

Assisting school boosts church outreach

Tideland News Report

Swansboro United Methodist Church has discovered a major increase in its community outreach activities after providing food assistance for a local elementary school.

SUMC began its efforts at Silverdale Elementary School in 2010, after an eye-opening experience in the nation's capital.

According to church member Jim Brewster, 14 folks from SUMC participated in a specially designed seminar at the UMC General Board of Church and Society, Washington, D.C. They arrived home with a vision: Learn about hunger in the community and share that need with the congregation. Manna, an outreach of SUMC's Church/Society Committee, was born, and Silverdale became a focus.

Why Silverdale? The rural school, at 841 Smith Road, just off Swansboro-Belgrade Road, eight miles northwest of Swansboro, has 400 students and 27 teachers. Manna committee members found the school has the highest percentage of Onslow County enrollments in the free lunch program and is a place with much food insecurity. The area is a "food desert," where people live far from grocery stores, there is poverty and a lack of transportation. For these reasons, Silverdale became a focus of the church's mission outreach.

Manna initiated monthly food drives in 2010, a primary, first-hand, mission effort. Each second Sunday of the month, three



Members of the "Manna Committee" at Swansboro United Methodist Church sort food for delivery to the

grocery carts, donated by Piggy-Wiggly of Swansboro, are filled with non-perishable food items, sorted and taken to the school, where they are given to children for weekend use.

The school, Brewster said, has been very helpful. Guidance counselor Yolanda Bullock coordinates and distributes food collections. Several members of the church are on the staff. The principal and vice-principal recognize the church's willingness to help the children and families at Silverdale and appreciate community involvement.

But food collection was just a

beginning. In the past year, many more folks have seen the need and caught the spark of mission activity for Silverdale. Manna has helped with landscaping. The United Methodist Women give school supplies.

Fifteen SUMC folks are approved by the county as volunteers. Several participated in the recent Read Across America day, and church members have monitored the annual end-of-grade testing program.

In addition, Brewster said, church youth have helped improve and restore Silverdale's Nature Trail, and the Contempo-

rary Worship spearheaded a collection to help support teacher assistants at the school. Currently, SUMC members are asked to buy books for a second-grade summer reading project.

Why such a response?

According to Dr. Ed Gunter, senior pastor, "We have been very active in mission work in Haiti. Once the church was aware of the needs of the school, it became an opportunity to do good in our own backyard. It's contagious. Hands-on-experience can make a real difference."

The church's efforts are affirmed in the North Carolina

Conference (UMC) priority "Congregations for Children" initiative. In 2013, Bishop Hope Morgan Ward challenged United Methodist churches throughout the state to a discipleship and love that could transform the lives of children and communities by partnering with local schools.

Swansboro UMC's effort is not just a response to the conference priority, it is directly related to the life of the congregation. As Gunter noted, "Not only do we help children, but the outreach brings us purpose and meaning."