

Faith Story
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It is hard to believe, but the time is upon us to organize and begin the planning for our 2013 2nd Annual Christmas Bazaar. To help kick this off, Rosemary asked me to share a Faith Story on what I experienced last year in leading this event. By no means though, do I wish to minimize the hard work and generosity of the planning committee and everyone else in the congregation who made this such a successful event.

For me, leading this effort was an amazing faith and spiritual journey. It taught me the incredible power of prayer and what it means to give and surrender all Glory to God.

Last year's Outreach Team began this planning effort early in 2012. Our first action was to select a credible charity who would receive all proceeds from our bazaar and I emphasize the word credible. We felt a big responsibility to our church and the community that the dollars donated would go to a well vetted and legitimate organization. We wanted the bazaar to benefit a local organization so that Big Cove Presbyterian Church could truly become a giving member of our community while putting our mission and vision statement into action. Little did we know what a daunting task this would be and how many stops and starts we would have with our decisions. We took to prayer for God to lead us to His desires. Answers to our prayers for direction took a lot of patience for it would wind up to be several months before we received His word. Some charitable organizations we selected went away, some never returned our phone calls, some spent too much money on administrative costs and local government officials we contacted never responded to our requests to share their knowledge on local needs. But we continued to pray and waited patiently for His direction and then a member of our team suggested The New Hope Children's Clinic (who we had never heard of). At the same time, God also directed me to participate in the New Hope School summer camp lunch program last year so that hungry children could continue to receive meals while school was out. Well low and behold this led me into direct contact with the volunteers and Executive Director of the Clinic. When I saw first hand the passion and literally hundreds of hours donated from volunteer physicians and staff to help our needy children and families, there was no doubt for us or The New Hope Children's Clinic that God had brought us together in their time of need.

As you know, last year's bazaar was our first so it took an incredible amount of time for our planning committee to select a name, figure out what it would consist of, pick a date that would not conflict with football games and many other holiday activities in town and then we had to gain the trust of the Session that we could actually meet all the challenges with only a \$1000 budget to pull all this off. It also meant putting together communication and advertising plans, getting the support of our congregation, putting together timelines and action plans among many, many other things. So I had many late nights and early mornings asking myself, would we get enough craft vendors to fill our facility, would our local merchants support our raffle baskets, do we have enough cars to support our car show, would we have a parking problem, would our budget be enough, would we have enough baked goods, would anyone show up and most of all

would our congregation support this because we needed everyone help? But most of all I prayed that our congregation would enjoy the experience and not make it a burden on their time. Then Rosemary said something to me that became a defining moment and led me on a faith walk and spiritual journey that I never thought possible. I was sharing with Rosemary how uncomfortable our Raffle Team was in soliciting donations and she said, "While asking for donations, keep in mind this is not about us but about the children of our local community". At that time the light bulb went on in my brain and I took her comment one step further. All of this was about giving all glory to God - it was not about me, not even our church, but was about God's children and His Glory. A peace came over me and I knew that God was using our congregation's spiritual gifts and everything now was in His control..as the song states..Jesus took the wheel. Rosemary had asked me the day before the bazaar if I was nervous and I honestly told her I wasn't, everything had been done that we as a committee could think of and the results were in God's hands.

But - I had one more personal challenge that caused me to pray, possibly more than I ever had in my life. Ron's mother had been ill for the past year and we were told by Hospice the day before the bazaar that she had less than 48 hours to live. As you know, Ron was extremely close to his mother and was an only child. He was carrying a heavy heart trying to do what was best for her. His mother had the purest heart and was one of the most devout Christian I had ever met. She showed me more love and generosity than I probably deserved. Even though I knew the planning team and church volunteers were more than capable of doing everything without me, I prayed very, very hard for God to tell me where I should be, at Ron's mother's bedside should she be called home or to be at the bazaar.

Well God gave The New Hope Children's Clinic and the underserved children of our community more that I could have ever imagined. We had hoped for 300 people to attend and counted 300 exactly, we had hoped to raise \$1500 and God raised over \$6300, we had hoped to have 3 raffle baskets valued at \$200 each, people and business's donated items worth over \$400 per basket. Due to a glitch with our rented computerized advertising sign, the company donated 2 free weeks of its use saving us \$800, we got free advertising time on WHNT and a beautiful article on AL.com and in the Huntsville Times at no cost, parking was not an issue, the car show was a big attraction, the bake sale was a huge success, we had to turn away venders and the crafters that were there were very happy with their sales, the response from our congregation was phenomenal, our youth group really pitched in and helped, we received various generous donations from our planning committee members to cover a lot of the cost, members of our congregation who had craft booths donated all or a portion of their sales. As a result, we came in \$630 under budget which we donated to the clinic. Afterwards members of our congregation relayed stories to me how they overheard strangers commenting in restaurants and other places how much they liked the bazaar, the quality of the crafts, and hoped we would do it again in 2013. One of my most memorable moments was when we told Rosemary how much money was raised as we were cleaning up, she literally got down on her knees and thanked the Lord.

And finally through Ron's encouragement I was at the event - his mother peacefully passed away the day after the bazaar with Ron, me and his daughter at her side. It was now complete, every single prayer on this journey was answered.

Jeff Irons is chairman of the Christmas Bazaar committee this year and many who led activities last year have again generously volunteered to once again support the bazaar. I think everyone hopes to grow the event. I learned last year, for the size of this congregation we have incredible spiritual gifts to share for His glory and the children of our community. I look out today and see just about everyone in this room contributed last year and it is my hope it was a joyful experience for all of you. So I would like to close by encouraging all of you to volunteer and participate once again this year and may you all experience this powerful gift of prayer and the joy of giving for the Glory of God. We truly have an amazing and awesome God. To God Be the Glory