

Cookie evangelism:

Asbury delivers the goods to nearby businesses

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. – Nobody can say that Asbury UMC comes up with half-baked ideas. The east Knox County congregation recently created a “cookie ministry” for a community that could have been hard to reach.

But reach them Asbury did – and when Sept. 11 happened and the community needed a church to pray in, they knew where to go.

Located near an industrial park in east Knox County, Asbury was challenged to connect with neighbors who were commuters rather than residents. The industrial park contains about 45-50 businesses with as few as two or as many as 750 workers.

“Our first idea was to cook them a dinner,” said the Rev. David Green, Asbury pastor. “We realized that might be nonproductive.”

Then the church missions coordinator suggested a cookie ministry, and parishioners got out their rolling pins. Over 10 weeks last spring, Asbury baked 20,000 cookies and delivered them to the businesses. They were organized, too: Church members used maps to identify companies, calling ahead for employee counts and the best time to come. They left flyers with Asbury’s worship times and the message, “We’re here in the community. If you ever need us, we hope you’ll call us.”

Word of Asbury’s ministry spread. Many workers said, “We were expecting you!” when church members called to schedule a delivery. “It was like, shocking to them that we would take the time to do this,” Green said.

Knoxville District Superintendent Jim Whedbee, who read the thank-you notes sent to Asbury by company employees, said he was impressed by what they had to say. “They were more than just thank-you notes for cookies,” said Rev. Whedbee.

“They thanked Asbury for its presence in the community and for caring.”

With about 95 in average worship attendance, Asbury didn’t expect its unique ministry to bring in throngs of prospective members. But they were pleased when about 10 vanloads of company employees came in to pray following the September terrorist attacks.

Since then, the Knoxville District church has begun to host a Wednesday noon Bible study for nearby Sea-Ray Boat workers. “They bring sack lunches. We provide coffee,” Green said.

The outreach effort has also inspired door-to-door visitation to a few neighboring residential communities. The approach is the same. Asbury members deliver a batch of their famous cookies and a no-pressure message: “We’re here and we care.” ☐



Cookies R Us:

(Left to right) Asbury’s Rev. David Green, Shirley Swaggerty and Slick Painter deliver cookies to employees of a nearby industrial park.

disaster response:

By Amy Overbay
The Greeneville Sun

Months after summer flood, cleanup continues in Johnson City District

CHUCKEY, Tenn.– The parsonage of the Ebenezer Circuit in the Johnson City District was filled with prayer one morning in late September.

But this was no ordinary parsonage prayer – it involved about 20 volunteers who were praying in preparation for repairing flood damage to one of Greene County’s oldest churches.

Ebenezer UMC, which is just off Ebenezer Road in Chuckey, was established in 1795.

At 8:30 a.m., members of two out-of-town churches began to repair Ebenezer’s basement.

“We’re just very thankful to the Lord for all these people coming and helping us out,” said the Rev. Phyllis Hankins, pastor.

The appreciation she expressed was for volunteers from Church Street UMC in Knoxville and Gray UMC in Gray, Tenn.

The Rev. Ralph Kidd, pastor of the church in Gray, said he learned after Aug. 4 that flood-damaged churches in Greene and Unicoi counties were in need of help. Ebenezer UMC was somewhat of a natural choice for Kidd because of his 30-year friendship with Hankins and her husband, the Rev. Buford “Boo” Hankins, pastor of First UMC in Elizabethton.

The basement of Ebenezer UMC, which is located in a shallow valley, was flooded when water that ran off a nearby hill reached a depth of 19 inches in August. “I’ve been in Africa and Central America as a missionary, and I’ve never seen anything like that,” Hankins said.

The volunteer effort was coordinated in part by Brian Rosecrance, of the United Methodist Committee on Relief, who was one of the first officials to become involved in local flood relief efforts.

Ebenezer UMC’s carpet, paneling, stairs and doors had to be replaced. A catch-basin drain was installed outside the basement door in an effort to prevent more flood damage to the church’s basement. ☐

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► **Editor’s Note:** *The flood clean-up mission in the Greene County area is ongoing. “We desperately need volunteers and we need money. We need money bad,” said Brian Rosecrance, Johnson City District disaster response coordinator. To volunteer, contact Rosecrance at (423) 747-4671 or (423) 282-0582. Send contributions designated for flood relief to Holston Conference, P.O. Box 2506, Johnson City, TN 37605.*

Wytheville digs deep to aid neighbors

WYTHEVILLE, Va.– When flooding devastated parts of the Tazewell District on July 8, Wytheville District leaders promptly voted to send \$2,000 in aid from district reserves. On subsequent Sundays following the flood, Wytheville churches took up special offerings for cleanup efforts.

To date, Wytheville churches have collected a total of \$14,934 for Tazewell flood relief, according to the Rev. J.N. Howard, Wytheville district superintendent. Of 118 total Wytheville churches – most of them small – 44 dug deep in their pockets to aid the neighboring district.

The Tazewell District office expressed appreciation for Wytheville’s generosity. “They’ve been true friends and allies,” said Administrative Assistant Jamie Boone.



Photo By Lisa Warren, *The Greeneville Sun*

The Rev. Phyllis Hankins (left) and the Rev. Ralph Kidd stand in front of Ebenezer UMC, which is recovering from flood damage.