

Louisiana Church Reaps Unexpected Harvest on Rwanda Seed

When *Time Magazine* labeled Lake Providence, La., “The Poorest Place in America” in an August 1994 edition, Don Boyett unconsciously accepted a challenge. As pastor of Providence Church, Boyett knew the power of words to knock down or build up his congregation and the town he had grown to love.

While U.S. Census Figures supported *Time*’s article that year, Boyett instinctively knew that, to prevent a spirit of poverty from shuttering his church, as it had the town’s only pawn shop, he would have to teach and model extravagant giving before the 150 members who had been with him since February 1981.

This week, as Providence Church celebrates its 32nd anniversary beginning Feb. 10, a legacy of generosity is returning rich rewards to Boyett and his flock. To mark the milestone on the Sunday before **Valentine’s Day**, the church once again demonstrated a spirit of giving.

This time with an award for a Houston woman who inspired Providence Church to give \$19,000 two years ago toward building an orphanage in Rwanda for children abandoned by tribal massacres in the African country. The woman, Jessica Tomlinson Maher, and representatives of the orphanage-building group International Corporating Missions, were on hand for the celebration, featuring music by Grammy Award-nominee Jeremy Calloway.

For its faithfulness in sowing through the years, Providence Church is reaping an unexpected harvest in time for the

holiday that celebrates love, which Boyett says, characterizes his ministry. "I don't mind by saying, humbly, that's the gift God's given us—loving the unlovely unconditionally," Boyett said.

Known in the farm community of 5,400 it serves for the words "You Are Loved" over the front door, Providence Church is receiving nearly \$60,000 this week from a fellowship in Colorado's "Sweetheart City," Loveland.

Resurrection Fellowship, a church in the city where Valentine's Day cards get the world-famous postmark from Loveland, is sending a check that will enable Providence Church to purchase nearly seven acres of land for a future sanctuary, replacing its current multi-purpose building that houses a gymnasium, classrooms and a worship center. The building is also utilized by the community, comprised mostly of farmers.

In a single offering on the second night of a four-day conference that highlighted supernatural provision from heaven, members of the Loveland church—commonly known as Rez—gave within a few thousand dollars the price of the Louisiana real estate, negotiated while Boyett and others in Colorado had their eyes turned to the skies. The landowners agreed to discount their asking price of \$85,000 in a last-minute deal for the exact parcel that Boyett had for years claimed by faith, even as his church gave money to build an orphanage that most members will never see.

Boyett, who spoke that night about three memorable, life-changing moments in his life and ministry, stood beside Rez Senior Pastor Jonathan Wiggins moments before hundreds of church members streamed forward with hugs, cash, check and credit card donations for the Louisiana pastor, whose eyes flowed with tears.

Since the conclusion of “Convergence: Let Heaven Come” at Rez on Saturday, donations for the Louisiana land purchase exceed its price tag, and they may be earmarked for future construction of a sanctuary on the site, Wiggins said.

“That offering, in my mind, was a supernatural opportunity to invest back in him,” said Wiggins, a son-in-law of Boyett and former worship leader at Providence Church where his ministry began at age 16. It’s also where he met his future wife, Boyett’s only daughter, Amy.

Like Providence Church where, as a 14-year-old boy Wiggins visited with his father during a troubled time in their family’s history, Rez aspires to be a place where love is extravagant, even for people who feel unlovely. Wiggins says he’s proud to share that legacy with his father-in-law.

In another display of extraordinary giving, Wiggins presented a Colorado pastor who spoke about heaven’s realities on the conference’s third night, a check for \$20,000. Pastor John Leach of Jubilee Fellowship, a multi-campus church spread over several, southern Denver suburbs, visibly shook as he accepted Wiggins’ gift. Leach was a pastor at Rez before it assisted him with a church plant in Centennial, Colo., home to one of Jubilee’s suburban campuses.

In rural Louisiana, land is comparatively cheaper than in Colorado and, while \$54,000 isn’t much for six-plus acres of land, Boyett calls the amount “miraculous, heavenly provision,” because it represents money his church didn’t have.

“The huge thing is that another place cared enough about us,” said Boyett who, at 63, hopes he gets to enjoy the fruits of his ministry in a new sanctuary, and continue a legacy of giving to other churches and ministries.

“Jonathan and I both believe that if we have a need, we sow into somebody else. We believe and teach that,” Boyett said

Rez is itself in the midst of a capital campaign for expansion of its worship center, classrooms and meeting areas and, like his father-in-law, Wiggins believes it’s good to sow monetary seed when looking to meet financial needs.

That, however, isn’t his primary motivation for leading Rez in giving to a church located in a town where there isn’t a public park, swimming pool, theater, shopping mall, McDonald’s or even a Wal-Mart. But he hopes others will follow.

“Wouldn’t it be an amazing thing if, for a place known for its poverty, the Body of Christ universal, helped this church (Providence) build a sanctuary,” Wiggins said.

One man has no doubts that Providence Church and Boyett have a bright future in Louisiana, despite *Time Magazine*’s harsh words in describing the town with “all the problems they have in New York City and Chicago, but nothing to fight them with.”

“The Lord’s been impressing upon me that he (Boyett) is to immediately go forward with building what God’s put in his heart,” Rez member Howard Skinner said. “He’s to start up the mountain like Abraham did with Isaac, and God will have the person coming up the other side.”

Those words provided an additional reason to celebrate Providence Church’s 32nd anniversary.

Because words like Skinner’s have power to build you up, not knock you down, which has always been Boyett’s hope for his church and the town he loves.