

The Courier

A New Day

by Keith Langley

I would say that a new day is beginning, but that would be misleading. A new era is really beginning. Our church has recently called a new minister, Pastor Mark Melillo to be our shepherd by a unanimous vote. He has enthusiastically accepted the church's call, and more importantly God's call to come and minister in Almont, Michigan. This is an exciting time for our church, and a time that we have not faced in close to three decades.

I must say that I am excited for our new pastor's arrival in town, and for him to begin his ministry with us. At the same time, I want to address a temptation that I have fallen prey to and perhaps you have too. We all admit that it has been a long road to arrive at this turning point in our history. Many of us have been looking forward to this day for a long time. Some of us are tired, worn down, and have been desirous of a break. While you are

all nodding your heads in agreement saying, "Yes, Keith, that is how we have been feeling. What is your point about this temptation you referred to?" I think, some, including myself, are tempted to view our new pastor as our savior, rather than our shepherd.

"Hang on there young man! I never said that this new guy was anything like that! What would make you think such a thing?" Well, the reason I think such a thing is due to the thoughts that have gone through my own head, as well as the comments that I have heard from others.

We have already said that many of us are tired, and feel as if we need a Sr. Pastor. However, his arrival should inspire us to do more in the ministry, not less. Oh yes, take a break if you need, but remember that it is only a break; a moment or two to catch your breath so that you may continue this race marked out for us by the Author and Perfector of our faith. In jest I have said that when Pastor Mark arrives I will take the month off. Is that fair? Not to me, to him? Should he be expected to step in and take over without any assistance? That is certainly not fair. We need to support him in all the ways in which we are capable and be willing to grow in new areas to support all the more.

Some of the comments I have heard people say make it sound as

if all our troubles will magically disappear when our new Sr. Pastor begins. These comments were being made before we even called Pastor Mark to come be our shepherd. While people may not have realized how those comments came across, or the logical end of what they had said, we cannot lose sight of the fact that Pastor Mark is our shepherd, not our savior.

Along those same lines, Pastor Mark is coming to be the shepherd of the sheep of First Congregational Church of Almont. The ability for the shepherd to do his job effectively requires that the sheep trust him, and follow where he leads. That means that we need to trust our new shepherd, and follow the course he helps set us on as he listens to God for direction. We need to be sheep who are flexible, open, and willing to follow the shepherd on courses to new lands. We cannot afford to be inflexible, closed off, or off charting our own course. In fact, shepherds use tough love techniques to help re-train sheep who are not flexible or who attempt to chart their own course.

Do we look forward to our new Pastor's arrival? Certainly! It will be a great day for our church, and a great day for our community. Let's prepare for his arrival by preparing our hearts and lives to be the sheep that Pastor Mark would look forward to shepherding.

Inside this Issue

Calendar	5
Children's Ministries	3
Men's Ministries	4
Trustee Update	2
Women's Ministries	7
Youth Ministry	6

TRUSTEE UPDATE:

Last month's article stated that our greatest immediate need was to obtain the funds necessary to replace our outdated, malfunctioning fire alarm system. We are pleased to report that the need was met and the fire alarm system has been replaced. We are continually amazed at how God works to provide for all of our needs. We would like you to join with us in praising God for His provision. We extend our sincere thanks to those who made contributions to this need.

Additionally, during the past

month, we tackled our role in the hiring process of Pastor Mark Melillo by coming to an agreement with regard to his compensation. In particular, we were faced with the new challenge of including health insurance. In the end, both Pastor Mark and us as Trustees stepped out in faith – Pastor Mark, through accepting a decrease in total compensation, and us through stretching beyond our stated budget. We ask that you also would stretch out in faith to meet the increase in need through your offerings and

prayers.

Finally, we seek your prayers as we begin to address the budget for next year. Please pray that we will continue to seek God's call to be good stewards of the resources He provides, but not become cautious to the point of faithlessness. It is a delicate balance that cannot be maintained without the leading of the Holy Spirit. We seek your prayers that we will be led by the Spirit and fulfill God's will at our church and in our community.

HOLIDAY POTLUCK LUNCHEON

Sunday, December 10
following late service

Meat, rolls and drinks will be provided by the Hospitality Committee.

Please bring a dish that corresponds to your last name:

- A-F a potato dish
- G-L a vegetable dish
- M-R a salad
- S-Z a dessert

Everyone welcome!
Hope to see you
there!!

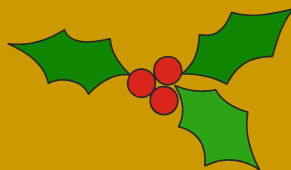
Special Service Times for the Holidays

Sunday, December 24

Services at:

10:00 a.m.

7:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m.



Sunday, December 31

Services at:

10:00 a.m.

PRE-ORDER YOUR AWANA SHIRT TODAY

You can now show your AWANA Club pride by ordering T-Shirts. The deadline to preorder AWANA T-Shirts (50% cotton/50% polyester) will be December 6, 2006. This way the order will be in for Christmas.



You have a choice of colors: red, blue, green, yellow, or gray.

Child sizes are medium (10-12) or large (14-16) for \$12.20. Adult sizes come in Small-XL for \$13.25. Adult XXL is 14.25 and Adult XXXL is \$15.25.

Please make checks out to First Congregational Church.

Children's Ministries!

There will be NO AWANA: December 20 & 27

Remember the deadline to preorder shirts will be December 6th. Make checks out to First Congregational Church. Contact Melody if you have any questions. mwebber@almontfcc.org or (586) 372-1948.

AWANA: The clubs are for children in Kindergarten through 5th graders. We meet Wednesday nights from 6:30-8:00 p.m. If you have children in these grades please join us!

We are learning about God's Perfect Book. The T&T group has been learning the books of the Bible together. We have a song called the Perfect Book to help us remember them.

Our volunteers are special to our program. When you see them please thank them: Rachel Owen (Praise Leader), Sarah Moyer (T&T Director), Cindy Baden (T&T Leader), Brad McDonald (Game Director), Jason Webber (Sparks Leader) and Stacey Kmetz (Snack Provider). If you would like to donate snack please let Melody know. There is always room for more volunteers. If children are important to you and you would like to donate your time, please contact Melody Webber (586) 372-1948.

JUST FOR OUR AWANA CLUBBERS...

Answer the following questions about God's Perfect Book. Keep up the good work on your memory verses!



- (A) What is the Perfect Book?
- (B) How many Books are in the Bible?
- (C) Why did God give us the perfect book?



Answers: A) The Bible, B) 66, C) He didn't want to leave us clueless

AWANA SLEDDING CHRISTMAS PARTY

Wednesday, December 13
6:30—8:00 PM

Awana Club Members and their families are invited to attend. Please bring your sleds!

Please give \$5.00 per child by December 6th, so that they can open an Awana Christmas gift at the party.

If you would like to supply some type of refreshment, please let Melody know.

Directions to get to the Webber's House: Go toward Imlay City on M-53. You will pass Dryden Road. You will turn left (West) on Hunters Creek Rd. Our house is across from the Village Barn. Our address is 6833 Hunters Creek Rd. Any questions please call Melody at (586) 372-1948.

Men's Ministry—Got Hope?

Job 17:15 - *“where then is my hope? Who can see any hope for me?”*

Personally, when it comes to hope I often find myself relating to Job. When I find myself in the midst of hardship and troubles, I find it difficult to praise God and his goodness. Oh, I may start out with good intentions and high hopes of growing closer to God, but eventually I begin to wonder where God's goodness has run off to, and when it might be running back in my direction again.

As I continue to mature in life and in my walk with God, my weaknesses become more and more painfully obvious to me. Yet

somehow, I still keep tricking myself into thinking that I can do it by myself. God wants us to put our hope in Him! The “God-shaped hole” in our hearts makes it impossible for us to live apart from Him and be satisfied. He doesn't want us to just make it on our own; He wants our full and complete dependence on Him. He wants our hope and faith to grow through hardships while He proves Himself faithful. Roman 15:13 – *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”* He wants us, no matter the situation, to quote what David said in Psalm 71:14 – *“But as for me, I will always*

have hope; I will praise you more and more.”

So regardless of the circumstances, regardless of the situation, we must trust in Him and in Him alone. And let us not forget that God has also promised us relief and strength. Isaiah 40:31 – *“but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”* and also in Lamentations 3:25 – *“The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him;”*

Search your hearts, realize how God's been faithful, then go tell someone.

Our Friends Who are Recuperating At Home or in Care Centers

*KATIE BACH

46100 Schoenherr Rd. Room
123B
Shelby Twp., MI 48315

DOROTHY BARNETT

920 John R #724
Troy, MI 48083

WALT AND MARILYN BAUSE

P.O. Box 543
200 Maple St.
Almont, MI 48003

BARB BECHTEL

18200 – 13 Mile Rd.
Beverly Hills, MI 48025

VIRGINIA BLUM

326 Janet Lane
Almont, MI 48003

MURIEL BOWMAN

7815 East Ridge Rd.
Almont, MI 48003

COLIN BRYCE

16496 Dryden Rd.
Allenton, MI 48002

*JEAN CALL

610 Washington
Lehigh Acres
Florida, MI 33972

CLAIRE CARNEGIE

863 Rolling Hills Ln. #1
Lapeer, MI 48446

HELEN ESCHENBURG

4251 Kidder Rd.
Almont, MI 48003

*LUCILE HOUGH

The Pines of Lapeer
1442 Suncrest Dr.
Lapeer, MI 48446

LEDA PARKER

Casa Maria
600 Maple Vista #26
Imlay City, MI 48444

GRACE PERKINS

268 Jonathan
Almont, MI 48003

ROBERTA WARREN

7856 East Ridge
Almont, MI 48003

DAVE WILLET

920 Martin Dr.
Attica, MI 48412

* indicates address change

Youth Ministry News

By Pastor Keith

With the Fall quickly passing, and the cold Michigan weather staring us in the face, we look ahead to another turning point for our church and ministry. After beginning the school year talking with our students about *How To Live With Their Parents Without Losing Their Minds*, we have switched gears to another important topic: Leadership.

There are two very important aspects to leadership: What a leader does, and who a leader is. We chose to begin a Bible Study on who a leader is because before you can do the job of a leader, you have to understand and cultivate the character of a leader. There is no doing without being (a good axiom for all of us in life).

This study is a solid, direct look for students to evaluate their character in light of leadership. Oh yes, by the way, we need to define leadership for you: Leadership is influencing those around you, rather than being influenced by those around you. We are not attempting to make a youth ministry full of generals, CEOs, or even develop the

next President of the United States. We simply want to see our students influence the people around them for God.

On a different note, we have been re-sculpting the youth area as well. We have gotten rid of two couches, and re-oriented the room to “face” one direction. We have purchased a wall-mounted screen for viewing videos, power point presentations, etc. at one end of the room, as well as drawn in much of the gaming equipment we have been using for the Fifth Quarters earlier this year. All of this is designed to make the youth area homier and draw everyone closer together.

We recently took several students rock climbing at Planet Rock in Pontiac for the day. We had a blast! They taught us how to belay for each other (that’s holding the person up who is climbing the wall for you flat-land-loving folk), how to tie the proper knots for climbing, as well as gym safety. We even had two of our youth leaders who shall remain nameless make it up to the top of 55’ high walls. GO Kim and Karen. Oops, did I say that? ☺

Coming in December we have a Christmas Party, the Sr. High guys are working hard to put on a dinner for the Sr. High girls, and we are planning a special worship night. These worship nights have been wonderful, unique experiences in the past, and the plans for this year should not disappoint. This time we will be taking a close look at the Christmas Story in a hands-on kind of way. The best part about this worship night is that a couple of the students developed most of the ideas!

Please keep the youth ministry in prayer. Pray for this worship night, pray for SpringHill rapidly approaching. Pray for our mission trip for next summer. We have chosen to go to inner city Philadelphia to share our love, and our faith. Pray for those student missionaries, as well as those still praying through whether this mission trip is for them.

NOT THAT I HAVE ALREADY ATTAINED, OR AM ALREADY PERFECTED; BUT I PRESS ON, THAT I MAY LAY HOLD OF THAT FOR WHICH CHRIST JESUS HAS ALSO LAID HOLD OF ME.

PHILIPPIANS 3:12

Women's Ministries

Helping Women Reach Their Full Potential in Christ

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH YOUR GIFT?

CALENDAR OF EVENTS:

Dec. 1	Christmas Party 7:00p.m.
Dec. 5	First Tuesday Ladies Prayer at 11:00 a.m. in the library

Prayer Chain Requests:

If you have a prayer request that you would like to add to our Prayer Chain, please call Shirley Wallace at 798-3208.

If Shirley is unavailable, please call Shelli Bourque at 798-8168.

Or you may submit a request at our website, www.almontfcc.org.

A year or so ago, I came across a Stampin' Up rubber stamp of a woman tearing into a wrapped present eager to see what is inside. The caption read: *Everyone is gifted. Some just open the package sooner.* Almost immediately, I related this to my Christian walk as I thought about the gifts of the Holy Spirit that are given to everyone who is a believer. Time and again I have chuckled and sometimes mourned at the thought that as Christians we are all gifted by the Holy Spirit, and yet some just open the package sooner.

I chuckle because I think of my own discovery of my gifts. Once I realized that I had been gifted, it was just like me to tear right into it and see what it was and how it could be used to glorify God. Bows and paper went flying everywhere in my eagerness to see what was inside.

I also chuckle as I think of others who have done the same thing, though perhaps more timidly or with greater lady-like decorum. I just get so much joy out of seeing others discover their gift, their passion for serving the

Lord. It's like watching a loved one open a gift that is sure to be the favorite, a treasured possession. I think I get as excited about watching others open such a gift as I do receiving such a gift.

But then there are times when I mourn as I think about the gifts that go unopened. So many Christians believe by their actions, if not their words, that Spiritual Gifts are given only to a select

few, so they never bother to seek out their gift. They open their gift later rather than sooner, or sometimes not at all. This not only keeps them from living a full life in Christ, but also hurts others. 1 Corinthians 12:7 says, *"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."* There are two truths contained in this short verse. First, "each one" refers to each and every believer, not just a select few. So don't think that you are the exception and are not special enough. Such thoughts reveal unbelief and pride. Sec-

ondly, this verse also states the reason for our gifts: "for the common good." Our gifts are not meant to be kept to ourselves for our enjoyment alone. Their very purpose is for the benefit of others, *"so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."* (Ephesians 4:12b-13)

So what about you? If you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you have received the Holy Spirit and received at least one gift of the Spirit. Have you opened your gift yet? If you have, have you received it with joy, knowing that your gift was hand-picked by the Spirit (Romans 12:6)? I hope you're not eyeing another's gift as better than yours. If that is the case you are rejecting not only your gift, but the sovereignty of God. I urge you to open your gift, search it out if need be, and then use your gift for the benefit of others, to the glory of God alone!

Everyone is gifted. Some just open the package sooner.

The Courier

First Congregational Church
201 E. St. Clair / P.O. Box 423
Almont, MI 48003

OUR VISION IS
TO FOSTER A
COMMUNITY OF
DISCIPLES WHO ARE:

Communing
with God

Connecting
with each other

Cultivating
our commitment

Communicating
the love of God

Caring
for our community

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*We exist to SERVE God by SHARING the
Good News of Jesus Christ and His
unconditional LOVE for all.*



Sunday Worship Schedule

Worship Service @ 8:30 a.m.

Sunday School @ 10:00 a.m.

Worship Service @ 11:15 a.m.
Jr. Church and Child Care available

CHURCH STAFF:

Keith Langley, Youth Pastor
Melody Webber, Dir. of
Children's Ministries
Audrey Minter, Secretary
Rob & Mary Kalmanir,
Custodians

CHURCH OFFICE HOURS:

Mon - Fri

9:00 a.m. — 3:00 p.m.

Phone: 810-798-8855

Fax: 810-798-7092

www.almontfcc.org

Articles are to be submitted
for the Courier by **15th**
of the month via e-mail to:
courier@almontfcc.org