

“One Woman’s Journey to Starting Families on Mission”

By Pam Parker

Written for SC WMU’s Missions Link, February-May 2012

Three years ago, a young woman with three young children asked me to help her learn how to teach her children to be thoughtful and helpful of other people and their needs. The first thing I did was take the two older children me to help me with a project at the associational office. We packed witnessing dolls, witnessing coloring books, crayons, and tracts for groups going on mission trips to Kentucky that summer. The kids had fun but decided that volunteering was hard work...until I explained to them the purpose of what we were doing and how what they were doing would help children learn about Jesus. I treated them to lunch and further discussed doing missions...

Then life interfered and I became sick for an extended period and the young lady's dad developed cancer and died after quite some time. After a long summer of mostly staying inside, praying, and looking to the future, I started thinking it was time to start a *Families On Mission* group. Persons at my church—men, women, boys, and girls—and I had been making blankets for a local child advocacy center for the past couple of years and we all loved working together, but we were never involved in one another’s lives beyond that one project. That ongoing involvement was what we were missing.

Then one Sunday in August 2011 that same mother came to me and asked when we could start doing and being missions to someone. I asked her when was she free. We set a date. We announced the date to the church. And we had 48 persons of all ages come to that first *Families on Mission* gathering!

We set up tables and assigned some persons to make sandwiches and some to bag them alongside cookies and chips. We assigned some persons the job of decorating the bags and some persons the job of stuffing the bags with food and tracts. Everyone played a vital part—even those who couldn’t come sent bread and meat or money!

After everything was ready, we read scripture, prayed, and talked about how we would be going to a local park to talk and play with children and families in an effort to show Christ’s love. Once at the park, we had a casual afternoon of sitting and talking and sharing food. We were graciously received and

families wanted to know if we could come again. Some even told us that, "Some preaching and singing wouldn't be bad!"

As we began to leave, our church members talked about the many needs they saw and started planning our return to the community. We decided to begin collecting children's books to give out upon our return to the park, and we decided to host a family fun day—complete with inflatables, snow-cone machine, popcorn machine, face and nail painting station, and food—for our neighbors who live in the apartments across the street from the church. This time, when I put up the sign-up sheet for volunteers, the slots filled so quickly that people were signing all over the paper and others wanted to know if they could come even if they hadn't signed up. In the end, we had 58 persons come to help with the family fun day!

After that, discussions shifted from talking about getting someone to work with the families in the apartments to how we could be that "someone." We began making plans to do a monthly Bible study with moms while their children play, and we started to see our children becoming aware of the needs of their own community. One boy asked his parents to stop and give food to everyone they saw walking down the street, and one GA went to her leaders and told them they needed to start raising money to build a home for a man who attends our church who is homeless....

God is moving through our *Families on Mission* group and I am excited to be part of my church's catching the vision of the needs of our community and sharing the love of Jesus in real and tangible ways. For many years I have shared the verse, "Without a vision the people will perish." How thrilling it is to be a part of a group willing to catch God's vision of not letting any person perish!