



# The Beacon

*News to family and friends of Ann Arbor Christian School*  
2007-2008, Number 1

*Ann Arbor Christian School offers a Christ-centered, academically excellent education that challenges students to live and act in society as committed followers of Jesus Christ*

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**November 2007**

## Body of Christ alive, growing at AACCS

Dear Friends of AACCS,

As your new principal, I've spent several months getting to know this blessed place and God's wonderful people here. Now, I'm excited to take this opportunity to share a few of my observations about Ann Arbor Christian School related to our chapel theme.

Our chapel theme for the 2007-2008 school year is "Fearfully and Wonderfully Made - We are the

Body of Christ." Staff members prayerfully developed several sub-themes for the chapels that will take place throughout the year to help students internalize the different facets of being the body of Christ. (As always, you are invited to attend our chapels!)

AACS does function as the body of Christ. How is this seen in our school family already?

Our AACCS parents are phenomenal. The amount of volunteerism at the school to improve the learning environment and student safety is amazing. I know of no other school where parents support the teachers as much as they do here. They work *with* the teachers to solve challenges as they invariably arise.

In addition, our students are intimately involved in reaching out to others. Several have taken it upon themselves to welcome and include new students. Smiles, laughter, and peers working/playing together all indicate that our student body has a basic understanding of Christian community. They are not perfect, but they do overcome friendship obstacles with the guidance of our dedicated teachers.

Our staff members also have seen each other through illnesses and other challenges since June. I have not seen this high level of Christian community in a staff in all my 25 years as an educator. AACCS truly understands what being the body of Christ is about.

I encourage all of you to visit Ann Arbor Christian School and see the body of Christ in action. It is my prayer that the strengthening of all parts of our Christian body will continue throughout the year.

In Christ,

Thom Ritzema, principal



*New principal Thom Ritzema meets eighth graders on the first day of school.*



*Fifth-graders David and Sam read to kindergartner Earl.*

Photos by Sue Postema Scheeres

## AACS 2007-2008 Contact People

### School

Thom Ritzema  
Principal  
principal@annarborchristian.org  
734.741.4948 x116

Cheri Lubbers  
Administrative Assistant  
office@annarborchristian.org  
734.741.4948 x115

Jan Musch  
Finance  
finance@annarborchristian.org  
734.741.4948 x120

Sue Postema Scheeres  
Development Coordinator  
development@annarborchristian.org  
734.741.4948 x117

### Board Members

Brooke Bowen, Treasurer  
Carla Byma  
Doug De Vries, Vice President  
Leslie Doorlag, Secretary  
Conchi Freund  
Joel Hofman, President

contact the board at  
board@annarborchristian.org

### Committees & Chairs

Building  
Dan Herrema

Development  
Tim Dekker

Education  
Dottie Elliott

Finance  
Bill Vander Meulen

Public Relations  
Sue Postema Scheeres

Technology  
Darren De Zeeuw

### Beacon

Marcia Mitchell, Editor  
Kathy Ann Moilanen, Copy Editor  
Jennifer Boes, Layout Editor

The *Beacon* is published by:

**Ann Arbor Christian School**  
5500 Whitmore Lake Road  
Ann Arbor, MI 48105

office@annarborchristian.org  
734.741.4948  
www.annarborchristian.org

## God blesses AACS with talented new staff



### **Thom Ritzema, principal**

*By Marcia Mitchell, Beacon editor*

When new principal Thom Ritzema checked out the Ann Arbor Christian School website, he found himself saying, "Really? They are really looking for a principal?"

Now he is excited to be working with students and families here. The kids have quickly become

acquainted with him and his puppets "Polly Wog," "Mr. Blue," "Ruff," "Ron," and others.

Mr. Ritzema uses puppets as a ministry to teach lessons about school and life. Each puppet has a purpose and personality. As kids adjust to new situations at school, for example, they can relate to "Ron," the subdued character wearing an AACS shirt. And, after the serious lessons are covered, Mr. Ritzema pulls out the wild and crazy "Mr. Blue" for

songs, fun, and laughs.

Mr. Ritzema finds joy in working with people and helping kids through challenges. He served as teacher and principal for 25 years in both public and Christian schools. After receiving his bachelors' degree in education from Calvin College, he earned a master's degree in educational administration from Michigan State University (although he assures us he will still cheer for the Wolverines!).

Besides puppetry, Mr. Ritzema enjoys watching old movies and musicals, playing piano and many other instruments, and experimenting with Power Point and other computer software. He has been married to Jan for 27 years. They have four children, ages 17-25.

Mr. Ritzema sees his most important role at AACS as keeping our focus on Christ and building our Christian community. "I want to serve the Lord wherever he calls me, in whatever capacity he calls me to serve," he says.



### **Hannah Tang, math and Bible teacher**

*By Jeanette Brooks, AACS parent*

There's a new face in the fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade classrooms this year! Hannah Tang joined Ann Arbor Christian School as a math teacher and fourth-grade Bible teacher.

Ms. Tang completed her bachelor's degree in education at the University of Michigan, where she majored in math and minored in language arts.

"I love math because it reflects the order and attention to detail that God put into creating our world," she says. She's especially delighted to be at AACS because she knows firsthand the value of a Christian education – she attended Christian school through twelfth grade.

"I'm so happy to be working in such a loving, supportive environment," she says. "And, I'm excited about the freedom I have to openly express my faith in Christ in the classroom."

In her free time, Ms. Tang enjoys singing (especially when she's alone in her car!), cooking, and reading children's literature. Welcome, Ms. Tang!



### **Mark Morgan, vocal & instrumental music teacher**

*By Marcia Mitchell, Beacon editor*

During opening-day chapel, AACS had the privilege of hearing Mark Morgan play his trumpet, just one of the talents he brings to us as our new vocal and instrumental music teacher.

Whether through listening, singing, dancing, or playing, Mr. Morgan wants students to discover they can grow to recognize more of what they hear in music. "My overarching goal is that students will experience that music lives at AACS," he says.

Mr. Morgan holds a bachelors' degree in music education from Wichita State University, a master's degree in trumpet performance from the University of Michigan, and a master of divinity degree from Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary.

He believes every rehearsal he has ever attended prepared him to teach music. "I've played under some great conductors and educators and they have shaped who I am as a musician and a teacher," he says.

Besides music, Mr. Morgan plays tennis and bicycles with his wife Pam, a professional flutist. The Morgans' two children also are very involved in music and dance. Please welcome them to AACS!



## Kindergarten aftercare a new option

By Kathy Ann Moilanen, Beacon copy editor

One day, four excited kindergartners each caught a grasshopper to examine and then set free. Every afternoon, they research pressing 5-year-old questions like: "Do turtles need to breathe air?" and "How much can an ant carry?"

This is a taste of Ann Arbor Christian School's new "Kindergarten aftercare."

The program was born when it became obvious AACCS was losing potential students needing all-day care. Parents who work or have transportation issues now can opt to pick up their kindergartner at 3:15 p.m., the same time older siblings leave school. They pay \$12 to \$13 a day.

The program is specifically designed so that those who do not participate are not left out or left behind, said AACCS parent Karen Eekhoff, who chaired the committee that investigated various options. AACCS wanted to preserve its core half-day kindergarten yet still offer this service. So, aftercare intentionally is not an extension of the morning class and it's not daycare, Mrs. Eekhoff explains. It's a unique program for such a small school to offer, she points out.

More than half of the 13 students enrolled in kindergarten stick around in the afternoon two or more days a week, meeting in the school's parent room. After eating lunch together, the students have recess, a Bible story and prayer, a themed story time and activity, quiet rest time, and a healthy snack.

"There's a lot of freedom to be able to explore things you can't with a larger class," explains Kindergarten aftercare teacher Jennifer Bryson. Mrs. Bryson enthusiastically supported the concept and set off running with many exciting ideas, Mrs. Eekhoff says.

"These are things a mom could do at home," Mrs. Bryson says humbly. The grasshopper hunt

happened during insect week. During colors week, the group observed "capillary action" in Queen Anne's Lace, activities a parent might not find time to do daily.

By the way, yes, turtles need to breathe air. And, how much can an ant carry? Four times its weight, which is like a kindergartner carrying their mommy. "The children got a big kick out of that," Mrs. Bryson says.



Lukas and Keegan have fun mixing colors with colored gelatin during Kindergarten aftercare.

Photo by Sue Postema Scheeres



Photos by Marcia Mitchell

### Jennifer Bryson, Kindergarten aftercare teacher

by Marcia Mitchell, Beacon editor

Jennifer Bryson feels blessed to be leading the new Kindergarten aftercare program. After teaching preschool for seven years, she is excited to provide a place for kindergartners to learn and explore.

She wants parents to feel confident their

children will receive high-quality Christian care in a play-based environment.

Mrs. Bryson loves hearing the kindergartners'

thoughts and enthusiasm as they explore God's creation. "Their excitement for learning is contagious and helps keep me curious about learning more about God and the things he has made," she says.

With degrees in psychology and social work from Calvin College and Michigan State University, Mrs. Bryson also works with Bethany Christian Services in the field of adoption.

Mrs. Bryson and her husband Jim have two children at AACCS, Barrett in seventh grade, and Sophia, in fifth grade. They are frequently found riding tandem bikes together, traveling, and exploring God's world.



## Spreading the gospel, one balloon at a time

By Bob Royce, AACCS parent

It happens at nearly every parade. A child cries out in tears as a prized balloon escapes, quickly rising out of reach into the sky. Up, up it goes...receding until it's too small to see. Will it pop when it gets too high? Or maybe catch a current and travel to Alaska?

Second-grade teacher Diane Horner will tell you: "It depends on which way the wind is blowing, but it's unlikely to make it all the way to Alaska!"

She should know. Every year, her class launches dozens of balloons into the sky. It's part of their lesson on Jesus' ascension into heaven and his command to spread the gospel. Each balloon is tagged with the school's contact information and the Bible verse John 3:16.

"Before we launch the balloons, we pray that someone would find them and the message attached would minister to their heart," relates Mrs. Horner. "After the launch, we stand and watch them drift away, the same way the disciples watched and watched during the ascension."

The kindergarten and first-grade classes also come to witness the big event. According to one first grader: "99 percent of the balloons made it all the way up into the clouds. Only a few smaller ones didn't rise up very high. It was really fun to watch them go."

Brighton Assembly of God donates a helium tank to fill the balloons each year. AACCS parent volunteers fill and tag each balloon the morning of the launch.

How far do the balloons go? Last year, calls came from Caro and Tyre, cities in Michigan's thumb area, about 145 miles away. The record so far, though, ended up in southern Indiana, nearly 300 miles from home.

*Balloons tagged with John 3:16 are sent out into the world.*



Photo by Sue Crittenden

## Bugs outnumber students in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade

By Jeanette Brooks, AACCS parent

It's that time of year again – the third-grade classroom is overrun with bugs! But don't call an exterminator – the bugs are part of a unit on the amazing world of insects.

The third graders worked hard over the summer and into the fall, each putting together an impressive collection of 10 or more insects. Some brought specimens back from vacation – a few from such far-away places as the Upper Peninsula and Nebraska! Students created displays by pin-mounting their arthropods to a cardboard or Styrofoam base and adding an identification tag for each.

The project gives kids an up-close-and-personal look at a bug's life, including insect habitats, life cycles, and anatomy, as well as the role insects play in God's world.

"It's great to see my students getting excited about God's creation," says third-grade teacher Kellie Steen. "When we explore how he has intricately created each of these little beings, we marvel at the work of our creative God!"

Toward the end of the entomology unit, each

third grader will learn in-depth details about a specific insect, and then "become" that insect for a day! The kids dress up like their insects and perform a "bug interview" to share all they've learned with their classmates.

So if you're curious about the difference between a thorax and an abdomen, or the merits of an exoskeleton, or the different forms of insect mouths, don't be surprised if you learn all that and more by asking a third grader!



Photo by Marcia Mitchell

*Third-graders Nathan and Lily examine an insect collection, proudly displayed by a classmate.*

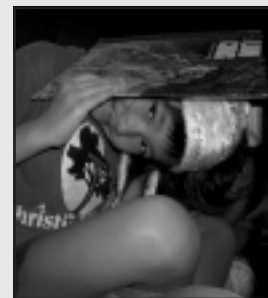
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# Safety Safety Safety



*Kindergartner Krystal shields herself with a book during a recent tornado drill. Students also participated in a fire drill this fall as part of AACCS' critical incident response preparation.*



## Middle schoolers relate, recharge in advisory club

By Marcia Mitchell, Beacon editor

Connecting with teachers and peers is a crucial part of the early teen years. But over the past few years, AACS middle-school teachers have struggled to find time to make teacher-student connections in



Middle-school teacher Mark Wiersma prays with a small group during advisory club.

their busy school schedules. To solve the dilemma, teachers created student “advisory clubs” this year.

Advisory clubs are groups of 15 combined sixth, seventh, and eighth graders who spend 25 minutes each day interacting with their advisory teacher and peers in a variety of creative ways.

“Our primary goals for advisory club are to ensure that every child has a teacher they can talk to and get support from, and to build community in the middle school through small, mixed-age groups,” says middle-school teacher Sue DeZeeuw.

So far, middle schoolers have discussed what it means to be a part of the body of Christ, prayed for events in the news, held one-on-one meetings with advisory teachers, and have written letters to teachers. Two days a week, students “recharge,” an especially big hit. During this time, they “recharge their batteries,” using a method that works for them. Some get a little homework out of the way. Others read a good book or relax with a Sudoku puzzle or magazine.

Later in the year, teachers plan to use some advisory time for service projects, problem solving, skill-building activities, and as planning time for student-led chapels.

“Middle-school students really need the opportunity to process what’s happening in their lives, to develop strategies and skills to meet challenges, and to grow as disciples of Jesus,” says Mrs. DeZeeuw. So far, advisory clubs have been a blast, she says.

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*Middle-school students really need the opportunity to process what’s happening in their lives.*

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Seventh-grader Brandt maneuvers the ball during a recent soccer game.

## Athletes join new league, welcome 5<sup>th</sup> graders

By Melanie Bolhuis, physical education teacher & athletic director

The final bell is not the end of the day at Ann Arbor Christian School, where some exciting after-school sports changes have occurred.

First, AACS is competing in a new, six-team league this year. We play against Central Academy, Emerson, Rudolf Steiner, St. Paul Lutheran, and Washtenaw Christian Academy.

And, for the first time, fifth-grade girls have joined the sixth graders on the junior varsity volleyball and basketball teams, and fifth graders are rounding out the boys’ JV basketball team as well. The varsity teams are now strictly for seventh and eighth graders.

Finally, girls’ volleyball changed from a winter to a fall sport. This allowed extra practice days in the late summer and almost daily practice after school. (They no longer share the gym with boys’ basketball, as they did in the winter.) Additional practices seem to be paying off: the girls’ varsity team won all but one league game.

Another bonus this fall is that our boys’ soccer and girls’ volleyball teams have been able to play many games at the same location on the same day, easing transportation issues.

It’s awesome to see the dedication and integrity of our coaches and watch the students pull together, demonstrating yet another way we at AACS bring glory to God. To find out our sports schedule, visit us on the web at: [annarborchristian.org/calendar/month.php](http://annarborchristian.org/calendar/month.php). Go Eagles!

### **Coaches deserve kudos**

#### **Fall sports:**

Boy’s soccer head coach Ben Wildeboer; assistant Bart Wise  
Girl’s volleyball head coach Tama Frison; assistants Melanie Bolhuis, Karen Eekhoff, Paul Gottschalk, Kellie Steen and Rachel Vogel

#### **Winter sports:**

Boy’s basketball head coach Jeremy Loudon; assistants Than Hoiles and Nate Daubendiek  
Girl’s basketball head coach Darren DeZeeuw; assistant Doug DeVries.

#### **Spring sports:**

Coed track head coach Chris Cristian, assistant Laura Bowen



## Laptops: high-tech boost to AACCS

By Kathy Ann Moilanen, Beacon copy editor

Not only are they cool—they boost educational time, too.

Yes, the 25 new “Apple MacBook” laptop computers are a hit with students and teachers alike.

When doing computer research in the past, teachers hiked classes down to use the library’s 12 desktop computers, requiring a simultaneous alternative activity for the other half of the class. Then they’d swap places.

“That’s not as efficient or educationally sound,” said Sue DeZeeuw, middle-school teacher. “Now, we can do the same lesson in a 10-to-15-minute time block.”

A campaign kicked off on Grandparents’ Day 2006 raised \$19,000 toward the \$27,000 purchase. AACCS development coordinator Sue Postema Scheeres secured a \$6,000 grant from the Detroit-

based Herbert and Elsa Ponting Foundation. The school’s technology committee covered the remaining \$2,000 to buy the laptop package. It includes the computers, their charging cart, a mini piano keyboard, two digital cameras, two camcorders, and a laser printer.

Two to three students are permanently assigned to each new computer. Teachers made assignments across the middle-school grades to allow for the least overlap. And, for example, a band student might be paired with a non-band student who can use the computer during study hall. Individuals can use their laptop before school, in study hall or during advisory periods.

“There’s been at least one of the laptops out every day,” Mrs. DeZeeuw said after only the first few weeks of school. “The students love them.”

“There’s some pride in knowing you share with only a couple other kids—and then there’s the ‘cool factor’ of having laptops.”

*A campaign kicked off on Grandparents’ Day 2006 raised \$19,000 toward the \$27,000 purchase.*



*Left: Crazy hat creations, worn here by eighth grader Megan and a friend who visited the booth, were a hit at Dexter Daze.*



*Right: Eighth-graders Megan and Matt use the new laptops to complete an American history assignment.*

## Dexter festival a new PR tactic

By Marcia Mitchell, Beacon editor

What do hot dogs, elephant ears, and Ann Arbor Christian School balloons have in common? They were all carried around at Dexter Daze, an outdoor event held each summer in Dexter, a village west of Ann Arbor. To promote AACCS, the public relations committee gave the venue a try August 12 and 13.

Casual visitors walking by the school’s booth received balloons, notepads, and pens imprinted with the AACCS logo. Kids of all ages made crazy hats by sticking feathers and stickers on brown paper bags turned upside down. Friendly faces

from AACCS handed out information packets and answered questions about the school. Nearly 20 volunteers helped make the event a success, including parents, students, a few alumni and even middle-school teacher Janet Jansen.

Dexter Daze was an inexpensive way to get our name out in a nearby community. The PR committee continues to look for new, creative ways to let others know about our school.

Of course, most of our new families learn about AACCS through word-of-mouth. So when you get the chance, be sure to share your enthusiasm for AACCS with your neighbor, co-worker, or even the grocery-store cashier!



## Invest in the future of AACCS

By Sue Postema Scheeres, development coordinator

In this season of giving, we ask you to prayerfully consider making a renewed financial commitment to AACCS. The development committee and school board members have identified five areas of giving:

- **Close the gap.** Tuition does not cover the cost of educating each student. The gap this year is \$1,000 per student. Your donation would ensure that we continue to offer an innovative curriculum that integrates faith and learning.
- **Reduce our debt.** We hope to dramatically reduce the principal on the remaining portion of our facility loan before the next rate adjustment in 2009. Perhaps you helped us raise \$3 million – 75 percent of the funds needed – to build our facility in 2003. Or maybe you are a new family who didn't have an opportunity to give in the past. Paying down the \$850,000 loan before January 2009 will help secure our school's future.
- **Increase tuition assistance.** Currently, 12 families receive partial tuition assistance. We would like to offer a tuition break to more families in need.
- **Grow Shelly's Hope Scholarship Fund.** The donor who established this scholarship fund viewed it as seed money to encourage others with a heart for Christian education to give. We are eager to offer more full scholarships to families in even greater need. (See related article on this page)
- **Save for the future.** Our facility was built in 2003, but we are saving now for when we need to replace the parking lot, the roof, and other big-ticket items.

## Join our giving legacy

### Gifts that will keep giving

By Sue Postema Scheeres, development coordinator

Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, Ann Arbor Christian School has created two new scholarship funds:

- Early this summer, a private donor established the **Shelly's Hope Scholarship Fund**, which will pay tuition for two students who cannot afford our Christ-centered education. This year, one scholarship was awarded for two years. Next year, an additional student will be identified. Awards are based on financial need and a family's desire for Christian education. The scholarship honors the memory of Shelly, a mother and teacher from western Michigan who bravely battled breast cancer before dying in January. The application deadline for the 2008-2009 school year is April 15, 2008.
- Another donor has established the **Harriet E. Dekker Memorial Scholarship Fund**. This scholarship will go to an eighth grader who shows character and academic promise, and will be applied to the student's college tuition once they graduate from high school. Details will be available to eighth-grade families next semester.

We are so grateful to these donors for their commitment to AACCS!

### Other ways AACCS raises money:

#### October

Apple pie sale

#### November

Pancake breakfast

(see back page)

Poinsettia sale

#### May

Flower sale

#### Ongoing

SCRIP

Box tops for education

Campbell's soup labels

*Please call the school at 734.741.4948 to see how you can participate.*

Sue Postema Scheeres was hired this summer as the school's development coordinator. Her duties include creating a long-term giving plan for the school. Please contact her at 734.741.4948 x117 or [development@annarborchristian.org](mailto:development@annarborchristian.org) if you have any questions about our giving programs.

## 8<sup>th</sup> graders earn their way to the windy city

Eighth graders have begun fundraising for the class trip to Chicago. Throughout the year, they will collect bottles and cans (drop yours off anytime in the school gathering space), serve hot lunch, sell concessions during sporting events, and babysit during designated school events. Last year's eighth grade class raised \$9,900!

Mark your calendar for the following dinners hosted by the eighth graders, and join the fun!

**Science Fair Soup Supper** – February 19  
**Fourth annual Broken Record Grille** – April 25

*Second-grader Elaina tries out the pump during a trip to the Wash Oak one-room schoolhouse.*



Photo by Franchine Westphal



You are invited to our annual \_\_\_\_\_

# Pancake Breakfast & Bake Sale

Saturday, November 10, 2007  
8:30-10:30 AM

- Enjoy a delicious pancake breakfast
- Select from our fresh home-baked treats
- Visit with school family and friends

*Donations will be accepted for the breakfast. All money raised will be used to replace the school's outdoor basketball hoops and pay for costs not covered by tuition.*



## Other upcoming AACS events you won't want to miss:

December 11	Family Christmas Gathering
January 21	Martin Luther King Day chapel
February 19	Science Fair and Soup Supper

Visit us on the web at [annarborchristian.org](http://annarborchristian.org)

5500 Whitmore Lake Road  
Ann Arbor, MI 48105  
Phone: 734.741.4948

Ann Arbor  
Christian School

