



Almena UMC Newsletter

February/March 2009
269-668-2811
www.almenaumc.com

2-1-2009 'Tis the Gift to be Simple

Dear Friends,

This week we conclude our sermon series on Living Simply. We've been challenged to simplify our lives, our calendars and our finances, not for just practical reasons, but for spiritual reasons. In response to God's abundant care and provision, we can relax into living in his Kingdom values. No need to hoard treasure in our life on earth, because our Heavenly parent is rich and generous, and has more and more life to give, as we give ourselves away.

As I've pondered simplicity and generosity in my own life, I also have been wondering about what greater simplicity might look like for our church. Here is a patchwork of ideas that have come to mind.

What if...

- We had a more intentional path laid out for spiritual formation for all ages...
Alpha \implies Growth Groups \implies Spiritual Gifts Assessment \implies
Hands on Ministry?
- We set limitations on how many "jobs" a person could hold at church, freeing each to do a few things really well, and trusting that others would do their part to accomplish God's purpose here?
- We did a total energy audit and began to conserve more of the earth's resources?
- Every member took to heart our vision of being and building Disciples of Christ?

Those are just a few of my wonderings. Feel free to share your ideas with me on how we might better align ourselves with kingdom principles for simple living.

Simply serving,
Pastor Donna

ALMENA UMC 2009 MISSION PROJECTS

LANE*	MONTH	PROJECT
1	January	MISSIONARY SUPPORT – Paul Webster in Zambia/DR Congo, Africa – Covenant Relationship
NA	February	Bible League – India Bibles – Matching Gift
2	March	WORLD PROJECTS - Mujila Falls/Musokatanda Ag. Project, Africa (P. Webster)
4	March 22	HUNGER RELIEF/UMCOR – Special envelope offering - One Great Hour of Sharing
5	April	RACIAL ETHNIC LOCAL CHURCHES – 50/50 split between Native American Churches (Kewadin Indian Mission) and Multi-Ethnic Churches (Faith UMC in Lansing)
4	April 26	CROP Walk - Eastern Van Buren County
6	May	LOCAL CONFERENCE MINISTRIES – 1/3 split among Golden Cross, Rural Life, and Christian Education Sundays
3	June	NATIONAL PROJECTS – Homelessness in the U.S.
2	July	WORLD PROJECTS – Middle East - Hope Secondary School for Muslim and Christian children in Palestine
6	August	LOCAL CONFERENCE MINISTRIES – WMU Wesley Foundation – Outreach to college students
4	September	Hunger/UMCOR – Global Project - Landmine Removal – harvesting landmines to reclaim land for cultivation
NA	October	LOCAL MISSIONS – Almena UMC for Thanksgiving Basket Expenses Donations for Decatur Clothing Center
3 NA	November	NATIONAL PROJECTS – PET (Personal Energy Transportation) LOCAL MISSION – Food donations for Thanksgiving baskets
NA NA	December	LOCAL MISSIONS – United Christian Services in Paw Paw Individual participation in ‘The Angel Tree’ – Goal is 20 children this year

Missions

Greetings in Christ for the New Year!

Almena UMC collected approximately \$1,500 in December for United Christian Services in Paw Paw. As Lois explained in the last newsletter, this project is funded by donations from many local churches and covers various needs of local people, such as help with rent, gas for cars, home heating fuel, medicine, etc. The other project for December was the Angel Tree. This year we sponsored 16 'Angels', providing specific gifts for each child. We had a great response and plan to sponsor **20** 'Angels' in 2009. Thank you so much for your generous giving to both of these projects in December. As you well know, more and more families are asking for support in this tough time, and Almena UMC continues to work as God's hands in our local community.

We were also able to help the local Copper family whose house burned (located just past the Almena store). We purchased clothes for their teenage son and also a Meijer gift card. They are still living with in-laws in Mattawan, but plan to rebuild in Almena at some point.

In December, Pastor Donna was contacted about a grandmother in Paw Paw who needed a crib for her granddaughter who recently moved in with her. Pastor Donna purchased new bedding and was able to locate a good used crib in Kalamazoo, which we were happy to deliver and set up.

Our **February mission** will be the **Bible League**, which we have supported for several years. The Bible League's goal is to place the Bible or New Testament with as many people as possible in the U.S. and in over 80 countries in the language of the people. The worldwide average cost to print, ship, and place one New Testament is \$1.50, and \$4.00 for one Bible. In 2008, Almena helped place **106 Bibles** due to our gifts!

We can double our impact in February through a matching gift opportunity from generous Bible League partners for **Bibles for India**. The Bible League has a dedicated, knowledgeable staff in India with networks in place to get the Scriptures to millions waiting for God's Word. Last year, more than 350,000 Bible and New Testaments were placed, more than 270,000 Indians completed Bible studies, and more than 82,000 Indians became members of a church as a result of God's great work through Bible League ministry. We can help Indians know the love and hope of Jesus in two ways: through our gifts, and by praying that more individuals and families in India will come to know Christ, and leave behind the empty worship of Hindu gods.

The **March mission** will be the **Mujila Falls/Musokatanda Ag. Project** in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia, West Africa. In January, we helped support our missionary there, Paul Webster, with our giving. However, our support in March will help support his project there to combat hunger through agriculture. Several of us were able to attend a potluck here with Paul in September and hear of the great work being done by him and his staff.

Upon return to Africa in November, Paul witnessed how the world economic crisis was affecting Zambia and Mujila Falls. The price of fuel, fertilizer, feed, and cement all increased dramatically. Fertilizer went from \$600 per ton in 2008 to over \$1,300 per ton this planting season. Diesel fuel jumped to over \$11.00 per gallon. The price of copper was less than half of what it was in mid-2008, with the result that people were being laid off from the mines and being sent back to their villages to try to live until the next harvest. The price of soybeans and corn also skyrocketed and are often unavailable to purchase. Due to this, they were forced to liquidate their chicken layer project and greatly reduce their number of pigs. They expect to be able to keep their 35 head of cattle, 30 head of goats, and 8 donkeys because the animals can graze through the current rainy season and they should have enough forage stored for the next dry season.

However, there is good news to report! The staff at Mujila Falls

- Planted 15 hectares of corn and bought seed to plant about 5 hectares of soybeans.
- Expect to plant a hectare of potatoes.
- Are planting experimental plots of peanuts and sunflowers.
- Bought about 15 tons of lime to help improve the soil so they can better utilize the fertilizer they have to buy.
- Are doing more with their own organic fertilizer. The forage crop planted in 2007 produced a good harvest which has helped the cows stay in milk and the oxen to continue to pull the plows.
- Are also harvesting their first significant crop of plantains, a cooking banana that is a good source of starch, vitamins, and minerals. Plantains continuously produce fruit throughout the year. People will then be able to plant them for their own families and possibly sell any excess production for a small profit.

- Harvested a small crop of red onions that they were able to market locally.
- Located a foundry to rebuild their RAM pump that they expect will pump water continuously day and night all year to greatly reduce the cost of watering the animals and irrigating the fields. Paul hopes to have help with this project from a Volunteers in Mission (VIM) group from Wisconsin in February.
- Has been contacted by an Alabama group with experience in sustainable agricultural research. This group wants to form a partnership to extend their work to Zambia. Paul has asked for prayers for further partnerships.

The greatest challenge facing Paul's staff at this time is getting their 15-year old Toyota Landcruiser and their 4 ton truck working again. They were both damaged while Paul was in the U.S. Since everything must be hauled to Mujila Falls from over 500 km away, these vehicles are essential to their work. Please pray that they will get help from the conference and individual churches in 2009 to buy a new Landcruiser, which will cost about \$50,000. The Wisconsin and Minnesota Conferences have committed to a portion of the cost, but additional funding is still needed.

Paul and his co-director, Tshala Mwengo, thank everyone and every congregation for their prayers and assistance over the years. Through all of their extremely hard work and sustainable projects, they are able to grow the United Methodist Church and provide a 'hand up' instead of a 'hand out.'

We will take a special envelope collection for **'One Great Hour of Sharing'** on March 22. Each year, this offering goes to support the relief and hunger administration costs for the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). Supporting UMCOR in this project allows UMCOR to send 100% of each mission dollar we collect to the projects themselves instead of using a portion for administrative costs. (Please see list of Missions for 2009, also in this newsletter.)

Thank you for your continued prayers and generous gifts for missions. If you have any questions regarding missions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Janet Swigart



Ash Wednesday Service is Weds. Feb 25 7 PM

The Lenten season of reflection begins with a service of the imposition of ashes on Wednesday night, February 25 at 7 pm. The service of ashes reflects the ancient symbolism of repentance that dates back to Old Testament times some 2,500 years ago. Ashes are a sign of humility and mortality, as well as being a sign of sorrow and intention to repent (turn around and start again). Ash Wednesday marks the 40 days leading up to Good Friday, the day Jesus was crucified. We make use of these 40 days to prayerfully consider the lives Christ would have us lead. Begin the season with us in worship!

MEN'S GROUP

Our Men's Group continues to meet the **Fourth Sunday** of each month in the Fellowship Hall at 8:00 am for Breakfast, Scripture, Fellowship and Discussion. Along with some good Christian praise music.

THIS IS AN OPEN INVITATION TO ALL THE MEN OF ALMENA TO COME AND JOIN US.

Our menu on most days consists of Blueberry pancakes, sausage, hash browns, and fruit. Coffee and juice is provided to wash it down. We do at times change it up to add a little variety.

There has been growth in numbers and in a spiritual desire to be of service for the Kingdom of God. It is our wish that all the men of Almena have an opportunity to experience this firsthand.

Even though we have experienced a bitterly cold winter and warm weather seems a distant thought, spring will be here before we know it. We are already making plans for continuing our work on the Crawford cabin at Crystal Springs campground. It is our goal this year to put a new roof on the cabin. Initially we were unsure if we would be able to handle the cost of this undertaking but with the effort of Rick Coons along with what we believe to be some divine intervention we may be able to get some of the materials at little or no cost. Also we have been the blessed recipient of funds received by the January 2009 Soup Supper. Thanks to all those responsible who put that on for keeping us in their thoughts.

Finally we would like to confirm our desire to be missionaries in our own community and beyond. It is our desire to be of service. If you or someone you know, be it a family member, neighbor or anyone you may be aware of that has a need for assistance in and around their home we want to help. Home repairs, small upgrades or anything that may help improve their quality of life around the house. Now more than ever it is time to come together. We are all family. Do not let pride or the thought of cost get in the way. Love of Jesus and the love for each other can fix many things.

If you or someone you knows needs assistance contact any one of these people listed below and let us put the love of Jesus in action:

Rick Coons	375-7703	Theron Huffman	657-4300
Craig Erickson	657-5607	Steve Keyte	329-1560
Dave Field	657-2522	Art Morgan	628-2379
Dave Gay	375-5326	Dan Naylor	668-4245
Sam Gordy	657-6410	Jennifer Nette	668-2326
Todd Harmon	668-4146	Greg Rozeveld	668-3796

UPCOMING MEETING DATES:

February 22, 2009 @ 8:00 am Scripture: Luke 14:25-33, The Cost of Discipleship
March 22, 2009 @ 8:00 am Scripture: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 The Parable of the Weeds

CHOIR NOTES

by Lauren Sorensen

With the New Year quickly slipping by, the choir is planning on spreading our wings a little and experimenting with different genres of music. While we'll still hold fast to the prayerful melodies we've always sung, we're working on some more driving pieces as well. Tell us what you think. We're here to praise God in song first and foremost, but we also want to help you draw closer to the Lord. Knowing what inspires you inspires us.

Alpha Course Update

In the past 18 months, 30 guests have taken the Alpha course at Almena. Many more have volunteered their time and talent to support the program by working on the kitchen crew, set up, and music crews. Thank you all!

The results have been very positive. Some guests have appreciated the opportunity to simply attend, ask questions about the Christian faith, and be treated with respect and leave. Others have been prompted to deeper commitment in their spiritual journeys; two have professed faith in Christ, one has been baptized, and many others report great spiritual growth. We rejoice at how God is using the Alpha course and this church to nurture faith in Him.

Although we would like to offer the Alpha course twice a year, we are only expecting to offer it in the fall, from September – November 2009. Please consider if God is calling you to leadership in this exciting and meaningful ministry. We are particularly seeking an Alpha Administrator and 2 Small Group Leaders. Training is provided. Contact Pastor Donna for more details.

“Compassionate Companions”

Sue Gay will be resuming training related to *Caregiving Ministries*. The last class has been rescheduled for Tuesday February 17 from 6:30-8:00 p.m. Please contact Sue Gay for more information.

MIDDLER'S CLASS

By Shirley Huffman

We have seven children attending our Sunday school class and have experienced good attendance. Thanks to the parents who bring them. This month has been a slow one with the weather being so unpredictable. We have forged ahead and are now studying the Gospels, the parables, miracles and the healings of Jesus. We are also learning the books of the New Testament. In a few weeks we will study the last days Jesus walked on earth leading up to the celebration of Easter. During the Christmas holidays we planned a short skit for the congregation. With the closing of church on December 21 and because of inclement weather, we were unable to perform. It was fun for the children to practice together and I feel they have learned a great deal about the Christmas story by doing so. We invite all children 3-5 grades to join our class on Sunday mornings from 9:45 to 10:45.

MONDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY

By Shirley Huffman

The Neighborhood Ecumenical Bible Study Group re-convened on January 26 at the Almena church. With holidays and stormy weather we have had a long vacation. On December 16 we packed 13 gift baskets for shut-ins. I want to thank those who helped. We again were forced to hurry with this project, as the week's weather was very unpredictable. Visitations and deliveries were made that afternoon and well received by the recipients. Our group is now enjoying a series of studies called Pleasing God led by Lois Richardson. All are invited to attend from 10-11:30 Monday mornings. We have a visiting time at 10 with coffee and refreshments. Bible study starts at 10:30 and promptly adjourns at 11:30.

NEW MEMBERS

GORDON AND SALLY CONOLLY

Our church family is excited to add the Conollys to our membership list of friends. Gordon and Sally Conolly became members of our church on Christmas Eve following Gordon's baptism. What wonderful ceremonies for our congregation to observe and be a part of. The Conollys have attended our church for several months and have participated in several church activities. With Gordon's mother, years ago, being a lifetime member, he certainly must feel he belongs at Almena U.M.C. in a special way. Gordon's brother Dale and wife Betty, his sister-in-law Pat and niece Diane and husband Jim, also are longtime members. Gordon was raised in Almena and attended Paw Paw High school. In 1951 he left to join the Navy serving until 1955. His Navel home base was Quonset Point R.I. and he was a crewmember of the Squadron VS-24 known for its expertise for sinking submarines. The Conollys have six daughters, Karen, Cathy, Lynn, Sabrina, Cindy and Shan. They have 14 grandchildren and 9 Great-grandchildren. Sally likes to embroidery and crochet. She also helps with the voting process during elections. Gordon's hobbies are repairing various items, going shopping, taking short walks and riding his bike. In the past they have lived in two areas and also have traveled to Florida and Texas for visiting family. The Conollys are ready to serve at Almena by helping in the dining and kitchen areas, painting, repairing, and working with the yard's landscaping group. Gordon and Sally, Almena friends welcome you aboard and we are pleased you chose Almena U.M.C. May God bless you daily.

Trustee Chairperson's Report

We have a promising year ahead, and we have made a list of things to do. We will be having a meeting on Wednesday, February 11th, 7:00 p.m. to prioritize this list. We have a very energetic group and are ready to get started. We will be painting the Fellowship Hall and the entry way in April after Easter, so please keep the week-end after Easter, April 17th and 18th, open. We will start on Friday afternoon and finish on Saturday. We will also be having a clean up soon in the Sound Room/Office, date to be determined. I will not be calling people to remind them, but check the back of the bulletin for meeting dates.

Thank you,
Trustee chairperson, Susan Tinkler

Soup Suppers!

Upcoming dates

Saturday, February 21st
and
Saturday, March 21st

In spite of the weather, we had a successful January Soup Supper, making \$635.00. The Men's Group received one-half of this money for their project, Crawford Cabin at Crystal Springs Camp. The other half will be used for improvements to our church. We had a very good turnout of patrons, volunteers and donations of food. I am hopeful that the next two suppers are as successful. For our February Soup Supper one-half proceeds will benefit United Christian Services, and for our March Soup Supper one-half proceeds will benefit Wesley Foundation at WMU. Please give your support for these worthwhile causes.

Marcia Williams

Treasurer's Report

On behalf of the church leadership, we'd like to say thank you to the membership of AUMC for a great year of giving in 2008. Your generosity and hard work allowed us to participate in several ministries and outreach programs throughout the year. Please keep up the good work as we start a new adventure in 2009.

We'd like to point out some of the highlights of the past year:

- Our increasingly successful Soup Suppers contributed an additional \$1,004 to our general fund and the same total amount among three different areas: Men's Group, the Wesley Foundation, and the United Christian Services Food Pantry. The success of these suppers is already evident with our first 2009 supper, where attendance was sparkling despite terrible weather conditions.
- The legend of Almena's Harvest Dinner continued to grow in 2008, adding \$2,890.40 to our building improvements fund. Money collected from the 2007 Harvest Dinner allowed us to upgrade the sound system in the sanctuary.
- We're proud to say that we were able to provide 100% support on our West Michigan Conference ministry shares. In addition to this, we collected and distributed more than \$5,300 to support various ministries of Almena's choosing, both locally and globally. Our total ministry support for 2008 was more than \$14,350, an impressive amount for our church size.
- A generous, anonymous donor allowed us to send several children to camp on full scholarships in 2008, and we will be able to support very generous scholarships in the coming years as well.
- In total for fiscal year 2008, Almena's income was \$89,272, and expenditures were \$77,210. The difference in these numbers is very significant because it means this church has the financial power to grow. We may be able to undertake a few more ministries this year, or be able to talk about expansion of church facilities, or add to our rainy day fund, if we so choose. The possibilities are many with our current standing, and our membership should be commended for propelling us to this position.

And lastly, the transition of Finance Secretary from Sue Tinkler to Dave Bates is complete. Many thanks to Sue for her hard work and dedication serving in this position for Almena. Dave encourages you to contact him if you have any questions or inquiries about the finances of the church.

Yours faithfully,

Susan Tinkler & David Bates

February 2009

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2 Bible Study 10-11:30 a.m. 4-H Meeting 7 p.m.	3	4	5	6	7
8 Camp Sunday and Potluck Sunday	9 Bible Study 10-11:30 a.m.	10	11 Trustee's Meeting 7 p.m.	12	13	14
15	16 Bible Study 10-11:30 a.m.	17 Compassionate Companions 6:30-8 p.m.	18 Ad Board Meeting 7 p.m.	19	20	21 Soup Supper 4:30-6:30 p.m.
22 Men's Group 8 a.m.	23 Bible Study 10-11:30 a.m.	24	25 Ash Wednesday Service 7 p.m.	26	27	28 4H Project Day 10a-2p

March 2009

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2 Bible Study 10-11:30 a.m. 4-H Meeting 7 p.m. .	3	4	5	6	7
8 Potluck Sunday	9 Bible Study 10-11:30 a.m.	10	11	12	13	14 4H Rummage Sale 8a-5p
15	16 Bible Study 10-11:30 a.m.	17	18	19	20	21 Soup Supper 4:30-6:30 p.m.
22 Men's Group 8 a.m. "One Great Hour of Sharing"	23 Bible Study 10-11:30 a.m.	24	25	26	27	28 4H Project Day 10a-2p
29	30 Bible Study 10-11:30 a.m.	31				