



The Beacon

News to family and friends of Ann Arbor Christian School
2009-2010, Number 3

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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June 2010



Mr. Ritzema leads fourth graders in a recorder medley at the AACCS Spring Music Night in May. Pictured are Melia S., Ella E., Joe B., Hannah E., and Kate H. Look for more snapshots of the evening throughout The Beacon.

“FROG”). Ann Arbor Christian School opened its doors in September 1991 with seven students (FROG again). The modular was sited at the Ann Arbor Christian Reformed Church (FROG), a successful pledge drive was launched (FROG), and by January 1992, 10 students from five churches attended (FROG).

In 1992-1993, the school grew to 31 students representing more than a dozen churches (FROG). We opened the 1994-1995 school year with 52 students and three full-time teachers, with one teacher assuming administrative responsibilities (FROG). In 1995-1996, the school added another half-time teacher (FROG) and, by July, a half-time principal (FROG). More modular classrooms were added (FROG) until it was determined that the school needed a new location.

In February 2003, we moved to our present site on Whitmore Lake Road (FROG). Principal Ann Deckert left after the 2003-2004 school year (FROG) and Kathy Broege joined AACCS in 2004-2005 as principal (FROG). Middle-school grades and several teachers were added each year from 2002 until 2005 (FROG) when we operated as a K-8 school (FROG). After Miss Broege’s three-year stay, I was hired (FROG) to lead the school. With the addition of preschool in 2009 (FROG), AACCS anticipates a grand total of 146 students enrolled for 2010-2011, along with 20 staff (FROG).

That’s a lot of reliance on God. More transitions lay ahead for AACCS. Several staff members, including myself, will be leaving at the end of this school year. New hires and families will be welcomed into AACCS. In addition, the school board is revising its governance structure to support AACCS for the coming years. It is my prayer that you will fully rely on God as he continues to guide you into the future through the many transitions ahead.

Remember: Fully Rely On God.

In Christ,

Principal Thom Ritzema

God’s faithfulness through transitions

Dear friends of AACCS,

Ann Arbor Christian School has seen God’s faithfulness through many transitions in its first couple of decades. I’ll review just a few of those changes and insert the acronym F. R. O. G. – Fully Relying On God – to highlight how the AACCS family has relied on God and his continued faithfulness to us.

On Sept. 23, 1986, after much discussion, research, and prayerful consideration, a group of Christian families formed the Christian School Association of Ann Arbor (an example of



Second grader Krystal K. displays her puppet, created in Ms. Kovak’s art class. Every student chose their favorite piece of artwork to display at the Spring Fine Arts Program.

Photos by Marcia Mitchell

Thanks & farewell to 4 staff

By Marcia Mitchell, Beacon editor

As we finish another year at Ann Arbor Christian School, we bid adieu to four staff members who are pursuing new paths.

Kellie Steen blessed AACCS third graders with her creativity, warmth, and secret handshakes for nine years. Now her attention has turned to her firstborn son, Benjamin Paul, born April 20. Mr. and Mrs. Steen will never be at a loss for babysitters with all those former students lined up outside their door! Congratulations, Steen family, and please come visit AACCS often!

As the art teacher extraordinaire for five years, Kristen Kovak inspired creativity and an appreciation for the arts. She developed in

her students the courage to think "outside of the box" with her reserved, yet witty and encouraging teaching style. Ms. Kovak and her husband are relocating to Pittsburgh. It will be hard to fill the shoes of such a special teacher and friend.

Lisa Smit has been a wonderful addition this year as an aide in our first/second grade classroom. Her steady presence and extra set of hands - and eyes! - were a blessing to her students, and especially to teacher Susan Furr! We thank her for her warm and encouraging spirit and wish her well in her next endeavor.

We also say good-bye to Principal Thom Ritzema, who has led our school for the past three years and bravely took on the challenge of teaching vocal and instrumental music this year. His friendly, positive demeanor has been a blessing to our students and families. After living across the state from his family for three years, Mr. Ritzema considers it an answer to prayer to be reunited with his wife and kids. We wish you all God's blessings!

AACS families and staff thank these faithful servants for the countless ways they have touched our kids with selfless dedication and unwavering love.

The winner? The Winter Olympics garnered 307 pounds of food compared to 182 pounds for the Summer Olympics. Kids donated a total of 489 pounds of food to Food Gatherers, designated for Hope Clinic! That's 155 pounds more than last year, making needy families in Washtenaw County the real winners!

Assessment results available

A comprehensive assessment of Ann Arbor Christian School has been completed. The AACCS board contracted outside consultants from SchoolRIGHT to determine the strengths, concerns, threats, and opportunities for the future of AACCS. For detailed results, please contact the AACCS office at 734-741-4948.

In Brief

By Marcia Mitchell, Beacon Editor

Auction nets \$17,600!

The second Ann Arbor Christian School auction was a huge success! Guests attending "An Evening in the Islands" were treated to delicious appetizers and desserts at the Barton Hills Country Club and waged bidding wars on more than 100 donated items and services.

AACS would like to thank the many donors who contributed wonderful products and services to the event, as well as those who solicited the donations and helped in any way, no matter how small. The biggest thanks goes to auction chairs Lisa Ann Schliebe, Rachele Kasten, and Rachel Bush for making AACCS' biggest fundraiser possible. Their many hours of service secured \$17,645 for our school!

Spaghetti Olympics wins gold!

For the second year, Ann Arbor Christian School served the local community by collecting non-perishable food for Food Gatherers.

Coinciding with the 2010 Winter Olympics, this year's "Spaghetti Olympics" promoted friendly competition as students voted for their favorite Olympic season - winter or summer - by depositing their food donations in the appropriate containers.



We joyfully welcome the newest member of the AACCS family, Benjamin Paul! Congratulations, Mr. and Mrs. Steen!



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Mrs. Furr's kids are all smiles at the Spring Fine Arts program. Pictured are (back row) second graders James M., Noah M., and Kaleb S., and first graders Caleb S., Leia S., and Judah W.

Photo by Marcia Mitchell



2010 Graduates

Krista N.
Maria B.
Julia S.
Hannah L.
Avery D.
Sophie B.
Kait E.
Brittany B.
Paul L.
Joel F.
Matt M.
Joe G.
Andrew C.
Michael D.
Phill T.
Brady A.
Dennis C.

Spread like wildfire, class of 2010!

Congratulations to the 2010 grads! AACCS is proud of these 17 unique individuals – seven who have been at our school since kindergarten – who have matured academically, socially, and spiritually through their experiences here. They are ready to courageously embrace the opportunities high school has to offer. We challenge them to be bold in their pursuits and “Spread like wildfire” for Jesus!



How much sand can the bucket hold before the bridge collapses? Joel G. and Julia S. test their bridge design in one of Mark Wiersma's eighth-grade science projects.

Class of 2010 Mission Statement:
We, the class of 2010, will take our role of leadership seriously. We also will embrace our responsibility to serve others and achieve common goals. We will honor our commitment to God by respecting each other, ourselves, and our authorities. As the eighth-grade class strives to be united through Christ, we will practice self-control in all situations. We promise to have a compassionate and patient attitude in our daily lives. We will flood our community with a vibe of joy and peace, using these opportunities to spread like a wildfire for God wherever life takes us.

8th-grade awards

At the AACCS Spring Fine Arts program, awards were presented to two eighth-grade students. Julia S. received the John Philip Sousa award for three years of musical excellence and leadership in AACCS' band program. Matt M. was awarded the Harriet E. Dekker Scholarship, a college scholarship given to an eighth grader who shows character and academic promise. Way to go, grads!



Eighth graders show off their poodle skirts at the Broken Record Grille, a fundraiser for their end-of-year trip.



Eighth graders Andrew C., Joel F., Michael D., Matt M., and Dennis C. count up the cash earned at the Soup Supper. The event raises money for the class trip to Chicago.

Reading = passport to the world

By Suzanne Vivacqua, AACCS mom



Kids experienced customs and traditions of Australia, Haiti, Nepal, and Uganda during a reading month event. Fifth graders Claire C., Caroline L., and Emily T. make peanut butter the Ugandan way.

Imagine traveling the world without ever leaving Ann Arbor! Students at Ann Arbor Christian School did just that as they celebrated reading month in March.

Each year for reading month, a committee of teachers plans festivities around a particular theme, a long-standing tradition at AACCS. This year, students filled in "passports" as their reading focus took on an international flair.

A whole-school assembly introduced the month, featuring preschool teacher Jennifer Bryson's slides of places around the globe she and her dad have visited. Students were given "passports" of suggested reading activities to complete at home or at school. Activities were creatively categorized into reading for relaxation, fun, knowledge, and adventure. Students set their own goals and read "around" their passports, exposing them to various styles and genres of literature.

Other events included an all-school reading of the picture book "How My Parents Learned to Eat" followed by an opportunity to eat lunch with chopsticks! Also, the O'Hare School of Irish Dance entertained students with a bit of traditional Irish dance. A second all-school assembly provided hands-on experiences from four countries. Guest speakers represented Australia, Nepal, Uganda, and Haiti. Students moved from station to station viewing objects, pictures, maps, playing games, and learning about each culture.

For the closing activities, students were asked to wear an article of clothing representing another country, and one staff member pledged a 25 cent donation to Haiti for every student who participated. When more than 100 students showed off their international wardrobe, \$25 was added to the Haiti relief fund!

The month's festivities enabled AACCS students to see the world through reading while extending a helping hand to those in need.

Math whizzes compete globally

By Marcia Mitchell, Beacon editor

- What two-digit number is twice the sum of its digits?
- The product of three consecutive whole numbers is 15,600. What is the smallest of the three numbers?
- The value of a two-digit number is 10 more than three times the sum of its digits. The ones digit is one more than twice the 10s digit. Find the two-digit number.

Do these little puzzles have you stumped? Never fear, the Ann Arbor Christian School Math Olympiad team is here! Our team of math enthusiasts has



Sixth graders Justin E. and Seth K. crunch numbers on a Math Olympiad quiz.

had a great start this year, competing against 4,700 teams from 300 countries around the world.

Middle-school teacher Sue De Zeeuw organized a Math Olympiad team to offer an independent challenge for fifth and sixth graders interested in math. Mathematical Olympiads for Elementary and Middle Schools (MOEMS), an international organization, aims to foster mathematical creativity and ingenuity while introducing math concepts and strategies for problem solving. Each year, teams compete in five contests by independently completing five mathematical challenges. Answers are submitted online, and at the end of the season, scores are tabulated and top performers are recognized.

While most Math Olympiad teams hold regular weekly practices, Mrs. De Zeeuw opted to let kids work occasionally on practice problems during math class as an enrichment activity. Even students who haven't chosen to participate in the after-school program still enjoyed the challenges offered by the in-class practice.

"I've found these times to be highly motivational with some awesome group work and passionate discussions about the problem and various strategies," remarks Mrs. De Zeeuw.

And students appreciated the opportunity to stretch their mathematical knowhow.

"Math Olympiad is fun because it challenges me," said sixth-grader Justin E. "It's fun to do harder math."

The final Math Olympiad results were released in May, with a special award given to Nathan N. for scoring in the top 2% of all competitors! Way to go!



Second graders Caleb S. (back), Katie V., Noah M., and Jenna A. squeeze into a large bird nest at the Toledo Zoo. First and second graders discovered grasslands, prairies, tundra, mountains, and wetlands during the culminating trip for their habitat unit.

Quake shakes up AACCS

Hearts moved to help Haiti

By Marcia Mitchell, Beacon Editor

When the most powerful earthquake since 1770 rocked Haiti, the hearts of Ann Arbor Christian School students and staff were saddened. As the school community searched for ways to help, students experienced dedicated teamwork reaching out to those devastated by the quake.

And it all began with prayer.

The morning after news of the 7.0 magnitude quake hit the airways, students and staff began praying for the Haitian people and relief workers. Middle-school teacher Mark Wiersma, who lived in Haiti for 13 years before teaching at AACCS, guided kids in praying for friends still living there. They also prayed for his son Daniel, an RN at Seattle Children's Hospital, who took three weeks vacation time to help the Haitians.

AACCS partnered with World Vision Haiti Earthquake Relief to provide and distribute life-saving food, medicines, and family survival kits, including clean water, blankets, cooking supplies, and tents.

Teachers implemented creative and meaningful ways to involve kids in raising money for the relief efforts.

After researching Haiti, middle schoolers created posters to educate and challenge fellow students to donate. Middle-school teachers offered a "Help Haiti Lunch" every Wednesday in March. Students could choose to exchange their home-packed lunch for a simple, teacher-provided meal. Eating only oatmeal, rice, or pasta allowed students to appreciate their usual ample food supply and teachers donated 25 cents for each participant. Middle schoolers sacrificed 162 out of a possible 196 lunches, adding \$81.50 to the Haiti relief fund.

The relief effort also extended to AACCS athletics. Boys and girls from the JV and varsity basketball teams played together in a fun-filled "Spirit Game." Entrance fees and concession sales were donated to Haiti.

The school's weekly "Blue Note" included prayer suggestions for home use and ideas for kids to raise money throughout Lent. Students were encouraged to do extra chores for pay and donate the money, kindly asking parents to match the funds!

By the end of March, AACCS donated \$915 to Haiti!

For more information or to donate, go to: donate.worldvision.org.



Photo by Marcia Mitchell

Eighth grader Julia S. and seventh-grader Joel A. battle for the ball in the spirit game for Haiti.

Students spurred to action

By Marcia Mitchell, Beacon editor

When Ann Arbor Christian School students were encouraged to raise money for Haiti disaster relief (instead of just asking their parents for donations), some go getters met the challenge head-on.

Fifth grader Emily T. remembered making a little box when she was 9 to collect money for homeless people and that set her in motion.

"I thought if I went around my neighborhood I could raise money for Haiti," she said. She made and decorated a small box, donated some of her own money, and began the trek through her neighborhood. Emily was pleasantly surprised that most neighbors contributed between \$3 and \$10, resulting in \$100 to help AACCS' Helping Haiti project!

Emily's assertiveness was contagious, sparking a desire to help in fellow students. Fifth grader Sarah C. was moved to act and brainstormed ideas with her family. She and her siblings baked goodies and donated more than \$30 from their bake sale.

"Since we have almost everything we need, it doesn't feel good when Haiti is suffering and we are all comfy in our houses," Sarah said.

Both girls say they hope the money donated goes toward food, clothing, blankets, and other things the Haitians need.

Emily, like many other kids, has developed quite a heart for Haiti through this experience. She hopes to continue to raise money by making and selling crafts, bookmarks, paintings, and lemonade.



Photo by Renée McKeone

Scalpel, please!

No "chickening out" on this science experiment! Ben B. and Leilani W. peek out of their scrubs during a chicken dissection, lead by parent Jon Elaison. The experiment fits perfectly into the fourth-grade unit on bones and muscles.

Tech team plans for future

By Jay Brooks, IT committee chair

Ann Arbor Christian School's Information Technology Committee has existed since the days of our school's blueprints. Hats off to Darren De Zeeuw who, at times, singlehandedly managed IT with great results. And nods (and smiles) to Sue De Zeeuw, Matt Mazurek, and Wayne Sit for their prior and continued focus on this front as well.

Our committee today is nine people strong with a good mix of backgrounds. We meet on the third Wednesday of each month in Mrs. De Zeeuw's classroom and would welcome newcomers and visitors, especially with our school's growing emphasis on stronger committee involvement.

One of the IT shifts we're seeing is a focus on making investments in technology that will carry us further into the future. For example, we're considering implementing a robust central server and shifting to a single wireless network available from anywhere in the building. Also, we're looking at Student Information Systems that will address our aging report-card system and streamline many other administrative and reporting functions.

Of course, with IT work, the difficulty is to balance needs, cost of ownership, training requirements, and ongoing supportability. The school has done this really well over the years, making good use of our phone system, computers, and network gear. As we invest in new hardware and software, we'll certainly work hard to make the most of it on all fronts.

As committee chair, I welcome your thoughts (jayhbrooks@gmail.com) and involvement on IT-related matters.



Photo by Dawn Morales

AACS parent David Morales shows love to one of the Guatemalan children receiving items donated by AACS.

Through Christ I can!



Photos by Marcia Mitchell

Fifth graders enthusiastically sing praises to God! Miss Jungkuntz' class is pleased to offer a CD they have recorded of more than 15 praise and worship songs. This collection entitled "Through Christ I can" shows the joyful hearts of these young musicians. Please call the office (734-741-4948) if you are interested in a copy. Suggested donation is \$10.

Guatemala grateful for basics

By Kathy Ann Moilanen, Beacon copy editor

Imagine kids excited over gifts of underwear. Now realize it's not imaginary.

A group of nearly 30 children in Guatemala gratefully received such humble, donated items from Ann Arbor Christian School when the Morales family visited in February. They brought three large suitcases of gifts to this safe haven for abused kids run by Life Unlimited Ministries.

Before their trip, an open suitcase and bin lay in the AACS gathering space to collect specific, much-needed items. In about a week, the containers filled with socks, underwear, notebooks, and second-hand pants, plus some towels, activity books, and candy.

David Morales grew up in Guatemala and his American mom – who went there 55 years ago as a missionary teacher – still lives there. During family visits, David, Dawn and their children make a point to serve this special group home in Central America. In the past, they've thrown hot-dog Christmas parties, acted out the Nativity, and brought warm coats for all the children (high altitude makes it chilly).

The kids at this home were rescued from dangers including physical, psychological, and sexual abuse. They range from babies to 18 year olds.

"Emily just loves these kids and this home," says Mrs. Morales, noting that her fourth-grader doesn't speak Spanish and many Guatemalan kids speak little English. One girl, slightly older than Emily, was riding one of three shared bicycles when they visited.

"Emily just jumped on the back of the bike with Jennifer and off they went!" Mrs. Morales said. "The language is no barrier if you can show love."

In fact, during their day together, Jennifer asked Emily if her parents would take her home. She promised: "I'll be good..."

Most of the children are available for adoption, but their government prefers they stay in their own country. Those with HIV cannot be adopted into the United States.

Mrs. Morales would "highly encourage" families who want to serve God to head to Guatemala. (See website lifeunlimitedmin.org.)

Middle-school teacher Janet Jansen's son served there with Mr. Morales last year. Volunteers have done such jobs as build a bench around a tree and put up a fence. One man from Pinckney devised a wood-burning water heater for them. They previously had no warm baths.

"If you are willing, God can use you anywhere," Mrs. Morales said.

Winter Olympics wow AACCS

By Suzanne Vivacqua, AACCS mom

Why travel to Vancouver when the Olympics can come to you? Thanks to Ann Arbor Christian School's physical education teacher, students participated in their own Olympic games without ever leaving school!

Mandy Boelter planned a creative PE unit with loads of Olympic fanfare. A bulletin board showed pictures of various events and provided students with background and descriptions for the games. After that introduction, Mrs. Boelter was ready to lead the students on their own Olympic adventure.

The Boelter Olympics included the following events: speed skating races (around the gym gliding with paper under foot); luge and skeleton races (on scooters through a course of traffic cones); curling (using a broom to shoot a hockey puck at a target on the floor); biathlon (running laps and shooting a Nerf dart at a target while timed); and hockey (shooting a puck into a net). Of course, the torch relay at the beginning and end of class served as opening and closing ceremonies. The "torch" was a volleyball carried on an inverted traffic cone.

"It was fun to plan this unit to coincide with the winter Olympics," Mrs. Boelter shared. "The Olympics have been a favorite of mine since I was a little girl and I wanted to expose AACCS students to some of what the Olympics are like."

She certainly accomplished her goal!



Photo by Mandy Boelter

Third grader Matthew C. gets in some target practice for the AACCS biathlon.

New sports club fills niche

By Kathy Ann Moilanen, Beacon copy editor

More than 75 percent of those joining the new "sports club" weren't after-school athletes previously. Goal scored!

This spring, Ann Arbor Christian School's athletic director introduced a new sports club. It started with a wildly popular co-ed volleyball program, then a session of bowling in April, followed by two weeks of table tennis, and finally a combination floor hockey/lacrosse club.

Susie Sulkowski designed the club to appeal to kids uninterested or unable to commit to a full-season team sport but still wanting to improve their physical fitness. The proposal also was a safety net in case AACCS couldn't locate track coaches.

(Without track, some students were unable to qualify as "three-sport athletes." Participating in two units of the new club program equaled one traditional team sport, allowing several students to get their names on our gym banner!)

In the end, AACCS hired two great track coaches. But the new sports club still is here to stay. Mrs. Sulkowski plans to repeat it again next year, perhaps adding soccer or cross country. God is working!

The school board approved the new program only if it could pay for itself. It has. As a bonus, it's a selling point for our school: more sports offerings appealing to a wider range of students.

As of March, only 33 percent of fifth through eighth graders played after-school sports at AACCS, according to Mrs. Sulkowski. Her future goal is 100 percent participation in at least one after-school sport, supplementing students' weekly physical



Photos by Kathy Ann Moilanen

Seventh graders Joanna V. and Sophia B., and sixth graders Karissa K. and Julia B. learn the fundamentals of lacrosse in the after school sports club.

education class.

The club program allows flexibility: bowling works no matter how many participate!

Plus, kids are likely to play these particular sports for a lifetime, Mrs. Sulkowski says. The long jump, on the other hand, is not something done at the company picnic or with the church youth group or in recreational leagues. Participating in club sports at AACCS may give students encouragement and confidence to join such groups and stay active.

"We've pulled in students that had, up to that point, not played any after-school sport!" says Mrs. Sulkowski. "Plus, it offers flexibility for those in elite sports. It's fun after school with their peers. It's doing something a little different that's not in their comfort zones."



Get your paddles ready! Sports club members gear up for some table tennis. Pictured are athletic director Susie Sulkowski, Julia B., Isabela F., Sarah C., Evan D., Kristen P., Alex P., and Sophia B.

Photo by Dawn Morales



Can you guess who's hidden under those masks? AACCS' third annual dance – this year a masquerade ball--was a special memory maker for dads and daughters.

Upcoming dates in 2010:

September 1
Back to School Picnic
5:30-7:30 p.m.

September 7
First Day of School
(9:00 a.m. Chapel and
11:45 a.m. dismissal)

September 9
**Middle School Back to
School Night** 7:00 p.m.

September 16
**Elementary Back to
School Night** 7:00 p.m.

October 21-22
Teacher's Convention
(No School)

November 12
Grandparents Day

November 13
Pancake Breakfast

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annarborchristian.org

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**Ann Arbor
Christian School**

