

September 14, 2016

Wider Net Celebrates 15 Years

To mark the 15th anniversary of "A Wider Net," we continue our series about how "A Wider Net" was birthed and how it has evolved over its history. In this insert, Northminster Associate Pastor for Community Ministry, Jill Buckley, and Northminster member Beverly Lawrence talk about our partnership with Operation Shoestring.

Jill Buckley

Northminster voted to embrace "A Wider Net" in June of 2001. That same month, we began providing breakfast and a devotional for the summer campers at Operation Shoestring. Each summer since, Northminster members, young and old, have volunteered for this simple, yet sacred, opportunity. Simple, because the tasks are straightforward and few skills are required; sacred, because these small acts bless and gladden the hearts of children. At last count, we've served over 14,000 breakfasts and offered over 190 devotionals.

In the beginning, we brought juice and Nutri-Grain bars to give the children. Soon, Ray and Vivian Thompson kicked it up a



WIDER NET

15th ANNIVERSARY

notch by making and bringing homemade sausage biscuits. One summer, Kay Parker helped the kids celebrate July 4th by bringing Krispy Kreme donuts decorated in red, white and blue icing. And then, Beverly Lawrence offered to coordinate the breakfasts for us. On her menu: pancakes and sausage, fruit kabobs, homemade blueberry muffins, cinnamon rolls . . . all made in her very own kitchen. Recently, we've made the switch to yogurt tubes, individual fruits, cereal and the like.

At Shoestring devotionals, I learned from Crisler Boone that if you slice an apple horizontally, you'll find a star in the middle. Once I saw Bill Nicholas offer a devotional, I immediately recruited him to bring his gentle, unflappable presence to our After School Program. And, I have discovered that a surefire way to get a bad morning headed in the right direction is to sing "Arustasha!" with Sally Thompson and 75 giggling children.

Our partnership with Operation Shoestring has not been limited to breakfasts and devotionals, however.

(Continued on back)

In the early years, several Northminster youth served as summer interns at Operation Shoestring's summer camp. For two years, one of our Kaleidoscope groups offered art classes at Shoestring's after school program. Several years ago, I worked with a Shoestring staffer to coordinate activities for high school students. When the new Habitat families moved in on Kevin Garnett Court, Operation Shoestring graciously hosted a meeting, which Northminster helped organize, to welcome the new families into the neighborhood. And about six years ago, Operation Shoestring hosted a neighborhood organizing meeting that I led and that Northminsterites attended.

Our partnership with Operation Shoestring is deep...and long. We love what they do. And we are so grateful that they have, over these many years, invited us to join them in such meaningful ways. We relish the opportunity to help lift the lives of the precious children entrusted to their care. Thanks be to God for all you have given to this effort, my friends. I truly do thank God for you.

Beverly Lawrence

Since the very beginning of Wider Net in 2001, Northminster has faithfully provided breakfast and a devotional for the summer campers at Operation Shoestring. Sometimes on Tuesdays, sometimes on Tuesdays and Thursdays, sometimes for six weeks, sometimes for eight, sometimes for kindergarten through fifth grade children, sometimes for middle-schoolers, sometimes for just the younger children, sometimes for seventy-five, sometimes for fifty, sometimes at the Bailey Avenue building, sometimes at Galloway or Brown Elementary School - the details change but Northminster's commitment has not. Northminster volunteers show up faithfully and joyfully at 7:30 each assigned morning to make sure the campers get a good start to their day, both physically through the food we provide and spiritually through the devotionals and Bible stories and songs . . . and we have a lot of fun doing it.

Again, some things have changed since the old days when Vivian and Ray Thompson showed up with homemade hot-out-of-the-oven sausage rolls, but some things haven't. The Thompsons still show up to serve the meal and Ray still leads the children in singing "Everybody Ought to Be Happy"; Marcia and Chuck still show up with an interactive Bible story the children love; David McNair is a regular with his zither and a Bible story; the Jo Ann Ratliff/ Jean Williams team (complete with Jean's autoharp) comes to serve and sing songs; various and sundry members of the Boone family make a regular appearance; and volunteers too many to name here have come to be a part of the fun, some faithfully since the very beginning of the program and some new each year. The children don't change either—their names and faces do as they grow up and move on—, but their eager, polite enthusiasm never changes or fails to make our small effort worth every penny and every minute we put into it.

If you haven't had the pleasure of helping, don't worry, you'll have another chance in the summer of 2017. It couldn't be easier - someone from Northminster will have the food there and all you have to do is show up and have fun. If telling a Bible story isn't your thing, come anyway. Someone else will be happy to do that and you can keep busy opening cartons of milk and trying to stick straws in little juice pouches and peeling Cuties. The blessing will be all yours.

