

Dale and Annette Shattuck

Come to Cornerstone Church and observe Annette and Dale Shattuck at work on any given Wednesday night. You'll marvel at the sheer number of middle schoolers, the dedication of the staff, and the organization of the program. Seriously, come. They'd really like it if you would, and they'll be the first to tell you so.

Annette, the newest Director of Student Ministries for Cornerstone, began in January after interning during the previous fall. She will strike you as infinitely patient. As she gives directions to the large group of students, she quietly calls a disruptive sixth grade boy to her side. Without missing a beat, she continues her discussion with the rest of the kids, while leaning an assuring arm on the one who'd misbehaved.

Although she leads an impressively structured program, she'll be the first to admit, kids will be kids. "They're not going to change into non-middle schoolers. That's what they are," she stated with a shrug of her shoulders, explaining she loves them all, without choosing favorites.

Dale, his wife's biggest fan, isn't surprised by her calm demeanor with the teens, having seen how she can handle more than her share of life's challenges. "Annette does a great job. I'm gone quite a bit, and she does the youth group stuff here, and she takes care of the kids and the house. She started her master's (degree), and she's always busy. She's always got something going on," he said with obvious awe.

If Dale's not out of town working for Baker Construction, remodeling McDonald's restaurants all over Michigan, he'll be at Cornerstone's youth group meetings on Wednesday nights, too. Middle school students—all teenagers, really—are especially fond of him. Jeff Willard, a volunteer with the youth group, said, "The kids love Dale. There are definitely kids in the youth group that come because they like hanging out with him."

"I really enjoy working with the kids," said Dale. "It's a blast. A couple of months ago, the kids in middle school were really rough, really rowdy. They picked on other kids. Now it's structured, there's a lot of control, the kids can feel safe and have a good time and not have to worry about getting picked on or hurt or teased. And Annette does a great job teaching. I think she really gets to the kids."

When speaking to the two youth groups, both the high school and the middle school, Annette and Dale often use illustrations from their own lives. Dale had a rough childhood, running away and emancipating from his family when he was

just 15. “Some of the kids, when they act up and stuff, I pull them out and I’ll give them a little bit of information on the way I acted when I was a kid, and that it never worked out.” He encourages them to turn to the Lord, as he did, get away from the negative people and start over. “All the friends that I grew up with--I talk to, zero. All bad influences,” Dale declared.

Annette, who calls herself a “lifetime learner” and enjoys reading and research of all kinds, read about testifying to teens as a way of reaching them, instead of preaching, and regularly puts the idea into practice. “I don’t feel that we have to really reveal everything about our past, but I try to tell things that they’ll find surprising to know about us, and relevant, so that they can realize that God uses people that are just like where they are at right now,” said Annette. Dale remarked, “Annette makes it pretty funny, so the kids laugh. A lot of kids think we should write a book.”

The young couple met in East Lansing, where Dale grew up. Annette, a Port Huron native, was living in the town while attending Michigan State University and working as a nanny for two teenagers. Dale described their first meeting with red cheeks, embarrassed at the confession. “I saw Annette walk in, and I was, just...woe...head over heels. I thought she was the hottest thing ever.”

It was more than her looks that kept him interested, though. “She’s cracking jokes any chance she gets on me. She’s really funny, and really intelligent. The day my dad met her, he said ‘She’s the one.’ He said, ‘Dale, you’d better stay after her, she’s the one.’”

Annette’s glad he did, and enthusiastically describes what makes Dale a great husband. “I love that Dale allows me to focus on my children, and the youth group. He never gets selfish, with the amount of time that I put into my children, my work, or my studies, ever. He never makes me feel bad about anything,” she bragged, modestly adding, “He kind of puts me on a pedestal too much sometimes. He constantly affirms me and compliments me.”

Married four years, Dale and Annette are the proud and happy parents of three year old Kaylee Grace and one year old Gavin Thomas. “I love having kids,” said Dale. “Just holding my kids, waking up with my kids--my daughter always sneaks in bed with us. Watching them grow and learn, it just goes so fast.”

Annette concurred, describing parenting as “challenging, rewarding, and it goes too fast.” She continued, “The best part about being a mom is when you teach them something, or you tell them something, and then weeks go by, and then they repeat it back to you, in context, and you realize that you’ve had an impact.”

Annette brings the same dedication she feels as a mother with her during each meeting with the teens. The Shattucks work on Wednesdays, with the middle schoolers; on Sunday mornings, during “Deeper,” a Bible study with both middle school and high school students; and on Sunday evenings, when she meets with just high school students for “D & D,” dinner and devotion. They are joined by a handful of volunteers, and would love to have more adults join them in the privilege of ministering to teens.

“I feel the weight of their salvation and their future relationship with God in my hands. You just want them to be so close to God, and have a better relationship than I ever understood at that age. I didn’t fully understand God until I was older, even though I was raised in church. So I hope for them, as a mother, and as a youth leader, that they won’t struggle in the middle like I did. They will catch on early; they will get it, the relationship with God and everything that it offers,” she explained.

“God took circumstance, and put me here, and has continued to use me, despite the fact that I don’t always think that I’m the right person for the job, and I don’t always think that I’m the most qualified. He reminds me that this is where I’m supposed to be, and shows me every week what he wants me to say, and what topic he wants me to discuss. So I just feel completely led by grace,” Annette exclaimed.

“It will never cease to amaze me how it will be a Monday or a Tuesday night, and I will have what I think is going to be a message ready, and then, Wednesday morning, he shows me something else,” continued Annette. “I’ll teach it, and a student will come up to me and say, well, this just happened to me at school today, just something like you were just talking about, so he always shows me the direction that he wants me to go, otherwise, I don’t know that I would know how to do it.”

Annette is currently studying elementary education, and pursuing her master’s degree. Working with the youth at Cornerstone Church--where she loves the music, the ministry, and the people--is a blessing she hadn’t expected in her life, and one she hopes to be able to continue. “Sometimes it’s difficult not to know what the future holds, but God hasn’t failed me yet, and I’m not worried about it,” she stated with confidence.