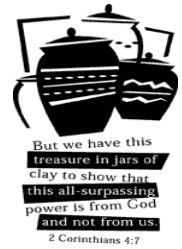


# Aldersgate Advocate

Beside the Alabaster Jar



January 12, 2007

Dear friends,

Following the seasons of Advent preparation and Christmas celebration, we enter this season of Epiphany. Our celebration of the incarnation of God in human life (Christmas) and the showing forth of God to the world (Epiphany) raises theological questions that help us to clarify and explore our faith. Brought on by my comments about the baby that we were baptizing at the 10:45 service, a recent email from one of our parishioners asked if I believed in original sin. I had indicated that the baby did not have anything to repent from "...unless we count keeping his parents up at night or worrying his family about the surgery he had to have when he was a few months old." Responding to these questions through this newsletter will help all of us to think about what we believe.

What is this concept of original sin? If it is the idea that sin is somehow passed from one generation to the next through the sexual activity of creating a baby, then no I do not believe in this. If on the other hand, original sin is something that is innate in the human condition that creates jealousy, greed, lust, and pride then yes I believe in it.

My experience of babies is that they are the most innocent people I know. John Wesley taught that babies who have not had the opportunity to be baptized before they die are welcomed into heaven and not sent to purgatory, as was commonly taught by other theologians of the eighteenth century. This suggests to me that Wesley did not see babies as inherently sinful. Our baptism of infants in part symbolizes what Wesley calls "prevenient grace," a kind of preventing grace that comes before salvation. "In some mysterious way [humanity], though bound in sin, still possesses an ineradicable measure of freedom – at least enough to respond to the proffered grace of God. Conversion as a meaningful response of [humanity] thus becomes possible."<sup>1</sup>

Wesley teachings are more in line with my understanding of human development. My readings as a young mother taught me that infants are not aware of the boundaries of their human self until they in a sense experience a second birth somewhere around their second birthday. That is why toddlers enjoy playing in small spaces, and are comfortable walking away from their mothers, but do not want her leaving the room on them. They are gaining a sense of themselves as individuals. As we become more aware of our human boundaries, the boundaries of our bodies and the pleasures of the world, then we grow in our experience of sin.

The pleasures of the world are not inherently sinful, it is when they take precedence over God's ways that they get in the way of our living the lives that God intends. When my desires become more important than the needs of others, then my life becomes totally focused on me. The sadness or beauty in all of this is that a quality life does not come through satisfying my own desires, but rather through my relationships with the others I sojourn with in this life. "Wesley believed that the very roots of sinful disposition can be destroyed and replaced by 'perfect love.'"<sup>2</sup> He called this "going on to perfection."

Perhaps underlying the question of original sin is the question of what is sin? Sin is whatever separates us from God. For some it is pride in their own knowledge; for others it is believing that they are not good enough. Sin can be greed or making decisions based on worship of money rather than worship of God. Through the incarnation of God in human life, we come to understand that God is present in other human beings. Thus when our actions deny the rights of other human beings, we set up walls that separate us from others and ultimately separate us from God.

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick A. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism*, Abingdon Press, 1983, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 49.

Fortunately, given these many opportunities for sin, we worship a God of forgiveness who only asks that we recognize our sin and turn back to him. The gift of Jesus Christ makes manifest the love of God in our world. This gift is the assurance of our forgiveness. Wesley identified assurance as one of our distinctly Methodist doctrines. His brother expresses this belief in one of his hymns. In response to the question "How Can We Sinners Know?" Charles wrote

His Spirit to us he gave,  
And dwells in us we know;  
The witness in ourselves we have,  
And all its fruit we show.<sup>3</sup>

We live in a hurting world that is in need of God's love. Let us focus on that love and forgiveness during this season of Epiphany as we do our part to show forth Jesus Christ to the world.

Pastor Sharon

## Worship News

On Sunday, January 14<sup>th</sup>, we will celebrate Human Relations Sunday and welcome Rev. Larry Peacock, Executive Director of the Rolling Ridge Retreat Center in North Andover. Larry will be sharing with us about the sources of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s strength and courage. Pastor Sharon is part of the Bishop's delegation in Nicaragua and is happy to be traveling with Rev. Gary Shaw and his daughter Leslyn on this trip.

The apostle Paul lifts up for us an image of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a. This lesson will be the focus of our worship on Sunday, January 21<sup>st</sup>. We hope that our Drama Club will be able to present a mystery play from the Book of Nehemiah on this day as well. Please join with Dan Carey in rehearsals on Sunday morning (1/14 and 1/21) at 9:35, or Tuesday evening from 7:00 to 7:30 if you would like to participate. We have several parts.

On Sunday, Jan. 28<sup>th</sup> the Epistle lesson is the often read 13<sup>th</sup> chapter on 1 Corinthians, the "love" chapter. These words were first written to a group of early Christians living in Corinth. Are you aware that on the acropolis at Corinth, the highest point in the ancient city, was a temple devoted to the worship of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love? Consider how these words might have sounded to those early Christians.

On the first Sunday of the month, we will serve communion at the railing for both services, 8:30 and 10:45. Lessons for this day include Isaiah 6:1-8 and Luke 5:1-11. In the first Isaiah experiences a cleansing of his lips and a calling to his role as prophet; in the latter, Jesus fishing with the disciples and his encouragement that they become fishers of men. In what ways can we respond to God's call to be fishers of men and women?

The gospel lesson on February 11<sup>th</sup> is Luke's version of Jesus' Beatitudes. Although the Matthew version is more familiar, Luke's version may be the earlier. Reading both in preparation for worship would help one to consider the differences and what the two authors were trying to tell us about Jesus. When we read this passage in juxtaposition with the Hebrew Scripture reading for this Sunday, Jeremiah 17:5-10, we are reminded of the blessings of trusting in God.

On Sunday, February 18<sup>th</sup>, we will kick off our Lenten Study, *Chocolate for Lent*. Lessons for the day are the traditional readings for Transfiguration Sunday. The assigned reading from Luke, 9:28-43a, however, includes a healing by Jesus that his disciples were unable to accomplish. The story reminds us of the possibilities of faith as we make the transition with Jesus to face Jerusalem and the crucifixion to come.

Please join us for worship at 8:30 and 10:45, each Sunday during this season. Adult studies and Children's Education take place between services. A coffee hour is also available in the Fellowship Hall. All are welcome!

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 49.



## Scripture Readings - February and March, 2007

### February 4

Psalm 138  
Isaiah 6:1-8  
1 Corinthians 15:1-11  
Luke 5:1-11

### February 11

Psalm 1  
Jeremiah 17:5-10  
1 Corinthians 15:12-20  
Luke 6:17-26

### March 4

Psalm 27  
Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18  
Philippians 3:17 - 4:1  
Luke 13:31-35

### March 11

Psalm 63:1-8  
Isaiah 55:1-9  
1 Corinthians 10:1-13  
Luke 13:1-9

### February 18

Psalm 99  
Exodus 34:29-35  
2 Corinthians 3:12 - 4:2  
Luke 9:28-36 (37-43)

### February 25

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16  
Deuteronomy 26:1-11  
Romans 10:8b-13  
Luke 4:1-13

### March 18

Psalm 32  
Joshua 5:9-12  
2 Corinthians 5:16-21  
Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

### March 25

Psalm 126  
Isaiah 43:16-21  
Philippians 3:4b-14  
John 12:1-8



## Aldersgate is a family of faith ...

As a community of faith, Aldersgate Church believes strongly in the power of prayer. There are many opportunities for you to participate in a group prayer ministry such as the Early Bird Bible Study at 6 a.m. and Prayer Gathering on Tuesday evenings at 6:30 p.m. at Aldersgate and, of course, at home whenever and wherever you are! In particular, please pray for: Pat, Nancy, Dave, Judy, Ginny, Maureen, Rick, Sarah, the Driscoll and Shetler families, and the Berard family.

If you have a prayer request, please notify Debbie or the Church Office. Debbie will alert AUMC's faithful prayer partners! We continue to hold all the people you have requested in prayer in the Sunday morning bulletin for a four week period of time. If you would like someone lifted in prayer for another four weeks, all you need to do is contact the Church Office or Pastor Sharon, and we are pleased to continue your request.

### Congratulations

Warm congratulations to Vern and Betty who recently celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary! Congratulations also to John and Kathy who are celebrating their 44<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary in January. God bless you all!





## **Thank You Notes**

### **Thank You – from Dirk**

Recently I experienced some severe medical problems; the cause was not immediately known, but the prognosis was not favorable. Through a process of elimination which included a number of exams, tests and procedures, the final results showed that my problems were benign! During that period of uncertainty, the support of our Aldersgate family was overwhelming. I am very grateful for the personal attention, offers of help, and above all for the prayers on my behalf. I feel that miracles still happen. Thank you all very much!

### **Thank you – from Ruby and Dave**

Thank you for all the spiritual help you have provided for us during the past months. Knowing that we are in your prayers has been a great source of comfort through the rough times. We have very much appreciated the transportation assistance that has helped us so much. We are so proud of our church. Friends, neighbors, and family are surprised when I say "our" church helped today. How wonderful to belong to "Aldersgate" – a caring Christian family that believes in prayer.

Thank you!

### **Thank You – from Pat**

Thank you all for your prayers, calls and cards during my recovery from surgery last Fall. I've been uplifted by your thoughtfulness. I'm truly blessed to have each one of you in my life.

Blessings, Pat

### **Thank You – Cub Scouts**

Thank you to the Cub Scouts who meet here at Aldersgate for cleaning up the debris at the end of the driveway. They did a wonderful job; the area looks better than before.

Jack, Trustees

### **The Outreach Committee**

The Outreach Committee thanks everyone who responded to the Prison Family Ministry Angel Tree gifting program. Your generosity provided gifts of clothing and toys to 18 children this year.

### **From Cheryl**

Thank you so much for the generous Christmas gift I received from my Aldersgate family! I praise God each day that I may serve you. You have given me so much over these past years and the love, joy, smiles and enthusiasm the children and youth share with me help keep me going!

### **From Joanne**

Thank you to my wonderful Aldersgate Family for your generous Christmas gift! Also, thank you for all the gifts that would just "appear" on my desk - I am truly blessed to be a part of the staff here and so proud to be a member! Thank you! Joanne

### **From Pastor Sharon**

Each year at Christmas time, I have been very appreciative of the congregation's generosity offered to me though the annual Christmas gift. This year, I am especially grateful as I plan with my husband for a summer trip to Croatia (to visit my nephew and his family) and Rome. Your gift will almost cover the cost of my airfare to Italy. Thank you very much! I also thank you for the many other ways in which you are a blessing to me.

Pastor Sharon

**Special Thanks to all those who made our church shine with Christ's love throughout Advent and Christmas through the gift of music: Jane, Carol, Becky, Debbie, our choirs – voice and bells; the beauty of our church through the skills of Victor, Janice, the Mighty Men of Aldersgate – the Christmas Story as told and sung by our children, Cheryl, and Pastor Sharon.**



We wish you all God's blessing as you celebrate these special times in your lives!

**Called out by Jesus Christ to serve our congregation,  
community...**

### **CAPITAL PROJECTS UPDATE**

The Board of Trustees is continuing the planning phase for the renovation projects that will be accomplished with the Capital Campaign Funds. These include an enclosed stairwell and elevator at the back entry, repair of the floors in fellowship hall and the front entry, adding a classroom in fellowship hall, and some kitchen renovations including a new stove. We started planning actions for these projects as follows:

**Floor:** The Trustees contacted two different General Contractors to get estimates for repair of the floor and replacement of the tiles in both the hallway and fellowship hall. Both contractors inspected the floor and underlying structure, and during this process some questions were raised regarding the structure of the floor. It appears to have too much flex and that is one reason the tiles are cracking. A structural engineer has since inspected the flooring and substructure. We have decided that a full structural analysis is necessary to ensure that any repairs to the floors fix the flex so new tiles do not crack like the old ones. Because we cannot make this repair while school is in session downstairs, we are working to schedule the completion of the analysis and have a contractor's proposal to fix the floor by spring break in 2007. If repairs take longer than a week it may have to wait until the summer.

**Enclosed back entry stairwell and lift:** One architect that surveyed the church in November 2005 proposed to provide three design alternatives of a new "Daily Entrance with Elevator" and then provide detailed schematics and specifications of a chosen design for \$12,000. The Trustees felt that this proposal was more ambitious, and hence more expensive, than required. Consequently we have had another architect look at this and are evaluating his proposal, which has a lower cost. We are also contacting other local churches with elevators to find out who their architects and contractors were, and what their costs were. In the meantime the back stairs were painted with a non-skid paint to help get us through the winter. **(However to be safe, please use the bottom entrance and the inside stairs during bad weather.)**

**Kitchen:** The Trustees are forming a "Kitchen subcommittee" of interested members who are experienced users of the kitchen to develop requirements for the kitchen renovation and to review the design prior to finalization. If you are interested in participating, please contact Dan Vooy.

**Classroom in Fellowship Hall:** During the visit by the architects in 2005, it was suggested that another classroom could be created by taking the current storage room adjacent to the Concord Room and extending it out into fellowship hall for a distance. A smaller closet just for the table and chair racks would be created at the opposite end of the hall. The analysis of the architects was that partitioning the hall would be prohibitively expensive because of the irregular shape of the ceiling. Hence we will probably proceed with the expansion of the storage room but this project needs to wait until the floor is repaired.

Currently we have over \$12,000 in the Capital Campaign account including \$8,363 that has come back from the Conference. We will receive another distribution in the spring. We may have to take out a short term loan to do both the floor and elevator projects this year. However, the Trustees are committed to getting the maximum improvement to Aldersgate for every dollar of your generous contributions to the Capital Campaign.

Dan, Chairperson, Board of Trustees

**and the world through loving, witnessing...**

#### **News from the Outreach Committee**

The committee would like to share with the church that all change collected in Sunday offerings will be going to the Outreach budget to help with our Missions. We would like to thank all of you. If you have any ideas for worthy missions, please share them with us. **Also**, we have put up a new sign-up sheet on the wall by the back door for all of our groups and committees to sign-up for St. Paul's. We really need your help and we can

certainly help all of you on your day. Just call Mike Kane or Deb Benson. Thanks loads – we couldn't do all of our tasks without you! Your Outreach Committee; Deb, Chairperson

## **CHURCH SCHOOL NEWS**

### **CHRISTMAS PAGEANT, POTLUCK AND CAROLING**

***We should never be hesitant to try new things!***

In December we decided to offer the Christmas Pageant at a new time. We met Sunday afternoon, and combined it with a potluck dinner and Caroling party. Over 150 people gathered on Sunday, December 17<sup>th</sup> for our Christmas Pageant, "Bethlehem's Best". The Junior Choir, Worship Art's children and church school children shone as stars as they shared the story of the birth of our Savior. They devoted many hours to practice, created the beautiful set design, and filled the sanctuary with their angelic voices.

Thank you to the following children, youth and adults for sharing their talents:

Rebecca, Stephen, Peter, Laurie, Paul, Billy, Sergei, Hannah, Courtney, Nadine, Jack, Lindsey, Alexa, Taylor, Kaylie, Annalise, Andrew, Amy, Ashley, Jim, Tyler, Jeff, Brendan, Isabelle, Jillian, Ben, Joshua, Sarah, Brad, Jared, Kate, Nicole, and Gabe.

Everyone was overwhelmed by the amount and variety of food during the potluck dinner. Someone commented that this was the best potluck they had ever been too! After dinner, our very own Aldersgate Band played a variety of Christmas music as we joined them in singing some of our favorite Christmas Carols. Even some of the children tried different instruments as they accompanied the band at times. What a wonderful experience for all to celebrate the birth of our Lord!

### **EPIPHANY SUNDAY**

**On Sunday, January 7<sup>th</sup> the church school celebrated the Epiphany. Our traveling kings; Dan, Tom, and Tyler visited each class and told of their adventures. The following children picked the cupcake that contained the coin which entitled them to be honorary king for the day; Amy, Jared, Micaela and Ezekiel.**

### **OFFERING ENVELOPES**

**The church school offering envelopes are now available. If your child did not receive a box, please see Cheryl.**

### **VALENTINE'S DAY**

**Each of our church school classes will be making valentines on Sundays, January 28<sup>th</sup> and February 4<sup>th</sup> for home bound members and friends, college students and servicemen. If you would like us to send a Valentine to someone special, please tell your child's teacher.**

### **SUPER BOWL SUB SALE**

**Our senior youth group will be taking orders for subs on Sundays, January 21<sup>st</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> after both services and downstairs during church school time. You can also write your order down on the sign up sheet in the Fellowship Hall or downstairs in the hall. You can pick them up after each service on Sunday, February 4<sup>th</sup>. This is our first fundraiser for our Youth 2007 trip this summer.**

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 4<sup>th</sup>**

**ITALIAN SUBS**

**TURKEY SUBS**

**VEGETARIAN SUBS**

**\$5.00 A PIECE WITH CHIPS**



### **CONFIRMATION CLASS IS BEGINNING**

Our first confirmation class will be on Sunday, January 21<sup>st</sup>, from 5:00 – 7:00 p.m. We will be offering a pizza dinner for the youth and their mentors for this first meeting. We are very excited to be using a new curriculum this year. Parents should plan on arriving at 7:00 p.m. and stay for a short time to help select dates for upcoming classes and receive special material concerning class.

### **WORSHIP ARTS**

Children, ages 4 through 5<sup>th</sup> grade are invited to join our worship arts team for crafts, stories and songs! We meet on Tuesdays, from 4 – 5:30 p.m. Cheryl Ortolf will also pick your child up after school at the South Row School. Please talk to her ahead of time so you can make the proper arrangements with the school. We will have a snack time from 4:00 – 4:15 p.m., craft time from 4:15 – 5:00 p.m. and music time from 5:00 – 5:30 p.m. We will begin a cooking unit called, "Milk and Honey Cooking School".

### **JUNIOR CHOIR:**

Tuesdays: from 5:30 – 6:30 p.m.

All youth in grades 4 – 8 are welcome to join us in this exciting choir. Becky will be beginning a new program in January.

### **JUNIOR BELLS:**

Thursdays: from 6:30 – 7:15 p.m.

All children (in grade 3 or higher), youth and adults are welcome to join us as we have fun learning how to play bells. You do not have to have any experience to join us. If you have any questions, please see Becky.

## **JUNIOR YOUTH FELLOWSHIP**

*This new fellowship group is for young youth in grades 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Our mission is to provide your children with a safe, healthy and loving environment to help them grow and experience Christianity. Please see Cheryl, David or Maria if you have any questions or would like to help.*

### **BANANA NIGHT**

Friday, January 26<sup>th</sup> from 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

**Let's go bananas at Banana Night! Please wear banana colors – yellow, green or brown (overripe). Your admission cost for this evening of fun is a bunch of bananas! Friends are always welcome.**

### **BEING UP, BEING DOWN**

Friday, February 9<sup>th</sup> from 7 – 9 p.m.

**Self-confidence! Even the word makes you stand up a little prouder. Self-confidence is something everyone wants. Our goal this evening is to help you replace uncertainty, fear, criticism and worry with enthusiasm, motivation, joy and self-confidence. Bring your favorite snack to share that makes you happy to eat. Friends are always welcome.**

## **SENIOR YOUTH FELLOWSHIP**

*We are a fun group of spiritually focused youth who celebrate Christ's presence among us by engaging in community and group activities, church participation and mission projects.*

**All youth in grades 7 – 12 are welcome to join us at any time; you do not have to be a member of the SENIOR youth group. There is no special sign-up sheet; you just come when you can. We ALWAYS welcome friends, or anyone else that happens to be with you. You are an important part of this group!**

### **SNOW TUBING**

**Saturday, January 20<sup>th</sup> 2:00 p.m.**

Come join us for an afternoon of snow tubing at Nashoba ski valley in Westford. The fee is \$20.00. We will meet at church, please have parent/guardian fill out permission slip. Friends are always welcome.

### **YOUTH GROUP FUN AND PLANNING**

**Sunday, January 28<sup>th</sup> noon – 2:00 p.m.**

We will discuss the sub sale, mission project and have fun and enjoy our pizza! Please bring \$3.00 for pizza and drink.

### **SUB PREPARATIONS**

Saturday, February 3<sup>rd</sup> 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.

**We will prepare ingredients to make our subs on Sunday. If you are interested in helping to shop for the food, please talk to Cheryl. You will receive a point for every hour you help towards Youth 2007 or our white water rafting trip this summer.**

### **SUB PREPARATIONS**

Sunday, February 4<sup>th</sup> 8:30 – 9:30 a.m. or 10:30 – 11:45 p.m.

**The first work time is for preparing the subs for people to pick up after the 1<sup>st</sup> service. The second work time is for preparing the subs for people to pick up after the 2<sup>nd</sup> service. Please see Cheryl to sign up for a time slot to work. Each hour of work is worth a point.**

### **CHOCOLATE CANDY MAKING**

**Saturday, February 10<sup>th</sup> 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.**

**Come find out the fine art of chocolate making. All are welcome to join us make chocolate candy to sell on Sunday.**

### **CHOCOLATE CANDY SALE**

Sunday, February 11<sup>th</sup> 9:00 – 9:45 a.m. and 11:30 – noon

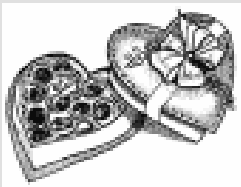
Sign up for a time slot to sell our chocolate after each of the services. You will receive a point for each hour you help out.

# YOUTH 2007

JULY 10 – 15, 2007 IN GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

United Methodist Youth and Youth Workers from across the globe will be traveling to Greensboro, North Carolina in July to form a spiritual community unlike anything you've experienced before. Several of our youth and adults participated in Youth 2003 and had a fantastic experience. We will once again participate in Youth 2007. So far 13 youth and adults have signed up to go. There is still time to sign up if you are interested. We will be traveling by train, staying in a hotel, and will be working hard at fundraising. If you have any questions, please see Cheryl.

## CHOCOLATE FOR YOUR SWEETHEART



*SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 11<sup>TH</sup>*

*AFTER EACH WORSHIP SERVICE*

*Are you looking for that special gift to give someone special for Valentine's Day? Our Senior Youth group will be selling homemade chocolates to help fund their trip to Youth 2007. They will have a variety of chocolates available and will be selling it after each of the worship services.*

**... AND TEACHING GOD'S WORD.**

## SPIRITUAL GROWTH CLASSES AND SMALL GROUPS

*Jesus tells us in Matthew 18:20: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."*

*We are encouraging you to join one small group this year to help connect with our church family and also help you in your faith journey. Please take some time in prayer, and listen to where God may be leading you in your faith journey!*

### **Early Bird Class**

**Tuesdays: 6 – 6:45 a.m. Concord Room**

**Leader: Charles**

The theme for the coming year is "Being a Faith Community". Plan to rise early and participate in this Bible study as together we explore and gain understanding of what it is to be a community of faith.

### **Thursday Morning**

**Thursdays: 10:00 a.m. Concord Room**

**Leader: Pastor Sharon G.W. Jones**

This class is a low key community study that acts as much as a support group as it does a Bible study. We are studying the gospel of Luke using the Interpretations study guide book.

### **Prayer Gathering**

**Tuesdays: 6:30 – 7:15 p.m. Concord Room**

**Leaders: Debbie, Carol**

*My House Will Be A House of Prayer*

Is Aldersgate a house of prayer? We sure hope so, and we also hope that you'll consider on Tuesday evenings at 6:30 for our weekly prayer gathering. There's no pressure to pray out loud; some weeks we've spent the better part of 45 minutes in silent prayer and it has been a powerful experience. There are other weeks when the 45 minutes seems barely long enough to speak all the requests that are on our hearts. This is a really rewarding time spent in the presence of God Who Hears what is on our lips and in our hearts. Please join us! For more information, call the church office.

### **Prayer Shawl Ministry**

**Thursdays: 7:00 – 8:30 p.m. Concord Room**

**Leader: Chery**

If you like to knit, or would like to learn how to knit, please join us on Thursday evening in the Concord Room to knit Prayer Shawls. If you have someone in mind who would love a Prayer Shawl as a reminder of God's love that surrounds and gives comfort, please let us know.

### **ADULT VOICE CHOIR**

**CHANCEL CHOIR – Rehearsal, Tuesday 7:30 p.m.**

**Director: Carol**

This choir provides musical leadership for our 10:45 a.m. service. As always, new members are sought and welcome. Youth are also welcome to join us. The only requirements are a tuneful voice and a joyful spirit! There are plenty of strong voices and music readers to support those who would like to develop music skills and have a chance to sing the praises of God.

### **HANDBELL CHOIR**

**SHEPHERD BELLS – Rehearsal, Thursday 7:15 p.m.**

**Director: Carol**

This is a performing choir for people wanting to have fun playing bells. You may have the opportunity to play at weddings, handbell festivals, Christmas performances and community events in addition to monthly participation in worship.

### **Begin at the Beginning – A New Study in Genesis**

**Sunday afternoons: 4:00 – 5:30 p.m.**

**Leaders: Debbie & others**

Would you like to really dig in to Scripture? To linger on difficult passages and ask the hard questions? This is your chance. We'll start at "In the beginning..." and journey through Genesis, encountering huge lives lived in faith for a great and glorious God. This study will be structured to fit the needs and desires of the class. We'll spend as much time as we need to mine the riches of God's Word. Will everyone make every class? Of course not, but that's okay. We'll take notes and provide extra materials for all who want them. And who knows... when we've made it to Genesis 50:26, we may keep right on going through Exodus!

## **Christianity and World Religions, Wrestling With Questions People Ask**

**Beginning on Sunday, January 14<sup>th</sup> for 6 weeks**

**Leader: Walt**

**Concord Room**

**9:35 – 10:35 a.m.**

"Christianity and World Religions" is a video-based small group study and outreach program that examines Christianity and four other major world religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism. The study is designed to help participants wrestle with some of the tough questions people ask, such as: Why are there so many different religions? How should Christians view other religions? How is God at work in other religions? And what is the fate of those who earnestly pursue God through other religions?

In addressing these and other questions in the course of this study, we will describe how these four religions began, present some of their essential teachings, and suggest ways in which they differ from and are similar to Christianity. In the final session of the series, we will explore some of the basic beliefs of Christianity and will discuss the question, "Why Christianity?"

The hope in offering this study is that as we seek to understand the faith of others, who in today's society are our friends, neighbors, and coworkers, we will gain new understanding that will enable us to build bridges with them so that we might grow in our Christian faith, seek peace in our world, love our neighbor, and find positive ways to share the gospel.

## **New Membership Class**

**Beginning on Sunday, January 7<sup>th</sup> for 3 weeks in the Library**

**Leader: Pastor Sharon Jones**

We are inviting anyone who would like to find out more about what it means to join Aldersgate U.M.C. This class will help to orient you to our congregation and introduce you to some other new members. We will also learn about the Methodist faith. If you are interested in joining this class, please speak to Pastor Sharon Jones.

# **CHOCOLATE FOR LENT**

## ***What do chocolate and Lent have in common?***

Everyone is invited to find out! The season of Lent is just around the corner and there has been some interesting discussions about chocolate, chocolate candy on tables, a chocolate dinner and movie, so what's up?

This Lenten season we will be using a creative approach to help you in your Lenten journey.

***This is a great way to take up Chocolate for Lent without guilt or calories – and a way to grow in faith with your friends.***

We will be using the book, "Chocolate for Lent", that uses themes from the 2000 Academy Award nominated film "Chocolat". This unique approach to the season creates the opportunity for deeper insights into self-discipline, self-giving, and maturing in Christ. This experience will be a smooth spiritual blend of scriptures, social awareness, service, community prayer, integrity, love and what it means to be a follower of Christ.

We will once again use this theme during our worship services during Lent, have many small groups that you may join at different times and days, a prayer supplement, music and other surprises! We will have a special Mardi-Gras party on Sunday, February 11<sup>th</sup> and will show the movie, "Chocolat". We will kick-off this sweet event on Sunday, February 18<sup>th</sup>.

***Watch for more chocolate updates, chocolate morsels and delicious treats for the soul!***