December 23, 2009

Dear youth Parents:

I was watching the news last night and the new teen pregnancy rate just came out. Arkansas ranked 47th out of 50 states in the number of teenage pregnancies. By the official records available

* 42.2 % of all students are sexually active in this state, (10.9 % of Elementary, 55.5 % of Middle school and 79 % of Senior High School students)
* 48.6 % of all students of sexually active students in this state become pregnant, (14.3% of Elementary, 66.7 % of Middle school and 82.8 % of Senior High School students)
* 19% of all students have had 4 or more sex partners and 41 % are not using any form of protection against pregnancy or STD and STI infections.
* In the United States there are 750,000 teen age pregnancies annually and in Arkansas there are 8,980. And our county has as high a percentage of these as any other in the state.

The church has always been a place to provide spiritual guidance and assist people in a variety of ways and our church would like to help you, your family, and your youth with probably one of the most difficult, embarrassing, and important issues today - SEX!

A Parent’s worst fear is how they are going to talk to their child about sex. The church not only feels that our sexuality is a gift from God but also believes it is the responsibility of the church to address this issue in an open and honest way, especially with the problems facing our teenagers today. Because we believe this is such an important issue, we are offering a workshop, “Sex Love and God” on January 16, 2010. The Rev. Michael Topham, the pastor of Des Arc First United Methodist Church, will lead the workshop. Also, some of the adults (experts and educators in this matter and other adults from our town) will also be leaders. Not only will the workshop give some basic information about sexuality, but also will address what the Bible has to say about sex. Additionally, a great deal of time will be spent on morals, ethics, and decision making. Finally, this workshop should open the lines of communications not only about sex, but also about a variety of topics.

Attached is a letter to the youth inviting them to attend this workshop. However, this is like inviting them to listen to five hours of a preachers’ sermons! Many times it takes a little encouragement (or full-blown arm-twisting) from parents for the youth to sign up. We know with all the things going on around them this may be the last thing they want to do on a Friday Saturday. So we need your help please.

Some of the things parents have said is, “Oh, I wish everyone would have come to this,” “this was a great way to open up a lot of discussion in our family,” and “it was good to know that I am not the only one dealing with all of these problems.” I highly recommend this program and think you will be glad you sent your youth.

There is no cost for this workshop it is our gift to the community. Your youth will attend classes on Friday night and all day Saturday and will be provided a lunch Please drop the youth off by 8:00 am and we will conclude the workshop by 5:30 p.m. Please make sure your youth returns the registration form by 11 Jan 2010 if possible, so we can get a count of who might attend.

This event could be one of the most important things you do for your child and your family. Don’t pass this opportunity up and later say, “Oh, I wish I had attended the sexuality workshop.” Together as Christian family and friends we can work toward a better understanding of how our sexuality affects all of us. Because of the subject matter and the pictures and graphics that your child(ren) will be exposed to we are requiring each guardian give their permission to attend this event. (These have been reviewed by parents like you to insure they are well done!) Parents are allowed to attend all open large group session where they may observe what is being said. They will not be allowed to attend the small group interaction session to help with privacy issues.

If you have any questions please call me at 256-3757.

Peace and grace to you.

Michael W. Topham

Pastor, Des Arc First United Methodist Church