

# Branching Out

Volume 28 Number 24 December 5, 2010

## Advent activities lead us toward Christmas

### Commission news

Worship Commission introduced the new Sing the Song hymnals last Sunday. Books were purchased with unrestricted bequest funds including those from Luella Linder. Improvements to the sound system system are being made. Gratitude is expressed to all those who decorated the Sanctuary and who are participating in the Advent services.

Christian Education Commission reminds everyone that Winter Quarter adult Sunday School classes begin today with two options: For those preferring traditional lessons, Lavera Helmuth will teach from the Winter Quarterly "Assurance of Hope: a study of Isaiah and Mark." The class will meet in Friendship Circle's room. Jim and Rachel Witmer will lead the other option, discussions about the core components of Anabaptism from *The Naked Anabaptist* by Stuart Murray. Classes meet in Fellowship Hall.

M.Y.F. is studying *Creative Bible Lessons in Revelation* with Jen Hartzler. The theme for the children's classes is "Meet Jesus, God's Servant: Stories from Luke."

Congregational Life Commission thanks the preparers and 150+ Beech families and friends who attended the annual Thanksgiving dinner and donated canned goods. Plans are being made for the Winter Sessions of ELF Wednesday Evening meals and classes.

Mission Commission thanks all who donated over \$6300 in the fall mission offering. Monies will be distributed throughout the year.

Missions, MWS and Shepherd's Gate are sponsoring several families in the Community Christmas project.



### Missions news (continued)

Missions and MWS as well as Shepherd's Gate are sponsoring the Giving Tree. Our collection continues through next Sunday. This week, the generously donated 35 hats, 34 pairs of mittens, 18 scarves and four matching sets from Beech were taken to Trinity Church for distribution to area school children and the homeless.

### MWS projects

At its monthly meeting Wednesday, Mennonite Women Serving (MWS) announced the upcoming projects. The group continues collecting used blankets, comforters, sheets and bedspreads for the Salvation Army to give to the homeless. WMS President Patty Yoder emphasized that the clean bedding can show some "wear and tear." Please place items in the Narthex.

In January and February, both MSW and Missions will collect Health Kits for MCC. Kits will be given to people in refugee camps throughout the world. A list of specific items will be posted and copies will be placed in mailboxes. Thank you for your contributions.

### Sermons deal with "time"

Our newest McKnight banner featuring our Advent theme, "Time Crunch," along with an accompanying banner, heralded the beginning of Advent. Beech attendees have also received a handout with practical suggestions for avoiding the "time crunch."

We are challenged to "reexamine our use of time and slow down, look for God at work, learn to handle longer periods of silence and pay greater attention to others." Specific ideas include skipping a meal during Advent to pray, inviting neighbors to a service and turning off electronic noise makers to be able to listen for new sounds.

Last Sunday's use of chimes introduced several silent moments and the first Advent sermon. Our remaining sermon topics include today's "Time to Repent," and next Sunday's "Time for Patience." "Time for Surprises" is on the 19<sup>th</sup> and "Time to Rejoice - Time to Weep," on the 26<sup>th</sup>. Weekly Old and New Testament scriptures are also listed on our Advent sheets.

Special Advent activities include the combined adult Sunday School Christmas dinner for those in Friendship Circle, Christian Fellowship and the Elective classes Wednesday evening at 6 p.m. in Fellowship Hall. Christmas caroling will occur on Saturday evening, December 18, at 6:30 p.m. Carolers will meet at church. The Christmas Eve service is being planned for 6:30 p.m. on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

An Advent choir and children's Sunday School classes will also enhance our worship experiences.

## Corner

*Just as Barnabas encouraged others in the New Testament church, let us encourage others here at Beech Church. If you would like to thank someone for a job well done, place your item for "Barnabas' Corner" in Deanna Slater or Rachel Witmer's mailbox.*

### The Time Crunch

Our theme for Advent is so relevant! Last Sunday, catching my breath enroute to church after a hectic week at our daughter's volunteering in her kindergarten class, then traveling to Columbus Thanksgiving Day for our family dinner and the rough three hour return trip with all four grandchildren, (two of whom were still with us Sunday,) I was grateful to hear my favorite hymn, "Amazing Grace," on the car radio.

I arrived in Sunday School, a guilty student who had not completed our assignment from Pastor Dan to reflect on our quarter's study of the challenging book, *Everything must change*. (I still hope to complete my scrawled comments.) Pastor Dan's view of the future (part of the assignment) appears on pages 3 and 4 and we plan to print some of the other responses in future newsletters. Hearing a brief video of the author verbalizing his views for following Jesus despite pressures of materialistic world encouraged me to follow some of the Time Crunch ideas.

Entering the beautifully decorated sanctuary, hearing the Christmas music and observing the moments of silence helped to slow my heart and open my mind. Participating in the praise team's singing and listening to our "Peacemaking" sermon as well as the response song, "Praise before us" (which sounded like and turned out to be a Navajo prayer!), brought peace and another sign from God for me to take the Xcess out of and put back Christ first in our Christmas! ds

Branching Out is the newsletter of Beech Mennonite Church. Its purpose is to keep the members and regular attendees informed of coming events and of the church organizations' activities.

The publication date is the first Sunday of every month. The submission deadline is the last Sunday of the preceding month.

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## Merry Christmas from Shepherd's Gate!

The children of Shepherd's Gate are getting more excited every day about the coming of Christmas. As we reinforce the theme of the true meaning of Christmas, the children are learning many new things every day.

During the month of November we kept busy. We had a special visit from Kid-Fit, an exercise program designed for preschoolers. The instructor kept the little bodies moving with scarves, balance beam maze, balls, water bottle "weights" and movement guidance. Pastor Dan continued to teach us numbers, body parts, directions and food names in Spanish. The children are like little sponges, soaking up new language concepts. We celebrated Thanksgiving with many crafts and lessons related to the first Thanksgiving and the meaning of thankfulness. Our celebration was complete when one of our families provided a complimentary lunch for the children and staff.

As we move into the holiday season, we will join in the church's charitable efforts by adopting a Community Christmas family and by supplying items for the mitten tree. It is our hope that the service will become a life-long lesson for our little ones.

Enrollment openings continue to be available at Shepherd's Gate. During the past month, we enrolled two new full-time toddlers, but the three-year old and preschool classes have openings immediately available, both full-time and part-time.

Shepherd's Gate will be closed December 24-December 31. We look forward to a new year filled with lots of fun learning experiences when we reopen January 3, 2011. It's hard to believe that we will be entering our fourteenth year of providing child care for area families!

We would like to thank the Shepherd's Gate Board and the congregation for their continual support of our mission "to provide quality education and care for young children in an atmosphere where God's word is taught and the love of Jesus Christ is present." Without your prayers and many acts of kindness, Shepherd's Gate could not be the wonderful child care center that it has become. God bless you one and all!

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Lori Dickerhoof,

Director

Shepherd's Gate Child Care Center

Shepherd's Gate is collecting powdered cream jars (such as Cremora) for a class Christmas project. Please bring any empty jars you have to SGCC. Thank You!  
The Shepherd's Gate staff



## “Finally, the reign of God has come!”

*“Your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.”* Thus writes the prophet Joel about the “last days.” Since what follows was not a night-time dream but a wide-awake “vision”, I must still be a young man! For our last Sunday School session in the Electives class (studying McLaren’s book Everything Must Change) I asked class members to jot down their “vision for the future.” Wanting to set a good example, I starting working on it myself. Turns out I had a hard time getting my sermon done last week, since new ideas about the future kept coming! When I was done (though not really done) I thought of using it for my Pastor’s Corner and kill two birds with one stone. Thankfully, Deanna agreed to let me do that, even though it is almost twice as long as my normal article. There were some other excellent “visions” turned in. Deanna and I are looking into printing them in future issues of this newsletter.

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Something strangely wild and unbelievable is happening! Like a tsunami crashing into the shorelines of every continent and spreading its waters over the land. Like the rushing winds of a mighty hurricane that strip the leaves from the trees. Like a quiet whisper that slowly increases in decibels to become a tumultuous shout from millions of voices around the globe. *“And the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”* (Isaiah 11:9)

Gambling parlors sit empty; bars and dance clubs have locked their doors. Drug dealers are bringing their goods to the city square and setting them on fire. People everywhere are singing and dancing in the streets. Prison wardens are releasing their inmates, who find their families waiting for them with open arms and tears of joy.

Well-to-do citizens who own large houses are inviting the homeless to live with them. Together they are tilling up their five-acre lawns and planting vegetable gardens. Flowers and fruit trees, grape vines and blackberries, raspberries and blueberries are being planted everywhere. Bee hives are loaded with honey. Large international ag businesses are selling off most of their acreage at rock bottom prices and no-interest loans to young families who are eager to try country living on a few acres. These families are renovating and moving into once-decaying farmhouses all over the land. Their barns as well are receiving facelifts and are filling with a variety of unusual animals. Bears and lions are using their muscle power to pull plows, alongside horses and mules. Children are playing with cheetah and bear cubs in backyards. Diversification of crops is restoring health to the soil. Extra produce harvested from many small farms is being sold at farmers’ markets in nearby towns and cities.

Swings are reappearing on front porches. People are finding such enjoyment sitting on them and visiting with their neighbors as they walk by that TV’s, computers, and other electronic gadgets are seldom turned on. Urban sprawl is grinding to a standstill as young families who prefer urban life are fixing up abandoned apartments and rowhouses, planting trees along the sidewalks and growing vegetables and flowers on rooftops. With streets much safer now, families are getting their daily exercise in the out-of-doors, on bicycles, jogging, or playing basketball and soccer in nearby parks.

Instead of playing golf or watching TV, retired persons are actively engaged in a variety of community projects: volunteering in local schools as tutors for struggling students, building houses with Habitat, visiting shut-ins and nursing home residents, and cleaning up vacant lots and polluted streams.

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## CONGRATULATION S!!!

Two of our Beech families have been blessed with new babies during this past month:

**Karen and Keith Miller** had their second daughter, **Khali Marie**, November 8, 2011 in Aultman Hospital. **Katelynn** is her older sister and **James and Marilyn Miller**, the maternal grandparents.

**Megan and David Frederick** welcomed their third son, **Zachary Allan**, two days later on November 10, also at Aultman Hospital. **Hannah** is the big sister and **Mathew and Andrew**, her big brothers.

Karen and Megan were briefly next-door neighbors during their stay at Aultman! All are doing well and the families have introduced their little ones to our congregation. Zachary already is a member of Praise Team!

### Pastor's Corner (continued from page 3)

Many CEO's of large companies are taking voluntary pay cuts, some of them down to the level of their factory workers, whose incomes are rising as a result. Professional athletes are being paid the same salary as day care workers. This allows baseball and football tickets to be sold at \$2.00 apiece. Stadiums now double as places of worship, providing space for millions of new believers to worship.

Couples who have been estranged are coming together, asking and granting forgiveness. Newly married husbands and wives remain true to their wedding vows, providing two parents for every child. With a balance of love and discipline from parents, children are growing into respectful and creative citizens. Teens and young adults are waiting for sex until their wedding night. Families gather around the table for the evening meal together, recounting the events of the day. Domestic violence is almost extinct as men everywhere show respect to women as their equals.

Because more meals are being eaten at home, many fast food places are being turned into artisan shops (painting, pottery, stained glass, etc) and studios for teaching the arts, music, and dance. Retired artists are staffing these places.

Military equipment (tanks, fighter jets, machine guns, nuclear silos, etc) is being dismantled, the metal recycled into wind generators and solar-powered cars. Military bases have been transformed into training camps for the brightest young minds to become world peacemakers. Without military expenditures, countries are now pouring unparalleled resources into their schools. Teachers are held in high regard by parents and students alike. Children read in their history books about a "bullying" problem in bygone years and ask their teachers what that means. One day a week classes are held outdoors, with lessons on creation care, gardening, and alternate energy sources.

An elderly visitor recently arrived on the mainland from a remote island where people still practice the old ways. As he walked the streets of Everytown, chatting with its residents, he was dumbfounded. "How has this happened?" he queried. "I was here as a young man some forty years ago, and you were all just like us then!" "Haven't you heard of our new king?" answered a teenage girl. "No, I guess I haven't." "How much time do you have?" she asked with a smile. "Plenty." So she began, "He is kind and wise beyond measure. Wherever groups of his subjects gather to learn of his ways he has the ability to appear simultaneously... in many places at once. His touch heals our infirmities. His voice calms our fears. He has shown us how to love others as we love ourselves. He has taught us that love is stronger than hate, that darkness is conquered not by force but by a warm light. After he had been with us a short time, we asked him, 'And why did you not come to us sooner?' 'I have been here all along,' he said. 'You have just been given new eyes and new ears.' She added, "The longer he is with us, the more we think like him and talk like him. I think we are even beginning to look like him." The stranger had many more questions about this strange land and its benevolent king, and the young woman answered them all.

As the sun began to set, the old man stood. "I must go back and tell my people about this place," he said. "Do you think your king will also give us new eyes and new ears if we ask him? Do you think he will visit us if we invite him?" "Yes, and Yes," said the teenage girl with a smile from ear to ear. As the visitor headed to his boat, folks could hear him whistling, in perfect harmony with the birds in the treetops.

**Dan King**