

Foursquare Churches Get Creative With Community Love

People at West Salem Foursquare Church in West Salem, Ore., may have wondered if the Grinch had paid them a visit a few weeks ago. In the sinister green monster's spirit of Christmas taking, someone stole the church's 12-foot cargo trailer, which was packed and ready to deliver much needed supplies to a local family.□□

West Salem Dream Center Director Craig Oviatt, in a story aired by TV station KGW, told a local reporter that all that was left were the broken padlocks and tire tracks in the gravel where the trailer had spun out of the church's driveway.

"The trailer, along with an older white box truck, has been an icon in West Salem and the Edgewater District for years," says John Fehlen, lead pastor of West Salem. "When our community sees it rolling around, it represents hope and dreams coming true; it represents freedom from the fangs of oppression."

Last year alone, donations of food, furniture and supplies were distributed to 540 families via the church's trailer. But John says the trailer is simply a tool.

"It's the passion of those who donate and serve that truly shows a hurting world that God is good," he tells .

Enter an anonymous and generous donor who heard the story of the stolen trailer and wanted to replace it with a larger, newer one to help the church help the community. Others who heard about the church's loss also made donations to help increase the outreach ministry using the new trailer.

One man and his daughter from a Foursquare church in Camas, Wash., drove 90 minutes just to make a generous cash donation

and to deliver bags of clothing to the ministry. Another woman in the community stopped by the church and donated cash, a blanket and gifts for needy families.

The love of Christ and the spirit of Christmas giving are alive and well in West Salem, Ore.—and in other Foursquare churches around the country.

Jerry Walton, senior pastor of Faith Temple (Lamesa Foursquare Church) in Lamesa, Texas, says people in his church are encouraged to bring gifts that would have made the baby Jesus more comfortable. He says people plan to donate heaters, pillows and blankets to the cause. Then, they will deliver the gifts to families in their West Texas community this Christmas.

The unemployment rate in Crook County Oregon remains at 19 percent, and that means one in five people of Eastside Fellowship (Prineville Foursquare Church) in Prineville, Ore., is out of work. But church members won't let that keep them from giving this Christmas.

Brian Carmack, an assisting minister at Eastside, says people gave gifts to one other on Nov. 13 to kick off what they call "Live to Give." They were encouraged to give a gift to someone else every day until the end of 2011. That's 49 days, and gifts, that these faithful folks will give away to whomever they want.

"The gift does not need to cost money," Brian explains. "We are encouraging creative ways of sharing Christ's love to the world around us." It's an effort, he says, to remind people of the joy of giving and "to realize that we cannot out-give God."

Gettysburg Foursquare Church in Gettysburg, Pa. will be taking part in the "Advent Conspiracy," based on the book by Rick McKinley. Senior Pastor Mark Chester says the people in the church raised \$31,000 last December to help fund a food

ministry in their community that reaches 80 families each month.

“The idea is to spend way less, and maybe nothing, on Christmas and to give the money away to someone else,” Mark says.

Pastors and congregants from Neighborhood Bible Church (Bakersfield Northwest Foursquare Church) in Bakersfield, Calif., will be available every night through Christmas Eve to give folks from their community a most interesting gift.

Anyone who drops by their church will be given a clear glass Christmas tree ornament and a small slip of paper. They will be encouraged to write a prayer request on the paper and stuff it inside the ornament. Then, the ornament will adorn the church’s tree through Christmas.

This gift goes beyond a simple ornament, however.

Each night, one of the church’s pastors will spend time praying with any individuals or groups that come to see the beautiful tree. Senior Pastor Thomas Gnacke remembers that, last year, several ornaments containing prayer requests for new jobs were hung on the tree. He is delighted to report that many of those people have since become employed.

Pastor Tom hopes this year that 1,000 people from his community will take part and help them decorate the church’s Christmas tree—and allow the church to pray for them in the process.

And so it looks like the Grinch is nowhere near Foursquare churches this year. Individual churches may celebrate Christmas in different ways, but one thing is clear: Jesus Christ is alive and giving through His people again this Christmas.

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article here.