



# Almena UMC Newsletter

December 2009/January 2010  
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[www.almenaumc.com](http://www.almenaumc.com)

December 3, 2009

“Houston, we have a problem.” Those words, uttered April 13, 1970, transformed a mission to the moon into a survival mission for astronauts aboard Apollo 13. In the nick of time, their problem was heroically solved, and their lives were saved.

I was reminded of that rescue recently as I listened to an NPR broadcast on the state of today’s manned spacecraft program, (Oct. 24 09 All Things Considered). Apparently robots are a much less expensive option for exploring space, yet NASA is pushing for human astronauts to once again land on the moon, and then eventually on Mars.

What caught my attention was an observation by former astronaut Leroy Chiao, defending the importance of human beings doing the exploration. He said that robots are valuable, but humans are far more adaptable and creative in solving space dilemmas on the spot. He noted that “as species humans are explorers, and it’s exciting for us to see humans exploring, because we can identify with those people.” He pointed out that missions have been saved because of human interventions. And finally, he concluded that “There’s no question it’s more expensive to send human beings, but at the same time, it offers operation flexibility that you can’t get otherwise.”

My pastor ears perked up at that and I couldn’t help notice the parallels to the necessity of God coming into the world as a human being.

Earth, we have a problem. In biblical language it’s called sin, and it pollutes what is meant to be sacred in our relationship with God, nature, ourselves, and others. The solution comes in the nick of time. Not in the form of a robot, money, or possessions, but in the form of a little baby born in a barn in Bethlehem. In his humanity, Jesus was far more accessible than was a God understood to be in outer space. Jesus was a master at solving complex problems on the spot as he walked along, shared a meal, or hung on the cross. Jesus was someone people could identify with; he spoke their language and suffered their sufferings. Humans have been saved because of Jesus’ intervention. Yes, it was extremely costly for our heavenly Father to send his son, but he offered “operational flexibility that you can’t get otherwise.”

As you prepare your hearts to celebrate the first coming of Christ, wont you reflect on the brilliance of God’s solution. The star in Bethlehem pointed to a dramatic, new discovery. The solutions to our deepest social and personal problems are rooted in Jesus Christ. He invites us to explore that relationship with him whether out of intellectual curiosity or a need born of hardship. Either way, he offers long term healing and an opportunity to partner with him in his mission of bringing forgiveness, light, and hope to a shadowy world.

Wishing you salvation, endurance and peace this Christmas Season,

Pastor Donna

## Trustee News

We were asked to do a safety walk-through of the church buildings. Our findings were:

- 1) The Community Room floor is unlevel in several areas.
- 2) The elevator is still not stopping and staying level with the Community Room floor, it is approximately 3 to 4 inches higher. I have spent several hundred dollars of the trustee budget trying to get this corrected and it is still not correct. Please step up when entering the elevator from the Community Room or you could do a nose dive. I am interviewing a new company at this time.
- 3) Our water has a poor taste and odor. We had it tested by the State of Michigan, which is done every year and the test came back that it is safe and good. We did purchase new water filters for the softener.
- 4) We were popping breakers in the kitchen and did not have enough electricity to run the things we needed to run, so I hired a company called Q-3 Technologies and for eight hours they ran wires, etc., updated all the outlets and numbered them in kitchen and Community Room. They donated their services for a tax benefit to their company. We found two outlets in the kitchen bad after they left and they were recently replaced.
- 5) In the basement, when you come off the elevator it is dark. Last year I bought two LED nightlights that stay on all the time, one is to the right and one is straight ahead. The one that was placed straight ahead has come up missing. If it was needed elsewhere that is fine, but let me know if another light is needed. I think we might have to buy a light and permanently mount it outside the elevator, but that will need another visit from an electrician.
- 6) We had to replace mailbox reflectors as they were broken.
- 7) There have been young kids found on the back Sunday School roof, so we are going to put some wrought iron fencing up to keep people off that lower roof.
- 8) By now everyone knows about the stove blowing up. Our gas stove is not electronic ignition; the burners and oven have to be lit manually. The gas is supposed to be turned off to the entire stove when not in use and the oven knob that has gas on/off also has to be turned off, because when you turn the main gas on, the gas will come into the oven if the gas knob is on and if not lighted right away gas is flowing in there and storing up. The main gas valve has to be turned on to light burners. The ovens have a 2nd valve to turn on, light and adjust to temperature. If you find the gas valve on for the oven, please turn it off and wait 10 minutes before trying to light the stove or ovens. During this time the hood fan should be on and oven doors should be left open to air the built-up gas out of the kitchen.

I have been asked by the Ad Board to check prices on new flooring for the Community Room/Fellowship Hall and for a new electronic ignition stove. Several people are afraid of the gas stove, but if proper use and precaution are used there should not be a problem. Snowplowing and shoveling of the steps will be done by Eric Lantz again this year. Please be careful to put thermostats back on "run program" after church use. Let's be conservative of our energy use.

Thank you, Sue Tinkler

## **MISSION UPDATES**

*Thank you so much* to everyone who donated to our winter clothing drive in October. Marcia Williams and I delivered 2 boxes and 11 bags of clothing to the **Decatur Human Services Clothing Center**. It was very much appreciated by them. Their clothing is free to anyone in need.

Also, *thank you* to everyone who donated food, cardboard boxes, money, and their time to making our **Thanksgiving Boxes** project such a success. We were able to give each family a bag of apples and fill 11 boxes with a turkey, a pie, and all the good food for a complete Thanksgiving Dinner. We even had enough money to include a \$25 Meijer Gift Card, an aluminum roasting pan, and a roasting bag in each box. It took two vans to deliver nine boxes to Bethany Christian Services, and those were delivered by them to client families in this area. The people at Bethany were so thankful that they could call upon us this year and that we were able to respond so abundantly. Two additional boxes were delivered locally. I especially want to thank Marcia Williams, Sue Tinkler, Linda Naylor, and Danielle Rickli for their help. It was a big project for Almena, but together as a congregation we were able to help so many beyond our doors.

On Sunday, Nov. 22, we had the pleasure of hosting the Wesley Praise Band from WMU and their Pastor, Lisa Batten. They provided lively new music for us, and Pastor Lisa gave an excellent lesson on the three rules of John Wesley. We have donated to the Wesley Foundation for several years, and they always enjoy coming to worship with us. We hope to host them for a Sunday evening meal, probably sometime in the first quarter of 2010. Stay tuned for more information! (See the August/September Newsletter at [almenaumc.com](http://almenaumc.com) to learn more about the Wesley Foundation at WMU.)

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## **ELEANOR'S PANTRY WISH LIST**

Diabetic Food/Snacks	Corn Muffin Mix	Ranch dressing (small sizes)
Chili	Flour	Canned Fruit
Canned Salmon	Sugar	Personal Care Items:
Tuna (small cans)	Cake Mix	Toilet Paper
Pork and Beans	Frosting	Tissue
Jelly	Brownie Mix	Cleaning Supplies
Canned Fruits	Coffee (small sizes)	Laundry Supplies
Large cans of Juice	Tea (small sizes)	Gallon Ziploc Freezer Bags
Chicken Broth	Cooking Oil (small sizes)	Size 2 Diapers
Ramen Noodles	Catsup (small sizes)	
Pancake Mix	Mustard (small sizes)	
Syrup		

Items can be left in the Fellowship Hall, or contact Janet Swigart at 657-7741.

## ***DECEMBER 2009 AND JANUARY 2010 MISSIONS***

We have **three missions** for **December** this year, all local. Money collected each week in the globes or by donations in your weekly envelope offering will go to **United Christian Services (UCS)** in Paw Paw. UCS is funded by donations from many local churches, with funds used to help those in emergency need of gas money, rent, utilities, home heating fuel, medicine, etc.

Our Christmas Eve offering will go to **Eleanor's Pantry** in Paw Paw at 221 Drew Street. This pantry is for residents in need of emergency food assistance in the Paw Paw and Lawton areas. It has been very busy since its opening in September. If you would like to donate food or other items to the Pantry, **please see the new list of their current needs elsewhere in this newsletter.** You may deliver them during Pantry hours, or give them to me and I will see that they are delivered. The new winter hours are M-W-F: 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., and T-Th: 3 to 6 p.m.

Our third opportunity to give to others this Christmas season is through the **Angel Tree Project**. We had 20 'angel tags' on the tree on Nov. 22, representing 20 children from Van Buren County, aged 9 months to 16 years of age. All 20 angels were selected that day and they went very fast! Each tag listed what each child wanted for Christmas. *Thank you* to everyone who chose to provide a gift for a child this year. Gifts should range from \$15 - \$20 and need to be brought to the church by Dec. 13. Please do not wrap the gift, but attach the original angel tag, if you still have it.

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Our **January Mission** collection money will again go to support our covenant relationship with missionary Paul Webster in northwest Zambia. We have pledged to give \$5 per member of our congregation, so that will be about \$460. Paul's agricultural project is called Mujila Falls, and he has been there for several years, starting from scratch on land donated by a tribal king to the United Methodist Church. **Be sure to read excerpts from Paul's August letter elsewhere in this newsletter**

Again, thank you to everyone for making our mission projects and Eleanor's Pantry successful in 2009. I look forward to serving with you as your Mission Chairperson again in 2010. May God continue to bless our congregation so that we, in turn, may be a blessing throughout His world.

*Janet Swigart*  
*Missions Chairperson*  
[jlswigart@aol.com](mailto:jlswigart@aol.com)  
657-7741

# MISSIONARY PAUL WEBSTER

August 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It has been a busy time as we have participated in a District Agriculture Show, built a swing set for our Mama Roxanne Day Care Centre, trained a new pair of oxen, trained a local group in goat milking, cleared a new corn field, planted pasture grasses, and planted and irrigated our dry season gardens, continue construction on a missionary house and complete two worker houses. In June we bought a new Holstein bull for the project and completed filling our silage pit. In May we harvested our many crops.

We are half way through the dry season and are beginning to think about planting, again. We are planning two “demonstration plow days” in October, and will be hosting a VIM person in September and a group from Engineers without Borders in October. We are continuing to build my missionary house and working on our water system.

We know that these are tough economic times in the U.S. and much of the rest of the world. The United Nations and the G-20 have announced a new effort to increase agricultural production in the Third World as they are coming to realize that surpluses from the developed countries can no longer feed the poor. We are on the forefront of that effort through our animal traction projects and low-input techniques to give the poorest of the poor an entry into sustainable agriculture. We want the United Methodist Church to be in the lead in this effort so we ask your continued and even increased support for our work.

In Ecclesiastes 11 there are three very instructive verses for us who would put off doing what we know is right due to uncertain times.

“Whoever watches the wind will not plant: whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.”  
Eccl. 11:4

“Sow your seeds in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.”  
Eccl. 11:6

And we are all enjoined without exception to:

“Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again.”  
Eccl. 11:1

## SWING SET COMPLETED FOR MAMA ROXANNE DAY CARE

After delays due to lack of transportation and simply too many other “irons in the fire” we have finally begun to build the promised playground, latrines and other improvements to the Mama Roxanne Day Care Center in Mujila. Last week we installed a swing set, tire swing and dug the pits for the latrines. We will be building the latrines in the coming weeks and adding a see saw, slide and a merry-go-round to the play ground as time permits and materials are found. We are very thankful for the \$1400.00 sent in by Christ-Greensboro UMC in Greensboro, North

Carolina for helping us to upgrade our facilities at Mama Roxanne Day Care which is now celebrating its third year of service to Mujila. We also want to thank the VIM team from Wisconsin who painted and provided educational materials for the Day Care Centre in February of this year. Things look much cleaner and more professional.

It is heartwarming to see children who have never seen a playground in their lives pushing each other on the swings and almost overloading the tire swing with their eager bodies. We see the playground occupied from sun-up to sun-down.

#### NEW BULL BOUGHT FOR MUJLA FALLS AGRICULTURE CENTRE

In late May we discovered that our old bull had been failing to breed our cows for several months. We made an emergency trip to Ndola where we searched for a week for a new bull of some quality. We were disappointed to find that most were very poor and very high priced. God rewarded us for our patience because after a week we got a tip that there was a Danish mission station that would sell us a very high quality breeding bull at slaughter animal prices. This saved us \$400 on the price. The bull rode the 12 hour trip over very bad roads without mishap and within two days was hard at work. We believe almost all of our open cows are now bred.

While this will give us a bumper crop of calves in about 10 months, we will suffer several months without much milk coming in. We are therefore, hoping to raise the funds to buy two high quality springing heifers to fill the gap. We hope that some of your congregations might meet the challenge. Please let us know by e-mail.

Along the same note, we are very pleased that after several years of poor sales, we are suddenly being approached by many drive in customers looking for milk, yoghurt, strawberries, eggs, and vegetables. Our problem now is with supply rather than demand as in the past. Again, God seems to be answering our prayers, though on His time-table rather than ours. Like the farmer in Ecclesiastes, we need to be diversified and persistent because we don't know what will succeed nor can we be looking at the sky to decide when to act.

#### ENGINEERS WITHOUT BORDERS TO ASSIST WITH WATER AND OTHER PROJECTS

After several months of communications I have been informed that Engineers Without Borders Chapter from Huntsville, Alabama, wants to send out a study team later this year to help us to design and build a water system for our project site as well as look at the possibility of building an agricultural lime quarry to serve local farmers with their soil fertility problems.

We look forward to their coming and hope that we can raise the funds necessary to put their plans into action. We are in the process of buying about a half kilometer of PVC pipe for the water system and will have to construct a large canal to serve the penstock and rampump to be installed near the falls. They will be designing a water filtration system to ensure that the water that we will be pumping from the river using only gravity as our power source will be clean and safe for us and our workers as well as for our animals.

#### EXPECTANT MOTHER TO JOIN OUR STAFF

As I write this e-mail bulletin, we are awaiting the imminent birth of a child to Joyce and Lenox Sakawaha. Pastor Lenox is our Spiritual and Development Outreach Specialist on staff. His wife, Joyce has not worked for us, but has volunteered as the president of the "Women helping Women" Club set up by our VIM team in February. Joyce has done a wonderful job of keeping the club motivated and has spearheaded a project to sew uniforms for UMW women throughout the Mwinilunga District of the United Methodist Church.

After her maternity leave, Joyce will be hired on as a badly needed secretary and office manager for our project. Please keep Joyce and Lenox in your prayers as they await the birth of their first-born child.

#### TSHALA AND BETTY TO ITINERATE IN ILLINOIS, INDIANA AND OHIO

Over the years Roxanne and I have itinerated throughout the North Central Jurisdiction. With my wife's death, I have found it impossible to visit every supporting church and often there were Conferences which I was unable to schedule even in the six months that GBGM gave me to travel the many states I have relationships with.

Now that I have Missionary colleagues working with me it has come time to assign them a region in which they could itinerate and raise funds for our missionary work here at Mujila Falls. In consultation with GBGM, we have agreed that I would give some of the Conferences I was poorly serving to Tshala and Betty so that they could have a fresh start and I could concentrate my visits in a smaller, more manageable area. This will also save GBGM travel expenses and make our itineration areas more compact and less stressful for us to manage. We hope that this will meet with your approval and that you will know that regardless whether you are supporting Tshala and Betty or if you are continuing to support me, the result will be your continued support for Mujila Falls Agriculture Centre and its many projects.

Tshala Mwengo has already visited many of the churches in Illinois so you have already met him and some of you are already enthusiastically supporting him. He and Betty are looking forward to corresponding with Conference Missions Chairs in Indiana and in East and West Ohio Conferences so that they can be welcomed next year (2010).

I made many new friends while itinerating in West Ohio and Indiana. I will be sorry to not be visiting you in the future, but am happy to be leaving you with one of the best missionary couples I know—Tshala and Betty. Your dollars given for project work will still come to Advance Special 15016A and will still be accomplishing the same goals of feeding the people of NW Zambia and giving them the skills they need to become successful farmers.

Your Servant in Christ,

Rev. Paul L. Webster



# Christmas Eve

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CANDLELIGHT  
SERVICE

Thurs. Dec. 24  
7:00 PM Candlelight  
Worship Celebration  
with Communion

## Blue Christmas Wednesday Dec. 9, 7 PM

Feeling blue this holiday season? Broken relationships, unemployment, ill health, isolation, or death can contribute to the feeling of being alone - of "feeling blue." The Blue Christmas Service is a time for healing and recovery for anyone whose days are laced with sorrow this Christmas season. We'll share in a simple service of scripture, meditation, music, and healing prayer followed by a time for light refreshments and fellowship. Even if you're not feeling down, this is a great service to bring along a friend who could use encouragement.

## **Christmas in the Middle of the Last Century**

**By Shirley Huffman, Church Historian**

During the 1930-1940 era, children of the Almena church prepared for the Christmas Program that was held for many years on the Sunday night before December 25<sup>th</sup>. The program consisted of the usual nativity scene, recitations, poems, singing together and sometimes a short play. The adult choir always practiced on Thursday evenings weeks before. In the early '50's, I can remember well how the program progressed, and each year it was somewhat repetitious and usually depended on the same talented people each year.

The smaller children wore little white cotton half-length robes, sometimes portraying angels. The adult choir was elated to finally have choir robes. It was quite an undertaking for the church to obtain them, and they were worn for years, one set being purchased from another church.

Each year the choir would march into the sanctuary to the singing of O Come, All Ye Faithful, and the first verse was sung in Latin. Program night the choir and others would gather in the old foyer (now the front office) as the new addition had not yet been built. There the performers would remain quiet, as the piano and organ played the prelude. Excited children had to be quieted until the choir marched down the aisle singing and heading to the choir loft.

As the program progressed, the minister would ask for a freewill offering for the Detroit Children's Home. Later, he\* prayed and invited the overflowing crowd to cookies and coffee held in the downstairs dining area. Each family would bring cookies and the variety was overwhelming.

As a child, I remember performing during the various stages. The anticipation of the children, full of excitement as they waited for their surprise gift that each would receive after the program. The church Trustees made small sacks of candy, and offered an orange to each child. During this era, children didn't receive candy as they do now, and gifts were not as plentiful, so the bags of goodies were well received.

In the basement dining room, a Christmas tree always stood with piles of Christmas cards stacked underneath. Each family brought cards for one another, even though they saw each other often. The Trustees would take a good hour to sort the cards for each family. I remember our family getting a good bunch of 20 or 30 cars, and enjoyed sharing them at home. My mother was especially delighted with the greetings, and they were her favorite Christmas present.

The basement dining area before 1967 was the space called a Michigan Cellar that is under the sanctuary. It is where we held money-raising dinners, coffees, and wedding receptions, and during the Christmas celebration it was where the congregation visited while enjoying the refreshments. The cumbrous stairway to the downstairs was/is under the space where many sit today for church, and is west of the old foyer where the sound equipment sits, and east of the entry doorway to the new foyer. The stairway is there yet today, and is probably full of spiders and dust, and was never used again. As a teen, I always thought that it would make a good hiding place.

The Christmas program was an event that neighborhood families looked forward to. It also brought together those that didn't attend church weekly. It gave these friends a time to chat and enjoy each other while catching up on news and wishing a cheerful Merry Christmas with smiles and laughter to all.

\*Almena Methodist Church's first woman minister was Pastor Beverly Gaska in 1987.

## The Christmas Program for 1969

The Tiny Tot class sang music numbers, and an 18 member **Junior Choir** and **High School Girls Sextet** both sang. The **Adult Choir** sang with soloist that year being **Dalton Rumsey**. Recitations and readings were given by the children. **Mrs. Jo Burns** and **Carol Rickli** presided at the piano and organ. Chairpersons were **Sharon Rumsey Lantz** and **Richard Mills**. The altar was decorated with 18-inch ceramic crèche figurines painted and donated by **Mrs. Isaac Hardy Johnson**. *Information from the Courier-Leader*

Although times have changed immensely and the structure of the church has expanded, we still worship in the same sanctuary that was built in 1867.

I often think back to the late 1800's and early 1900's. When I was a youngster, the following was told to me:

*People gathered at our church for the Christmas Eve celebration. They came with horse and buggy, using the horse barns that sat west of our church. They brought family gifts, although the gifts were not big and often being home sewn clothes and baked food items. The people sat in the cold church enjoying the sparse tree that sat in front while all sang and celebrated. Wood burning stoves sat in various places of the sanctuary. Two of the chimney holes now sealed are visible if you look towards the ceiling. Because of the cold room, long wool coats and hats (always black) were worn with blankets wrapped around many for warmth. The little portable organ was played or just a tuning fork was used for singing. It was an evening that was looked forward to even without comfortable transportation, handy communication, no electricity, and no refreshments. It was an evening that was reserved each year by the Almena folk for celebrating each Christmas season together.*

Today we need to be thankful for a warm and larger church, unending transportation, telephones, and tasty Christmas food.

Let's not forget the **Reason for the Season**. Take time to be thankful this Christmas.