

700 Kids and Counting

As schools nationwide grapple with budget cuts, teachers at Combee Elementary in Lakeland, Florida, have made a wish list to give to nearby First Baptist Church at the Mall.

That's because the 9,000-member church adopted Combee's 700-plus students last year when it learned the school lost a third of its supplies budget. The church provided \$5,000 worth of supplies, prepared spaghetti dinners for parent-teacher meetings and even purchased 180 pairs of sneakers for school officials to give to poor students. "We have chosen not to look at [the budget cuts] as a problem," says missions pastor Dave McClamma. "We've chosen to look at it as an opportunity ... to be the church."

Last Christmas, the school connected First Baptist with needy families who said they wouldn't mind a home visit. Church volunteers took food, gifts and the gospel; as a result McClamma said 13 families accepted Christ.

The unusual partnership has raised some questions about church-state separation, but Combee principal Steve Comparato told the *Wall Street Journal* the support has been "like a prayer answered." When school begins again this month, First Baptist will be there with bags of pencils and notebooks. "There is something we all can do," McClamma says. "It may not be on a large scale, but it could be something that would be on a big scale to those in need of it."