

# Hope Members Reach Out To Area Youth With Awana Club



This dedicated group of volunteers have taken the training to lead the Awana program at Hope Lutheran Brethren Church in Barnesville. Each Wednesday they work with children in their church and community ministering to them through the Awana Bible-based evangelism and discipleship program. Leaders are, left to right, back row - Audrey Holter, Brent Kleppen, Mike Jorud, Suzie Bowen, Judy Friesen, Jay Holter; front row - Mark Vold, Cindy Jorud, Marisa Fagerstrom, Barb Moe, Carlton Moe and Armand Swenson.

**By: Karen Carpenter**

Hope Lutheran Brethren Church is well established in the community. They are celebrating their 50th anniversary and preserving their heritage.

The congregation is also poised for the future, in fact, reaching for the future. One of the things members of Hope strive for is to build a strong youth program.

In 2019, the church leadership embarked on a project to spark interest in area youth of all ages.

In September, Hope began an Awana program. The acronym stands for Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed and is based on a Bible verse: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (NIV 2 Timothy 2:15).

Awana is an international Christian organization designed to minister to children from ages two to 18. The Bible-based evangelism and discipleship program gives children the opportunity to know, love and serve Jesus.

Curriculum, programs and training to reach kids and their families is offered through Awana.

Jay Holter, a Barnesville resident and member of Hope LBC, took on the leadership of the program.

"A year ago Hope LBC held a leadership conference," said Holter. "At that meeting it was determined that one of our ministry objectives was to focus on a mid-week program

that provided ministry to children in our church and in the community."

And so the project was launched. Awana provides local missionaries to train and encourage church and Awana leaders.

"After much prayer and research it was decided that Awana would be the appropriate program for Hope Church at this time," stated Holter.

A dozen men and women volunteered to be leaders and went through training with the Awana missionaries.

Trainers Arlyn and Marcy Nies came to Barnesville and led the three-hour class to groom leaders. All of the leaders, with the exception of one, are members of Hope LBC.

"Since then we have gained three additional leaders. Our financial needs for the startup and first year were met," said Holter.

Supplies were ordered and the Awana game circle was laid.

Volunteers built a float and sailed down the streets on Potato Days with hundreds of invitations handed out.

"Teams were established with a games leader, music leader, Sparks and Truth and Training (T&T) leaders," commented Holter.

Sparks is the name for the children's group from kindergarten to second grade. T&T is the name for the kids' group ages third to sixth grade.

On September 11, 2019, Awana was kicked off at Hope LBC with the first club meeting. There were 18 children attending that first meeting.

Since then the local Awana leaders have worked with 37

different kids from Hope Church and the community. The nightly average is about 22, as leaders find various sporting events competing for Wednesday night.

"We meet every Wednesday from 6:15 to 7:45 p.m. for 30-minute sessions of scripture memory, Bible lesson, and AWANA games," said Holter.

The program is designed to be highly relational and highly scriptural. The goal is to reach boys and girls with the gospel of Christ and to guide them to serve Him.

"One of our goals as a church is to have a presence in the community. Most of the kids who have attended Awana are not from Hope.

"There are many testimonies from adults who have maintained habits or practices learned as kids in Awana, such as regular church attendance, Bible reading and studies and prayer.

"It is habits such as these that develop responsible citizens who build back into their communities," stated Holter.

Any youth interested in attending can come to the church at 6:00 p.m. on any Wednesday. It is preferable that a parent brings them, as there is a registration form to complete.

Those interested can also contact the church by calling 354-7466.

"We have enough trained leaders to work with up to 40 children," stated Holter.

It is not too late to get involved in 2020. The Awana program will run through the end of April at Hope Lutheran Brethren Church.



Through the Awana program children play games, learning skills of cooperation and acceptance. They are led through Scripture by trained leaders who work with them weekly. Leader Mark Vold helps with this class of youngsters.



Kids who attend the Awana program at Hope Lutheran Brethren Church in Barnesville have fun playing games during their time at the church.



Eric Swenson is one of the adult Awana program leaders that work with children on Wednesday evenings. Awana is a highly relational and highly spiritual program designed to reach children with the gospel of Christ and teach them to serve Him.

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