

The Courier

Greetings!

by Pastor Mark Melillo

HAPPY NEW YEAR! I trust you all had a joy filled celebration of our Savior's birth. My family and I are so excited to enjoy a white Christmas next year. We did have a good Christmas out here in California though. We decorated our tumble weed and threw handfuls of sand at each other as we had visions of green trees and snow. Praise God in 2007 it shall, by God's grace, come to pass.

I am delighted to be the new Sr. Pastor at First Congregational Church of Almont. I greatly anticipate rolling up my sleeves and laboring in the word, cultivating relationships and developing ministries in the name of Christ our King.

Several have asked me what my plans are at FCC. What do I wish to accomplish in Almont, Michigan? The answer is in Colossians 1:28. It is my aim to labor toward the goal of being able

to present the members of the First Congregational Church of Almont complete in Christ. What does it mean to be complete in Christ? That's a great question; I'm glad you asked. Although one could offer a *very* lengthy answer with a lot of ten dollar words, it could also be answered very simply.

To be complete in Christ is to be like Christ. To be complete in Christ is to take on the image and the mind of Christ. In other words, to think, speak and behave the way Jesus Christ would if He were living your life.

Ask yourself a few questions. What kind of employee would Jesus be if He were filling in for you at your job for one week? What kind of father, mother, husband or wife would He be if He were filling in for you at home for a while? Would He have the same priorities that you do? Would He have the same routines...the same vocabulary?

Jesus Christ has called us to a life of personal holiness and service to Him in your daily lives. Serving God does not need to be selling everything you have and moving to some obscure village in the mountains of India to translate the Bible into a language that never had it before. Serving God does not necessarily mean going to seminary and committing your life to "full-time Christian service". It

does not mean that you need to do something big for God. Think about it—could we really do something that would seem big to God anyway?

God wants us to live out the lives *we already have* for Him. The little decisions that put together our days, our weeks—those are the ones He wants from you. Are we considering His will and His purpose in the little day-to-day decisions?

Becoming complete in Christ means we align our thinking with Scripture so that we think the way Jesus thinks (Romans 12:1-2). Then we adjust our behavior to reflect our Christ-like thinking (Philippians 2:1-5).

I look forward to preaching and teaching God's Word, cultivating relationships and developing ministries in Almont, Michigan that move us toward the goal of one day standing before our Sovereign God and King, Jesus Christ complete in Him.

After all, when we wipe away all of the appointments and to-do lists and bills and shopping and—the list goes on and on—what really is going to matter in the end is whether or not we have pleased Him. Let's work together at pleasing Christ in all that we think, say and do. May the Lord richly bless you in your efforts.

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Youth Ministry News

The Year Without a Santa Claus

By Pastor Keith

Did I say Santa Claus? I'm sorry. I meant to say, "a Sr. Pastor." Yes, that's right, the year without a Sr. Pastor. It's been an interesting year hasn't it folks? A great many things have taken place this year. Some of the things were not what we would have asked God to grant us in our lives. Some of the things were exactly what we were praying for. And some things, some things worked out "immeasurably more [better] than all we ask[ed] or imagine[d]". Let's look back over what the Lord has accomplished this past year.

We began the year by saying "goodbye" to an old, trusted friend we called "Pastor". After 27 years of wonderful ministry with us, Pastor Larry Rieck and his wife Jill bid us farewell to seek after the next chapter that the Lord was writing into their lives. It was a bittersweet parting for all. We all knew we would miss them, but were excited for the new doors that were opening to them, and for their faithful following of God's leading.

We have had the benefit of learning from several Christian leaders, teachers and speakers that God provided in the interim between Sr. Pastors. This really was a blessing in many ways. First, it was amazing how God had the visiting Pastors speak on subjects that the congregation needed to hear. Often times I would hear comments about how "That was just what we needed to hear this morning". Second, it

gave us exposure to several different types of speakers. Let's face it, after 27 years we were used to Pastor Larry's style. This helped us appreciate other styles as well.

Yet another work of God is how He strengthened us during the fallout from one of our roughest moments this summer. It is a precious rare thing when the division of God's church leads to anything good. No one's desire was to see people leave the family. Yet, it is amazing to me how God reduced potential problems, and minimized the number of people we lost. We still feel the loss, and even grieve over our brothers and sisters who felt that they needed to leave the family, yet we are thankful that God was faithful to our family during a difficult time.

During the summer months, we saw a great many people "picking up the slack" around the church to help with a variety of tasks. Flowers were planted, trees removed, buildings insulated, roofs were being prepared for replacement, and even landscaping done. None of these things went unnoticed, and they all contributed to something amazing: a renewed sense of pride. That pride led to a boost in morale in a time in which it was very much needed. By the way, just a little side note: let's keep up that sense of pride, and the upkeep of our building. It helps us out with morale, makes the grounds attractive, and displays to the world that we care.

Yet another accomplishment was the letter sent to our brothers and sisters in Christ who felt the need to leave our family this summer. You might ask, "Why is this an accomplishment?" The sending of the letter shows that we have leaders in place that understand God's value on unity, forgiveness, and doing what is right before the Lord. I give high praise to the leaders for their work, and their focus on doing the right thing before God. Incidentally, we have had nothing but positive feedback regarding the letter. Yet another confirmation that the letter was the right thing to do before the Lord.

Of course, our most obvious accomplishment this year was the finding, and hiring of a new Sr. Pastor. Pastor Mark Melillo will begin his ministry with us 49 weeks after Pastor Larry left his duties. Considering the average search time for a Sr. Pastor is usually 18 months, God accomplished much in bringing us not only a Sr. Pastor, but someone who we firmly believe is God's man for this Body of Christ in Almont.

If you were looking for the Youth Update in this article, maybe next month. Considering all that God has done in our family this year, and how it affects all of us from the adults to the teens, I felt it was paramount to review God's goodness, grace, and blessing this year.

TRUSTEE UPDATE:

Wow! Is it 2007? This just doesn't seem possible. As most of you know, the Board of Trustees has been functioning with one less Trustee than called for by our Constitution. Despite this, all the current Trustees have risen to the challenge by putting in extra time, energy and effort.

We recently completed job reviews of our staff members. The reviews went well and we have had positive and constructive feedback from our hard working staff members. We are also gathering information in order to prepare the proposed budget for 2007. We can already tell that each of our boards is trying hard to

provide us with budget requests that are equal to or less than their budget requests from last year. There will obviously be changes to our budget in the area of staff compensation due to the addition of Pastor Mark, as well as cost of living adjustments and other similar adjustments for our other staff members.

It is great to see our new fire alarm system up and running and all the Trustees can now breathe a sigh of relief. We are currently working on an assortment of building and grounds issues, including snow removal, wetness on the south sanctuary wall, windows in the office building and installing

programmable thermostats in the fellowship hall. We have all been surprised by the number of issues that we are dealing with that were previously handled by Larry. It has been quite an adjustment and eye-opening experience.

As a final note, we would like to again thank Keith Langley, Audrey Minter and all those who have had to really step-up during this last year. We are excited about the arrival of Pastor Mark and his family and look forward to working with him. Have prosperous and blessed new year.

The Board of Trustees

Children's Ministries!

Our Christmas Party went great. Almost everyone was able to attend. Sadly, God did not bless us with snow, so that we could go sledding, but there is time in the future for that. We had plenty of snacks. We sang Happy Birthday to Jesus. Each child received an AWANA bag so that his/her belongings can be transported to and from AWANA each Wednesday night.

AWANA T-shirts came in. Some of the kids were so excited to get them that they put them on as soon as they were handed out. If you missed ordering a T-Shirt and would like one. Please contact Melody and she will try to help you out.

We will not be meeting over Christmas Vacation. However, we will have our first meeting of the new year on January 3rd at 6:30 p.m.

JUST FOR OUR AWANA CLUBBERS...

AWANA Challenge



1. Name the Reference, "In the beginning, God created heaven and earth"
2. According to Genesis 1:26-27, God made man in whose image?
3. The Lord formed man from what?

Answers:

1. Genesis 1:1
2. His Own
3. dust of the ground



www.almontfcc.org

Have you checked out our website yet? Our site is intended to be a place where people can get to know us before they enter our doors, as well as a communication tool for everyone in the church. Here are some of the features that you may find useful:

- **Calendar** of all church events and activities
- **News** featuring items that you may want to know
- **Site Member Directory** - get connected with others in the church
- **Member Businesses** - add your business listing here or check out what others can offer you
- **Member Classifieds** - have something you want to sell (or buy)? Add your listing here.
- **Courier Newsletter** - view the Courier several days before you receive it in the mail; misplaced your Courier? Look it up on our website.
- **Email lists** - want to be notified when the Courier is online? Sign up under Email Lists.
- **Small Groups** - find the latest information regarding small groups, including topics, meeting times and locations (including a map)
- **Ministries** - find out the latest information on Children's, Men's, Women's, and Youth Ministries, as well as Christian Education and the Missionaries that we support
- **Prayer Requests** - enter your prayer request and choose whether it is to go to staff or the Prayer Chain
- **What's New?** - our website is kept up-to-date; see the latest changes here

Now that you know, check it out!

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

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

CALENDAR OF EVENTS:

January 2 First Tuesday Ladies Prayer at 11:00 a.m. in the library

January 9 Tuesday Bible Study Begins: *A Beautiful Offering* by Angela Thomas 9:00 - 11:00 a.m. in Taylor Chapel

January 9 A new First Place session begins: *Making Wise Choices* 6:30 p.m.

January 14 Sunday Bible Study Begins: *A Beautiful Offering* by Angela Thomas 7:00 - 8:30 p.m. in Taylor Chapel

PRAYING BEYOND OURSELVES

It's hard to believe that it was just about a year ago that I was overwhelmed by the need to pray for our church. This need was the beginning of a new emphasis on prayer for Women's Ministries and was brought to fruition through First Tuesday Ladies Prayer, which met monthly all year long for the specific purpose of praying for the needs of our church.

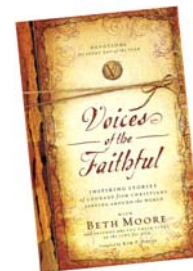
Little could I have imagined at the time, how great the needs were soon to become. I could never have envisioned the turmoil that was about to overtake our church. But God knew what lay ahead and I believe He impressed the need for prayer on my heart so that we could partner with Him as He was about to display His glory through the way He would carry us through a heart-wrenching period of our church life.

To the few, but faithful participants in First Tuesday Prayer, I thank you for your faithfulness to the Lord through prayer. I expect that you, like me, are taking stock of the past year and are exclaiming "Wow!", as you see in hindsight all that God has accomplished. While God has no need of our prayers to accomplish His work, He has chosen to

use them; so, amazingly, our prayers mattered! I believe they made a difference in the working of God's plan. What joy that brings!

Now, as we are embarking on a new year, the need for prayer has only grown in my heart. As I expected would happen a year ago, my personal prayer life has grown richer as I have come to know the Lord even more. Corporately, there are still many church needs that require prayer. However, I think we are at a point that we can shift our focus from praying for ourselves (our church here in Almont) to praying beyond ourselves (for the Lord's church all over the globe). We will accomplish this by continuing First Tuesday Prayer, and by adding a personal element, as well as a small group element. Let me explain: beginning with our first meeting on January 2nd, I invite you to participate in **Lift Up Your Voice**, a year-long commitment to

prayer for God's work in the nations around the world. Key to this prayer commitment is a devotional



book entitled ***Voices of the Faithful*** (participants will receive a free copy). Each day contains a story from a missionary and

a prayer to pray. The daily time commitment is no more than five to ten minutes per day. Then monthly (First Tuesday Prayer) we will meet for discussion and prayer.

I anticipate that while we may not see how God is using our prayers as we did this past year, we will grow personally in ways we cannot imagine as we join with others who are praying for world, and develop a heart for the nations. And we can pray by faith alone

for the work that God intends to accomplish in hundreds of missionaries who we will never meet in this life, but will rejoice with in the life to come. Our prayers do matter, and I encourage you to join in this new prayer focus.

Lift UP Your VOICE

A Churchwide Call to Prayer

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.

Women's Ministries Continued

FIRST PLACE - A TESTIMONY BY BETH HANEY-HECKART

God tapped me on the shoulder! I heard His voice. It was not a voice like you and I hear coming from lips of ordinary humans here on earth, but a very soft whisper saying, "Beth, You can do the First Place Bible Study here in Almont."

I had been feeling guilty that I was not currently on any committees or donating my time to our church. In years past, I had sung in the choir, taught Sunday school, and had been on various committees. I secretly had been praying that God would lead me to use my talents to glorify Him.

I also had been feeling very depressed about my weight. I was so out of control with my eating habits and many other "out of control" issues in my life. I had remembered my mom, Ruth Haney, being a part of a Christian weight loss group. She passed away March 3, 2003. Mom had battled weight issues all her life. I felt I was heading down the same path and did NOT want to die related to weight issues. I felt a whisper and a tap on the shoulder from what I believe to have been from God. I went on line on my computer to see if I could find just such a weight loss group that was meeting here in the area. To my delight, a group called First Place was meeting in Imlay City at the West Goodland Baptist Church. I went to their meeting and immediately felt welcomed into this

Bible study group. This was exactly what I was missing in my life.

The First Place program consists of nine categories, which make up the "commitments" that each member is asked to prayerfully consider and follow when joining a class:

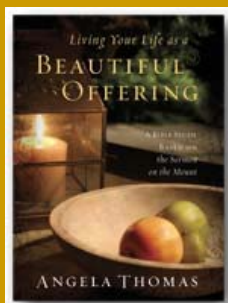
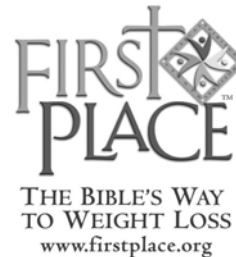
Attendance • Encouragement • Prayer • Bible Reading • Scripture Memory • Bible Study • "Live-It" Plan • Commitment Record • Exercise

The tremendous success of First Place is due to its biblical approach to weight management, which puts Christ first and improves every area of a person's life: spiritual, physical, mental and emotional. This Christ-centered, balanced weight-loss program has guided hundreds of thousands of people to a healthy lifestyle and a closer walk with the Lord. The program includes Bible study, group support and accountability; a proven, common sense nutrition plan; regular exercise; daily prayer; and Scripture memorization.

I faithfully attended these meetings for almost a year and learned so much about myself and how to deal with my "out of control" issues of my life. Just when I was feeling better about myself and starting to fit into smaller size clothing, the leader announced that she would no longer be able to lead the group and possibly the members

would have to go elsewhere to attend the First Place meeting in another city. This was when God tapped me on the shoulder and whispered, "Remember how you were secretly praying? Remember how you wanted to use your talents to glorify Me? Lead this First Bible Study here in Almont!" I was so excited to begin a First Place Bible Study. I began the First Place Bible Study session on April 4, 2006. This had particular meaning for me because April 4th was my mom's birthday. We are averaging about 12 women attending each meeting and have had as many as 18 ladies in our group.

You too can be part of our Bible study. We start our fourth session on Tuesday, January 9th. The workbook we will be using this time is called "Making Wise Choices". After reviewing many of the choices we all make each day, you will come to recognize and discern wise choices from the unwise ones, seek God's will in making the right decisions and learn how to face the consequences of your Choices. I am so glad I listened to God's whisper and followed through with his tapping my shoulder. If God is tapping on your shoulder right now, come join our Bible study group. You will be blessed by it.



Living Your Life as a Beautiful Offering

Drawing on insights from the Sermon on the Mount, Angela Thomas clearly outlines to women how Jesus gives us His compassionate instruction for everyday living and then wraps His teaching with the promise of His blessing. This study seeks to show women how their lives, though imperfect with blemishes and scars, can reflect back to God a true gratefulness for His love through daily surrender.

This 7-week study will be offered:

Tuesday mornings from 9:00 to 11:00 (childcare available) beginning January 9

Sunday evenings from 7:00 to 8:30 beginning January 14

Cost: \$10 for Bible study book

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:

Mark Melillo, Senior Pastor
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.

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www.almontfcc.org

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