

St. Stephen
United Methodist Church

YOUTH NEWS

December 2009

Can I Follow Christ Without Being Weird?

God at the Golden Corral

BRANDON DIRKS, MINISTER WITH YOUTH

Taste and see that the LORD is good.
— Psalm 34:8a

These articles are devoted to answering *practical* questions on how to be a faithful follower of Christ. Now, “*How do I get to know God?*”

I finally went to the new Golden Corral in Matthews. I LOVE buffets — not because I get to eat *a lot*, but I get to eat *whatever* I want!

So on my first pass, I took a plate and started heaping on some things I

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Important Dates

December 4-6

Ron Robinson Christmas Tree Sale

Friday, December 11

High School at Room-in-the-Inn

Sunday, December 13

Christmas Parties

Wednesday, December 16

Youth Choir Christmas Caroling

Friday, December 18

MS & YouthWorks Room-in-the-Inn

Thursday, December 24

Christmas Eve Services

Sunday, January 3

Youth Covered Dish Breakfast
UMYF New Year Kick-off!

Discipleship Groups

Discipleship Groups are short-term intensive small groups that help participants engage the Bible and apply it to their lives. Our first series ends on December 20 and we are looking forward to the new series kicking off on January 10. (Note: there will not be Discipleship Groups on December 27.)

**Take the
Next Step
in Your
Faith!**

Covered Dish Breakfast!

Sunday, January 3 from 9:45am-10:30am

Everyone loves breakfast! All youth, counselors, teachers, and especially former youth are particularly invited to bring a dish to share and celebrate with us a new year together! Drinks will be provided. Everyone is encouraged to bring something homemade, but if you are kitchen-challenged, feel free to bring ‘pre-made’ items. Ideas — egg casserole, sausage biscuits, french toast casserole, cinnamon rolls, bagels and cream cheese, fruit, coffee cake, muffins, biscuits and gravy, or whatever you’d like to share! Please bring your food by 9:45am. If everyone brings something great, it will be a feast to be remembered! Parents, please help your youth!

We need Discipleship Group Facilitators!

We desperately need discipleship group facilitators — adults who can use their gifts to experience God’s grace. We have had traditional discipleship groups that study the Bible, spiritual topics, or life applications. But we have also had non-traditional discipleship groups like YouthArts, book clubs, and Creative Expressions. We have had ideas such as Experiencing the “Foods” of the Bible, a service group, an advanced Bible group, a contemplative prayer group, and others. If you are intrigued by these ideas or have ideas of your own, please let Brandon know as soon as possible.

Garden City Beach Retreat

July 11-16, 2010

**Registration Forms are
included in this newsletter!**

The St. Stephen Garden City Beach Retreat is one of the most significant Youth Ministry events for 6th-12th graders.

Teenagers are a part of a Christ-centered community that strives to discover God in special and amazing ways. The week includes intimate small groups where the older youth reach out to younger youth, amazing daily worship that challenges the heart, and incredible activities which bring laughter and joy to the deepest parts of the soul. This truly is a retreat not to be missed.

To officially register, you must complete and return the appropriate registration form with payment. (Note: if you locked in the “Super Early Bird” rate in July 2009, you need to turn in your form by 1/31/10.) Early-Bird discount deadline is 1/31/10. Deadline to register is 6/13/10. There will be no refunds after this date. Registration forms are included with this newsletter and are available in the church office and on our website at www.ststephenumc.net/youth.html.

For up-to-date Garden City news, join the GC 2010 Facebook group.

Sunday Night UMYF

United Methodist Youth Fellowship in December

Our regular UMYF schedule is:

5:00 Snack Supper (bring \$5) in the Youth Café

5:30 Youth Worship/Large Group in the Youth Ministry Center

6:30 Senior High, Middle School, Confirmation (meeting rooms)

7:30 Closing

December Large Groups

December 6 — “The Second Advent? There’s been one before?”

December 13 — Christmas Parties (No Youth at the church)

December 20 & 27 — No UMYF

January 3 — NEW Year Kick-off with a guest Band!

Missions

YouthWorks

Mark Casper – Coordinator

YouthWorks 2010 is June 27-July 2 to Charleston, WV. Your \$50 commitment payment is due no later than January 8. The \$225 remaining balance is due no later than February 5. The signup pamphlet can be found in the kiosks in front of Brandon’s office, at the Youth Café or at the YouthWorks bulletin boards. Contact Mark Casper at 704-846-6088 for more details or talk to me on Sunday nights. You know where to find me...

ASP Date Set

Clonnie Lambert – Coordinator

ASP has accepted our application for the week of June 20, 2010. We are set to go. Remember, this is our 25th anniversary year with ASP. Don’t miss out.

Golden Corral, from front

liked. A spoonful here, a chicken leg there, a steak here, spaghetti there ... before I knew it, I had filled my plate, and I hadn’t even gotten halfway through the buffet line! So, I just kept piling it on!

I realized that I had a huge mound of food, but I couldn’t be happier! I started to dig in. As I ate, it occurred to me that I had no idea what I was eating. Everything started to get mixed in together, and nothing tasted that distinct. After finishing the plateful, I was full but I was not satisfied. And I barely had room for three desserts!

Unfortunately, many of us approach following Christ in this same way ... we just keep piling on as much ‘stuff’ as we can, but we never really feel satisfied.

Getting to know God isn’t meant to be so overwhelming. Think about it like this: No one has to force you to eat, you eat because you’re hungry. Your stomach growls and you recognize that you need to put some food into it. In a similar way, our spirit hungers for God. That’s what draws us to Him. When you have questions, problems, doubts, triumphs, failures, dreams — those are hunger pains poking you to get nearer to God.

When we eat, we don’t try to eat EVERYTHING in the fridge (or on the buffet). We make a reasonable plateful with different items that we know will make us strong and healthy, and then a reasonable dessert that tops it off nicely. If we filled our plates only with fries or desserts, meal after meal, day after day, we become bored and our bodies soon break down and are good for nothing.

Our spirit is not much different. As our hunger for God grows, why should we try to gulp down all of Christianity at once and never savor the diverse flavors and aromas that faith in God offers? No wonder we become ‘bored’ by our faith when we are unwilling to ‘taste’ something new or different.

If you are just starting out in the faith, begin by reading a few of the Bible’s “best morsels” — stories. I am reading a children’s story Bible with my daughter ... as I read a story that is particularly interesting, I’ll go back to my Bible to read more about the story and the characters.

As you grow in your faith, consider trying out different ‘restaurants.’ In the same way that restaurants have different foods and ways off prepar-

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Youth Ministry Staff

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You can get this newsletter, registration forms, health forms, picture galleries, updated information about our youth and recreation programs by going to the website and clicking either “YOUTH” or “RECREATION.”

If you would like to help us keep this website exciting and current, talk with Brandon Dirks or e-mail Kelly Keesling at kellykeesling@ststephenumc.net.



Golden Corral, from previous page

ing the food, the various events and activities of the church help you 'taste' God in many splendid ways. Try things that interest you ... join a Discipleship Group, experience a mission, help with choir, assist in a children's Sunday school class, attend a different style of worship. There are literally hundreds of different ways that you can get to know God by 'tasting' different activities. And when you try different things, you begin to get a deeper sense of who God really is!

Getting to know God is best done by responding to the hunger of your spirit in the same way you respond to the hunger of your body — one bite at a time.

Wherever you will go. — Brandon



Confirmation

Mark Casper - Coordinator

Fall, football and fried chicken — what could be better? Confirmands enjoyed an outing to Davidson College to tailgate and watch the Wildcats lose a close one to the Marist University 14-6. We had a great spirit of camaraderie and adventure. Thanks to all who joined in the fun!

We now look forward to the wonderful Advent and Christmas seasons. December is always a busy month, so please take note of what is coming up in the weeks ahead.

Sunday, November 29

All Confirmands are encouraged to attend the Advent Festival. We will be celebrating the beginning of Advent with a wonderful tradition that focuses on the true meaning of the season. Bring your favorite "dish" for a potluck supper at 5pm in the Fellowship Hall. Then, join us in the Sanctuary for a Chrismon Service at 6:30pm. We'll learn about the Chrismon decorations, sing Christmas carols, have children's activities and songs, and have the first lighting of the Chrismon Tree. Please bring non-perishable food items wrapped in white tissue paper to place under the Chrismon tree, an offering symbolizing the three kings bringing gifts to Jesus.

Sunday, December 13

Christmas Party at Brandon's! The Dirks have kindly opened their home to us for our Christmas celebration! We will enjoy a Mexican Fiesta of food and great fellowship. In the spirit of the gift-giving season, please bring a wrapped gift to exchange (under \$5 please). Parents should drop-off Confirmands at Brandon's house by 6:30pm and plan to pick up at 8pm. Details will be sent home with directions and requested food contributions.

Time to Think Mission

Mentors and Confirmands should begin thinking about and planning their mission projects! If you need an idea, consider contacting Brian Barger about Room in the Inn needs. Visit the church website at www.ststephenmc.net for detailed information about RITI. Also, consider a mission project that supports St. Stephen UMC — there are many projects and needs within our own church. We can't wait to hear how our Confirmands are in service!

Finally, remember that we will not have class on December 20 or 27. The Confirmation Teachers wish all our families the joy and peace of this Advent season. Merry Christmas!

Middle School

Mary Owen - Coordinator

I cannot believe it is December already! Christmas trees and carols will be seen and heard in a few weeks!

Sunday, December 6

We will be making fleece blankets to give to the guests at Room in the Inn on December 18. We are asking each youth to bring \$7 to offset the cost of the fleece.

Sunday, December 13

Our Christmas party will be at McKenzie Rays' house (4613 Shadycroft Circle) from 5-7pm. We will send directions home with your youth. Each youth should bring an appetizer to share and a nice gift (no more than \$10) for the gift exchange. Remember this will be our last regular UMYF meeting for 2009.

Friday, December 18

On this Friday night we will be hosting Room in the Inn for the evening. There are all sorts of ways for youth to be involved in this service. Sign up on the sheet in the Middle School room and we will be sending information home for parents.

Have yourself a Merry Little Christmas and a wonderful New Year!!

Senior High

Kelly Keesling - Coordinator

Make sure you join the Facebook group for updates and information: **St. Stephen UMC - Senior High UMYF**

Friday, December 11

We'll be hosting all aspects of Room in the Inn (bedding, dinner, breakfast, lunches, overnight host, van driving). Sign up in youth group for one of these areas.

Sunday, December 13

Senior High Christmas Party at Lana Delap's house. More details coming soon!!

Parent Volunteers Needed For UMYF Meals

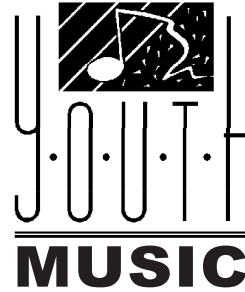
EVERY parent should help with Sunday night meals. You just arrive at 4pm to meet the meal coordinator, help prepare the food, serve it, and clean up. This is a great way to meet other parents and to help support our dedicated Kitchen Coordinators! Contact Nancy (nancybaum@ststephenumc.net or 704-364-1824) NOW to sign up for one of these needed dates: **February 14; April 11; May 2, 16, 23.**

AGAPE BELLS 6-6:45pm, room 6

This beginning bell choir teaches the fundamentals of handbells, note reading skills and techniques. We play in worship many times during the school year.

YOUTH CHOIR 6:45-7:30pm, choir rm

All youth (6-12 grade) are invited to be a part of our growing program, as we lead worship and provide music for special youth events. Bring a friend!



ALLELUIA RINGERS 7:30-8:15pm, room 6

This advanced handbell choir plays often in worship. Music reading skills are required. We also go to the Annual

Youth Handbell Festival in Richmond each November.

If you are interested in playing handbells, or if you have any other questions, please call Julia Hubbard at church (704-364-1824) or at home (704-321-5415.)



Walk with Emily's Entourage!

The JDRF Walk to Cure Diabetes is Saturday, April 17, 2010 at Carowinds Amusement Park. The 4 mile walk begins at 8:30 am (arrive by 7:45 am) and ends by 11:30 am. (Youth can be picked up at the front gate at 6pm if they can stay and ride!)

Collect \$200 (or more!) to help find a cure for Juvenile Diabetes, turn it in at Carowinds before the Walk

on April 17 and receive: 1 free Carowinds pass, 1 free t-shirt, 1 free Charlotte Checkers ticket, 1 free Bobcats ticket, and more!

After the JDRF Walk to Cure Diabetes ends, we'll enjoy a complimentary lunch from JDRF sponsors underneath the Emily's Entourage Tent, and then we'll use the tickets you've earned or purchased and spend the day at Carowinds! If you already have a 2010 season pass, save your ticket for a friend on another day and still join us for the afternoon to ride everything we can!

Watch 2009's highlights: www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8vLaA6imTg

More information about registering and team t-shirts will be sent later. If you have questions, call Elizabeth Barger at 704-841-8936 or email bbarger@carolina.rr.com.

An Invitation from the Dennis Family

Come see us perform in The Nutcracker in December. We are in the Performing Company at the Harris YMCA School of Dance. This is our 7th year putting on this show. It is narrated and includes girls and boys ages 6 and up.

Kathleen Dennis is cast as Clara Stahlbaum, with Caroline Lubinsky and Kelsie Greene in Party Scene, Angels, & Reed Flute. Kathleen's little sister, Halle, will be in the dance of the presents. Also catch Kathleen's parents, Art & Erin Dennis, as Mr. & Mrs. Stahlbaum at the Saturday 7pm and Sunday 3:30pm shows only.

Show Dates and Times are:

Saturday, Dec. 19 at 1pm and 7pm
Sunday, Dec. 20 at 3:30pm

The show is at Theater Charlotte on Queens Road. Tickets are \$12 and can be purchased at the Harris YMCA main desk OR place your order with Erin Dennis at ekdennis@carolina.rr.com or 704-351-4852. Checks should be made out to Harris YMCA. We hope you can make it!

Kathleen, Caroline & Kelsie



Joey Blackwell	Dec. 2
Kate Conti	Dec. 3
Brittany Bevis	Dec. 7
Alex Blackwell	Dec. 13
Kelly McWeeney	Dec. 14
Emily Usher	Dec. 21
Sarah Gledhill	Dec. 22
Katherine Tavener	Dec. 30