

THANKSGIVING



and
CHRISTMAS



GEIGER MEMORIAL BRETHREN CHURCH
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Rev. Anthony diBenedetto, Jr
Pastor

HISTORY

Over twenty five years ago, recognizing that there were many needy people in our area and throughout the city, Geiger Church began to distribute Thanksgiving and Christmas food baskets. Contributions of canned goods and money were received from congregation members and friends who heard about our effort. These contributions were usually collected from September through December. However, it soon became evident that we often received canned goods we couldn't use. So, within a few years the transition was made from collecting a contribution of canned goods and money for perishable items to just collecting money. Offerings are received in a can that is available at the rear of the Sanctuary each Sunday throughout the year. By this means we can purchase exactly the items that are needed to fill the food baskets.

During the past six years the total numbers of baskets we give has more than quadrupled! Now, because of the changes in government aid, the need to assist families is greater than it has ever been.

In 1989 a Christmas dinner, with all the trimmings and gifts, was begun to help the needy of the community to enjoy Christmas and to introduce them to the true meaning of the season. We accomplished our purpose by serving a delicious full course turkey dinner, with all the trimmings, served on china dinnerware. Table decorations as well as room decorations added to the festive atmosphere. A program of carol singing, Scripture reading, special music, the preaching of a Christmas message, and friendship around the table helped our guests see the true meaning of the season. Gifts were given to each person who attended.

Since then the distribution of food baskets, gifts, and the community dinner has grown to the point where we are reaching over 400 adults and children each Thanksgiving and Christmas Season. During the 1997 Holiday Season we reached over 500 children and adults! Because of the increased numbers it has become impossible to host a Community Dinner at the present time.

In 1990 a new Christmas program entitled "Adopt a Family at Christmas" was started. Churches and individuals are encouraged to provide Christmas dinner and 2 gifts for each member of the family.

OUR METHOD

During the first week of October neighborhood schools are notified that we are asking them to submit names of needy families worthy of support during these "hard

times" of the year. The needy especially feel depressed at Christmas because they have so little and others have so much. On occasion referrals from the city of Philadelphia, Children Services, Phila. Food Bank, and other churches are received. An effort is made to visit each family before they receive a basket. Unfortunately some folk are fearful of receiving aid of any kind.

When the names of families have been received and some knowledge of their circumstances received, we make up food baskets with staple items which include rice, cereal, dried milk, vegetables, pasta, and sauce, as well as perishable items such as chicken or turkey, bread, butter, potatoes, eggs and much more. "Munchies", such as cookies, peanut butter, jelly, crackers, candy, and cake mix are also included when available. Each food "basket" is made up according to the size of the family. Christian literature is also included. Such items as Daily Breads, Church Bulletins, tracts, and other items as available find their way into each home. Warm greetings, prayer, Scripture reading, and an invitation to services is given to the one(s) who pick up their baskets and also by the one(s) who deliver baskets.

When the dinner was held, our purpose was not to "slop the hogs" or to feel good, but to provide a warm hospitable atmosphere for those who attend. They are treated and waited on as our guests not as poor people. We want them to see Jesus in us. Attendance at the dinner was by invitation only! Tickets are distributed and are not transferable. This is done so that the people invited are guaranteed a seat and to limit the number people who attend because of lack of space. We cannot serve more than 200 comfortably.

There are those who hear about the dinner and really need; but there are also those who try to con their way in. These people are asked to wait and see if room is available, since there are always some no shows. By God's grace we have managed to accommodate everyone.

When everyone has been fed, the program continues with carol singing, special music, the reading of the Christmas Story according to Luke, and a message by the Pastor. As the folk leave, each child was handed a wrapped gift, and a stuffed animal. For several years ('95 - '97) we were blessed to be able to give the children two wrapped gifts. Each adult was given a ditty bag containing various items for personal grooming and use. Also included was Christian literature, tracts, and a New Testament (when money allows). Everyone received a box of Christmas candy. There is hope that if more help becomes available the dinner can be reinstated.

HERE'S WHAT IS INVOLVED

Early in October plans begin to be made for the community Thanksgiving and Christmas Outreach. As the weeks go by money is collected, contacts for gifts are made, ditty bags are sewn, and items for the ditty bags are purchased. The menu is decided upon and a list of needy individuals and families is drawn up. The number of those we will care for at Thanksgiving and the number we will serve is determined, and needed food begins to be assembled. Many trips to the supermarket are made, and wherever possible, the food is purchased in case lots. Many hands are needed to sort the food and fill the baskets. When the baskets are ready, the families are notified to come in and pick them up.

For the Christmas Dinner many long hours were put in wrapping gifts, filling candy boxes, and filling ditty bags, and purchasing the food for the meal. Early in the week of the dinner food is purchased and the tables are decorated. Preparation for the meal begins days before and gets into high gear the morning of the dinner. The total number of people to work as cooks, helpers, dish washer, and servers totals over 30; and those who clean up after everything is over is usually over 30. It's late at night when the last worker leaves for home. Each year sees us becoming more efficient as commercial kitchen equipment is purchased or received as gifts.

WHY DO WE DO IT?

Our purpose is quite simple: we want to be obedient to the command of Jesus, to please Him and to help our neighbors who are in need. The Word of God tells us not only to evangelize but also to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and those in prison, and to do it all in the name of Jesus.

To evangelize the hungry without feeding them is difficult at best; to share the Gospel with the naked is very hard; and to tell folk about Jesus without meeting their needs makes evangelization almost impossible. Therefore, in obeying the commands of Christ we please Him, satisfy ourselves, meet the needs of our neighbors, and make the work of evangelism a great deal easier!

HERE'S WHAT WE NEED!

We need YOU to:

- Give Money
- Give gifts (mittens, scarves, hats, toys, etc)
- Give items for ditty bags
- Give time to make ditty bags
- Help purchase food or make up food baskets
- Help at the Community Dinner
- Help raise support for this Outreach program
- Help wrap gifts and stuff ditty bags

We Need MONEY for:

- **Thanksgiving:** (*When we are able*)
It costs approximately \$90 - \$110 to make up one food basket for a family of four. In 2001 we gave baskets, including turkeys, to 147 families. This amounted to approximately 1000 bags of food.
- **Christmas:**
When the Christmas Dinner is held, it costs between \$1500 and \$1800 to feed 200 people plus gifts and ditty bags. When new gift items are received and food donated, the cost goes down.

Please Note: Some years we do not have the dinner because of too many large families that cannot be accommodated for in our facility. In addition, our resources would be taxed to the limit.
- **Children's Christmas Party:**
When a dinner is not held a party for the children of our "Basket Families" with gift distribution is held. In recent years they have numbered over 275. A Christmas Video and refreshments are part of the program when possible; which precedes the gift distribution.

ITEMS NEEDED:

(A) Food Baskets - Thanksgiving and Christmas

Most food purchased or received from USDA. About \$2000 is needed to purchase needed items. While we appreciate staple type canned goods, we prefer money to buy what's needed.

(B) Christmas Dinner - when able to be held:

1. *Food Items*
 - Potatoes - 50lbs.
 - Turkeys - 10
 - Yams - 40lbs.
 - Pies - 20 (we buy from bakery at discount)
 - Cranberry Sauce - 20 cans
 - Butter - 10 lbs.
 - Rolls - 20 doz.
 - Stuffing Mix - 6 double boxes - Stove Top
 - Stuffing Bread - 10 loaves
 - Tomato Juice - 10 cans
 - Coffee - 5 lbs
 - Tea - 100 count box
 - Sugar - 20 lbs
 - Milk - 4 gallons
2. *About \$500.00 is needed for perishable items*

(C) For Ditty Bags:

1. Material to make 100 Ditty Bags (pieces must be no smaller than 18" x 18")
2. Items to put in Bags (100 bags)
 - Toothbrush
 - Toothpaste
 - Tissues - sm. pack
 - Ball point pens
 - Hand towels
 - Wash cloths
 - Soap
 - Lip Balm
 - Shampoo - sm. bottles
 - Soap powder - very sm. boxes
 - Disposable razors
 - After shave - sm bottles
 - Christmas cards
 - Home made sewing kits - black and white thread, needles, scissors, straight & safety pins
 - Writing tablets - small

(D) Candy

We purchase candy by the case, as well as small Christmas boxes to put it in. It costs about \$300 to purchase the candy and boxes.

(E) Toys and other items

- About 600 new toys are needed each year to meet the growing need.
- About 300 knit hats, plus 300 scarves and 300 pairs of gloves are needed.

(F) Capital Items Needed

- ♦ 3 Commercial electric knives
- ♦ Commercial garbage disposal
- ♦ Larger capacity dishwasher

INVITATION

The need is great, the work is difficult, but the reward is without measure. To help someone enjoy the holiday, to help someone learn firsthand about what it means to follow Jesus is beyond expression. Come, be a part of our inner-city ministry that is trying to point people to Jesus and help them to rebuild their often shattered lives through faith in Him and with our helping hand.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Please contact:

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