



# The Beacon

News to family and friends of Ann Arbor Christian School  
2009-2010, Number 2

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

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**March 2010**

## Vital volunteers add value

Dear AACCS family and friends,

In today's economy, all of us are looking for value - value in automobiles, home insulation (something the Ritzema family is currently working on), groceries, and much more. Christian education for our children and grandchildren is no exception.

Likewise, when we give of ourselves, we hope to see a good return on what we've invested; we want our actions to add value to our world. Whether it is an investment of time, talent, or energy, please know that each action you take has a vital impact, adding great value to our school.

At Ann Arbor Christian School, we depend on the gifts of dollars, talent, and time to realize the full potential of the value of Christian education.

Many of you offer prayers, the fruit of which we see in the spiritual growth of our students and multiple blessings to our staff and all school families. Some in our community give generously of their money. This helps reduce tuition for our families. Still others give time, partnering with the staff daily to impact our students for Christ.

Several national studies have shown that parents who invest time in their child's school see higher student achievement for their child as well as a greater connection with their school community. What kinds of volunteering do our families contribute? Here is a sampling of the myriad of ways you contribute to the value of AACCS:

- Committee Work - This is how things get done in the areas of finance, community building, information technology, development, education, building and grounds, and public relations. All our committees this year are full and fully engaged in supporting the vision and mission of AACCS.
- Educational Partnering Opportunities -This offers daily/weekly/annual support of our staff and students, with people serving as morning carpool greeters, playground supervisors, board of director volunteers, hot-lunch workers, set-up crews for events like the Science Fair, Grandparents Day, and the Spring Fine Arts Fair. Also, many serve as classroom volunteers, Moms-in-Touch prayer partners, audio-visual technicians, room parents, library helpers, building cleaners, and public relations helpers.
- Extracurricular Partnering Opportunities - This is a portion of how our fundraising happens, through the apple-pie sale, pancake breakfast, poinsettia sale, the annual auction, the flower sale, SCRIP, and Boxtops for Education.

Thank you for giving of yourselves to support the staff and students of *your* school, Ann Arbor Christian School.

In Christ,

Principal Thom Ritzema



Seventh-graders Tim A., David C., Leanne D., Elle J., and Lindsie E. share a laugh and a hug while on a field trip to Lake Erie (see related story on p. 5)

Photo by Michelle Armbruster

# U-M student teacher selects AACCS

By Kathy Ann Moilanen, Beacon copy editor



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Photos by Marcia Mitchell

Student teacher Lauren Bacon interacts with Andrew C. and Maria B. during an eighth-grade lab experiment.

Our budding 'scientists' and outstanding staff are playing a special role in training future instructors.

For the first time ever, a student teacher is assisting and learning at Ann Arbor Christian School with plans to share her experience with the University of Michigan.

Lauren Bacon, who attended Christian schools in Grand Rapids through high school, is finishing up her two-year teacher's certification in biology and chemistry at U-M. With a bachelor's degree in anthropology and zoology, her placement in Mark Wiersma's middle-school science classes is a perfect fit. She'll be at AACCS through April.

"I never imagined it'd be this much of a community," Miss Bacon said of AACCS. "Everyone's so welcoming."

## A field trip back in time

By Marcia Mitchell, Beacon editor

Imagine a school with no computers, technology, or even pens and pencils! At the Wash Oak one-room schoolhouse, Ann Arbor Christian School first and second graders found out what it was like to use McGuffey Readers, slates, and charcoal instead.

For these young students, the field trip back in time is one of the most highly anticipated days of the year. The kids not only visit the historic school, but make the experience authentic by dressing and acting the part.

Long braids and long skirts were the style for girls, while boys wore caps and held up their knickers with suspenders. Students creatively stuffed knapsacks or baskets with simple lunch foods like apples, home-baked bread wrapped in brown paper, ginger snaps, and ginger ale in glass bottles. They even experienced some good old-fashioned discipline when poor Fannie

Miss Bacon previously trained at Clague Middle School (public) and at Greenhills School (private), both in Ann Arbor. After researching options, she requested her final student teaching assignment be at AACCS. That means our students may be videotaped for study and training at U-M. Parents were asked to sign permission slips in January.

So far, Miss Bacon has been observing our teachers and helping carry out Mr. Wiersma's lesson plans. She looks forward to using her own ideas and lesson plans during the eighth-grade unit "Interactions of Matter," under Mr. Wiersma's supervision.

"The question is always 'How do you integrate faith into science instruction?'" said Mr. Wiersma, whose background includes training teachers in Haiti. "She's doing a wonderful job—and at this time, her assistance is huge. She's been jumping in from the get-go."

The extra classroom help has been a well-timed Godsend with the stress of Mr. Wiersma's wife facing a recurrence of cancer and their son in Haiti helping with the earthquake aftermath.

Miss Bacon appreciates our small class sizes and the resulting one-on-one opportunities with kids.

"Everybody at this school – the kids – all seem to be friends and no one seems to be left out. In most schools, it seems there's always division with kids left out and teasing," she said. "During team-building today (in middle-school advisory), they were cheering each other on, they were all good sports, and everyone was involved."

"I'm so thankful to be here. It's better than I ever imagined."



Photo by Sherry Day Kao

First-graders Caleb S., Will E., and Nathan L. sit in an old-fashioned desk and recite excerpts from McGuffey Readers.

May (a.k.a. first-grade parent Kim Hubers) just couldn't get her act together, and had to sit in the corner wearing a "dunce cap!"

The field trip, which began as part of the Community Unit, gives kids a feel for how much things have changed in the past 150 years.

# Joni Eareckson Tada extends personal thanks

By Marcia Mitchell, Beacon editor

Raking leaves has become quite a tradition for Becky Jungkuntz' class. For at least a dozen years, fifth graders have spent an afternoon serving others by ridding lawns of the blanket of leaves that fall in October. Homeowners then offer donations to class-selected charities related to topics discussed in fifth-grade Bible lessons.

This year, it made perfect sense to donate to Wheels of the World, a wheelchair outreach program of Joni and Friends. Founded by Joni Eareckson Tada, who became a quadriplegic after a diving accident at age 17, the ministry reaches out to people with disabilities and their families around the world. Joni is known internationally for her talents as an artist who draws and paints with her mouth, a vocalist, a radio host, and an author of 17 books, including "Joni," which the fifth graders read during their Bible lessons.

Joni was truly touched by the service and generosity of our students. Soon after the leaf raking project, AACCS parent Rachele Kasten received a call from Joni and Friends, asking for an address to which they could send a thank-you letter written by Joni herself!

The following is an excerpt:

Thank you so much for your wonderful gift toward Wheels for the World! It thrills me to know that you boys and girls at Ann Arbor Christian School are helping us reach disabled people for Christ around the world.

Just think of the boys and girls who will receive wheelchairs because of your generosity. These kids in developing countries are just like you...except they have disabilities. Almost all of them don't have wheelchairs. In Africa, I have seen mothers carry their children on their backs to bring them to be fitted for wheelchairs. I have seen these same kids smiling and speeding around, testing out their new wheels. It's especially wonderful when these same young people have the chance to hear about Jesus and pray to receive Him as their Savior. It's what Wheels for the World is all about, and you kids at Ann Arbor Christian are a big part of helping to make it happen!

And I'm glad to hear that you enjoyed reading the "Joni" book in your reading class - wow! It has a happy ending; we all go to heaven to be with Jesus. And thank you for writing personal letters. That made me feel real connected to your classroom.

Thank you again, and may God bless you for helping us at Joni and Friends and Wheels for the World.

Yours in His care, Joni Eareckson Tada



Photo by Marcia Mitchell

First-graders Dre H. and Judah W. proudly hold up hats, mittens, and scarves collected by the first and second graders and donated to the Staples Family Center, a homeless shelter in Ann Arbor operated by the Salvation Army.

Its not too late! Please join us for our second annual Ann Arbor Christian School auction

## An Evening in the Islands

Friday, March 12, 2010

Silent Auction at 6:30 Live Auction at 7:30

Tickets: \$35 each

Appetizers and desserts will be served

All proceeds go toward making education at Ann Arbor Christian School affordable and accessible to all interested families.

Please call Ann Arbor Christian School @ 734-741-4948 to make a reservation.

Go to [AnnArborChristian.org](http://AnnArborChristian.org) to view an auction catalog or download an absentee bidder form.

relax · socialize · laugh · reconnect



Photo by Marcia Mitchell

During a recent gym class, P.E. teacher Mandy Boelter and the fifth-grade class strategically release a parachute to see how long it will stay airborne.

## A new way to exercise brains

By Jeanette Brooks, AACCS parent



Seventh-grade student Elle J. boosts her concentration as she balances on an exercise ball in Mrs. Jansen's room.

Wait - are those exercise balls? Is Ann Arbor Christian School offering a Pilates class now?

It might look that way - but all those exercise balls in Janet Jansen's middle-school classroom aren't being used for crunches or yoga moves. They're being used as chairs.

Mrs. Jansen began experimenting with the huge, pliable balls last fall after taking a brain research class. She learned that one way to make learning "brain-friendly" is to provide students with cross-lateral balancing activities during a learning experience.

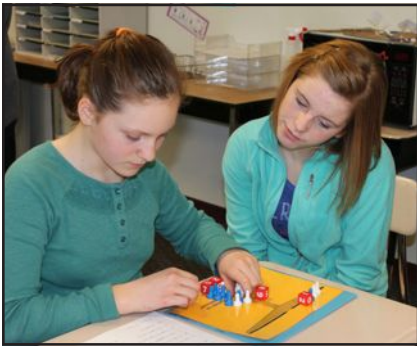
"Cross-lateral" just means the brain engages both sides of the body, which stimulates all four brain lobes. Just the simple act of sitting on a ball requires the body to make subtle movements to stay centered. When kids' bodies have to work this way to balance, their brains are less likely to become distracted or fatigued. This ignites attention, relieves excess energy, and improves kids' ability to file their learning into long-term memory. Instead of drifting off, their memory sensors kick in, and they're able to absorb and recall more.

Plus, it's just fun. The novelty of learning in a new way has naturally made students more eager and attentive.

Teacher consultant Greg Yoder of the Christian Learning Center Network agrees. (AACCS partners with the CLC Network to assess and address student needs.) In fact, one of the mini-workshops Mr. Yoder conducted for AACCS teachers covered the use of similar cross-lateral techniques to stimulate brain activity.

So where'd the exercise balls come from? Thirteen are on loan from AACCS families. They've been such a hit that the middle-school grammar group wrote letters to four retailers asking for donations. So far, Meijer and Dick's Sporting Goods have donated eight additional balls!

Want to learn more? During their letter-writing campaign, the grammar group found some compelling research from Grand Valley State University on the benefits of using exercise balls in education. (Check out: <http://www.ballodynamics.com/research/a1237990661.pdf>) You might even consider swapping your office chair for an exercise ball!



Eighth-grader Kait E. (right) helps make math fun while she mentors fifth-grader Kristen P. in hands-on equations.

## Multiple merits in math mentoring

By Suzanne Vivacqua, AACCS parent

Peer tutoring is an effective educational tool which provides students the opportunity to learn from one another.

This year, middle-school and fifth-grade math teacher Sue De Zeeuw introduced her students to math mentoring. The program pairs middle-school students with fifth graders while they work on hands-on equations, a component of the fifth-grade math curriculum which introduces basic algebraic concepts.

Mrs. De Zeeuw is excited about offering middle schoolers this opportunity for leadership as they "teach" their younger peers. Equally true, the fifth graders love learning from the older students.

"My mentor has helped me stay focused on the problems we were doing," remarks fifth-grader Jacob T. "He also showed me how to do some things we haven't learned yet, which is really cool."

Mrs. De Zeeuw says the only drawback to the program is "we don't have a lot of time for mentoring!" The middle-school students invited into the program give up 10 minutes of their lunch period while Mrs. De Zeeuw extends math class for an extra 10 minutes.

Math is not the first Ann Arbor Christian School subject to incorporate peer tutoring. Our age-old "reading buddy" program pairs fifth graders with kindergartners who read to each other weekly.

When peers teach peers, all benefit. The "teachers" gain confidence in skills they have already acquired, while the "students" learning new skills are engaged and receptive to information presented by friends they admire. Thanks to the creativity of AACCS teachers, our children are learning new ways to learn.



Photos by Marcia Mitchell

Second-graders Kaleb S. and Noah M. go for the spiky look on Wacky Hair Day!

# Sea legs required for Lake Erie adventure

By Kathy Ann Moilanen, Beacon copy editor

It was a day to 'Go Green' and luckily, it wasn't around the gills.

God blessed our sixth and seventh graders with a sunny, calm October day to set sail on Lake Erie as part of Michigan State University's Great Lakes Education Program. No one got seasick and everyone learned something about ecology!

Once the boat left the dock, Ann Arbor Christian School kids moved around in groups of six to eight.

At the bow, students learned to tie sea-worthy hitch knots and tested the lake's oxygen levels. At the rear of the vessel, they scooped and strained muck from the lake's bottom to reveal tiny creatures, like a rare, freshwater sponge. (One rule: No "eeews" allowed!)

Mid-deck, kids learned to read a naval map and

played a rousing game of "identify the biodegradables." (Did you know an apple core breaks down in two months, an aluminum can takes 200 years, and a plastic bottle lasts 450 years?)

Back on shore, the students used microscopes to examine samples from 12 buckets of marsh water drawn from various locations around Lake Erie Metropark, about an hour from Ann Arbor. Identified wriggling creatures included damselfly nymphs, water boatmen and water scorpions.

Finally, an enthusiastic park ranger led a show-and-tell of marsh life. Students got to touch Michigan's rarest snake, the Eastern Fox Snake. The checkerboard yellow-and-black reptile, whose narrow habitat is centered around this particular Metropark, is often mistaken for a rattler because it coils up and its tail buzzes.

Middle-school science teacher Mark Wiersma discovered this field-trip opportunity during a Michigan Science Teachers Association meeting in Detroit. Thankfully, a corporate grant covered half the cost so AACCS could take part at a reasonable rate.

What a blessing our small, inland school was able to learn hands-on from real-world scientists and naturalists on this day-long trip!



Sixth and seventh graders examine creatures in marsh water drawn from Lake Erie Metropark.

Photo by Michelle Armbruster



Sixth-grader Annie B. bravely scours the muck scooped from the bottom of Lake Erie. Students uncovered red worms, a fresh water sponge, and other interesting creatures.

Photo by Jim Bryson

## 'Heart'-felt thanks to special speaker

By Suzanne Vivacqua, AACCS parent

Always an exciting unit of study, the fifth grade's Circulatory, Respiratory, and Nervous System curriculum was enhanced this year by a special guest lecturer.

Dr. Wai Shun Wong, cardiologist and Ann Arbor

Christian School parent, provided some authentic "hands on" heart learning.

Dr. Wong brought a larger-than-life-sized model heart, which allowed close up viewing of heart chambers, valves, and arteries. Following his demonstration, the stars of the show were revealed - pig hearts!

Students examined a dissected pig's heart under Dr. Wong's guidance. They were able to feel the inside of the heart - valves, ventricles, atrium, and septum. Excitement crescendoed as they handled a second, whole pig's heart, where some blood still remained in an artery. Teacher Becky Jungkuntz was able to push the blood along and block the movement with her finger, demonstrating how blood that is blocked from reaching the heart causes the tissue to die.

Dr. Wong provided an amazing opportunity for fifth graders to view the workings of the heart firsthand.

"Dr. Wong is a good teacher," said fifth-grade student Sam V. "He has a good sense of humor. He made learning about the heart very exciting!"

Our children are blessed by those in the AACCS community who share their knowledge and talents, and in this case, their heart!



Fifth-graders Zach J., Caroline L., and Jessica W. show enthusiasm as they examine a real pig heart!

Photo by Becky Jungkuntz



AACCS parent and cardiologist Dr. Wai Shun Wong wows the fifth-grade class with his human heart model, and real pig hearts, too!

Photo by Becky Jungkuntz

# Board initiates school assessment

By Karl Jennings, president of AACCS Board of Directors

## Fundraising update

2009-2010 to date

Apple Pies	\$5,230
Pancake Breakfast	\$1,450
Poinsettia Sale	\$440
Boxtops for Education	\$359
Target Take Charge of Education	\$183
Scrip	\$1,625
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$9,287</b>

Other donations (including debt retirement, general fund, and various designated funds) \$46,293

-compiled by Jan Musch, administrative assistant for finance

The Ann Arbor Christian School Board of Directors looks forward to celebrating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of God's work at AACCS. We deeply appreciate the many families that came before us who were instrumental in establishing and moving AACCS thus far.

As we prepare to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the board has decided to begin a comprehensive assessment of our entire organization. With guidance from an expert in the field, we'll be assessing the school's operations, not the education provided. The board firmly believes that next to the quality of our teachers, our integrated, thematic curriculum remains the strongest attribute of our school. We made this announcement to the school community at a Feb.1 parent and association member meeting.

The board initiated this assessment after identifying four trends requiring full evaluation. These trends have merged to cause an unintended and systemic decline in enrollment and stand in the way of AACCS successfully achieving and sustaining our common mission. Specifically, the trends are:

- The geographic re-location of the school,
- The demographic change in school population,
- The transition of founding families, and
- The state of governance, roles, and structure.

The board intends the planned comprehensive assessment to be a collaborative process between all

## Our Mission

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

willing stakeholders in our association. Our clear objectives are to:

1. Accurately diagnose, prioritize, and tackle current trends and challenges.
2. Empower a new generation of AACCS families as partners in Christian education.
3. Engage all who believe in the mission of Christian education at AACCS.

Two of the ways the board will measure success or failure will be the reversal of declining enrollment and the expansion of our mission.

Clint Holden of Schoolright ([www.schoolright.com](http://www.schoolright.com)) will be our consultant and the assessment will begin in mid-February. For more information, please send an email to [board@annarborchristian.org](mailto:board@annarborchristian.org).



## Eagles basketball continues to thrive

*Above: The AACCS varsity girls' basketball team stays pumped up after another hard-fought win to continue their undefeated season!*

*Right: Eighth-grader Kait E. fights for the ball!*



Photos by Dave Smit

## Students reenact Civil Rights sit-ins

By Marcia Mitchell, Beacon editor

The January chapel service honoring Martin Luther King Jr. was anything but typical. Students sat in the hall, back-to-back in two straight rows, staring at the walls, not saying a word...

The peaceful "protesters" were reenacting the sit-ins organized by civil rights activists in the early 1960s. Fifth-grade teacher Becky Jungkuntz dramatically narrated the protest, bringing it to life for small groups of multi-aged students.

Miss Jungkuntz explained how college students began the peaceful movement to try to change the unfair laws which allowed restaurants to serve only white people.

"They just sat," she said sternly. "They didn't eat or drink. They were mistreated and they never talked or even reacted." She even pretended to pour ketchup on the AACS student "protestors," and challenged them not to react. The sit-ins grew, she said. White people and other ethnicities joined African Americans, working together to promote peaceful change. Eventually, the laws did change.

At the AACS sit-in, you could have heard a pin drop, if not for the sounds of other students experiencing seven different interactive stations around the gym. Each multi-sensory station was designed to create an awareness of leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., who walked in Jesus' footsteps by displaying courage,



Photos by Marcia Mitchell

Students listen intently as Miss Jungkuntz challenges them to remain steadfast in the Civil Rights sit-in simulation. Pictured are sixth-grader Jenna G., fourth-grader Emily M., alumni Laurel M., fourth-grader Justin M., and third-grader Dane H.



AACS alumni enjoy the company of old friends at the MLK Jr. chapel service. Pictured are high school sophomores Christine D. and Blaire C., freshmen Taylor B., Emily A., Andie D., and Gabrielle V., and junior Sera B.

## Robotics meets "Star Wars"

By Tami Michele, AACS parent

Young Lego and robot enthusiasts share their passion every Monday at Ann Arbor Christian School.

A local company called Brain Monkeys has been leading an after-school class here for the past year. (Previously, the class was called Rocks and Robots.)

Twelve students in third through eighth grade work on various projects that involve programming and building NXT Lego Mindstorms, a type of robot.

Currently, the students are building their robots as podracers from the "Star Wars" movies. They will use multiple light sensors and learn more complex programming icons such as nested loops, switches, logic blocks, and data hubs. They will

equip the podracers with video cameras and set up a "Star Wars" scene and film a movie of their podracers racing.

The organizers from Brain Monkeys say AACS is one of their favorite places to teach. George Albercook and Katie Tilton are impressed with our students' ability to creatively design and implement their own personal projects and to problem solve when their projects fail. They noted the great desire of the students to help each other even at the cost of setting aside their own projects for awhile.

The class, which costs \$112, meets Mondays from 3:30-5 p.m. through March 15. Anyone can come observe. For more information, go to [www.brainmonkeys.com](http://www.brainmonkeys.com). For summer camp information, go to [rocksandrobots.com](http://rocksandrobots.com).

Fourth-graders Justin M. and Ben B. make modifications to their podracer.



# AACS Open House

Thursday, March 18, 2010 Invite your friends!

9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.: Come see our school in action!

6:00 - 8:00 p.m.: meet our families and staff, and participate in the Winter Olympics, AACS style!

## Other upcoming dates:

Auction

March 12, 6:30 p.m.

Broken Record Grille

April 23

Kindergarten Round-up

May 27

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



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