



First Baptist
Knoxville photos

From 'handouts' to holistic ministry

Franci Rogers
freelance writer



McEntyre pitches in at a Kids Hope event in which First Baptist Knoxville participated.

When she looked at the way many churches do community ministries, Carol McEntyre saw the best intentions but not always the best methods. “We want to share the love of Christ and spread the good news but churches haven’t always been effective in doing that,” she said. In her role as director of Buckner Community Ministries at First Baptist Church of Knoxville (Tenn.), McEntyre is finding ways to combine the two.

McEntyre works at the church as an employee of Buckner Children and Family Services, a globally oriented ministry that works with children in need, and a division of Buckner International, Dallas, Texas. A social worker, with an undergraduate degree from Carson Newman College and a Master of Social Work degree from Baylor University, McEntyre was first employed by the 1,700-member congregation in 2004 as minister to university students.

She has found that many churches engage in what she calls “commodities-based ministries,” giving people food, clothes or money for rent. “But to me, building community ministries in the church means building ministries that are life-transforming.”

She said the question she and First Baptist are exploring together is, “How do we take everything we do and make it about relationship and life transformation and not about giving stuff away?”

McEntyre uses her social work background to help congregation members better understand what the long-term effects of community ministry can be. Instead of the immediate good feeling of giving away a Christmas basket or sponsoring a child at the holidays, she said, “We are trying to go a step

further and change lives. Once they [congregation members] heard the rationale, they began to understand that we could really make a difference, and they have just been totally on board.”

The Rev. Dr. William D. Shiell, senior pastor at First Baptist Knoxville, said McEntyre’s focus on transforming ministries has been revitalizing. “Carol empowers the church to develop relationships and move beyond the standard ‘programs and handouts’ so often found in downtown ministry,” he said.

Kids Hope USA is an example of a community ministry that McEntyre believes can have a lasting impact and be an eye-opener for congregation members. The school-based mentoring program brings volunteers face-to-face with at-risk children. It works in collaboration with Buckner in many parts of the country. She helped First Baptist become involved in Kids Hope USA two years ago at a local elementary school.

“We have 19 mentors at the school now. That means 19 hours out of every week there is somebody from First Baptist Knoxville at that elementary school,” she said. “Once you start something like that, it’s easier to say we don’t want to just give stuff away, but we want to engage people in relationships.”

As trust grows between the school and the church, the relationship becomes reciprocal. McEntyre said that when the school recently wanted to send some students to safety patrol training in Washington, D.C., the school social worker called the church and asked for help. With just one e-mail, the Kids Hope volunteers raised all the money needed.

“It’s because those mentors know the school, love the school, love the children and are invested,” McEntyre said. “If we had not had the relationship with the school, we could not have raised that money.”

It’s that kind of collaboration that Shiell finds so rewarding. “Buckner has provided the catalyst for our community ministry to come to fruition,” he said. “Without their collaboration, we would not be able to minister in an effective, holistic way.”

In addition, Shiell said that investing in such an empowered community ministry has attracted new members to the church. “Many people have been drawn to our church who want to make a difference in Knoxville,” he said.

That’s exactly what Buckner hopes will happen when it places a staff member into a church, said Scott Waller, director of program initiatives for Buckner International. “We don’t place professional social workers into churches to do church ministry for them,” he said. “We want to empower, equip and energize the congregation to do what only the congregation can do.”

For that to happen, Waller said the church culture, vision and leadership have to align. “When all of that lines up, like it has in Knoxville, that’s when the church can create long-term, sustainable, effective ministries,” he said.

Another example of such an emerging ministry at the church is its English for Speakers of Other Languages program. A large Latino population lives in the community where the church is located, and the ESOL program has grown quickly. This challenged the church to think about ways to take the ministry to another level.

“Last year we brought in a bivocational minister to begin a Latino congregation in our church,” McEntyre said. “And so now it’s a really interesting blend of the ESOL program feeding and nurturing the church, and the church feeding people into the ESOL program.”

One positive result of the Latino Ministry is that the demarcation between the church and the community has blurred. “It becomes just part of the DNA of the church. It’s who the church is and what we do,” McEntyre said. “It’s not their community over there and the church over here.”

“That’s life-transforming, to move to a culture and not know the language and to end up learning the language, and to have this church body supporting you and encouraging you.”

Sharing her passion to serve with the members of First Baptist Knoxville has been a blessing, said McEntyre, who first felt called to ministry in college.

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“GET TO KNOW PEOPLE ... WHAT THEY ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT”

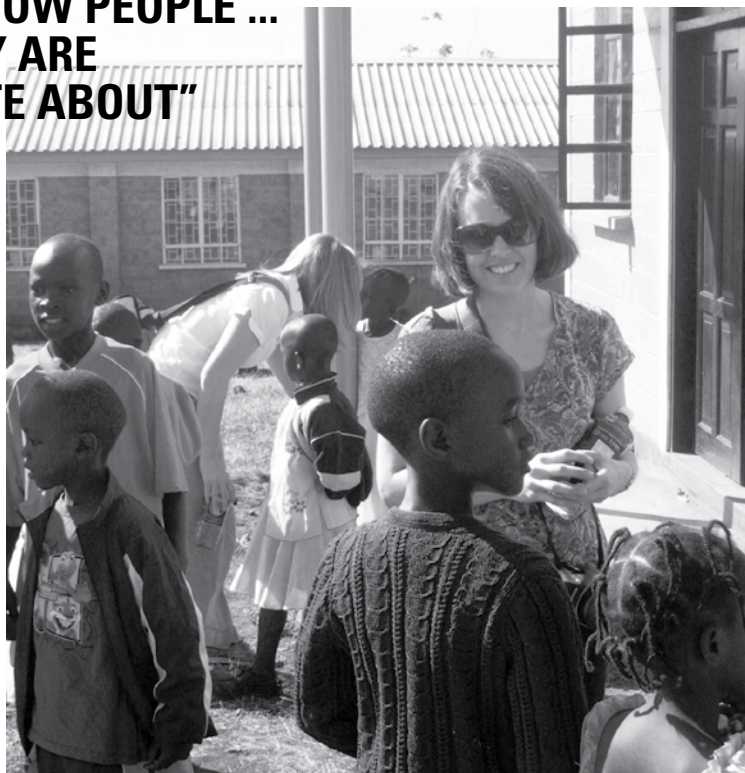
would be a very practical, tangible, real way to live out my faith,” she said. “And I really feel like my role as community minister is mobilizing church members to serve the ‘least of these.’”

A lack of compassion for others is not the problem, McEntyre said, but she hopes to help people focus their compassion and then establish realistic, sustainable boundaries.

“‘Healthy helping’ is a term we’ve begun to use around here,” she said. “We find ourselves asking ‘How do we help in a way that’s healthy?’ It’s funny that this is a challenge, but it is,” she said. “And now that we’ve begun down this road of community ministries, I have church members coming to me all the time, interested in starting new community ministries.”

Recently, First Baptist conducted a churchwide, six-week program it called “Get Connected,” in which sermons and Sunday school lessons focused on volunteerism. The program talked about setting specific boundaries for the church’s community ministry programs and evaluating where members’ passions lie.

In addition, McEntyre trained 27 church mem-



bers in how to conduct interviews with individuals about their passions, interests, skills and gifts. Some of the questions included “If time, money and talent were not an issue, what would you love to do?” and “What kind of skills do you have that you would be willing to lend to the church?” These responses are still being studied, but already McEntyre sees pockets of interest emerging.

McEntyre encourages other churches that are beginning or want to improve their community ministries to first look within.

“I would say the first thing you need to do is get to know your congregation,” she said. “Get to know people. What are people passionate about and how can we channel that passion and energy and concern?”

“People are committed,” McEntyre said. “Expect big things from people, and they’ll rise to the occasion.” — *Additional reporting by Angela Dennison*



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www.fbcknox.org

Buckner International
www.buckner.org

Kids Hope USA
www.kidshopeusa.org