

# Branching Out

Volume 29 Number 5 February 1, 2012

## Come to ELF (Eat, Learn & Fellowship) Nights!

### Beech Basics classes return!

We have developed a pattern of offering a series of classes in late winter/spring for those interested in exploring baptism and church membership, called "Beech Basics". The classes are taught by Pastor Dan during the SS hour for 6-7 weeks leading up to Easter. (This year the first class begins on Feb. 19<sup>th</sup> and the tentative date set for baptism and receiving of new members is April 22<sup>nd</sup>.) Talk to Dan if you have questions or interest. Below comments from Andrew Parrish about his experience with *Beech Basics* last year.

### Reflections on the Beech Basics Class-by Andrew Parrish

*Roughly a year ago I went through the Beech Basics class, taught by Pastor Dan. On the path to church membership, I really cannot recommend it enough. Not only did I relearn the nuts and bolts of our Mennonite denomination, but it is also a great time of fellowship with other newcomers to our church. Throughout the course I learned more about important shifts in practices with the church over the years, amazing bits of history, both of the larger Mennonite church and of Beech, and the full importance of the meaning of believers' baptism and why this was such a radical shift among Christians at the time of the Reformation. Those who know me know that my thirst for knowledge is insatiable, but this class also increased my thirst for the message of Christ, and as a result I have learned much (but not enough!) about history and theology on my own, driven by the inspirational spark the class gave me. Beech Basics was such a wonderful and enriching way to get to know Beech again, and to learn some of the stories of those who have come before us in our faith journey. Anyone thinking of (Continued at bottom of next column.)*



### Mission News

Beech MWS held its monthly meeting last Wednesday, February 1<sup>st</sup>, in the Fellowship Hall. The winter project is paper products, snack foods and craft materials for Shepherd's Gate Child Care Center, continues through February. Everything contributed has been much appreciated by the staff and students. Please place items in the marked box.

### Help for Homeless

Beech was again contacted by the Canton Coalition for the Homeless to help provide bedding, snacks and personal items for their "census sleepover" on Sunday, January 22<sup>nd</sup>. MWS donated 25 comforters for the event and thanks everyone for their last-minute donations!

### Shepherd's Gate Dinner

Please support our child care center by attending a chicken dinner and bake sale on Thursday, February 16<sup>th</sup> from 4:30 to 7:00 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall. Tickets are available today and next Sunday (Feb. 12<sup>nd</sup>) or at SGCCC. Walk-ins and carryouts are welcome.

**REMEMBER to pick up the Super-bowl Subs you ordered from MYF**

-----  
*baptism and church membership should seriously consider the class. It was great fun, it was highly instructive, and I consider it to have been absolutely invaluable.*

Last Wednesday, February 1, the winter supper/class sessions of ELF began. The last one will occur on March 28<sup>th</sup> with an Ash Wednesday service held in between on February 22<sup>nd</sup>. Light suppers again are served, starting at 5:45 p.m. Under the capable supervision of Nancy Schneider and her staff.

Class for all ages begin at 6:30 p.m. Adults choices include:

### Essentials of Parenting:

Stephanie Miller continues the series of topics and discussions for parents and grandparents based on videos from Focus on Family.

Mennonite Amish and the Civil War: During its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Jim and Rachel Witmer lead discussions on topics from "politics and peoplehood in a restless republic" to "reconstructed nation, reconstructed peoplehood."

### Science and Nature Films:

Sit back and relax as you enjoy these beautiful and enlightening films with Larry Emery as your congenial host!

### Heart and Hands Serving:

Led by Patty; you can put faith into action by working on mission projects, crafts for seniors and shut-ins or knotting comforters.

There are classes for preschoolers aged 2-5 with Diana Gruber and Alma Schloneger and K-5<sup>th</sup> graders with Janet and Ashley Mangus. Pastor Dan provides Bible Memory and special music for these groups. MYFers (middle and H.S.) Meet with their advisers. Child care is also available.

### NOTE from the TREASURER

Those wanting an annual receipt for contributions to the church using the number system, please use an offering envelope and indicate your number and amount. Paul Helmuth

## **DID YOU KNOW**

...that a dozen Beech men met for a Fellowship Breakfast at Bob Evans Restaurant on Lesh Road on Saturday, January 18<sup>th</sup>? They discussed possible church projects.

## **CONGRATULATIONS**

**Esther Miller** is celebrating her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday on Tuesday, February 7<sup>th</sup>. According to her daughter, hearing from her Beech Family highlights her days. Cards can be sent to her at Walnut Hills Retirement Home, P.O. Box 129, Walnut Creek, OH 44687.

**April and Joel Thoenen** announce the birth of their daughter, **Alexandria Dawn**, born on December 30, 2011. Rich Linder is the proud maternal grandfather.

**Kyle and Kendra Snyder-Miller** welcomed their daughter, **Anya Ruth**, the hospital's first baby of 2012, on January 2<sup>nd</sup>. Her proud paternal grandparents are James and Marilyn Miller.

## **NEW BOOKS IN THE CHURCH LIBRARY**

**The Myth of a Christian Nation** by Gregory A. Boyd - Through close examination of Scripture and lessons drawn from history, Dr. Boyd argues that evangelical Christians who align themselves too closely with political causes or declare that they want to bring America "back to God" are actually doing harm - both to the body of Christ and society in general. He challenges readers to return to the true love of Calvary and the message of the cross - setting the politics of worldly government aside.

**The Irresistible Revolution** by Shane Claiborne - The author invites you into a movement of the Spirit that begins in the heart and extends through our hands into a broken world. This book will comfort the disturbed, disturb the comfortable and invite believers to change the world with Christ's radical love.

**A Generous Orthodoxy** by Brian McLaren - Here is a provocative, stimulating and challenging account of a committed Christian orthodoxy that is truly inviting. The author provides a model for those who are seeking to develop, nurture and practice an ecumenical, missional Christian Faith.

**Following Jesus Without Embarrassing God** by Tony Campolo - Here we are confronted with some of our everyday words and actions that are out of step with the footsteps of Jesus. He gives us some insightful advice on how to get back in step!

**Youth Ministry at a Crossroads** by Andy Brubacher Kaethler and Bob Yoder - You will find here wisdom and encouragement from those who have dedicated themselves to Jesus - centered youth faith formation that encompasses biblical Anabaptist-Mennonite ways of knowing, being and doing, all while following the One who offers abundant life.

**I Am Hutterite** by Mary-Ann Kirkby - In 1969, Ann-Marie's parents did the unthinkable. They left a Hutterite colony in Canada with seven children, and little else, to start a new life. The transition was overwhelming. The book is called, "A superb memoir."

## **GROCERY LIST**

Louise Redden, a poorly dressed lady with a look of defeat on her face, walked into a grocery store. She approached the owner of the store in a most humble manner and asked if he would let her charge a few Groceries. She softly explained that her husband was very ill and unable to work, they had seven children and they needed food. John Longhouse, the grocer, scoffed at her and requested that she leave his store at once. Visualizing the family needs, she said: 'Please, sir! I will bring you the money just as soon as I can.' John told her he could not give her credit, since she did not have a charge account at his store. Standing beside the counter was a customer who overheard the conversation between the two. The customer walked forward and told the grocer that he would stand good for whatever she needed for her family. The grocer said in a very reluctant voice, 'Do you have a grocery list?' Louise replied, 'Yes sir.' 'O.K' he said, 'put your grocery list on the scales and whatever your grocery list weighs, I will give you that amount in groceries?' Louise hesitated a moment with a bowed head, then she reached into her purse and took out a piece of paper and scribbled something on it. She then laid the piece of paper on the scale carefully with her head still bowed. The eyes of the grocer and the customer showed amazement when the scales went down and stayed down. The grocer, staring at the scales, turned slowly to the customer and said begrudgingly, 'I can't believe it.' The customer smiled and the grocer started putting the groceries on the other side of the scales. The scale did not balance so he continued to put more and more groceries on them until the scales would hold no more. The grocer stood there in utter disgust. Finally, he grabbed the piece of paper from the scales and looked at it with greater amazement. It was not a grocery list, it was a prayer, which said: 'Dear Lord, you know my needs and I am leaving this in your hands.' The grocer gave her the groceries that he had gathered and stood in stunned silence. Louise thanked him and left the store. The other customer handed a fifty-dollar bill to the grocer and said; 'It was worth every penny of it. Only God knows how much a prayer weighs.'

## **NOTE from SHEPHERD'S GATE**

Thank you very, very much for your generous donations to Shepherd's Gate throughout the month of January. Absolutely everything is greatly appreciated. God has truly blessed us with a loving and supportive church family.

God has also blessed us with more children enrolled in the Center. Currently we have 1 toddler opening available, 3 openings in the 3 year old class, 4 openings in the 4-5 year old class, and only 1 opening in the after school care program. Beech Mennonite Church members receive a 25% discount off their child's tuition. We also have sibling discounts for full time enrollees. Referral bonuses are issued to enrolled families that recommend new families who enroll their child. Shepherd's Gate is proud to offer high quality child care in a loving, faith based atmosphere. Please tell family and friends about our wonderful facility.

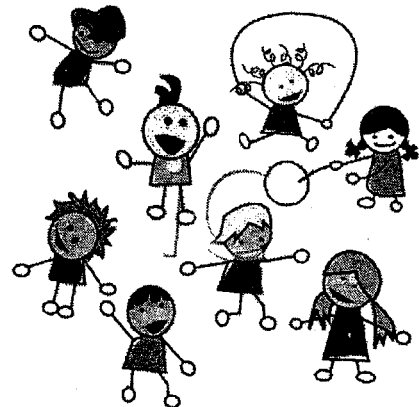
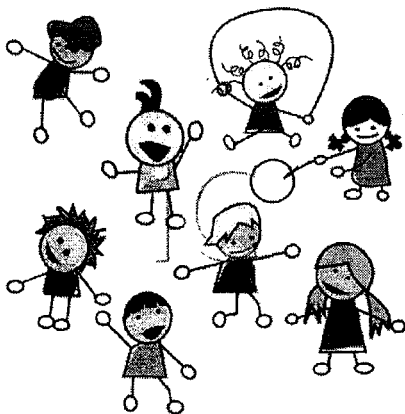
Remember to mark your calendars for the February 16th Chicken Dinner/Bake sale Fundraiser. Dinner consists of: Chicken, twice baked potatoes, green beans, salad or applesauce, rolls and butter, dessert and beverage. Adult dinners are \$8.00, children ages 6-11, \$4.00, and 5 and under are free. Tickets are available in the Center's office or after church from a Board member. Donations for bake sale or dessert items will happily be accepted the day of the dinner. Baked goods may be left in the kitchen or the office. Hope to see you there!

Other themes this month are:

Jan. 30-Feb. 3	Author Laura Numeroff
Feb. 6-10	Hearts Galore
Feb. 13-17	All You Need is Love
Feb. 20-24	Show Me Your Choppers-Dental
Feb. 27-Mar. 2	Dr. Seuss

Please remember Shepherd's Gate before throwing out your Sunday coupons. We use coupons to make our budget stretch farther. Any coupons are greatly appreciated. Thank you to those of you that have been saving your coupons for us.

God Bless You!  
In His Love,  
Janet Mangus  
Director SGCCC



# **Day Care**

## Pieces of Peace With Justice

***“But let justice roll down like a river, righteousness like a never ending stream.” Amos 5:24***

Long years ago, God through the prophets commanded that his people love justice and treat people fairly. Jesus continued by saying that we must ‘love our neighbors as ourselves.’ Since then many of God’s people have attempted to live out those qualities of justice and respect for all. February is designated as ‘Black History month’ and though some persons would say we do not need that kind of emphasis anymore, they are not aware of the deep racism that still exists in our country and even among Christians. We fail to say anything when a racial joke is told, or when we hear comments that lack integrity. We sometimes do not have courage to ‘stand alone’ when we are in a work situation.

David Wiebe in last week’s *Rejoice* says that “Christianity at its best is a cradle for ethical and positive work environments. When business owners operate by the ethics that Jesus taught, slavery is abolished, working conditions improve, and wages are paid fairly. Unfortunately many Christian bosses are sorely tempted to cut corners or act unethically in other ways, and thus they damage the reputation of the faith. God’s call remains to act justly on behalf of others. Every time I see news about people protesting or even terrorists blowing themselves up, I wonder what conditions lead to such extreme acts. And I say a prayer that we Christians would become more diligent in treating others properly.” The next day he mentions heroes who challenged authority – Rosa Parks, Nelson Mandela, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Dr. Martin Luther King and says “I am always amazed at those who had the courage to stand up against orders. How did they know that this was the right thing at the time? I am so well trained to respect authority that I wonder if I would have even the presence of mind to consider saying no to a legal requirement or socially accepted expectation. . . . The apostle Peter famously said, ‘We must obey God rather than any human authority’ (Acts 5:29) The early Anabaptists are fine examples of such courage. They paid for their choices with their lives.”

Some of our parents and grandparents had the courage after the first World War; in 1919, to sign a petition to our government asking for exemption from Military Training and participation in any future wars. Followers of Christ who have religious convictions against war have benefited for many years from this action and have been able to do alternative constructive service.

So in this month, as we think of African Americans who are still trying to obtain jobs and ‘fit in’ in the work-place, social activities, schools and churches let’s remember some of the words of Dr. King who bravely took a stand when it was unpopular and ‘stood up’ for justice for all persons, when he said in 1958, “True peace is not merely the absence of tension, it is the presence of justice” and 1967 “It is not enough to say ‘We must not wage war. It is necessary to love peace and sacrifice for it. We must concentrate not merely in the negative expulsion of war, but on the positive affirmation of peace.” And in that momentous speech when he said “I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” May it be so! Amen and Amen!

Lois Leidig

Pastor's Corner - *"Where there is no vision..."*\*

As we made our descent into Akron-Canton airport on Wednesday, I was jolted back to the reality of northeastern Ohio's winters. As I gazed out the window, we left the sunshine of higher altitudes and entered a thick blanket of clouds. As we descended farther, breaking through this gray stratus layer, an ugly-brown landscape appeared. (White would have been prettier, right?) How quickly (one short week) I had come to imagine that the whole world was enjoying constant sunshine and temperatures of 75-80 degrees F!

Another reality that faced me as we pulled into our garage was the need to put together a sermon for Sunday that would inspire and challenge its listeners. And it didn't help to have in my short-term memory bank the excellent sermon I had heard on Sunday by an African-American pastor in Miami named Kayla. (I took notes in the off chance I might choose to "steal" it from her some day.)

A third factor bringing me back to reality was my datebook reminding me of our "Listening Project" to take place on Monday evening. Several staff persons from Ohio Conference have arranged to meet with Beech leaders to get the pulse of our congregation. They will ask us a series of questions. But the first one caught my attention the most, in an unnerving sort of way: *"What is your congregation's vision for the next 3-5 years?"* I searched my sometime-deficient memory but could not recall much of a discussion on this question in any recent Beech meeting. Sure, we had a theme for 2011 (*"Come and See"*) and have another one for 2012 (*"Come Grow with Us"*). And we have brainstormed some creative ideas that connect with these themes. But when have we, in any of our leadership groups or congregation as a whole, sought to discern where God might be leading us 3-5 years from now? Perhaps we have succumbed to the proverbial *"tyranny of the urgent"*, thinking only of what must be accomplished at Beech this week, this month, this year.

I have encouraged all who attend the "Listening Project" to bring their ideas, including this first challenging question. It will be interesting to see what emerges. And knowing that the publication of this Newsletter follows that meeting, I feel safe jotting down a few of my own dreams here and now. (Remember Joel's prophecy, *"Your OLD men will dream dreams."*)

- Regular worship attendance of 200. (I know "numbers" aren't the whole story, but as someone has observed, *"Numbers mean people for whom Christ died."*)
- Large and active youth group. (a youth pastor?)
- More small groups meeting regularly in homes
- A training program that mentors youth/young adults into various types of ministry
- Our church playing a key role in the planting of a new Mennonite church in Alliance
- Even greater percentage of our giving going to Kingdom causes outside our church

I cannot think of any reason why these dreams cannot be brought to reality! Can you? Let's let our "holy imaginations" run free as we discuss our long-term vision together and ask God to guide us. Pastor Dan

*\*...the people perish." Prov. 29:18 (KJV)*

## **Beech participates in Ohio Conference's "Listening Project"**

On the eve of Jan. 30, Beech hosted two staff persons from Ohio Mennonite Conference for their "*Listening Project*." Ralph Reinford, our Regional Pastor, and Sherah-Leigh Gerber met with seven Beech leaders\* to discuss our church's vision, programming, and relationship with the Conference. Following is a summary of the issues discussed:

- Our congregation's vision for the next 3-5 years:
  - church growth; 2012 theme – "*Come Grow with Us*"
  - to be the friendliest church in Stark Co
  - welcome sign out front has attracted some; greeters' ministry, prayer team at 9 am
  - seven priorities of the Denomination to be emphasized, esp. spiritual nurture & growth
  - better communication re: Beech's activities and dispelling misconceptions re: what it means to be Mennonite
- Interactions with our community:
  - fourteen activities mentioned, including Backpack Festival, Parade float, VBS, caroling at Giant Eagle, Shepherd's Gate, Louisville Food Pantry, Rock the Park
- Key issues or important concerns of our congregation currently:
  - youth – instilling a strong faith commitment; concern about college choices.
    - Question: What is the Conference's position on encouraging students from our churches to attend a Mennonite college?
  - dealing with polarities of political affiliations within the congregation
  - declining membership and larger overhead; does raise some questions about planting churches in areas within reasonable driving distance from Beech
- Interactions with Ohio Conference
  - staff persons: Ann Leaman and Stan Helmuth
  - Jean Emery – President of Ohio Mennonite Women
  - appreciated services of Regional Pastor during Pastoral Search process
  - resourcing Beech with speakers (such as Deb Horst)
  - workshops (worship, etc)
- Gifts at Beech that could be used within Conference
  - acknowledge many gifts at Beech but hesitancy to commit them beyond our congregation
  - members who live in Alliance who might help with future church plant there
- How can Conference meet the needs of Beech today and beyond?
  - provide educational materials, from preschool up; resources for young adults not attending Mennonite colleges to help them integrate faith and education
  - questions about the effectiveness of the Corinthian plan
- Suggestions on improving communication between Beech and Ohio Conference

*\*(a "Thank You" to Larry E, Diana G, Bryan L, Tanya H, Paul H, Rod R, Jim W)*