

Aldersgate Advocate

Beside the

Beside the Alabaster Jar

August 29, 2008

Dear friends,

Summer months are time for family reunions, overnight camp, and long afternoons of porch setting. I've had lots of family reunions, been away to overnight camp, but I've not had enough of porch setting. I do not want summer to end.

Summer months help us to slow down long enough to recognize the splendor of God's creation, enjoy the blessing of love and friendship, and truly see the uniqueness and beauty of the people who inhabit this world. My prayer is that you have taken the time to slow down during these summer months and give praise to God for all your many gifts.

Conversations with people from other parts of the world give us a better perspective on our own lives. I am reminded of Henry Cejudo, gold medal wrestler and son of undocumented immigrants and the praise that he was able to give for his home in the United States, his parent's adopted country. Sometimes when we look through someone else's eyes we see things we did not anticipate.

A conversation with an acquaintance from Eastern Europe reminded me of freedoms that we take for granted. This young woman grew up during the break-up of the former Yugoslavia; she went to school in underground shelters due to a war with Serbia. The instability of her country made life uneasy at several junctures. Her mother was Roman Catholic and her father was Jewish, however in a communist country religion was not important. This young woman was never baptized.

During August, I had the pleasure of attending her baptism and the baptism of her two daughters. In discussing her decision to be baptized with me she told me that in her country all children have religion classes along with their regular public school classes. If her daughters were not baptized they could not be part of these classes and people would assume they were Muslim or even worse Serbian Orthodox. Either way the children would face discrimination from teachers and class mates. She knew that she believed in God and in Jesus Christ, but she was unsure about other teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. But in her country, this was the only choice.

At that moment, I thanked God for the diversity of faith that is available to us. We are free to choose and that freedom makes for a stronger faith. Of, sure, it might sound easier to let the public schools teach religion, but faith is not the same as math or spelling. Faith is something that is caught rather than taught. We catch faith by spending time with people who have faith. We spread faith by sitting in conversation with those who are seeking.

I've not had enough time of front-porch setting this summer, so my hope for the coming year is that we might be able to sit and talk. Let's spend more time sitting on a metaphorical front porch and make room for conversation with people who are seeking to know God.

Grace and peace,

Sharon G.W. Jones

WORSHIP NEWS

As we return from the summer months we focus on building community here at Aldersgate. Community is that sense that you are not alone, but rather part of an extended family, a family of God, called together by the presence of God in our midst.

The foundational story of the Exodus helps us to know that God provides what is needed and the importance of trusting God and one another. In the Exodus experience the people of God come together and are formed into a nation for the first time. Imagine thousands of people, divided into twelve tribes, wandering in the desert, seeking to follow God. These scripture passages speak to us today as we adventure together seeking to follow God. Please join us for the journey.

Your worship planning team has partnered the different readings of the Exodus from the lectionary, with readings from the Book of Acts. This book from the New Testament relates to the story of the formation of the church, the people of God called by Jesus Christ. These lessons will help us to think about communication, relationship, and common purpose as key elements of community.

On Sunday, September 7th we begin our year of "Adventuring Together." We return to our school year schedule of worship with Holy Communion at 8:30 a.m. and a worship service with children and a theme conversation at 10:45 a.m. We are inviting children to bring their backpacks to the 10:45 service and process with the worship leaders. Each child and youth will receive a tag for their pack as the backpacks are blessed by the congregation for the new school year. Members of our Gardening Club are also asked to process with fresh produce that they are offering to God's people and God's work. We will register children and adults for Sunday school as well as hear about the plans for small groups to meet during the week. The children who were part of Vacation Bible School have been invited to sing "God's Big Back Yard" with our Chancel Choir.

We continue the theme of adventuring together on Sept. 14 as we remember that "All Are Welcome." Lessons for the day include Exodus 14:19-31 and Acts 10:9-20. Our new Director of Small Group Ministries, Kurt will offer the message as Pastor Sharon will be in Nicaragua. Kurt says, that Peter's vision tells us about "...the radical inclusiveness that God shows us, and how human hearts need to be opened to each other, even those who we have thought they should be closed to." He's thinking of using the idea of an umbrella to represent the love of God through the church sheltering us. We will also dedicate new sound equipment that will welcome more fully those with hearing difficulties.

Kurt will also be preaching on Sept 21st as Pastor Sharon uses a week of vacation to develop a new project in Nicaragua. Exodus 16:2-15 tells the story of the Israelites receiving manna in the desert. The Acts passage for this week, chapter 9:1-19, is Saul/Paul's conversion. Kurt shares that "Our unexpected "manna" is the food of God's grace which feeds us, even though it is not what we may expect or even want. Sometimes we may even say "enough already", yet we cannot turn our backs on God's will for us and be truly happy. Eating the "manna" is a life-giving and life-changing event. Nothing stays the same. We can look ahead to the future, but the manna we need is only provided for the journey day by day." We will present Bibles to our Third Grade Sunday School Class on September 21st.

On September 28th we are reminded that God is among us. The lessons include Exodus 17:1-7, the miracle of God giving water through a rock and Acts 3:1-11, Jesus' healing of a lame man through the actions of Peter and John. The question asks by the Israelites "Is the Lord among us or not?" is always answered in the affirmative. God is always with us, it just that we sometimes close our eyes to God's presence. On this Sunday, we will also recognize members of our congregation who joined Aldersgate during the season of Pentecost.

On World Communion Sunday, October 5th we "Invite Others Into God's Grace." Grace is an experience that is a lot like love, the more we receive the more there is to offer. God's grace is like an

ever-flowing well, incapable of drying up. The lessons for the day include Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20, the Ten Commandments and Acts 15, the struggle in the early church about what it means to be welcomed into God's family.

We continue into October "Embracing the living God" on the second Sunday, October 12th. Exodus 32:1-14, the story of an Israelite rebellion against God and Moses makes us wonder about our own impatience and our relationship with God. Acts 14:8-20, a healing in Lystra, leads men and women to treat Paul and Barnabas as Greek gods. They are reminded of the living God who is responsible for the sky, the earth, the sea, and everything in them.

We are "Formed by God" when we come together as one, God's people, adventuring together into an intimate relationship with God. The Israelites came to understand themselves as a people through their years of wandering in the desert. Moses, their leader, is given a glimpse of God's back in Exodus 33:12-23. Peter and John found strength in listening to God rather than the threats of the authorities in Acts 4:23-35. Please join us on October 19th as we seek a closer relationship with God.

We draw this fall season of community building to an end on October 26th as we "Move on Out," hearing the story of Moses glimpse into the promised land just before his death. In our gospel lesson, Matthew 22:34-46, Jesus teaches about the greatest commandments, preparing us to be his disciples in this place and time. Please join us for worship and/or Sunday School as we form community and offer a safe place for discussion and dialogue.

AMONG OUR CHURCH FAMILY

A beautiful wedding it was! Alison and Matthew were married at Aldersgate on Sunday, August 3. We wish them great joy in the years ahead.

It was wonderful to have Curt and Sherry back "home" at Aldersgate. We had an opportunity to worship with them on August 3 and "catch-up" on all the news. We miss you, Curt and Sherry!

We were saddened by the death of one of our founding members of Aldersgate – Jim passed away on June 17 and his life was celebrated here at the church he loved, on June 21. Please keep his wife, Jean, and their children and grandchildren in your prayers. His life was one of dedication to his Lord, to his family and to his church and community.

Please keep Vera and her family in your prayers in the death of her mom just this week. Also Paul's sister, Winifred, passed away this week as well. Please keep their families in your prayers.

We ask you to keep Gigi and Dirk in your prayers as well as Dave and Ruby, John, Jack and Lillian. We are happy to see Maureen out and about – feeling much better and anxious to get back to "doing." And so, we thank God, for those we have prayed for who are on the road to health once more. We thank God for our family, for our church family and for our sisters and brothers throughout the world.

Members of our church family are going to Nicaragua! The group includes Pastor Sharon and Richard, Bob and Deana, Greg, Alyssa and Billy. The delegation was invited to be in Nicaragua for their Independence Day celebration following Pastor Santos and Matteo's visit with us on our Independence Day. Please keep this group in your prayers and talk with them when they return about their experiences. They leave on September 12 and return on September 17th. They'll be strengthening our relationship with our sisters and brothers in Sierra Maestra.

THANK YOU NOTES

Thank you so much for your prayers, cards, and support during Alex's recovery from his accident.

It has brought us strength and comfort and has meant so very much.

Love, Ed, Sherri and kids

To Our Aldersgate Family,
Thank you so much for your kind words and cards of sympathy upon the loss of my stepfather, Arthur. They were a great comfort to us.

Bill and family

Dear Church Family,
Thank you for your prayers and kind expressions of sympathy following the loss of our sister and aunt, Mary.

Your prayers have given us an added strength. They also have helped us to better cope with the loss of our loved one. The many expressions of sympathy remind us how very special you are to this family.

Thanking you again and letting you know too that your many kindnesses will be long remembered.

Love,
Jan, Frank, Joe and Anne

From Church World Service: Thank you for your generous gift of \$432 to help provide blankets for those in need throughout our world. With your help we are helping to build a more sustainable future in some 80 countries. The evening news is often a grim reminder of the failings of our human family, but because of people like you, who empower us to act on your behalf, we are able help a needy world. May God bless you for your compassionate support.

Rev. John L. McCullough, Executive
Director and CEO, Church World
Service

Open Pantry of Greater Lowell

The Open Pantry of Greater Lowell wishes to thank you for your recent donation of food. The response of so many individuals and organizations is truly heartening for those who run the Open Pantry, as well as the recipients. Since the Open Pantry has been open, thousands of people have been helped. We hope you find gratification in the knowledge that your donations of food and cash donations are part of this ongoing work that fill an urgent need in the greater Lowell community. Your generosity keeps us going!

The Pantry Volunteers

(We received two thank you notes from this group – one for all the food brought to them from our Aldersgate Food Pantry and one for a large cash donation through the generosity of Gail's Bridge Club.) Thank you, everyone!

Special thanks to all those who sang, played an instrument, preached, taught, read Scripture, served coffee, greeted, taught and helped with a super VBS, etc. Throughout the summer, Aldersgate was alive with activity and all because of people like you!

Being the Connection!

I thank the Aldersgate community for your support and prayers during this year's General and Jurisdictional Conferences.

Every four years, United Methodists from all over the world gather to review our program emphasis, missions, polity and budget. Representing you in Fort Worth this spring was an awesome adventure. Then, in July, twenty-six United Methodists from New England helped to elect our newest Bishop, Peggy Johnson, a leader in ministries to deaf communities. You can be proud of the leadership from New England during both of these conferences (some saw us on streaming video!) as we sought to be good stewards, faithful Christians and seekers of justice. While there are times we disagree, we still live in covenant relationship with all United Methodists around the world. United Methodists are everywhere!

Blessings, Bonnie

What's Happening At Aldersgate

See what happens when God plants a seed!! After spending lots of time playing in the dirt, tilling and spreading compost and manure (see what God can do with a load of crap!) The garden club planted lots of seeds and seedlings out in our little 20x30 lot. It looked very sparse at the time but if you have looked over into the side yard lately you will see it has grown into quite a jungle. Here is a list of what we have currently harvested as of Aug 20:

11.75lb summer squash 6.5lb green beans
31.25lb cucumbers 3lb swiss chard
49lb tomatoes 1lb eggplant
17lb butternut squash (5)
Plus one sweet red pepper and
May bags of parsley and basil

All this produce has been given free of charge to the congregation and some to St. Paul's feeding program. Please feel free to stop by and pick for your self or someone in need. Also if you are planning a St. Paul's dinner, please check in at the garden and see what is ready to pick. Right now the only thing reserved is the butternut squash for the Thanksgiving baskets. Other than that Bon Apatite

Skilled Childcare Worker
seeks live-in Nanny position.
Contact Pastor Sharon at
978.256.9400.



From Outreach

The Aldersgate Food Pantry supply has been given to the Lowell Open Pantry for the time being. The need in Lowell is great....When you have a family or know of someone in need of food, please let Outreach's Maureen know and we will get food or whatever is needed to them. It seems to be that the need for us is during the school year when nurses from the various schools can inform us of families in need. Thanks for all of your continued support.

Keep that change coming! What a sound....Many thanks and blessings for helping Outreach with this coin project. You are making a great difference in peoples' lives. The change that we accrue will be given to the Billerica House of

Correction for their Prison Ministry in memory of Jim. Jim gave this ministry his time and energy for some years.

Giving and Receiving!

All that we have, receive and give is first a gift from God. Thanks be to God for such abundant generosity! Our church family continues to be blessed by both opportunities to receive and to give. Members continuing support for the Together for Tomorrow Campaign has funded our floor replacement and back stairway renovations. Memorial Gifts have made possible the implementation of a recording ministry (CD's available in the office) bringing our worship services to home computers, hearing enhancers, an organ expansion and we anticipate new sanctuary rugs. These special gifts help us focus our weekly giving on current missions and ministry.

Please know that our continued weekly support is an expression of our discipleship and a part of our personal spiritual disciplines. Giving is good for the soul and the heart! Joyful giving is its own reward and an expression of the scripture text "Where your treasure is, there also is your heart."

Your Finance Committee and Trustees continue to seek cost saving measures and to tend carefully for all your gifts to Aldersgate UMC. If you have questions or suggestions, please let us know.

Interested in electronic giving? Want to explore how to increase your income through a creative gift using some of your accumulated assets? Need to create or update your will? Including your favorite ministry or mission in your will is just one of the creative and meaningful ways we can shape the future today.

We hope you experience giving to AUMC as a wise investment and act of faith which brings you joy and peace. And, we know that many of us do not realize we can make choices now that will impact the future. Please consider making a gift to AUMC in your will or estate planning, and learn how to calculate a gift of, for example, appreciated stocks, which benefit you and your favorite ministries. Considering creative planned gifts is for everyone!

We give praise to God for all we have already received as we continue to become faithful and joyful Stewards. Contact Bonnie thru the church office at (978) 256-9400 for more information.

Opportunities at Aldersgate

We are going to try to meet the *last Tuesday of every month* to keep it on a consistent night..... Here is the list and dates that we know of:

Tuesday, September 30 - "How Elizabeth Barrett Browning Saved My Life" by Mameve Medway – **WE WILL MEET AT 6 PM AT PAT CASADONE'S HOME FOR SUPPER** - Please bring items for Lowell Open Pantry if you are so inclined!

Tuesday, October 28 - "Family Tree" by Barbara Delinsky; **Tuesday, November 25** - "A Circle of Friends" by Maeve Binchy;

Tuesday, December 30 - "Red Bird Christmas" by Fanny Flagg; **Tuesday, January 27** - "March" by Geraldine Brooks

Tuesday, February 24 - "To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee; **Tuesday, March 31** "Revenge of the Middle Aged Woman" by Elizabeth Buchan; **Tuesday, April 28** - "Three Cups of Tea" by Greg Mortensen

The person who chose the book will lead the discussion. Hopefully this will work for everyone. Book Club is a time of fun, food and fellowship so please join us.

Deb

An Invitation

The invitations are in the mail for the Pentecost 2 Membership Party Group. The Pentecost 1 group was postponed so we also invite you to attend the Membership Party on Sunday, September 14 from 6 pm – 8 pm, as well as anyone from our congregation who may have missed their specific evening of fun and fellowship together. We hope you will attend. If you plan to attend, please let Pastor Sharon or the Church Office know by September 10th. Dinner will be served at 6 PM!

We wish all our returning students a most wonderful year ahead.

If you are a beginning college student or returning to college, please let the office know the address of your college student. Thank you!

Start cleaning out your closets for the Rummage Sale, October 24 & 25

Holiday Faire and Festival Preparations

Plans for Aldersgate's **Christmas Holiday Faire and Festival on December 5 and 6, 2008** are underway and you are invited to join in the fun!

In these delightful end of summer days, winter festivities seem months away, but it is time to share ideas, create crafts and holiday gifts or recruit a friend to work an area with you during the Faire! Teams are forming and please let the office or Bonnie know what you wish to offer or where you would like to help. Please join the fun! We look forward to hearing from you! Contact the Lead Elf listed below for more information.

Glad Tiding Greens - (Carol. assisted by talented Carmen and Betty)

Kringle's Kitchen (Deana)

Country Store and Bakery (Betsey)

Gracious ReGifting (Bonnie)

Silent Auction (Melinda)

Creative Crafts (Nancy)

Children's Shoppe (Cheryl)

Plans also include **Jingling Jewelry** and other new and familiar highlights including our **Carolers**, the **Aldersgate Band**, as well as **Story-Telling Time** and visits from **Saint Nicholas!**

Our wreaths usually sell out and volunteers are needed to make picks and bows so look for **Greens and Crafts Work Party dates** to be announced soon! Wreath decorating and centerpiece creation is scheduled for November 23-25 at church all day – all are welcome! Greens are collected from homes (pruning by AUMC elves!) on November 21-22.

Contact Bonnie or Melinda for additional information. Thanks!

**Excerpt from Understanding Maturity,
credited to Earnest Campbell,
Riverside UMC, New York**

To be young is to sit under trees,
which we did not plant,
To be mature is to plant trees
under which we will not sit.

To be young is to dance to music
we did not write,
To be mature is to write music
to which we will not dance.

To be young is to worship in churches
we did not build.
To be mature is to build churches
in which we may not worship.

Thank you, Bonnie

**Is God Calling You
To Use Your Musical Talent in Praise and Worship?**



If God has gifted you musically in a small way or a big way we hope that you will prioritize this year to include time for the Chancel Choir and/or the Shepherd Bells in your schedule. We guarantee you will be rewarded ten-fold.



**Shepherd
Bells**

The Shepherd Bells are always in need of new players – to substitute or to become a regular member. We have 3 or 4 openings for new players and we can teach you to play if you have a sense of rhythm. If you play or have played another instrument it is helpful but not required.

If you sing, the Chancel Choir would welcome you with open arms. We have a small and very talented core choir but you do not need to feel intimidated by that talent if you have a “small” voice and/or do not “read music”. Come, come, come to sing and praise God!

Choir Rehearsal: Tuesday 7:30 pm Shepherd Bells Rehearsal: Thursday 7:30 pm

(There is an option for Choir members if you are musically confident enough to do it and are unable to come on Tuesday night. We have a Sunday warm-up rehearsal beginning at 10 am and you can be welcomed as a Sunday-only singer.)

Rehearsals Begin Tuesday, September 2 and Thursday, September 11

**TEACHERS / LEADERS / FACILITATORS SOUGHT
FOR ADULT SMALL GROUP PROGRAMS**

The ongoing success of the Adult Education programs, and the growth of the new Small Group ministries at Aldersgate depends on the participation of leaders within the congregation. Lay leaders are the backbone for spiritual and personal growth.

Please contact Kurt or speak to him after one of the Sunday morning worship services if you are interested in co-leading or facilitating an educational study or small group.

Adults leaders of all ages will be helpful in attracting adult participants of all ages in these wonderful opportunities at Aldersgate. Even if you have limited experience in leading a group, you still have some gifts to share. Give it a try!

Adults leaders of all ages will be helpful in attracting adult participants of all ages in these wonderful opportunities at Aldersgate. Even if you have limited experience in leading a group, you still have some gifts to share. Give it a try!

A NEARBY OPPORTUNITY

One of the sometimes hidden treasures of our United Methodist connection is the program called **Schools of Christian Mission**. Many women and men have grown spiritually and intellectually through these schools where we learn about God’s world and its relationship to the Bible. This year a One-Day school has been scheduled for St. Matthew’s UMC, in Acton, MA. On **October 4, from 9:00-4:00** you can choose between two studies:

- *I Believe in Jesus*
- *Native American Survival* The cost is \$40 and it includes a continental breakfast and lunch. For additional information you could speak with Pastor Sharon or Bonnie Marden, both of whom have been involved in previous years. For registration, visit www.neumc.org/socm, or contact Karen Rivero, Registrar, at karenrivero@hotmail.com or (978) 929-9888. For other questions, contact Rev. Barbara Schreier, Dean, at bstks@sbcglobal.net or (860) 928-0308.

CHURCH SCHOOL NEWS

Vacation Bible School

God's Big Back Yard

During God's Big Back Yard, forty one children and youth and seventeen adults learned the importance of serving and working together to show God's love for people everywhere. Each day began at Backyard Bash with large-group music, a skit, and fun, where children were introduced to a Bible story and Life Focus. We learned about serving family, friends, neighbors, community and Jesus through games, crafts, creating fun food snacks, and Bible Club. We also had a guest speaker each day that shared their own personal story about how they serve in the community. The children learned about our Prayer Shawl Ministry, the feeding program at Eliot Church, Mission Central and Nicaragua. We closed on Friday with a special service sharing with our family and friends what we learned during the week, and then celebrated God's Big Backyard with a barbecue! Thank you to all the many helping hands that worked so hard to create an uplifting and spirit-filled week!

Summer Book & Craft Time

This summer we continued this opportunity for children during worship time. After the theme conversation, the children were dismissed and traveled downstairs to listen to a special book and make a craft. Thank you to the following for helping: Nancy, Jim, Christine, Lee, Jill, David and Kathy. We highly recommend the following books that we read this summer and some are available in our children's library:

"Horton Hatches the Egg" by Dr. Suess

"Goodnight, Dewberry Bear" by Dori Chaconas

"Captain Grumpy" by Russell Deal

"Gingerbread Baby" by Jan Brett

"Miss Rumphius" by Barbara Cooney

"Franklin Says I Love You" by Paulette Bourgeois

"Sophie's Masterpiece" by Eileen Spinelli

and Brenda Clark

"Runaway Bunny" by Margaret Wise Brown "

The Chicken Chasing Queen of Lamar County"

by Janice N. Harrington

Presentation of Bibles to 3rd Graders on Sunday, September 21st during the 2nd Service

RALLY DAY - SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2008

WORSHIP SERVICES: 8:30 & 10:45 A.M

CHURCH SCHOOL REGISTRATION: 9:30 A.M.

CHURCH SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH : 9:30 A.M.

RECEPTION FOR ALL CHILDREN, PARENTS AND ADULTS:

10:00 A.M. IN FELLOWSHIP HALL

We will have a special continental brunch for all in the Fellowship Hall at 10:00 a.m. All classes will go upstairs and meet their parents, create a class hand wreath, enjoy fellowship and food as we celebrate being part of God's family.

Our church school program will begin on September 7th for children and youth ages 3 - 18. Please take the time to fill out the church wide registration packet included in this Advocate and bring it with you on Rally Day. Please consider the different ways you can help during the year.

Exciting Worship Arts Program

Tuesdays, 4 – 5:30 p.m. Beginning on September 9th Ages 3 years old – 5th grade

Come join us as we create art and have fun with music this fall. The children will gather for snack when they arrive. Children in 2nd – 5th grade will participate in a wonderful music program led by Carol Prasad from 4:10 – 4:50 while the younger children will participate in the art program, then we will rotate the groups.

JUNIOR YOUTH FELLOWSHIP

We are entering our 4th year of this exciting fellowship time for youth in grades 4 - 6. We will meet twice a month on Friday night, beginning on September 12th. We are finalizing plans for this upcoming year and encourage parents and youth to share their ideas and visions for this Christian fellowship group. Friends are always welcome!

Our kick off event will be a barbecue and potluck for all junior youth and their families on Friday, September 12th from 6:00 – 7:30 p.m.

Cheryl Ortolf and David Driscoll are very excited about all the fun and spiritual things we will be doing this year! We are also looking for parents to help with chaperoning, phone calls, providing snacks, and any other way you would like to help support this program. If you have any questions or concerns, please see Cheryl. *A Junior youth newsletter will be mailed out in September with more details about this program.*

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 and we ALWAYS welcome friends!



Our kick off event will be a barbecue and potluck for all Senior youth on Sunday, September 21st from 5:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Please bring your favorite dessert to share.

All our welcome to join us for this special occasion as we share our summer memories, enjoy good food and talk about our fall program. During the year we will join together for fun activities, spiritual moments, and ways to help our church family and the community. We also have a youth room that needs some redecorating! A Senior Youth Newsletter will be mailed out in September. Hope to see you!



**Aldersgate U.M.C.
Vacation Bible School
2008**

