

Newsletter Reflection for September

We have been gathering items for two of our major efforts to be of service in our community—the collection of school tools for H. H. Beam Elementary School (which is a “near” neighbor to us) and for the Crisis Assistance Ministry food bank (which represents a wider neighborhood but is still “our” community). The time frame for these collections overlap and signal the approach of the end of summer and the beginning of the fall season (even if the weather doesn’t seem to recognize that we are leaving summer behind). That we continue in these efforts annually represents our endeavor to witness and offer service to our neighbors. They have become a marker in the life of this congregation. There is not a lot of fanfare around them, or recognition of what we are doing. There is just a steady commitment to caring for others. Another marker for this time of year is that this time of year can be a very exciting one. Many are experiencing events marking great changes in the pattern of their lives—entering school for the first time like my granddaughter or going off to college for those who are older. Calendars available for sale now are academic calendars oriented toward this cycle of life. They often begin with September as the first month of the year because that is when the school year generally starts. The Christian church considers the first Sunday in Advent as the first month of its year because it recognizes the celebration of the birth of Christ as the central starting point for the church’s existence. The calendars of other faiths mark other months as the beginning of their year. We place a great deal of importance on this type of event—on what occasion we consider the starting point because we measure all that follows from that point. There seems to always be something exciting about beginnings even when to some extent they are actually repetitive like the examples from calendars. Even though January 1 happens every year, that event is celebrated as “New Year’s Day” with great acclaim as if it will truly represent something new. From time to time, I find that it is hard to experience this sense of being at the beginning—I no longer am embarking on the new experiences which commonly mark major milestones or turning points of a life. It seems to me that we often rely upon “newness” as a stimulus to provide energy. That energy which comes from anticipation and excitement about the unknown lessens as we find fewer and fewer events in our lives which fall into the category of “new”. Yet there is another, perhaps greater, source of energy available to us. I think that energy is reflected in the commitments we have made to our neighbors. I think a continuing faithful witness is also cause for celebration. In another place in this newsletter you will see a picture and report on those school supplies that were taken to H. H. Beam Elementary School in preparation for the beginning of their new year. We began this ministry before I came to Olney because a member who taught there saw the need. We continue this ministry because although we no longer have a direct connection to the school, its teachers or students, we gain energy through this witness and service. The same thing holds true for our commitment to CAM through the supplying of food items for the month of August. These are two examples of how when we look outside ourselves, when we offer care and service to others, then we are strengthened and energized. The community that is the church has always been called to look outside of its walls; to engage the community which surrounds it; to care for and to nourish

both within and without. So although we may no longer be doing “new” things; we may not be changing the world, we **are** still doing things which can change those who receive what we have gathered. We **are** still taking opportunities to witness, to care, to be the true church we have been called to be. And the doing of these things, the commitment to these efforts bring life and energy to all that we do in Christ’s name.

Shalom,

Pastor Libby

School Tools

School Tools is actually a trademarked name for the effort to supplement the resources available to children for their schoolwork. The school system itself no longer has a very large budget to spend on school supplies. So each grade at each school publishes lists of these items that the students must bring with them to school. For families with more than one child and/or limited resources, these lists are intimidating. I looked at one for a kindergarten student in Cabarrus County and was astonished at the total cost of that one list. Older student lists seemed to be even more costly. In 1997 the program was initiated in this area under the auspices of WSOC and their Family Focus program. Their collection efforts receive a lot of publicity and the supplies they gather are taken to a central location and then distributed to schools in the 22 counties which make up their market area. That is a worthwhile effort. What we have done does not compete with that effort, but supplements it locally. No matter how large their collection, it is spread over numerous schools in 22 counties while what we collect is dedicated to the school nearest us. When I delivered the items shown above, they were received with excitement and joy. I was told that they would make an impact on the lives of many students attending this school. This is a way we show our care for our nearest neighbors.