

# USS ARK

News of God's People in Action



Lent  
March 2010  
(Edition 3)

God's work. Our hands. + Upper Susquehanna Synod + Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

## Girlfriends Unlimited

### “Changing Hearts. Changing Lives. One Girlfriend At A Time!”

St. John's, Potts Grove, reaches out to women with a unique social group. “GIRLFRIENDS UNLIMITED” focuses on building relationships between women of all ages while strengthening their relationship with God. Gatherings and events are geared toward things women enjoy experiencing. It is a ministry that encourages women to come together to do things that they would naturally do with “girlfriends.” And, it is a ministry that fits into many schedules, because girlfriends meet together to do what they want when they want.

Pastor BJ Collins says the initial gathering of the Potts Grove “Girlfriends Unlimited” was on September 4, 2008, at St. John's with five ladies in attendance. After that, they enjoyed other gatherings with themes on “Christmas Cookie Swaps,” “Card Making,” a “Bloomery for Faith and Friendship,” “Chocolate Madness,” “A Day of Pampering,” “Mardi-Gras,” “Back to School,” and “Scrapbooking”. Gatherings throughout the first year grew to bring together more than 40 ladies both from the parish and the local community.

The group also has smaller “girlfriend interest groups” actively doing their own thing. The church's quilters, who came together for the love and interest of quilting and who have since built up friendships with one another while providing a wonderful ministry with quilts, fit into the category of a “girlfriends interest group.” Also, for many years ladies active as a unit of the Women of the ELCA came together regularly for Bible study, fellowship, and service projects; and they have formed a “girlfriends interest group.”

There are so many possibilities with “Girlfriends Unlimited” - possibilities that you can make happen from individual interests. Collins says here is the bonus. “You can easily build up relationships across your neighborhoods and community by simply inviting your friends, co-workers, and neighbors to come join in activities they would naturally enjoy. Imagine being able to share the love of God with others while doing things you already enjoy doing with girlfriends,” she said. “Girlfriends Unlimited” material is available through Group publishers at <http://www.girlfriendsunlimited.com>.



Members of the recent work trip to Mississippi pose for a picture. The group worked for five days.

## Mission Trip to Mississippi

Twenty-five members and friends of Upper Susquehanna Synod, ELCA, and beyond participated in the Lutheran-Episcopal Disaster Response Camp Victor in Ocean Springs, MS, in February. They worked on Hurricane Katrina disaster rebuilding projects. Participants represented the following Upper Susquehanna Synod churches: Holy Spirit, Turbotville; Himmels Church (Lutheran and UCC), Rebeck; Salem, Salem; St. Peter's, Kreamer; Leiningers-Arbogast; St. Matthews, Shamokin Dam; as well as Winfield Baptist Church; Holy Name of Jesus Roman Catholic Church, Harrisburg; Witmer United Methodist, Port Trevorton; and Trinity United Methodist, Middleburg.

The group was split into three work teams working on houses in different areas in and around Biloxi. The teams did demolition, framing, hanging and finishing drywall, plumbing, landscaping, and painting. The road trip was approximately 1150 miles with the icy winter weather slowing down the driving through the states of West Virginia, Maryland, and Virginia, those traveling by car experienced a 29-hour trip!



## Washingtonville and Hidlay Parishes Reach Out

**CARD OF THE WEEK MINISTRY:** Each week the Washingtonville congregation signs a card to someone in the community. It could be for a new baby, sickness, accident, death, fire, or a new house. Pastor Melody Sell places a card in the narthex on Sunday, and the congregation signs it before it is sent out in Monday's mail. Congregation members suggest whom to send the weekly card to within their community. Sandy Grier, the synod's social ministry coach, suggests, "I thought this idea could even be shared within a neighborhood of a congregation or you could ask people from your congregation to share names of folks they know that could use some cheering up and remembrance. Have everyone sign the card and send. Everyone loves to receive a card, especially if you are going through rough times. Just knowing that your congregation is praying and thinking of them may be the brightest light of their day." Pastor Sell reports that 95% of her congregation even writes a note, not just their name.

**PEW PRAYERS:** The Washingtonville Congregation engages in a ministry called "Pew Prayers." This ministry started on All Saints Sunday 2008. The words below are listed on two cards at either end of a different pew each week. "We pray for the people who sat in this pew in the past as witnesses to their faith, who sit in this pew today that they may share the Gospel, who will sit in this pew in the future that they will share the old, old story that we have loved so long." Pastor Sell says they have a wonderful conversation each week in the pew with all ages rejoicing in the past, sharing the present, and hopeful for the future. As the congregation remembered people from the past, the conversation turned to how those people who sat in the pew shared their God-given talents. These conversations even led to the start-up of ministries again; the congregation walks around the community giving out bags of goodies and caroling in December; and they offer a Christmas Play and invite the community. If the "Pew Prayers" are not moved each week, the congregation really notices! Pastor Sell remarked that a 4-year-old came up to her one time and reminded her that it needed to be moved.

**COMMUNITY PARTY:** Pastor Sell also serves Hidlay Lutheran and shared that this congregation has several outreach ministries. Their largest is an annual community party at their pavilion. The congregation bakes cakes, brownies, and other goodies and makes homemade ice cream. Last year, they had eight varieties. People bring their lawn chairs, eat, listen to a band that the congregation provides, and talk to one another. This is a great "meet your neighbor" event. This free July event is on a Sunday afternoon for about 3 hours. Last year, 300 people attended. The congregation members talk with the guests and invite them to come to church if they don't already have a congregational home. The members hand out extra bulletins and flyers from the church with worship times as well as activities listed from their congregation and community. This lawn party costs the congregation about \$500 which includes everything from the entertainment, the paperware and food. Much of the food is donated by members.

Thank you to Pastor Sell for sharing highlights of her congregations' outreach ministries. To share your outreach ministries with others, please contact Sandy Grier, AIM, at 570-220-5039 or [sandygrier@comcast.net](mailto:sandygrier@comcast.net)

### Up and Down the Valleys

**Installations:** Pastor Carolyn E. Simonds was installed as the pastor of Liberty Valley Lutheran Parish on Sunday, February 14, 2010. Pastor Jane Compton was installed on Sunday, February 21, 2010, as pastor of Himmel's, Rebuck.

**Susquehanna University's (Chaplain Mark Radecke)** "Issues at the End of Life" course has earned a gold Excellence Award in the service-learning category and a Grand Bronze Medal for overall excellence from the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), the nation's preeminent organization for student affairs in higher education. Radecke says this is the fourth year in a row that NASPA recognized SU for its service-learning programs.

This year on Epiphany of our Lord, Zion, Kratzerville, (Pastor Breen Sipes) brought a house blessing service to people's homes instead of having a worship service. Fifteen member families signed up in advance, and the pastor set up a schedule that would get her to each house in a timely fashion. She did the traditional chalking of the doorpost and did a brief service and then provided a prayer sheet and tea light to each family to finish blessing their own home after she had gone on. It was truly an occasion to spread light to the whole community!

**Messiah, New Berlin (Pastor Andrew Fitch)** held a Souper Bowl of Caring to benefit ELCA World Hunger on Super Bowl Sunday. They also held a Valentine's Day Date Night for young married couples, providing child care at the church while couples enjoyed a movie and dinner at a member's home.

USS ARK is a publication of the Upper Susquehanna Synod, ELCA. Permission is granted to reproduce USS Ark for congregational communications. Send your mission stories and ministry ideas to Editor Chad Hershberger at [news@uss-elca.org](mailto:news@uss-elca.org).



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**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
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