



Photo by Kathy Barnes-Hemsworth for The Call

Children in rural Greene County are invited to pick out new Reeboks, courtesy of Bewley's Chapel UMC.

## NEW SHOES: Bewley's Chapel provides 156 pairs for community

By Kathy Barnes-Hemsworth

**MOSHEIM, Tenn.** — A Morristown District congregation with a worship attendance of 50 showed God's love to 156 children by providing them with new athletic shoes.

"I wanted to see our church do something to show God's love to the community," said Melissa Chambers, a member of Bewley's Chapel United Methodist Church. "I felt like getting children new shoes to wear to school would be a way to do that."

With increasing gasoline costs and the increased cost of living in general, middle-class families are joining the struggle to survive from paycheck to paycheck, she said.

Chambers and her husband, Mike, said they know a person who works for Reebok Factory Outlet in Sevierville. They made a call and discussed the possibilities.

"At first we thought about handing out gift cards, but we then realized it may be difficult for people to drive to Sevierville to redeem the cards and get shoes," Chambers said.

From that point on, things just fell into place: "God was definitely in this. The church supported the project, then Reebok was willing to give us a discount."

Five Reebok employees agreed to drive to the church in rural Greene County to measure children's feet and help them select shoe styles. Fliers were distributed throughout the community, inviting families to "The Big Giveaway."

On Saturday, Sept. 13, picnic tables were lined with shoe choices. Children were instructed to select two options in case first choices weren't available in their sizes. Reebok ordered the shoes, which were expected to arrive within a

couple of weeks. Congregation members planned to deliver the shoes or arrange for the recipients pick them up.

The congregation didn't want the children to leave empty-handed, so the Saturday morning giveaway turned into a party. Pepsi employees from the Morristown plant gave out cold drinks. Cookies and chips were served.

Every child received a goody bag. The blue plastic bag featured the church's name and contained snack cakes, crackers, a ruler, jump rope, a coloring book and crayons — all donated by businesses and individuals.

"I asked the church for the money to buy the shoes," Chambers said. "They voted to do this and we set the date. We have several members of the congregation here today helping the children select shoes and hand out snacks and goody bags."

"God gets all the glory for this. He was definitely in this, and I hope this is the first annual shoe giveaway for our church," Chambers said.

Bewley's Chapel is one of six churches in the Riverview Circuit, pastored by the Rev. Bobbie Dunford. "I am privileged to be serving a body of people who are serving Christ through a program like this and who are wanting to minister to their community," he said.

"This shows that every church can make a difference," Chambers said. "No matter how small a church is, it can still make a difference in their community and even the world around us." ■

*Kathy Barnes-Hemsworth is lifestyles editor for the Newport Plain Talk.*

Image by Millie Meese



Photo by John Shearer for The Call

Vicki Harden is executive director of Urban Family Outreach, a ministry of Washington Pike UMC.

## ONE-ON-ONE: Washington Pike changes lives through mentoring

By John Shearer

**KNOXVILLE, Tenn.** — Instead of just ministering to those who come through the doors, Washington Pike United Methodist Church is reaching people outside the walls.

Six years ago, the church started its non-profit Urban Family Outreach, a licensed program that includes after-school activities, art and music programs, Upward Basketball and a mentoring ministry very close to the hearts of the Knoxville District congregation.

According to Executive Director Vicki Harden, the latter involves a visit at least once a week by an adult volunteer with a student at a school, primarily Belle Morris Elementary across the street from the North Knoxville church. The mentor helps with academics or simply tries to make a positive social connection with the child, she said.

While the investment is small, leaders say the rewards are great. Washington Pike has 160 in worship attendance.

"We have gotten much more in touch with our community," said Harden. "We pull church members from 15 to 20 miles outside the area, so we need connections with the community and that has helped us a lot."

Church member Linda Wilson began mentoring a then nine-year-old girl last year. Through Big Brothers and Sisters, Wilson was also able to help the child in ways other than mentoring. This summer, while they were on a trip as a reward for the student's good work in summer school, Wilson learned that she and her siblings had been removed from their home by the state.

After some contemplating and a big prayer, Wilson

decided to become the child's legal custodian, caring for her in her home. "It is not something I planned," she said. "But I have not regretted it. I have truly turned this over to God more than I ever have anything in my life."

While she hopes she's helping the youngster, the child has definitely been a blessing for Wilson herself, whose husband died in 2007. Bill Wilson was football coach for Knoxville's Bearden High School and a former coach at West High.

"As good as I have been for her, she has been just as good for me," she said. "I have a son and daughter, and they all live within walking distance. They are a wonderful support system." The youngster has also become involved in the children's activities at Washington Pike UMC.

Other volunteers have also been blessed by the ministry, according to Harden: "We have had mentors who have met with the child once a week, and we have had some who have formed relationships with the children," Harden said. "It can be a life-changing experience."

The Urban Family Outreach program has evolved from an after-school program that was organized 18 years ago, shortly after Harden began working as Washington Pike's part-time children's ministry director.

"We have gone from an after-school program with 12 kids to four programs and some 208 kids," she said, adding that Urban Family Outreach was developed because the church wanted to expand its ministry to the community. The mentoring program includes an Amachi outreach, in which church members mentor children whose parents are incarcerated. ■

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