

Helping hands in a Dallastown church

For over 25 years, my church congregation, Bethlehem United Methodist Church in Dallastown, has been "giving" to Helping Hands in York. Twice a year the people from my church get together for a very specific purpose, to feed the less fortunate. This is done every Saturday and Sunday of the year by someone, could be a school, a benevolent group or a church group.

The process begins weeks before the actual date of distribution. The committee chairperson obtains donations and discounts from church members and local merchants for food and storage containers. That chairperson is my sister, Eva Hoffman, who has been doing this for more than 20 years. As "our day" gets closer, Eva calls the Helping Hands office in York where an estimate of the number of needed meals is given. She then decides on a menu and calculates how much food is needed.

On "our day" we gather in the church basement, a giant meeting room called Fellowship Hall. There is a fully equipped kitchen with four double ovens, a heavy duty dishwasher, refrigerators, plenty of tables and counter space for preparation. When we arrive there are usually fresh baked cookies waiting, having been made by members of the church. Some volunteers arrive early to help or some arrive after the church service. All contributions are welcomed and appreciated.

There are actually two meals prepared, a hot meal, perhaps one of pulled pork and baked potato or a pasta meal, also a bagged lunch for the next day. The hot meals go into the ovens to bake, while the assembly lines are formed in the big hall. Giant cans of peanut butter, huge jars of jelly and dozens of trays of bread slices line the tables in wait. At another station, pudding cups are filled,



PRISCILLA HOFFMAN

Community Columnist

covered and sealed. Each bagged lunch gets a sandwich, apple, cookies, Lantz crackers and pudding.

Styrofoam containers are filled with the hot food when it's ready. A dinner roll is added. These containers are loaded into coolers and boxes, then are loaded into vehicles. The caravan travels to several designated locations in the city, where anxious residents await. Tables are set up, prayers are offered and the food and pints of orange drink are distributed.

This past Christmas a new tradition was added to our Helping Hands ministry. Darlene Kuhn recruited several knitters and seamstresses from our congregation. These ladies made scarves for our recipients. Over 300 sets of hats, scarves and gloves were given to the men, women and children. This was done to honor my mother, Joan Hoffman, who for many years prior to her death was one of the organizers of our churches' Helping Hands. Darlene had remembered seeing my mother taking off her leather gloves on a freezing, wintry night and offering them to one of the women standing in line. Small acts of kindness can have a far-reaching effect. Yes, there are those who take this for granted. But it is those who are so thankful and appreciative that make us want to do this again and again, year after year.

Even though we are months away from the holiday season, there are two more sets of helping hands that belong to little elves from Brogue that I believe should be acknowledged. The first set belongs to Gretel Smith of Brogue. When Gretel was a child, her mother Sandy would haul her portable piano to York Galleria and Park City. There Gretel would sit and play the piano for hours to collect donations of money. With this money, she would purchase dolls for the Children's Home of York because Gretel thought every little girl needed a doll of her own.

But dolls were not the only thing she purchased. Over time, she raised enough money to buy the Children's Home residents tickets to HersheyPark, an air hockey table, several computers, a tree house, pool table and a weight lifting set. These charitable acts continued for many years until Gretel went off to college. Gretel is presently an attorney, having passed the bar in California and most recently Pennsylvania.

The tradition of giving away dolls has been taken up by her mom, Sandy. At Christmas time, the rooms in her home are filled with dolls of all shapes, sizes and colors, some complete with beds, car seats and extra clothes. There are women in the community who create wardrobes year round just so they can give them to Sandy to give to the little girls. Sandy collects stuffed animals and other toys for boys as well. And she works tirelessly right up until Christmas Eve giving out hundreds of donated Christmas trees to those who do not have one. Some people's charitable cups "runneth over" all year round. It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas!

Priscilla Hoffman lives in New Bridgetville.