

November 8, 2009

Geneva BLESSINGS

... And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Genesis 12:3

REFLECTING GOD'S GRACE IN THE SUPERMARKET

Sometimes less really is more—a great deal more. As Mary Montague has found, it's the little things that often do the most to spread God's Word and share His love.

Mary works two jobs one as a graphic designer for a family-owned printing firm, the other as a clerk-helper in an area supermarket. It's her evening clerk-helper job that offers an opportunity to reach out to people. "Every afternoon when I walk from my car to the store, I pray, 'God, is there anybody with a special need today? Please send that person my way and then please give me the right words to share,'" Mary says.

Extra Kindness in the Parking Lot

The store where she works serves many elderly people, some of them with infirmities that make shopping a challenge. "If I see someone obviously not finding what he or she wants or straining to reach something on a shelf, I always go and try to help." She also goes out of her way to help older shoppers get groceries from the store to the parking lot and into their cars. Sometimes, a friendly "How are you today?" opens the door for an opportunity to listen or comfort. "People may have been ill or had surgery," Mary says. "Even just listening to their concerns can help make them feel better." Because of company policies governing discussion of religion in the workplace, Mary must wait for the customer to take the conversation any further. If and when the moment seems right, she offers to place names and needs on Geneva's prayer chain. "But I always pray before I speak," she says. "Lord, lead the way."

Occasionally, someone will ask her if she goes to church. Then she tells them about Geneva, "our Bible-believing church right across the street!" and about the three Sunday services.

Silent Blessings in the Checkout Line

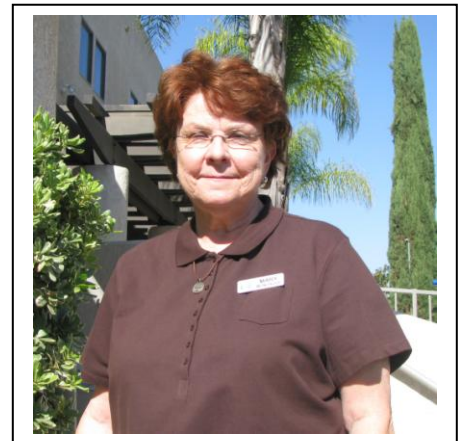
As customers go through the check-out line or pass Mary in the store aisles, she makes a special effort to smile and offer a pleasant "hello." She also often prays in her heart for God to bless them and help them with whatever burdens they may be carrying that day. "I figure when God nudges me to pray for someone, that prayer is a part of His plan for that person for that day."

And then there's Mary's taxi. Several of the younger people who work at the store in the evening don't have transportation home after work. "I know what it's like not to have a car or much money in Southern California," she says, remembering her early days as an art student at The Art Center College of Design. Most evenings, she takes one or two of the kids home.

Mary wasn't always a Christian. "I was an atheist for years," she says. But unsuccessful struggles to resolve difficult personal issues on her own led her to realize she needed Christ's love and grace. "I was the captain of my own ship," she remembers. "But I ran aground. I just couldn't do it on my own any more. I accepted the Lord in December of 1975."

In shaping her life as a Christian, Mary has followed the example she had seen set by her mother, Elizabeth. "She was always kind and gracious to everyone, even when she was old and very ill," Mary says. "She prayed every day. She was a blessing to our family. She tried to live as she thought God wanted her to live." And that is what Mary also tries to do: reflect the Lord's love and grace by the way she lives.

"I may only be able to talk directly to one or two customers a month," Mary protests. "I really don't do anything special." But all the people who have been warmed by her smile or cheered by her help or have had a burden lightened by her interest may feel she has done something very special indeed.



LIVING TO SERVE

The words on their tee shirts say "Live to Serve," forming the horizontal bar of a cross. Beneath the cross is a Biblical reference: Galatians 5:13. "For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence," St. Paul tells the Galatians in that passage, "but through love become slaves to one another." In other words, you're saved through grace; now serve in response to God's love.

And that's exactly what a number of young Geneva men are resolved to do. The group, called "Live to Serve", began as a Wednesday night Bible study. But participants felt called to do more than just study. "We felt we should be doing something," says Gabe Burt, who is a part of Live to Serve. The tee shirts, designed by group member Dave Capelle, are intended to get that goal out in front of people—and not just Geneva people. "We're hoping that people outside the church who see us when we're working will notice the shirts and ask what we're all about," Gabe continues. "Then we hope they'll say, 'Guys from the church are doing this!'"



Cleaning Up Messy Spaces and Connecting Outside Established Circles

The group's first project was helping at an Orange County Rescue Mission food drive, where members packed food boxes, loaded cars, and did anything else that needed doing. Since then, their projects have included regular Saturday clean-ups at a number of area beaches, sprucing up a men's shelter in Santa Ana ("lots of messy spaces!"), digging up and replanting a yard for an ailing single mom, and getting the patio of Laguna Woods Village home ready for painting. The Laguna Woods Village project turned out to be especially rewarding.

The owner of the house was an elderly woman, Mike Heydenrych remembers. "It was difficult for her to ask for and accept help. But by the time we were done, she was encouraged and cheered up by the fact that younger guys were helping. For us, it was a chance to meet people outside of our own circle." "It's great to be used by God," Gabe adds. "You feel like you're doing what God wants you to do. You're part of a ministry."

Expanding the Live to Serve Ministry Inside and Outside Geneva—You Can Help

Currently, Live to Serve is looking for ways to expand its ministry. "We're not serving as much as we want to," says Mike. "We'd really like to have a consistent flow of work, mostly on Saturdays. We're happy to do anything that needs doing." The group is particularly interested in helping folks who have tasks they can't manage easily or for whom the cost of other outside help might be a burden. Gabe and Mike urge potential users not to be shy about contacting Live to Serve. The group really wants to help.

YOU CAN BE A PART OF THE "LIVE TO SERVE MINISTRY"

If your friend or neighbor could use some help from Live to Serve, call or e-mail Mark Chapman: 837-4765, ext. 211, or mchapman@genevapres.org.

Help others see what God's love can do!



Of course, the ministry isn't limited to Geneva members. "Call if your neighbor needs help," says Gabe. "That way, you get to be a part of our ministry too, by passing it along to others outside Geneva."

In the end, it all goes back to those tee shirts. "This is a way of sharing our faith," Gabe says. "We want to show what God's love can do."

Live to Serve members pictured: Gabe Burt and Mike Heydenrych.
Members not pictured: Bob Anthony, Cliff Bodie, Dave Capelle, Tim Lao, Jason MacAllister, and John Pieterse

COMING EVENTS

November 22: Hanging of the Greens—2 p.m.
December 7: Sing Along Messiah—7 p.m.
December 13: Christmas Concert—4 p.m.

December 19: Christmas Play—4 p.m.
December 24: Christmas Eve Service—5 p.m. (Family) and 11 p.m. (Candlelight)