

Shepherd's Creek Ablaze with Baptisms

reported by Pastor Dan Fulmer

Shepherd's Creek Lutheran Church-Bradenton, FL, was blessed recently with the opportunity to celebrate ten baptisms in two months. Why has the Holy Spirit been so active in our small church? I don't pretend to know exactly why, but I can tell you that the concepts explained by the "Groups Ablaze" (Small Group) program developed by Missions International for the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod encouraged our congregation to purposefully focus on relationship building and exposed us to ways we could guide individuals through the various steps of coming to faith in Christ.

Our church took part in a "Groups Ablaze" seminar in

August 2005 and found that it is a perfect fit with the mission — "Glorifying God through Relationships"— God has called our church to fulfill. "Groups Ablaze" is based on the premise that most adults come to faith through a friendship with a Christian. At Shepherd's Creek, God made it even clearer for us by providing us with a mission statement that calls us to build relationships with our friends, neighbors, relative and contacts, and in so doing, bring others to Christ through us and what he is doing in our lives. Let me share the story of how the willingness to build a relationship bridge, slowly, but deliberately, was successful.

Our Director of Family Ministry, Marsha Fulmer, was leading a Life Group when a regular attendee's mother became curious about the group her daughter enjoyed attending each week. Marsha met the mother, whose name was Barbara, realizing this was a chance to begin a friendship. Barbara had been a circus performer prior to a paralyzing trapeze accident at which point she felt God had abandoned her. Marsha met with her and Barbara listened as Marsha shared God's love, but it didn't appear that she would respond as a result of this meeting.

A few months later Barbara became seriously ill and I joined my wife Marsha in ministering to her and her large extended

family. The Holy Spirit worked through us, and Barbara died peacefully, knowing she was a child of God. The Holy Spirit continued to work through the relationships formed with the family of the deceased. Family members began attending worship services and the congregation involved them in the Christmas play and a life group. Playgroups were arranged to encourage this family to build relationships with other members of the congregation and they were asked to attend a variety of other church get-togethers.

God worked through a variety of events and the various members of the congregation who established relationships

with this family, to bring them into His family. God's way of working through us is sometimes incredibly complex and it may be difficult to trust that He is using us to fulfill His plan. Two adults and six children from Barbara's family were baptized last month and the relationship with this family continued as a wedding allowed us to reach out to even more of the family.

We share this story in hopes that it will inspire you to look into the "Groups Ablaze" seminars and begin building relationships with an increasingly wider circle. Surely, if God has chosen to use Shepherd's Creek, a small mission church, to fulfill His plan, imagine what He could do in a larger church with many more potential contacts. □

Concert Series Details Announced

St. Luke's-Oviedo, FL, has announced its 2006-2007 concert series. Each event is open to the public at no charge.

Saturday,
September 16 - 7 PM
Brass Band of Central Florida with Conductor Michael Garasi - "The Best of BBCF"

Sunday,
October 15 - 4 PM
Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra with Conductor Christopher Wilkins - "The Seasons"

Saturday,
November 18 - 7 PM
UCF Symphony Orchestra with Conductor Laszlo Marosi, Pianist Laurent Boukobza and Violinist Ayako Yonetani - Music of Polish Composers

Saturday,
December 2 - 2 PM and 7 PM
Brass Band of Central Florida with Conductor Michael Garasi - Holiday Concert

Saturday,
January 20, 2007 - 7 PM:
Orlando Concert Band with Conductor Richard Greenwood

Saturday,
February 10, 2007 - 7 PM
UCF Symphony Orchestra with Conductor: Laszlo Marosi - Music of Czech Composers

Saturday,
March 10, 2007 - 7 PM
Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra with Conductor Anthony Hose - Water Music

Sunday,
March 25, 2007 - 3 PM
Lutheran Cantata Choir with Director James Coe - Annual Sacred Music Concert

Saturday,
April 14, 2007 - 7 PM
Ayako & Friends - Summer Music

St. Luke's is located at 2021 W. SR#426 (Aloma), Oviedo, FL. Nursery care will be provided at each event. For more information, call 407-365-3408 or visit the congregational web site www.stlukes-oviedo.org and click the Concert Series logo. □

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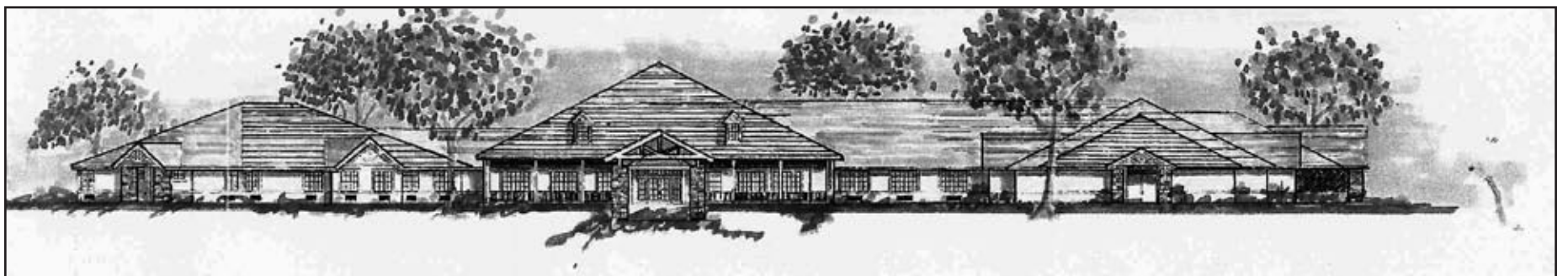
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