



Almena UMC

Newsletter

February and March 2012
269-668-2811
www.almenaumc.com

2-5-2012

Greetings Friends,

Last month six leaders from our church attended the Kalamazoo District Conference at the Stevensville UMC. The keynote speaker was Benton Heisler, Director of Connectional Ministry in the West Michigan Conference. Rev. Heisler spoke about the Vital Church Initiative, (VCI) a new process being launched in Michigan to facilitate healthier and more fruitful United Methodist churches. VCI is not a quick fix program, but a thorough, 3 year process helping churches to identify their strengths, weaknesses, set clear and accountable goals, and set a prescription for achieving the goals. Two key components are the “coaching” of lay and clergy leaders, and accountability for sticking with the program. VCI has been developed and used successfully in the Missouri Conference, and pilot programs are currently underway in the Albion District. It is a voluntary process, with churches choosing whether or not to participate.

For a church to engage in the process, they first need to decide if they want to enter into Phase I. Phase I for small membership churches, (which we are due to average worship attendance around 80), involves 5-8 lay leaders and the pastor making a commitment to 7 leadership trainings over a 12 month period. Training sessions will be in the Kzoo District, usually for 4 hours on a Saturday. Following that the church decides if it would like to proceed with a formal consultation. A consultation includes an in depth assessment of the congregation by trained Conference personnel. Mystery visitors also evaluate our church experience from a newcomer’s viewpoint. The church then reviews the assessment and the “prescription” for becoming healthier, and decides as a whole whether to proceed or stop there. If proceeding to Phase II, the pastor and church are assigned a coach for one year, and they commit to following the steps agreed upon for improving growth and fruitfulness. Follow up coaching and assessments are done over the next 2-3 years.

The Missouri churches have benefitted in many ways including: improved morale, collaboration with neighboring UM churches, more engaged leaders and pastors, renewed urgency for the mission of the Church, and deeper discipleship development. They have discovered the value of having outside help in bettering themselves. They have found that common learning, language and resources strengthen the momentum of the church and help it to reach into the community and world with greater effectiveness.

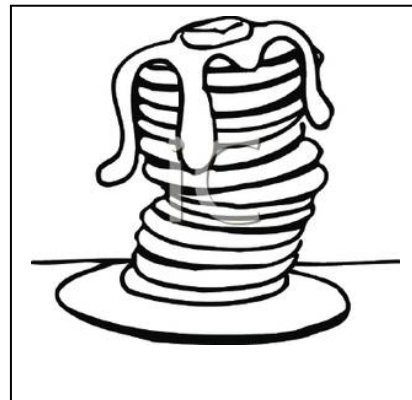
So the question is, “Would Almena UMC benefit from participating in VCI?” Our Council on Ministries and Ad Bd. will be considering this over the next few months. Please share your thoughts with one of our lay leaders or myself as we begin the discernment process. A VCI document is available on the bulletin board in fellowship hall with more information.

Serving Together, Pastor Donna

“Learning through Lent”

Pancakes, Ashes and Fasts, Oh My!

The liturgical season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, February 22nd, and extends thru Easter, April 8th. Our theme is “**Learning through Lent**” and we will explore and practice spiritual disciplines as a means of grace, helping us to move into closer relationship with Christ as we prepare to celebrate his passion and resurrection.



Wednesday, Feb 22 a pancake supper will be served by our Men’s Group. Think of this as our own little Mardis Gras celebration, a last blast before the penitential season of Lent begins. Pancakes will be served from 6:00-6:30, come anytime as you are able.



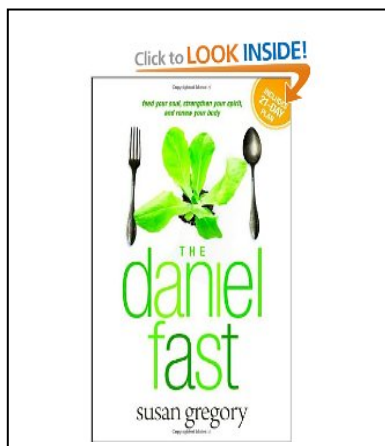
At 7:00 pm we’ll move to the sanctuary and change our tone to one of reverence and penitence. Our Ash Wednesday service includes time for prayer, repentance, singing and receiving the mark of ashes on our foreheads.

Sundays in Lent we will study the character of Daniel and learn how his steadfast faith, imperturbable prayer life, and habit of fasting allowed him to face incredibly difficult circumstances with grace and confidence. We’ll also learn from the prayer life of Jesus as he faced the difficulties of his week of passion.

Here’s the Big Lenten Learning Challenge for those able and desiring to participate: We will engage as a congregation in a “Daniel Fast” for a period of 21 days, beginning the second week in Lent. The Daniel Fast is a powerful spiritual experience to help deepen their relationship with Christ, to seek answers to prayer, and grow in the love and knowledge of the Lord. We will use the book [The Daniel Fast](#), by Susan Gregory to guide us. It includes principles, recipes, and a devotion guide. Visit the website at www.daniel-fast.com for more information. Books will be available for purchase, about \$10 each, please sign up on the bulletin board if you’d like to reserve one. Free books available to those who need it.

The Daniel Fast is a biblically based partial fast based on two accounts of the Prophet Daniel’s fasting experiences (see Daniel 1 and 10) and typical Jewish fasting principles. The eating plan is similar to a vegan diet (no animal products) with additional restrictions, including only water to drink.

Sound radical? It is! Fasting up a notch in our level of an end in itself, but fasting, serves as a means of grace to begin praying now about the join the fast, and the level at For example, what is your your life? Do you want to and more consistent manner? relationship be stronger? Do pressures? Do you have yet know the Lord or have



corporately will help us crank devotion to the Lord. It is not when coupled with prayer, draw closer to God. You can purpose for which you might which you would commit. greatest need at this time in learn to trust God in a deeper Could a significant you have employment family members who don't walked away from the

Christian life? Are you facing a big decision and need direction? It is good to focus your fast on one or two particular purposes. Depending on your health needs and circumstances, you may not choose to participate 100%, and instead modify the fast to be manageable for you. Perhaps give up certain foods, or caffeine, alcohol or sugar. Or you may not want to participate at all. Stay tuned for more information on this grand opportunity.

LENT and HOLY WEEK SCHEDULE

Wed. Feb. 22 6-6:30 Pancake Supper
 Wed. Feb. 22 7:00 Ash Wednesday Service
 Thurs. Apr. 5 7:00 Holy Thursday Service
 Fri. Apr. 6 1:00 pm Good Friday Community Service at Paw Paw UM Church
 Sun. Apr. 8 11:00 am Easter Sunday Worship
 Sun Apr 15 11:00 Holy Humor Sunday



Thank You



A little belated, but a very sincere, thank you to all the church family for the many notes of encouragement, the Christmas boxes and many thoughts on my behalf during the past 9 months. Things are going pretty well for us. My son is here nights and VERY BUSY during days cleaning his Dad's shop, his own shop, and barn plus so much still to do on settling his retirement financial business. And then there is the snow at this house, his house in Almena and his friends house West Almena. He does most of the shopping, cooking, cleaning up *and picking up after me* so with Deidra doing the semimonthly cleaning, things are going well. So, thanks to all for everything. I MAY see you in March or April if the snow is gone. You are in my thoughts VERY much. ~ Bea Ellis



Camp Sunday – February 12, 2012



Join the fun next Sunday as we celebrate and prepare for the camping season!

Special Guest: **Jeff Parsons** from *Crystal Springs Camp*
will join us for Children's Moment

Learn about all the beautiful camps in the West Michigan Conference.
Bring a friend and see how your church can help make camping a reality this summer.

Wear your camping clothes, enjoy hot dogs and s'mores at potluck,
listen to campfire songs, and share memories of camping in years gone by.

SOUP/SALAD SUPPERS

Saturday, February 18 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Saturday, March 17 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Signup sheets in the Fellowship Hall. Looking for Soups, Salads,
Desserts, and lots and lots of help.



Altar Flowers

Sign up for Altar Flowers in memory of someone, to celebrate a birthday or anniversary, or in thanksgiving for something special. You can provide the flowers yourself from the store, the roadside or your garden... OR you can give \$12 to Marie Wilke-Dolber and she will purchase an arrangement for the altar. Notice will be included in the bulletin stating your special occasion. See Marie for more details.



Missions

Our **February mission** is new for Almena, **True Vine Equestrian Center (TVEC)**, located in Lawton, dedicated to providing therapeutic horse-back riding for people with special needs, youth at risk, and able-bodied students. The goal of TVEC is to combine equine companionship and professionally-designed riding programs for physical, personal, and spiritual growth. Participation in therapeutic riding programs and the social interaction between riders and horses can greatly benefit the mind and spirit by providing increased balance, coordination, flexibility, mobility, circulation, respiration, improved muscle tone, increased attention span, self-confidence, self-esteem, independence, improved social skills, and responsibility.

They offer group and individual riding sessions between April and December, summer camps, and other events. TVEC is also a great place to bring Boy/Girl Scouts, and school, church, or other groups.

Doesn't this sound like a great place to volunteer and help with their ministry? TVEC would love for you to join their volunteer team. There are many opportunities, these are just a few:

Pray	Stall Cleaning	Grooming/Bathing/Worming
Tack Cleaning/Organizing	Stall Maintenance	Help Students Get Ready for Class
Putting Hay in the Barn	Youth Group Events	Leading and Side Walking Students
Roof Repair	Grounds Maintenance	Special Events –
Donations	Office Work/Bulk	Video/Photography
Fundraising	Mailing/Copying/Filing	Food for Volunteers

Contact Vickie Nakamura (269) 501-0529 for more information on volunteer opportunities.
72861 28th Street, Lawton, MI 49065 www.truevinequestrian.org

I am the vine, you are the branches: he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit: for apart from Me you can do nothing. John 15:5

Our **March mission** is also new this year and local, **Wings of God Transition Home** in Paw Paw. **Wings of God** is a faith-based, non-profit home for newly-released female inmates from the Van Buren County Jail. This home will teach about the love of Jesus Christ and will change the women in a positive way forever. They will reach the broken-hearted with the gospel Jesus Christ, help Mommas be better Mommas, sisters to be better sisters, and God's Daughters to experience the fullness of His Love. I had the pleasure of attending their Open House in December with Chris Robbins. We were very impressed with the beautiful home which provides four bedrooms lovingly decorated by local groups, and each named for a woman of the Bible. **Wings of God** opened this month with their first resident.

Wings of God Transition Home, Inc., PO Box 3, Paw Paw, MI 49079 (269) 415-0777
E-mail: info@wingsofgodinc.org

He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge. Psalm 91:4

Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. Psalm 63:7

On March 18, we will have the annual special envelope collection for ‘**One Great Hour of Sharing**’. This all-important offering goes to support the relief and hunger administration costs for the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). Supporting 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.

****‘Soup/Salad Supper’ Mission Giving****

Do you know that the proceeds from our Soup/Salad Suppers benefit our church and many others besides? One half of the proceeds from each supper are given to the approved ‘mission of choice’ of that month’s chairpersons. Our chairpersons make this decision thoughtfully, and many times the choice is very close to their hearts. The 2012 choices are:

- January** – ‘Friends for Families’ backpack ministry – providing backpacks stocked with food for a school child for over the weekend
- February** – Eleanor’s Pantry in Paw Paw. (You are welcome to bring a donation to the Supper, such as food or personal care items, soaps, TP, dish washing or laundry detergents)
- March** – A scholarship for one child at Crystal Springs United Methodist Camp in Dowagiac

If this sounds like a great idea and you would like to make a difference in someone’s life, be thinking of how you and a friend can chair a supper next year!

Thank you for your continued prayers and generous gifts for Missions. Almena truly shared the love of God in 2011, and you can be sure we will continue to do so in 2012 and beyond. If you have any questions or suggestions regarding any mission project, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Janet Swigart
jlswigart@aol.com
657-7741



“Each Alive In Christ, All Connected in Mission”

“Do all the good you can, in all the places you can, to all the people you can” – John Wesley

ALMENA UMC 2012 MISSION PROJECTS

LANE	MONTH	PROJECT
1	January	MISSIONARY SALARY SUPPORT – Paul Webster in northwest Zambia, Africa – Covenant Relationship
NA	January	Soup Supper – Friends for Families backpack ministry
NA	February	LOCAL MISSION – True Vine Equestrian Center - Lawton
NA	February	Soup Supper – Eleanor’s Pantry - Paw Paw
NA	March	LOCAL MISSION – Wings of God Transition Home - Paw Paw
4	March 18	HUNGER RELIEF/UMCOR – Special envelope offering – One Great Hour of Sharing
NA	March	Soup Supper – Crystal Springs Camp Scholarship
6	April	LOCAL MISSION – Methodist Children’s Home Society - Detroit
4	April 29	HUNGER RELIEF /UMCOR – Global Project – Church World Service CROP Walk - Eastern Van Buren County
3	May	NATIONAL PROJECTS – NOMADS
5	June	RACIAL-ETHNIC CHURCHES – Grand Rapids La Nueva Esperanza
2	July	GLOBAL PROJECTS – Ubuntu Gathering Center at Africa University - Zimbabwe
2	August	GLOBAL PROJECT – Africa - Mujila Falls Agriculture Research and Training Center - (P. Webster) - northwest Zambia
6	September	CONFERENCE PROJECT - Outreach to college students - WMU Wesley Foundation
NA	September	LOCAL MISSION Clothing donations: Cover of Hope* – Women/children; Decatur Clothing Center - Men
NA	October	LOCAL MISSION – Almena UMC for Thanksgiving Basket Expenses, also collecting food donations
4	November	HUNGER RELIEF/UMCOR – Global - Bread for the World – Advocacy for government policies that address hunger
NA	November	LOCAL MISSION – Deliver Thanksgiving baskets
NA	December	LOCAL MISSION – Eleanor’s Pantry - Paw Paw
NA	December	LOCAL MISSION – Angel Tree gifts for children
NA	Christmas Eve	LOCAL MISSION – United Christian Services - Paw Paw

YOUTH GROUP

Upcoming Youth Group Events (6th-12th grade)

Saturday, February 11, 6-8 p.m. Youth Group SNOW Bonfire
Saturday, February 18, 6:30 Soup/Salad Supper Clean-up
Saturday, March 10, 6-8 p.m. Youth Group Bowling Adventure??
Saturday, March 17, 6:30 p.m. Soup/Salad Supper Clean-up
Saturday, April 14, 6-8 p.m. Youth Group



Men's Group Breakfasts

Sunday, February 26, 8-9 a.m.
Sunday, March 25, 8-9 a.m.
Sunday, April 22, 8-9 a.m.

All ages welcome!



Potluck Sunday

Bring a dish to pass, or at least an appetite and come join us after worship service on Sunday, February 12 and Sunday, March 11 in the Fellowship Hall.