insights over the next few months.

On a more local note, we at Almena have been ReThinking our methods for reaching our goal of building disciples. At our January Administrative Board meeting all members were in agreement that quality Christian Education is a vital component of our mission to build disciples of Christ. Noting that attendance in our children's program was steadily declining, we considered several options for making Sunday School more relevant and accessible to both adults and children. After listening to input from many sectors over the past 3 months, and after praying God's guidance, the group discerned that the best option would be a multi-prong approach:

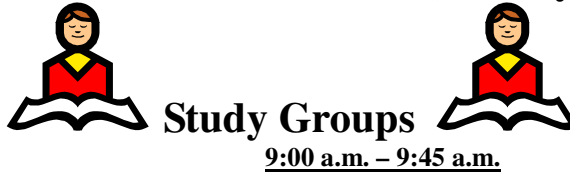
- Improving communications about class offerings,
- Adding an adult class of relevance to parents or other younger adults,
- Increasing instructional time to be 60 minutes, (9:45-10:45)
- Moving the start time of Sunday School from 9am to 9:45 am.
- Moving worship to 11 AM during the school year
- Summer worship will be at 10 AM (Memorial day thru The Wine & Harvest Fest)
- The new schedule will begin on March 2nd

Although this was not the personal preference of many, it was agreed that for the good of the whole, we would adopt this new schedule and be loyal to each other. Friends, this is what Christian Conferencing is about; discerning with prayer and thoughtfulness what is the best direction for a whole group to take. It is difficult, and wearying work, but I feel we have been obedient to God's prompting and he will reward us for acting instead of procrastinating. I thank those for whom this is a less desirable option for their patience and cooperation as we all adjust to this new schedule. On the plus side for those who prefer an earlier worship time, we will return worship to 10 o'clock in the summer.

Re-Thinking is challenging work.

Thanks for the effort, Pastor Donna

Sunday Morning Christian Education (Sunday School)



Pre-School - 2nd Grade - Mrs. Ann Field

We're located downstairs in the Bible Hut, Movie Theatre, Snack Shack or Craft Room. Study is of various stories of the Bible. We learn Bible verses, make crafts and have lots of fun! Join us on Sunday morning. We have lot's of FUN learning about Jesus...so will YOU!!

Middlers - Mrs. Shirley Huffman

You can find our class downstairs (last door on the left). Our lessons are hands on in the Bible. You learn how to look up Bible verses and Mrs. Huffman always helps you to understand God's Word. There is always room for you, just pull up a chair and joins US!! (P.S. Bring a friend!!)

Classroom Helpers /Substitutes are: Sandra Rickli and Janet Gill

Jr./Sr. High School - Mrs. Jackie Coons

Our classroom is located downstairs. The current topic of discussion is: *Growing in Christ*, lessons on Christian living and beliefs (book and video applied).

Adult Study (Downstairs) - Mrs. Lois Richardson

Topic: **God Was Here & I Was Out to Lunch** by James W Moore



Way back in the book of Genesis, Jacob made a powerful and poignant statement that has resounded across the ages: "Surely the Lord is in this place - and I did not know it!" The modern-day version of that statement would sound something like this: "God was here, and I was out to lunch!" In other words, God comes near to us, but we are so busy, so preoccupied, so set in our ways, or so caught up in our own agenda that we don't recognize God; we don't realize it when God is here. When we turn ourselves toward Jesus Christ and learn that love is the answer, love is the way, love is what God wants, we can live each day-every moment-aware that we are in God's presence.

Adult Bible Study (Upstairs in Library); Mr. Theron Huffman

Topic of learning beginning on February 3rd is: The Minor Prophets; beginning with the Book of Joel

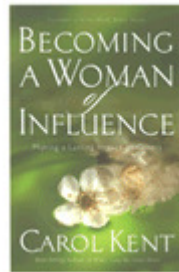
Submitted by: Elizabeth Gordy

UPCOMING SMALL GROUP STUDY!!

“Effective Parenting in a Defective World” ~

We live in a time of unprecedented challenges for parents. The world seems more defective than ever. But the truth is that God has been working in the lives of young people from defective situations for thousands of years. Come learn biblical principles that will change your understanding of the role of the parent and the role of God in the process. Take home practical lessons on discipline, parenting attitudes and more. This class includes a DVD presentation and group discussion. The DVD portion is taught by Chip Ingram, pastor, parent of 4, and host of the Living on the Edge radio program. Deidre Sweet will facilitate the class and moderate discussion. Parents and grandparents of children of all ages are welcome.

Sunday, March 2, 2008 at 9:45 a.m.
Small Group Leader: Deidre Sweet



Becoming a Woman of Influence: Making a Lasting Impact on Others

written by Carol Kent

“Jesus' twelve disciples changed the world forever. Would you like to have a similar impact? Learn seven simple, life-changing principles Jesus used to influence others - like asking questions, telling stories, and offering unconditional love to others. Through practical examples, see how your struggles and triumphs can inspire others. This book also includes a nine-week Bible study.

Tuesday's from 7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. for 9-weeks
Small Group Leader: Elizabeth Gordy
April 22, 29
May 6, 13, 20 & 27
June 3, 10 & 17

Submitted by: Elizabeth Gordy

From Bea E.'s corner ~~~

Thanks to all our friends *and relatives*~~ for your thoughts, prayers and concerns for Tom during the past couple of weeks with his 'slight stroke'. He is still quite weak, in his legs and stability but getting along as well as expected. Again Thanks~~s. we love you !!

Spartan UPS news ~~1000 were sent in on Dec. 31 of '07 due to some large contributors and even have 500 toward the next 1000. With some new savers, maybe we will wait for the 2000 mark to save postage, check, etc expense and have \$40 check coming! The neatly trimmed ones are VERY much appreciated! A suggestion on milk bottles & other plastics, fill the bottle above the label lever with VERY hot water, wait a few minutes and they will remove easily. Fold back on themselves and cut off the extra sticky part.

Pointsettias ~~The invitation to leave plants in the church foyer for us to pick up is still good. Interesting that I was not terribly fond of pointsettias until I began 'playing' with them last year. With extra moisture in the 'wash' room they still have bright red flowers and very cheery as the snow keeps falling. "The Lord taketh away and the Lord giveth", Thank you Lord.

School 'coupons' from Cereal boxes can also can be given to us as a Chris' daughter is teaching in Kentucky and they save and redeem them and we'll send them along.

NEIGHBORHOOD ECUMENICAL BIBLE STUDY GROUP

Where two or three are gathered together in Jesus' name, He will be with them. Matt. 18:19

Even with this cold weather we have had good turnouts for our bible study. We would like to make it a yet bigger crowd and invite you to join us. The coffee is hot and the conversation with friends is uplifting and fun.

These last two months we have been busy. We packed and delivered 16 Christmas gift boxes to shut-ins. We had a Christmas get together at a local restaurant on December 17th and exchanged a small remembrance and enjoyed good food. Afterwards, we gave our next few days to family and friends, spending time with them during the holidays not meeting together again until January 7th.

Our study, in these weeks, takes place in the books of Kings and Chronicles. It is an intensive study with the various skirmishes between the tribes and also their enemies that took place after the death of David and Solomon. This led to the division of the Israelite Kingdom. We intertwine the prophets and the various dispositions of the kings who serve along the way during 930-435 B.C. We will soon be into the sad state of Judah, as it is being carried off to Babylon. We find the history of the Old Testament reporting many of the same problems that exist between people and countries today.

Our group meets at ten a.m. every Monday and the place is listed on the back of the bulletin. If you need information or a ride phone me at 657-4300. We would love to have you join us. There is no need to be a scholar of the bible. Everyone in the study is at different levels and we all are learning together.

Shirley

SUNDAY SCHOOL MIDDLELERS CLASS GRADES 3-5

Shirley Huffman

You are God's temple and His Spirit lives inside of you...I Cor. 3:16

I want to encourage you teachers, in the future, to step forth and teach in our Sunday school. It is so much fun!

Our goal is to urge the children of the church and area to attend class each Sunday morning at 9 a.m. I find that children are anxious to learn during their early years. They are inquisitive and have less on their minds then when they reaching the age of puberty. This younger age is when our Sunday school must be ready to teach and instill in a child the importance of the Word of God.

Our Middler's class has learned the meaning of having God and His son Jesus Christ in their lives. This gives them the foundation to face obstacles and yet be also thankful for good times during their walk through life.

Although 9 a.m. seems early on a lazy Sunday morning, and the time that we consider sleep-in time, the effort of getting to Sunday school each Sunday morning will pay off in the years to come. A good weekly attendance is also very important. LET'S ALL GIVE IT THE OLD COLLEGE TRY!

ADULT BIBLE STUDY SUNDAY MORNINGS

The adult bible study group on Sunday morning will be studying the Minor Prophets starting February 3 at 9 a.m. in the Fellowship Hall. All are invited to learn with us while we search through and discuss this interesting topic. Remember we are all learning together.

Theron

Missions by Lois Richardson

As most of you have probably heard by now, God really blessed our very ambitious goals for Christmas giving options during December. All five programs received a lot of congregational support. There were wonderful donations made for our Angel Tree children's gifts, toys for the Stockbridge UMC Community Christmas Party, and winter clothing items for the Decatur Human Services Clothing Center. With the help of our matching funds donor, our donations to the United Christian Services in Paw Paw was an astounding sum of \$1420.14. The Society of St. Andrews also received \$122.42 from the coin banks to help in nationwide hunger relief programs. Many many people were helped by your generosity. It was a pleasure to work with all of you on these Christmas projects. Thank you to everyone who participated.

Paul Webster is the United Methodist missionary we support. His project, where he lives and works, is Mujila Falls in Zambia, West Africa. Our February mission funds, in lane 2 under World Projects, will be given to assist this project. Paul is working to combat hunger through agriculture. He believes that God has given the people there an abundance of natural resources but they don't know how to adequately use them. For example, they never drank the milk provided by their goats or ate chicken eggs that give so much protein. Only now under Paul's direction, are they learning to use oxen to plow their fields. His lofty goal is to teach the people good agricultural skills so they will be able to take care of and provide for themselves. Paul has stated in one of his recent letters that "our project is dedicated to bringing the light of education, food production, employment, family health, as well as the knowledge that Jesus Christ died so that we may all live in Christ's light."

Ethnic churches, in Lane 5, will be our project for the March missions. There will be a 50/50 split between African American Churches (Washington Heights in Battle Creek) and Asian American Churches (Church of All Nations in Kentwood). Members of Washington Heights state that they "exist for the purpose of proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus Christ. They are compelled to advance God's Kingdom through service to others and fellowship within the church family". Michigan Subhu Korean UMC consecrated its new building in Kentwood in September, 2005. In January, 2006, they celebrated a grand opening as The UMC of All Nations. Their vision is to become a "multi-ethnic Christian community", welcoming all ethnic persons, all cultures and all languages for worship and fellowship. Both congregations have set worthy goals that we can help them achieve through our contributions.

Center for Transformation by Lois

Local pastors have recently been informed of an organization named Center for Transformation. Its purpose is to assist prisoners as they return to their communities so that they do not commit new crimes. When released they currently face obstacles which can prevent them from successfully reentering their communities. Unfortunately, approximately 60% of released offenders are re-incarcerated within two years.

The Center for Transformation is currently seeking assistance from churches in this area to aid prisoners who are released locally. A group of 5-6 people from one church would work individually with a recently released prisoner to help that person by offering love, compassion, and support as he transitions back into our community, whatever the need might be (transportation to appointments, finding suitable housing, etc.). This assistance can mean the difference between failure and success as he makes the adjustment.

The purpose of this article is to find out if there is any interest among our congregation to become a part of The Center for Transformation. We would need 5-6 people who would be willing to share in assisting the released prisoner assigned to us. If there are enough people who express an interest, we will find out more about what our responsibilities would be and if we want to proceed. Please let Pastor Donna or myself know if you are interested in helping with this need.