



Building Bridges • Transforming Lives

# first touch

This is a monthly publication of First Church of God, St. Joseph, Michigan



From playing in the “Streets” this summer to curling up with a good book this fall, First Church is moving forward in outreach.

From Jenny Fry, Outreach Director

We have officially closed the book on First Church Summer 2010 Outreach. Thanks to many willing hands and hearts, we impacted our community in a big way in just a few short months.

Starting in July, we hosted the awesome *Sweet Summer Food Event* at Benton Heights, *Hoops Hip Hop & Hot Dogs* at Broadway Park in Benton Harbor and (thanks to the Middle School Lunch Club) we held the *Benton Kids Bash* at Benton Heights for all kids in the neighborhood.

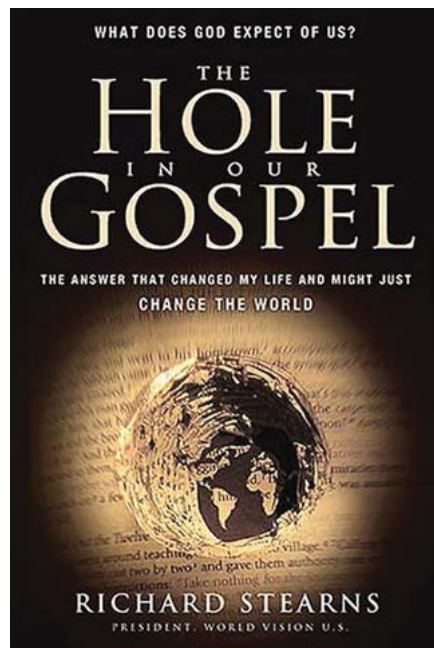
We kicked August off with a very well-attended Neighborhood Block Party at First Church at Benton Heights, followed by a week of Vacation Bible School. And, despite a rainy day, we hosted the *McCord Back to School Block Party* to launch the school year for students and neighbors of McCord School.

We interacted with hundreds of people, played a lot of games, painted a lot of faces, and served a lot of hot dogs, hamburgers and ice cream this summer!! Could there be a more fun way to show God’s love to our community?

This fall we will be shifting gears to focus on more one-to-one outreach with individuals from our community, both in Benton Heights and those who come to First Church in St. Joe needing some support. We are in the early stages of developing and equipping a group of people who will become the *First Church Community Care Team*. My hope is that some of you might feel led to be a part of this team.

On Sunday, November 7 (note date change from Oct. 10), 5-7:00pm, we will get together in room 5 at the St. Joe campus to discuss a book entitled, *The Hole in our Gospel*, by Richard Stearns. Mr.

Stearns is the president of World Vision U.S. and shares his story, as well as, what he believes is Christ’s criterion for determining the authenticity of our profession to follow Him.



Stearns believes that there is no “whole gospel” without compassion and justice shown to the poor. Following is a paraphrase of a portion of Matthew 25, according to Richard Stearns:

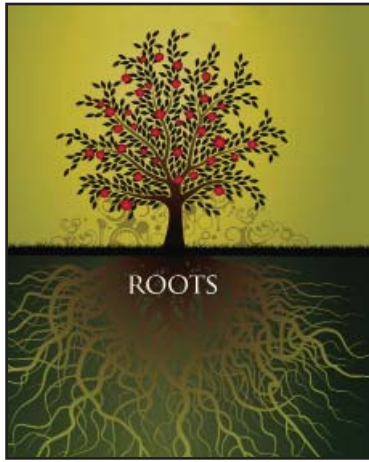
*For I was hungry, while you had all you needed. I was thirsty, but you drank bottled water. I was a stranger, and you wanted me deported. I needed clothes, but you needed more clothes. I was sick, and you pointed out the behaviors that led to my sickness. I was in prison, and you said I was getting what I deserved.*

I hope you will consider being a part of our book discussion and possibly the *First Church Community Care Team*.

You can purchase a copy of *The Hole in Our Gospel* at the Good Word bookstore (at the St. Joe campus) for just \$10. This will include a 6-week study guide to work through at your own pace.

On November 7, we will share a soup dinner as we discuss the first in a series of books that we have chosen to equip ourselves to share the “whole” Gospel with the people in our community.

We ask that you register for this dinner and discussion so that we have enough soup prepared. Call the First Church office 983-1524 or email [jenny@myfirstchurch.com](mailto:jenny@myfirstchurch.com)



## DISCOVER: A Roots Class

As you cross the bridge onto your Christian walk, our new “ROOTS” program will help you to put down some healthy Christian roots in your life. Roots consists of four special classes: *Discover*, *Pursue*, *Engage*, & *Share*. Here are two we are offering this fall:

### **DISCOVER: Discovering First Church**

An important first step is learning what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ at First Church. In our DISCOVER class, you will learn the history, beliefs, and vision of our church, and be challenged to move from spectator to participant in unity and community.

A 2-Saturday morning seminar will be held October 16 & 23. Sign-up for the seminar online or call the church office.

### **PURSUE: Growing Like Christ** (4-week class)

Are you content where you are in your spiritual journey? PURSUE God’s story for your life and dig into Scripture! This class weaves reading and studying the Bible, prayer, obedience, and servanthood with the real-life application of learning to work God’s Word into the fabric of your own life. This class is offered every Sunday in November, 11:00am-noon.

NOTE: Class booklets for these classes are available at The Good Word in the Gathering Area of the St. Joseph campus of First Church.

**Puppet Ministry is Calling You!**

If you're 12 & older, the “Mini Messengers” need a hand (yours!) in spreading God’s love.

**Wednesdays, 4:00-5:00pm**

**INFO: 269.983.1524**

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### **A Place to Serve**

Community Café is a Wednesday evening dinner prepared and served right here at First Church. We need your help! We need help with set-up/food prep, serving, and clean-up. It is not that hard to do. You get to work with some great people. And you will feel better about yourself for finding another place to serve the “body” (pun intended). Don’t wait, call Barbara Matthews at 925-3196 to volunteer. Thanks for getting involved.

### **Benton Harbor Street Ministry**

Volunteers are needed for BHSM (Mon-Thurs, 9am-12:30pm or however long you can help) Duties include: tutoring students, helping with clerical work, grading tests etc. Contact Diane Youngstedt at dianeyoungstedt@yahoo.com, 428-2787 (home) or 313-2284 (cell).

### **Festival of Praise: Oct 24**

A hymn-sing will be held on Sunday, October 24, 6:00pm, at First Church of God. This will be a great time to sing the hymns of the church and enjoy special music. Refreshments and fellowship follow the hymn-sing.

### **Walk with Us**

Join us for a healthy walk each Monday, Wednesday, & Friday, 10:00am, at Grand Mere Park.

### **Do You Like to Knit/Crochet?**

We are looking for people to knit/crochet sweaters/bonnets for infants and children from the Safe Shelter. For more information, contact Peggy at 269.429.7363 or secretangel75@sbcglobal.net.

### **Military Support Group**

Check out the Soldier-of-the-Month at our Military Support Group display in the Gathering Area of our St. Joseph campus! You can also send a card/letter to any of the soldiers on the display by placing your card in the cardholder located next to the pictures.

## Flu Shot Clinics



FCOG-SJ: SUNDAY  
OCT 10 | 10:30-12:30pm

FCOG-BH: SUNDAY  
NOV 14 | 12:00-1pm

Seasonal flu vaccine clinic for FCOG parishoners will be held at each campus. To receive your shot, you must call and register by Monday, October 4 (SJ) or November 5 (BH).

Vaccine cost: \$30. Medicare accepted; must have a copy of the front and back of Medicare card and any other insurance card.

To register call Parish Nurse Beth Fiskars: 269-983-1524 (ext.40). Leave your full name and phone number, where you can be reached, as well as, if you will be Medicare or private pay.

## Help With Lead-Based Paint

Concerned about lead-based paint hazards in your home? Lead was used in many paints and coatings for homes built before 1978. If eaten or inhaled, lead is a poison; children under 6 are particularly vulnerable. The Berrien County Health Department has grant funding available to control lead hazards in residences with children. This includes:

- an assessment of lead hazards in the residence, and
- up to \$10,000 for lead hazard removal by a licensed abatement contractor.

Items most commonly replaced include windows, doors, and siding.

Homeowners or tenants may apply. Contact Chuck Lawrence at 269-927-5645 or Steve Weldert at the 269-927-5611 for information and an application.

## Purdue Christmas Show

On Sunday, December 5, 11:00am, senior adults will travel aboard a comfortable chartered motorcoach to enjoy the Christmas show at Purdue University. Cost is \$40 for show tickets and transportation. Dinner is on your own at MCL Cafeteria.

Sign-up to be a part of this trip by calling the church office.

## Prime Timers Fall Color Tour

Two full busses of Prime Timers will leave the church parking lot at 9:00am on Thursday, October 14, to enjoy the pleasures of fall (apples, changing leaves, etc.), returning home by 4:30pm.

## Prime Timers Enhance Their Smiles

On Friday, October 22, 6:00pm, Dr. Ronald Karpanty, a dentist from Coloma, will give us some pointers on keeping our teeth (natural or artificial) clean and healthy. Dr. Karpanty has been to India on mission work and will also share his experiences from that country.

A catered meal of Imperial Chicken Breast, Roast Beef au Natural, Au Ratin Potatoes, Italian green beans, mixed greens salad, and dessert will be served.

Cost is \$10/person. Register no later than Monday, October 17.

## BLOOD PRESSURE CLINICS



### First Church at St. Joseph:

Nov 7 | Dec 5  
10:30-11:15am  
Room 5

### First Church at Benton Hts:

Nov 7 | Dec 5  
Immediately after service  
in the Little KZ Room

# First Church Celebrates Having Chris Spitters as Pastor for 20 Years



*Did you know...* that Pastor Chris Spitters has been serving our congregation for 20 years! We want to celebrate this milestone by honoring him at all services at the St. Joseph campus on Sunday, October 31, followed by a reception after the 11:00 service. Mark your calendar! A basket will be available for cards/letters.

*Want to help?* Contact Mitzi Tompkins at [mtompkins@sjschools.org](mailto:mtompkins@sjschools.org) or 757-2437.

## High School Ministry News

### Tribe

*Tribe* has started again and already God has been blessing this ministry. If you are a high school student, join us in the Attic (downstairs at the SJ campus) Sunday evenings, 7-8:30pm.

### Zombies

Zombies will be back to First Church on Sunday, November 7, 7-9pm. All high school students welcome to come and chase zombies with us.

### Fall Retreat

High School students will be taking off November 19-21 for Fall Retreat at Warner Camp--a great weekend of fun, friends, and worship! Registration forms are at the church office.

Check out the high school ministries webpage at:

[myfirstchurch.com/highschool](http://myfirstchurch.com/highschool)

## Middle School Ministry News

### D-Groups

D-Groups is gearing up for some pretty awesome events.

- **October 27**, is the annual hay ride out at Five Pines in Berrien Center. There will be food, friends, and lots of fun to be had!
- **November 17**, is also parent night for D-groups. Come and join your child's D-group for the night. This is also a great chance to meet your child's leader. Don't miss it!

More information about middle school ministries can be found at:

[myfirstchurch.com/middleschool](http://myfirstchurch.com/middleschool)

## D-Groups Hayride

Middle School students are going on a hayride at 5 Pines on Wednesday, October 27, 7-9pm. Drop off and pick up at 5 Pines. Tickets (\$5) at the wagon.

## GET TO KNOW YOUR STAFF!

Too often, our days are spent busily running in myriad directions without time to stop and get to know one another. In 2010, we're going to take a moment to allow you to become better acquainted with the folks who work in the First Church office by having them answer a few simple questions.



NAME: **Chris Spitters**

POSITION: Pastor of Student Ministries and Worship

**FAVORITE PART OF YOUR JOB:** the chance to really know young people and have the chance to impact their lives at such a critical time. I love going to camps and retreats where life-changing experiences occur!

**FAVORITE ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE WORK:** Being with my family, enjoying the beach, running at Grande Mere, and playing basketball

**FAVORITE CHILDHOOD MEMORY:** Spending summers playing in the ravine on hickory creek

**FAVORITE BIBLE VERSES:** Mark 12:30 & Proverbs 3:5-6

**FAVORITE FOOD/S:** Chicago style pizza, smoothies, raspberries on ice crême, sweet potatoes, most anything grown in a garden



NAME: **Candi Spitters**

POSITION:  
Student Ministries Support

**FAVORITE PART OF YOUR JOB:** worshipping with middle school students

**FAVORITE ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE WORK:** being with my family, family vacations, reading, playing piano, and walking the beach with Chris

**FAVORITE CHILDHOOD MEMORY:** On the 4th of July, Mom & Dad let us sit on the tip of our roof and eat popcorn while we watched the fireworks!

**FAVORITE BIBLE VERSE:** Psalm 139

**FAVORITE FOOD/S:** Sesame chicken, good burger on the grill, and keylime anything!

# Not All Heroes Wear Capes: **Blood Drive: Nov 30**

Michigan Blood will host a Blood Drive in the Fellowship Hall at First Church of God, St. Joe, on Tuesday, November 30, 2-7 pm.

Michigan Blood is the sole provider of blood for Lakeland HealthCare, Borgess Health, and Bronson HealthCare Group. Thousand of lives are saved each year from donated blood. Your donation may save the life of a loved one.



Please visit Michigan Blood at <https://donate.miblood.org> to make an appointment online or call them at 269.408.1540. Appointments are preferred, but walk-ins are welcome.

*“As a child I always bruised much easier than my friends or any of my family. I didn’t think too much about it until I had my first child and I hemorrhaged. The bleeding just would not stop. . . I was given four blood transfusions. After that I was given one transfusion of fibrinogen, the part of the blood that helps with clotting. . . Without blood donors, I would not be here today.” --Cheryl Walberg*

*Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for all the prayers and support during the recent loss of our home. May the Lord bless each and everyone of our church family.*

*--Scott & Cathy Merkle*



## Help for those dealing with grief during the holidays.

If the prospect of facing the holidays without your loved one causes anxiety and dread, you are not alone.

Connect with support, encouragement and advice to survive the holidays in two special hours of

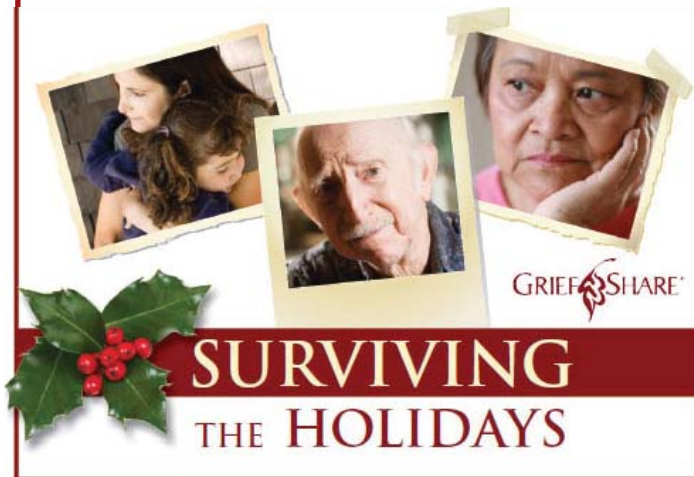
### ***GriefShare: Surviving the Holidays***

**Sunday, December 5  
3:00-5:00pm**

Featuring video instruction and group discussion, it helps you deal with the intense pain of grief during the holiday season.

Register on line at [myfirstchurch.com](http://myfirstchurch.com) or call 269.983.1524.

Please register by Monday, November 22.



## Community Garden a Success

First Church at Benton Heights community garden was a great success! Harvests of broccoli, lettuce, zucchini, cucumbers, melon, tomatoes, and peppers put fresh foods on the tables of the neighbors and the congregation of First Church at Benton Heights.

“Our goal with the garden,” explained Meghan VanLente, “was to bring attention to the church, serve the community in a small way, and hopefully engage the neighbors in doing their own gardens next spring, with the church offering workshops and supplies. I would say we’ve done that.”

“Square-foot” garden boxes (*above*) were built--some raised; others at ground level--in lieu of traditional rows, making it easier to weed and water.

Under the leadership of Andy & Meghan Van Lente, the small group who took on this large task included: Jeff & Jessa Calderwood, Jason & Lisa Holok, and Jason & Lisa Kaeding. Volunteers who helped with keeping the garden watered included: Heidi Heald, Louise Wrege, and Brian, Denise, Ali & Sydney Gardener.

With Andy & Meghan Van Lente’s move to Kalamazoo this fall, Jeff Calderwood will be taking over the leadership reins for the garden.

# Butter Braids: Warm Winter Evening Fundraiser



Women's Ministries will be selling Butter Braids (\$11 each) until October 23 to help fund *Warm Winter Evening 2011*. These wonderful coffee cakes can be kept in your freezer to use anytime. You bake them fresh so they are excellent to have on hand around the holidays, and they make great gifts, too! Order forms are available at the church office.



Proceeds from the sales will help us offset some of our costs (such as, scholarships for tickets) for the *Warm Winter Evening* event which will be held at Lake Michigan College on Thursday, February 24, 2011. Kelly Minter is going to be our speaker and we're going to have a *yummy* time!

*women*  
OF THE CHURCH OF GOD

## WCG & World Community Day

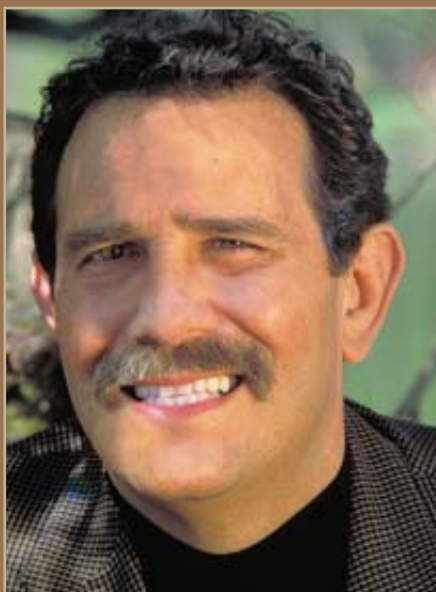
Women of the Church of God meet Tuesday, November 2 at 1:00pm, in Room 5 at the SJ campus. Mary Shawl-Ranke, Campus Pastor at First Church at Benton Heights, will be our speaker. All women are invited to attend.

Friday, November 5, is World Community Day. It will be celebrated at Union Memorial AME Church, 911 S. Crystal, Benton Harbor. Call for details: 269.927.2219.



Hands-On Ministry is collecting new / gently-used coats for children at McCord School. Sizes thru teen/small adult are welcome. (Hats, gloves & boots are nice, too!)

*Collection is ongoing throughout the month of October. Donation boxes can be found in the Gathering Area of the St. Joseph campus.*



## DAY OF HEALING

*LIVE LIFE TO THE FULLEST!*

with Dr. Dan Allender

**November 6**

**8:30am-4:15pm**

Honeywell Center | Wabash, Indiana

**34 workshops for a better life.** First Church is taking the bus there. Register by October 11 for a rate of \$33/person for conference, lunch, and transportation. Registration packets are at the church.

For more information, visit: [wabashfriendscounseling.com](http://wabashfriendscounseling.com).

**2 LOCATIONS**

St. Joseph Campus & General Office

First Church of God  
2627 Niles Ave, St. Joseph, MI 49085  
SERVICES: Saturdays at 6pm  
Sundays at 9:30 & 11AM

Benton Heights Campus

First Church at Benton Heights  
990 N. Euclid Ave., Benton Harbor 49022  
SERVICES: Sundays at 11am

OFFICE HOURS

M-Th, 8-4:30 | 269-983-1524  
recep@myfirstchurch.com

Deadline for First Touch articles

1st Friday of each month  
Send to: teresa@myfirstchurch.com

WEBSITE: myfirstchurch.com

Web Designer: Julie Beam

**PASTORAL STAFF**

**Lead Pastor**  
*David Colp*

**Prayer/Missions**  
*Rick Blumenberg*

**Life Groups/Assimilation**  
*Ryan Carrell*

**Discipleship/Older Adults/  
Pastoral Care**  
*Bob Confer*

**Young Adults, Worship**  
*Dan Deitrich*

**Executive Administrator**  
*Gregory Gordon*

**Benton Heights Campus Pastor**  
*Mary Shawl-Ranke*

**Student Ministries**  
*Chris Spitters*

**Advisory Council**

JC Anderson	11
Bob Dowsett	11
Vance Price	11
John Fozard, Oklahoma	11
Arden Bradley	12
Michelle Kerns	12
Mark Krenz, Arizona	12
Mitzi Tompkins	12
Gary Bolin	13
Rajeon Alexander	13
Dave Eichberg	13
Gregory Gordon and David Colp	

**Staff Missionary:** Joseph Steiner  
*Church of God, Debrecen, Hungary*

**Missionary Partners:**  
*Camille Melki, Beirut, Lebanon*  
*Church of God in Paraguay*  
*Tammie Tregellas, Malawi, Africa*

*Do you have the Spiritual Gift of Caring?*

**Have You Considered our Stephen Ministry?**



*By Art Clark*

The Lord has given each of us spiritual gifts, how are you using yours right now? Are you looking for new ways to use your gifts? Perhaps God is calling you to be part of a one-on-one caring ministry. Would you like an opportunity to reach out in loving care to another in our congregation? Stephen Ministry may be the answer for you. Our ministry responds to Jesus' command, "Love one another even as I have loved you". Stephen Ministers answer this call in a special way by simply being there for people in crisis or people who need a Christian presence amidst the struggles of life.

Stephen Ministry is a distinctively Christian ministry. Each of us brings our own special gifts and motivation to any ministry. In this ministry, each of the caring relationships will be unique. You may be caring for a person who is chronically ill, divorcing, grieving a loved one's death or going through other difficult transitions. God has been equipping each of us for specific ministries throughout our lives. However, if you choose to become a Stephen Minister, training will be provided to make you even better able to bring Christ's healing care into care giving situations.

Stephen Ministry multiplies the amount of caring First Church can provide through a team of lay caregivers who are equipped to bring Christ's healing love to people in our congregation. Everyone benefits from this ministry. Those receiving care from Stephen Ministers, because they receive prayer support through the crisis they face. Stephen Ministers benefit through personal spiritual growth, and our pastors benefit because caring ministry at First Church is expanded. Most of all, folks in our congregation benefit from the increased number of trained care givers who are available to them.



We will provide you with 50-hours of stimulating training that expands, complements and reinforces your present skill set. Classes will be lead by trained Stephen Leaders. A variety of topics will be addressed, including: dealing with feelings, the art of listening, confidentiality, and establishing boundaries in the caring relationship. The skills you learn in our training program will not only equip you for this caring ministry, but will also be useful in your everyday relationships with family, friends, neighbors and co-workers. Being a Stephen Minister does require a commitment of time and effort, but it also brings joy and fulfillment. It may be one of the most rewarding challenges you will experience.

We currently have openings for Stephen Ministers to meet current caring needs. If you have an interest in being a caregiver and would like to know more about our ministry, we invite you to talk with one of our Stephen Ministers. We will be in the Gathering areas following each service, at both campuses, on October 16th & 17th. We will be pleased to answer questions and provide additional information about our caring ministry.

*The need is great and we are asking you to consider becoming a new Stephen Ministers. This is a meaningful one-to-one caring ministry that really helps a person during a crisis time in their life. There will be Stephen Ministers at the Welcome Center the weekend of October 16 & 17, following all of the services on both campuses to answer your questions. Applications are due back to Pastor Bob by Sunday, Oct. 31. If you have questions please contact Pastor Bob Confer at 983.1524 x14 or confer@myfirstchurch.com*



## A Mother's Story Wins Matthew West Contest

Listening to that “still small voice” in your heart can lead your life into new experiences in the Lord. On a cold February morning, Michelle Caple was driving to work and listening to the radio when a commercial came on and a call went out for personal stories to be chosen for Matthew West’s new album, “*Stories of Your Life*.” The message of the album was simple: “Your life is the song that you sing, and the whole wide world is listening.”

The still small voice said, “You need to submit a story about Connor.” Michelle’s son, Connor, was harassed terribly in middle school where “being different” is the enemy. So, following the dictates of her heart, Michelle wrote, “Have you ever felt the pain of middle school...”

In August, Matthew West’s brother, Joel (who is also his manager), emailed her with a request for her and her family to meet Matthew in Muskegon. She asked him why.

“Oh, we haven’t had a chance to tell you yet, but your story is one of the nine winners (out of 10,000 submissions!!).” He explained that it was the first line of the story that really touched Matthew’s heart. He well remembered the pain of middle school.

Matthew came to the Caple home and sang the song, “*To Me*,” for them. (“*To Me*” is now available on *itunes*) Then, they all rode

up to Muskegon together where he took Connor on stage and serenaded him with the song! Then, the entire family joined Connor on stage.

Now, the First Church family is invited to hear the song in a special concert at Crossroads Community Church in Goshen on October 25. Tickets are usually \$18, but we are receiving a special rate in honor of Michelle and Connor.

**Hear the Song, “To Me,” in Concert!**

**Monday, October 25, 7:00pm**  
Crossroads Community Church  
Goshen, Indiana

Tickets (\$10) available at the First Church office!

Here is some of Michelle’s (and Connor’s) story:

*Have you ever felt the pain of Middle School? I have through my son Connor.*

*There are many things most people don’t know about him:*

*That he struggles to learn on a daily basis, that he thinks of himself as stupid; however, he works harder than anyone I know.*

*That he is just looking for a friend that will accept him as he is. Someone to hang out with and do things with on the weekends.*

*That he wants a girlfriend just like everyone else...enough to put up with mean remarks because they’re better than no remarks at all.*

*He is my inspiration because through all the pain he still has such empathy for people and can forgive in a heartbeat.*

*I always tell him that God has something special waiting for him because of all the struggles he has been through since his birth. I want him to tell me how he can get up each morning and still put a smile on his face and be positive when he has so many negative things going on around him each day? He’s learned it is a choice.*

*You see, I want that special gift he has inside to get through each day ~ that is a gift only God can give you!*



(l to r): Ian, Connor, Michelle, Matthew West, and Steve Caple