

Deeds of kindness: Servant Evangelism Is Popping At McKendree UMC

By **Clint Cooper**
Chattanooga Times Free Press



2002 Photo by Annette Bender, The Call

▲ **AT YOUR SERVICE:** Members at McKendree UMC gear up for another popcorn giveaway at a local video store. Pictured from left to right are Julia Cash, the Rev. Terry Goodman, and Wilburn Cash.

Members of McKendree United Methodist Church have been offering something for nothing.

JASPER, Tenn. – Church members have given out 128 packages of microwave popcorn with movie rentals, “upsized” 50 Dairy Queen meals for customers and wrapped Christmas gifts for Dollar General Store patrons. They have done all of it and more without asking for anything in return. The efforts are part of a servant evangelism plan implemented last fall at the church.

“We’re trying to catch people off guard,” said the Rev. Terry Goodman, pastor of the church. “They’re experiencing something they weren’t planning to experience, and they just might experience God.”

The servant evangelism idea is one Goodman learned from speaker Steve Sjogren during a workshop at NextChurch in St. Paul, Minn.

Sjogren, minister at Vineyard Community Church of Cincinnati, says on his Web site (www.servantevangelism.com) that “deeds of kindness tenderize hearts (so) they can later receive the message of God’s love.”

Goodman has three purposes in mind for trying the concept at McKendree UMC. He hopes to increase exposure of the church, get his members involved and touch the lives of those who might not

be expecting it.

“We look at it as seeds that we’re planting,” he said. “We hope to be around to see the harvest, but if not, we hope someone else is.”

McKendree members Sharon Swafford and Jane Bumpus recently manned the wrapping table in the Jasper Dollar General Store, where a handmade sign on the door said “Free Gift Wrapping Today.”

“Anytime you can do something outside of your self is good,” said Bumpus. “Usually, people say, ‘Let’s do something for ourselves.’ It’s easy to get into that.”

Goodman introduced servant evangelism to McKendree by requesting during a worship service that 10 people give him \$5 each and asking them to trust him. Instead of \$50, he got \$105.

“We were off and running,” he said.

One of the first things the church did was sponsor a booth at the Marion County Fair in September 2001. There, members gave away cups of water and more than 700 helium balloons in four nights.

Following the fair and the popcorn giveaway, McKendree had made a sizable numbers of contacts.

“Now 850 people know the church exists, at least,” said Goodman. “One guy (at the video rental store) came back and spoke with one of our members for 30 minutes. He was very taken with the idea.”

With each item given away, members attach a contact card. The cards contain worship times and a simple greeting such as “From your friends at McKendree UMC.”

Goodman said research shows it sometimes takes people 10 to 12 contacts with some aspect of God before they realize “something is going on here.”

In the meantime, he said, the church plans to continue the servant evangelism program. Plans for the future include more car washes, postage stamp giveaways, grocery store escorts – and more free popcorn for video-store customers.

“We’re still experimenting,” he said, “but I believe it’s going to pay off. My people are enthused, people are more aware of our name and it’s making a positive impact.” ■■

Clint Cooper is a member of First Centenary United Methodist Church. Reprinted with permission, Chattanooga Times Free Press.