



TALENT PROJECT STORIES

Newlonsburg Presbyterian Church
November 2008- February 2009



In November of 2008, the church received an anonymous gift with a letter.

Dear Newlonsburg,

Enclosed is a gift that we hope you will use in a talent experiment. We encountered this in a church in New England who received a note very much like this one from someone who encountered the idea in Florida. Educators teach us we learn better by doing than by merely hearing.

People of all ages are asked to take care of a "talent", in this case \$20.00, for the Master over the next 3 months. Then they bring them and whatever the talent has garnered back to the church.

We hope you will see what God has in store for you in this experiment.

*Sincerely,
Fellow Newlonsburgers*

We dedicated the talents and the tenders and heard a sermon on Matthew 25:14-30.

This booklet tells some of the story.

Triple Benefit

Here's what I know about Gayle's talent. Gayle bought 6 boxes of Girl Scout cookies to help out a girl that takes her to the movies and sometimes babysits her. Obviously, that ultimately helps out the Girl Scouts. She then took the cookies and made a tray that was taken to Westmoreland Manor which helped the Manor as funds are limited for anything "special". They were used as a "treat" for the residents during an activity period at the Manor. From what I heard, the residents really enjoyed the treat.



-Beth Tyson for her sister Gayle Hartin

Talent in the Hands of an Antique Dealer

I agreed to take a talent. I used my individual lifestyle to multiply the \$20.00. None of what I did was that hard or exciting. Because I own a small business it was easy to use that venue. I doubled the money with a small purchase of a holiday wreath and then reinvested it into a skaters lantern from the turn of the century. If you have ever seen a "Currier and Ives" painting of a ice skating party on a New England pond, then you have probably seen a child carrying a skaters lantern. That sold for \$100, so my talent is worth the same.

Thank you for the opportunity to use my gifts, abilities and interests in a new understanding of Stewardship.

-Judy Radcliff

Talent assisted by Sister

For my talent I made 2 purses which I sent to my sister in Indiana. She sold them at the food/craft shows she participates in. I think the talent served me there in opening up better communications between the two of us. We seem to be visiting across the miles more often and are more accepting of each other's differences. We still see life differently but have reconnected in a better way.



-Barb Barth

The Great Food Multiplier Project

Roger and Vicki Schneider have become members at NPC after having moved to Murrysville in the year 2000. Prior to that, they were members of a church in Wilkinsburg for over 30 years. Roger was involved in many community outreach activities through the church, including working as a volunteer and board member for the Wilkinsburg Community Ministry. He continues to help as a volunteer maintaining a small computer network and assembling a periodic newsletter.

When the Talent Project was announced, Roger and Vicki immediately thought of a more recent local service provided by WCM as a great way to multiply the NPC Talent they decided to nurture. Angelfood Ministries is a national program that provides nourishing foods to the needy at bargain prices each month through local distribution centers at churches and social service organizations around the country. WCM handles food distribution one a month for people in the Wilkinsburg area. The individuals pay \$30 for a box of food that contains over \$60.00 worth of food that provides balanced nutrition and variety with enough food to feed a family of four for a week. So the \$20 Talent (with a little added by Roger and Vicki!) was able to almost triple in value.



Roger and Vicki asked Ray Tolbert, Social Services Director for WCM to pick a worthy recipient for their NPC Angelfood Ministries food box for the February 21, 2009 distribution. That was not an easy choice, since WCM serves a larger number of senior citizens and needy individuals and families in Wilkinsburg each month. Ray conferred with Ann Greider, Director of WCM and they made a wonderful choice of a young single parent and her 4 young boys. At this point the Talent really blossomed! Ann suggested that the NPC Talent should become the model for a new program of WCM each month. She will contact local churches, businesses and individuals asking them to make contributions so that other people in need can be special recipients of food boxes in the months to come. If plans work well, this new program will be starting in the month of March.

Below is the text of a thank you letter that Vicki and Roger received from the recipient of their Talent gift:

"I am a 28 year old, single parent of four boys, ages 12,7,4, and 1. I am currently working with the EARN program to achieve my goal of becoming a medical claims processor. I will be attending Bidwell Training School for medical claims processing and coding in September 2009. The EARN program has helped me in attaining a job with Wilkinsburg Community Ministry in the meantime. It has been a blessing that I was placed at the particular site, because Ray Tolbert and the Wilkinsburg Community Ministry have helped me tremendously. They offer services for everyday living such as food, clothing, help with utilities and much, much more. Being a single parent trying to make it in this world with four children can

be a struggle, but I am grateful that WCM is in my life to help make things a little easier with providing for my children. I work hard for myself and my children to make sure that they can have the best life possible that I can provide to them. I would like to thank Mr. Ray Tolbert and WCM for the Angel Food box. It will be truly appreciated and helpful to me and my children.”

PRAISE THE LORD!

-Roger and Vicki Schneider

My Talent Experiment

When I received the \$20.00 for a talent experiment, I considered my various interests and each time came back to the idea of doing something for the Alzheimer residents at the Golden Living Health Care Center where my mother resided for three years. I was finding it difficult to visit the center after my mother's death, so I used the talent experiment as a way to return to the center. I decided to offer a time of fun and friendly conversation at a tea party for the Alzheimer residents. I'm presently baking cookies for the event which will take place on February 26th. Barbara Stricsek, the director of the Alzheimer section, is delighted about the activity I'm planning. She and her staff cared for my mother with exceptional devotion and supported me with much love.



-Sylvia Henriquez

A Purse Story

I purchased material with the \$20.00 and made 2 quilted purses for \$40.00 each.

Clever idea! I was glad to participate.

-Dodie Hagan

Talent Tenders

Similar to others that accepted a talent tender, we had no idea what our "talent" was going to be when we raised our hand. We thought about it for awhile and discussed it with Meg and Stella. After considering a number of ideas, we decided to ask Marnie if there was someone in the congregation that we could reach out to. Marnie suggested Joyce Frost. Joyce's husband passed away late in 2008 and Marnie thought she would appreciate some visitors.

The idea of reaching out to someone as our talent tender came to mind because of another rich and rewarding relationship we developed through the church several years ago. Our children were very young; Stella was still in a baby carrier and Meg was two. One day after service, Ken White pointed Alice Craig out to us and explained that she had recently starting attending church again after years of tending to her husband at home. Ken suggested that we reach out to Alice and make her feel welcome. We sat near her in church. We developed a great friendship with Alice. She loved our girls and they loved Alice. We loved Alice.

We decided that we could use our talent, to plant the seeds of friendship with someone else in the congregation that we didn't previously know. This is where Joyce Frost enters the picture. After Marnie recommended Joyce as someone that would appreciate some visitors, it took us awhile to put the plan in action. Finally, we called Joyce and left a message inviting her to join us for lunch one day after church. Joyce called us back later that evening and accepted our invitation. We frequently go to Hoss's for lunch after church since our daughters really enjoy it there. That is where we went with Joyce.

We spent lunch getting to know each other. Joyce sat between Meg and Stella and they took turns talking with Mrs. Frost. Joyce was a good listener and explained to us all her affinity for angels. After lunch the girls said that they "liked Mrs. Frost". We all thought lunch went well and that the seeds of friendship had indeed been planted.

Our eight year old, Meg, wanted to make a card for Mrs. Frost. She likes to draw and, knowing Mrs. Frost likes angels, incorporated angels into her drawing. Additionally, Meg insisted on using some of her allowance money to buy angel stickers to put on the card. Meg and Stella wrote a note on the card (a two sided piece of colored construction paper) and signed it "your new friends Meg and Stella". They came up with this language on their own and it was heartfelt. Finally, Kim laminated this card and we gave it to Mrs. Frost before church the week after we met for lunch. It now resides on her mantelpiece!

Mrs. Frost also told this story from her perspective later during church on the day the girls gave her the card they had made. We appreciate Joyce's willingness to accept our invitation to join us for lunch. She has invited us over to see her angels which we will do one day soon. The seeds of friendship have been planted and we hope to see this friendship blossom in the coming years. We appreciate the talent tender initiative and will return the tender and add to it. However, as was said during service, the tender was not about the money. In our case, it is about friendship between the generations. As our girls said, "we like Mrs. Frost."



Kaye/Anderson Family
-Meg Anderson, Stella Kaye, Kim Anderson, John Kaye

Sixth & Seventh Grade Talent Project



This fall the members of the sixth and seventh grade Sunday School class decided to accept the challenge of investing a talent offered to church members. There was a lively and spirited debate on the best way of increasing this talent. Our top choice (a car wash) was unfortunately ruled out due to the November temperatures. After good discussion, the class voted to provide cookies and punch in a fellowship time after the Christmas program. They chose to bake at home, and a wide variety of cookies and baked goods arrived on the day of the program. Mrs. Barth donated the punch supplies and Mrs. Rissler donated the table settings. Every class member present that morning helped to set up, serve, and then clean-up. Thanks to the generosity of our church members in attendance, the class is pleased to present our profit of \$159.38.

In presenting this idea to the class, Mrs. Barth allowed them to participate as full and contributing members of the NPC congregation. They were enthusiastic and excited. It also allowed them to feel an investment in the Christmas program. You know, the lure of live sheep in the ARC cannot be underestimated! We had a wonderful time, worked as a team, and learned about serving. Thank you for this opportunity.

-Barbara Rissler and Barb Barth, teachers
and the Sixth & Seventh Grade Sunday School Class

Talents Project Sliding to Notecards

Briefly, my project involves scanning some old color slides into digital images, using the images to produce note cards, and offering these for a contribution competitive with the cost of store-bought cards. A quick analysis showed that applying my entrusted twenty dollars to the purchase of materials (photo quality paper and suitable envelopes) for a hundred cards could, if fully exploited, earn a 525 per cent gain; in other words gross revenue of \$125 or \$105 net.

Why did I choose this project? I had recently found a long-lost box containing hundreds of color slides taken when I pursued photography as a hobby (beginning about 55 years ago), packed away and almost forgotten. The discovery seemed a blessing of sorts. The slides were in surprisingly good condition, and having them in my hands brought pleasant memories of places visited, of making quality photos in the years before automated cameras, and so forth. Interest had faded, as had the faint hope of one day using the slides for a purpose then not clear. (Stuffy slide shows never were popular, and deservedly so.) Along came the Talents challenge and the prospect of putting at least some of those pictures to work for the common good.

New challenges emerged immediately. I had to drastically adjust criteria for picking from my collection good pictures for note cards. Men don't use note cards, I'm told. Not true, I argue,

but must concede that men, typically, neither select nor buy note cards. Two other challenges derive from that one. What images do women like to see on a note card? The winners are – flowers and flowers. I didn't make photographs of flowers – Bummer!

The third challenge? I needed to pick subjects (other than flowers) which would not only appeal to Lady A, but which Lady A would think might appeal to a card recipient, Lady B. This seemed to be analogous to attempting a three-cushion billiard shot with a crooked cue stick. The answer came down, "Let go, and let God."



So, I lumbered into production with an expanded catalog of slides – including some made in more recent years, hopefully to fill a void. New problems arose, yes, but fun to tackle: for example, using photo-editing software not merely to crop images to fit the card format (as expected), but also to compensate for harm done by the scanning process. My scanner, I found, tends to exaggerate contrast in those photos that were originally a bit high in contrast. The tools were there, but learning to use them took practice.

I will soon have an inventory sufficient to display and invite selection by customers. I plan to offer packs of four cards, each different but with a similar theme, for a donation of five dollars, or individual cards for one-fifty.

-John McAdoo

Cookies for Meals on Wheels

This year in our Mintec Sunday School Class, our theme has been "Helping Hands." We have made Christmas ornaments for the trees at Redstone Highlands, Easter baskets for the children at East End Cooperative Ministry and now we baked cookies for Meals on Wheels. During two of our Sunday School Classes, we became cooks. We donned aprons and whipped up 10 batches of chocolate chip cookies. We packaged 40 bags of cookies and took them to First Presbyterian Church, the headquarters of Meals on Wheels. Also, we ate a few cookies in the process.



We needed to sample them to see if they were any good!!!!!!!!!!!!

-MINTEC Sunday School Class
Gayle Hartin, Linda Madden, Alec Siegel, and Jill Wilson

Wood Lathe Ingenuity

Here is my story about the talent that was given to me in Church.

When I first read about the idea in the bulletin I thought it sounded quite interesting. My initial thought was that many people would take on the "challenge." Much to my surprise,

only two of us at the 8:30 service asked for an envelope. Now maybe many more were given out at the other service, at least I hope so.



My very first thought was to buy some cheap penny stock in the hope that it would grow in three months...boy would that have been a mistake. Instead I focused my thoughts on what kind of talent God has given to me. For about two years I have been making pens, pencils, key chains, etc. on the wood lathe and selling them at craft shows.

September through December is the best time for me as it is close to Christmas. When I was given my envelope I immediately began to think of how I could use it in conjunction with the crafts. It was pretty late in the year and I only had one show left, in York, PA. I decided to use the twenty dollars to cover 1/5 of the registration and in return yield 1/5 of the total sales.

Shows this year have been pretty slow, probably due to the economy being down but this one turned out a bit better. My sales totaled \$220.00 with 1/5 being \$44.00. Add in the original \$20.00 and that makes \$64.00.

I think that God has given all of us the ability to do certain things well. One of mine is working with wood. It felt pretty good to tie that skill into this project. Making those pens is already enjoyable but now it is even more fun. Thanks for the opportunity and if we do this again in the future count me in.

-Rich Gebrosky

Watercolors to Cards



For the past 7-8 years, I have been having our Christmas cards printed from various ones of my watercolors. Having additional cards printed to sell to others to send seemed to be the logical way to invest my talent.

After the \$20 investment, the return from the card sales was approximately \$60.

The buyers were pleased with their cards, and according to comments they've passed along to me, the recipients considered them something special - "keepers", in some cases.

While this kind of project is something I probably would have done anyway, looking at it as an investment of a "talent" to further God's work, gave it a new perspective. My cards seemed to be doing "double duty" with the tie in to the Christmas season.

Thank-you for this opportunity!

-Barbara Jewell



The Lolo Bag

As a “servant talent keeper” I had no idea what I was going to do when I accepted the \$20.00 talent at church one Sunday. I just thought the concept was a novel idea in which I could participate. I explained it to my Book Club Ladies, and they thought it was a creative idea, and suggested I use my newly acquired quilting skills to produce something sales worthy. My friend Patty said if I made Fudge, she’d buy it for Christmas. I never made candy before, so that was a no.

I came up with what I thought would be a quick, easy project: quilted hand bags. I made some as an experiment for Christmas gifts which my friends seemed to like. Then when my husband, Jim went into the hospital for hip replacement surgery I got serious. We were housebound for the month of January. I set to work making my bags. We dubbed them the Lolo bag. The sewing kept me sane during the lengthy recovery time. I learned much about quilting, but more about myself and others. People are willing to buy or donate when something benefits the church. My friends who purchased the bags were delighted with them and gave more than I asked! I thank God and the anonymous donor who enabled me to be creative and produce something lovely in the doldrums of winter.

-Lois Philpot

Washington DC. Bus Trip

NPC Talent Challenge by Bus and Art

The November 2008 “Talent Challenge” was an invitation to explore some uncharted territory on behalf of Newlonsburg Presbyterian Church. I had been thinking for some time that we do not have enough entry points for adult fellowship at NPC. For me, then, the challenge was to design an event for extending friendliness, fun, and learning -- a decidedly different experience from our current opportunities. That was the rationale for a chartered bus trip to Washington DC. The trip centered on the art and beauty of the city on March 28, 2009, the first day of the Cherry Blossom Festival in Washington.

Early in December a friend asked me, “What does a bus trip have to do with your art talent?” Well, I had to think about it. It would be the Lenten season in March so I decided to provide an Adult Sunday School Class on the “Easter Story in Art” with slides from the National Gallery of Art. For those who wished to see the original works in Washington, I would offer a tour that day in the National Gallery. Otherwise, the day would be open to enjoy Washington as people chose.

The management of details required some thought. I procured maps...created a few “starting places” itineraries on “ways to spend the day” and offered some tips on public transportation. Everyone was phoned on departure week with a weather report, departure times, and other information. That must have been important because we had no mishaps and no one was late (!)....



Perhaps the winter seemed long and a late March bus trip seemed like a relief to people. Or perhaps the idea of sitting back in a comfy bus on the road to an interesting city seemed like heaven. Or maybe it was....”Let’s get out of here to spend the day with family and friends.” Whatever the reason, I had to order a bigger bus!! We departed promptly at 6:00am on March 28 with 52 passengers on a drizzly 50 degree morning.

At 10:30 am the bus dropped off about 15 people at the fabulous Washington National Cathedral. There they could spend time as they desired - self-guided or docent tours, leisure walking about. This idea of “on your own” worked well. Everyone made his or her own way downtown to the Smithsonian Mall area...and were successful!

Our charter bus arrived at the Smithsonian Mall at 11:00. The cherry blossom trees were magnificent and it was quite a thrill to see them in full bloom. The weather was a bit rainy and cool but we were intrepid travelers. At 1:00pm I met 20 or more of our party at the National Gallery of Art for a 30 minute talk and tour. It was a great surprise to me that so many were interested in these paintings and I was totally delighted.

By the end of the day we were all tired and happy. The bus left town at 6:15 pm, all aboard. Following a fast-food dinner stop we arrived at NPC by 11:30. Together we earned \$555.00 for the church from this Talent Challenge.

-Alice Lieb

Talent for Highland Dancing and Scottish Shortbread

I took a talent with the intent of helping some people who needed my special skills as opposed to making a lot of money. There will be a small amount of profit but I don't know how much.

As I'm sure you know, I teach Highland dancing--retired now. I'm as highly certified in this field as you can be. Another teacher friend of mine is only partly certified and has only an Associate Membership. There is a movement in our national organization to limit participation in dancing events by students of Associate teachers. So she needs to get her full membership. I'm training her for the Full Membership exam. In addition, I will be teaching her students periodically as part of this training process. This will be an ongoing process for the next several months and will not be completed by Feb. 22. I have not set a fee for either her training or the coaching of her students, but have said I would take a donation to pass on to the church.

She's located in the Coraopolis area, is raising 2 boys, has a husband on disability so not much money, and just had an emergency appendectomy. So it's going to be a long process!!

When I first read about the talents I didn't really think there was anything I could do. After all, I can't build things to sell and there's not a lot of money to be made in baking shortbread. (ed. Note: After this was written, Sarah Jean decided to go



ahead and try her hand at shortbread too. And she is baking!) But when Kathy pleaded with me one more time to help her with her Membership, it occurred to me that I did have a talent to share--a great deal of specialized knowledge that someone desperately needed. And when I told Kathy she was my "project", she was elated. I could charge her a lot of money, but that's not the spirit in which I took the talent. This is going to take quite a bit of work on my part. I haven't trained a teacher in many years. And during that time there's been a lot of technical changes that I will have to brush up on. Next weekend Kathy and I and some of her students will be heading to Columbus for a workshop where I hope to brush up on my own skills. I expect this adventure to be both challenging and a growing experience.

In working with her students, I have made some new friends of both her students and their parents. They are a wonderful group of people. The philosophy of this dancing school is to develop not only the dancing skills of children but their character as well. They love to dance and to share their talent with others. They regularly perform at many different nursing homes and have even come out to Redstone in Greensburg for me. Working with such a great group of people reminds me of the good things in the world. And that's what I consider my spiritual development.

This isn't perhaps a real high-powered talent. But it's something that will make a real difference in someone's life. And that really pleases my soul.

-Sarah Jean Thompson

Adventures in Tending Our Talent

I started out in two directions. One direction would be to purchase stock with our \$20, and the other would be to buy and sell some note cards. Both approaches would not be easy in this very slow time in our economy.

Years ago we would always buy Alcoa stock, in our savings plan, when the value went down to \$25 a share, and then sell it when it reached somewhere in the \$40 a share range. (No, I couldn't find any good railroad stock to consider.) In December, the Alcoa stock was down to NINE dollars. So I bought 2.22 shares for \$20. How can you go wrong... it has never been that low. Surely things will start to turn around by late February. Well, it is a good thing I had a second plan, since the stock is now selling for only eight dollars a share!!

The second approach was to talk with the CEO of Boget Watercolors and negotiate a good wholesale price for some of her note cards, which I make on our home computer. Since it is the Holiday Season, surely there will still be some sales in this slow period. So I ended up buying eleven note cards, one pack and seven singles, for \$20. Now how to sell them? As it turned out, Jenny was sending some things over to Lane Neff's, to be



placed in her Log Cabin Shop during the Holiday Season. So I was able to have my eleven note cards displayed during the two weekends before Christmas, when the shop was open. This turned out to be a good investment, since all eleven cards sold for a total of \$31.28 after the 10% consignment fee for the shop. Then in the interest of a good cause, we decided not to accept the talent seed money, which brings our total return for the talent project to \$51.28.

Lessons learned, my talent is still not in the stock market area better stay with familiar areas.

-Paul Boget

Talent Painting



I thought that the talent experiment in Matthew was a good way to let people think of how God has blessed them in their talents and be challenged to do something with those talents.

I feel God has blessed me with the talent of being able to build and fix things, so I painted an elderly couple's laundry room for eighty dollars. Enclosed is a check for \$100.

-Ty Radcliff

The Talent of Compassion

This exercise at first felt a bit uncomfortable, because it was difficult to accept money for doing something that I should be doing myself, as a Christian. The exercise compelled me to do more and to feel more and pray more for others who are suffering in various ways.

As a family we decided to give the first \$20.00 to a mother we know who recently lost her job. We sent a Christmas card with a silver ornament that said, "Faith". The woman works tirelessly with three children, one with cerebral palsy and another a runaway. She is working on getting her GED and is studying to become a medical transcriber. She did all of this while working 40-50 hours a week and taking care of the children. I matched the \$20.00 so she had a total of \$40.00 to spend on herself. I wrote her a note saying that as a mother we forget about our own needs and get lost in taking care of everyone else. I told her that the money was for *her*, to by herself a Christmas present and that she needed to treat herself. I do not know if she did use the money for herself or if she stashed it away for her children, but I hope that she used it for something special for herself to make her feel loved.

The second \$20.00 was used for a teenage girl who is going through a very rough time- an alcoholic father, bankruptcy. She's lost her home, her father and now her mother who has to

go to work to support the family. This is a critical time for a teenage girl, and I wanted this girl to know she is not alone and that I am praying for her to never lose sight of God- that despite all of this, He is with her and loves her and will make everything right in His time. I purchased a special charm bracelet at Morning Glory which is quite a splurge for teenagers and something I know her family would not be able to afford for her. It had all of the Christian charms on it to remind her she is never alone. Again, the \$20.00 was more than matched to make this happen, but it was what I was compelled to do.



What this did for me was act on that little tap on my shoulder that God gives. I've sent cards to friends who are going through hard times. One in particular has learned her husband has been having an affair and can't give up this other woman. She was oblivious and completely devastated and is doing anything and everything to keep her family in tact. I sent her several cards, letters and one silver ornament that has etched in it "Hope". She told me she has it hanging on her window over the kitchen sink and when she sees it she is encouraged and feels blessed to have so much support around her.

So, I guess my "talent" is compassion and being able to see others' suffering in a unique way. You know my background. I don't feel bitter about having the background I do. I'm grateful that I suffered growing up. I'm glad that feeling never goes away because it enables me to see others and give them support and compassion and sympathy rather than empathy.

I'd prefer that this remains anonymous. I feel strongly that giving should not be put on display. I give because God tells me to give- not because I want the world to see what I do. So, I don't mind if you give the details, but I'd greatly appreciate my name and family's name be left out.

-Anonymous

The Talent Experiment



This step stool is my version of a Shaker step stool. The original is at the Hancock Shaker Village in Massachusetts. My first stool was built when we remodeled our kitchen in order to reach the upper shelves. Because of the added back it found its true purpose as an extra children's stool at the dinner table. I've since built six more for my grandchildren as Christmas and birthday presents.

I chose it as my talent project. My sawyer agreed to provide me with the wood to build the first stool for \$20. This stool is built from a single board of cherry. It is dovetailed as is the original Shaker design which would have been built of pine or poplar and painted. The finish for this piece is tung oil, hand rubbed as with fine furniture. black walnut lightens with age and cherry takes on a dark reddish patina. Both are richer colors than an original stain.

The first stool was sponsored by Sylvia and Shelby Henriquez. a second and third have been committed to close friends. The income from these has enabled me to build additional stools. I expect to complete three more by February 22nd. This will be a limited, final addition.

The income from these last step stools is clear profit on the original \$20 talent. These last three are being built and are still for sale. Payments will be made by check directly to NPC. They will be sold to the highest bidders. We will be on vacation until February 12th and I will close the bids on the 15th. Each stool takes 25 to 30 hours of effort. They are built as heirloom pieces and I guarantee the stools for 200 years just as the original.

-Hank vonHollen

Blanketing by a Talent



Chrissy is actually the "talent" person on the project....I'm just along for the ride. Her interest/talent is sewing. Blankets are her "speciality".

The most challenging part of our journey was in deciding what "our" talent was. Chrissy would have preferred to have a lemonade stand with fresh-baked goodies, but that didn't seem feasible in the cold weather. Sewing is an interest that she has, especially after receiving a sewing machine from her grandparents last year.

During our research for ideas, we discovered a charitable organization named Silver Lane Quilting. Last year they received over 350 hand-made baby doll blankets, which were then given to organizations to help provide Christmas gifts to those in need. This year, someone donated 100 teddy bears and dolls and challenged donors to provide blankets for them. After the talent-tending project, we hope to help provide blankets for some of those teddy bears and dolls.

Another challenge was helping Chrissy understand that we could do "small" things with "big" results. As a child who doesn't have full perspective on the value of a dollar, Chrissy's ideas to help were enormous in cost and scope. And it was fun and heartwarming to actually consider the possibilities if money was not a factor. I sometimes forget what it's like to view the world as a seven year-old, and she cleared the cobwebs from my memory and it was wonderful to think how easily some things could be remedied, "if everyone in the world just tried".

The experience has been very rewarding for me, even though this is her project. And because this is Chrissy's project, I have let her lead me in creating ideas and discussing how to accomplish them. It's easy to believe that a baby doll blanket will make a big difference in a child's life when she talks about it. She can visualize her results and I know that her faith in Jesus has opened her heart to all that is possible in life.

-Lori Livingston with Chrissy Livingston

Multiplication Challenge



The Rittigers accepted two talents. The idea we came up with was to try and multiply them for charity, as it seems that during these tough economic times and particularly during the holiday season, people are really hurting for help. We know here at Newlonsburg that the Westmoreland County Emergency Food Pantry is receiving a lot more calls. Through work Alcoa does with the community, I know that the United Way, the Red Cross and the Salvation Army are being stretched as well. So we contacted friends and family and encouraged them to make donations over and above what they would normally make to their favorite charity or to our church. We then committed to them that we would match their donation up to \$10 and provide that donation to our church or if they felt strongly that they wanted our match to go to their favorite charity, we would do that also. The response we got was a faithful one. \$855 was donated to charities including Bethania Kids Orphanages in India, Allegheny Lutheran Prison Ministries, Westmoreland County Food Bank, Animal Rescue League, Salvation Army, Maggie Webb Scholarship Fund (a young lady killed in the Von Maur shootings of Dec '07), and In Touch Hospice. Another \$125 was donated to Newlonsburg including our match. So, a total of \$940 was raised to support the work of God's kingdom, \$125 of which comes back to Newlonsburg. Actually, \$165 is coming back to Newlonsburg including the original 2 talents.

Some of our friends and family wrote us emails about this talent experiment and I want to share parts of them with you to include in this story if you want because it underscores the power in the boldness of what our anonymous donor chose to do and how the boldness tends to multiply because God blesses it and works through it.

My friend Juli from Davenport, Iowa wrote: "This 'talent' idea is really cool. You guys are always coming up with creative ideas at your church! The charity I contributed to is the Maggie Webb Scholarship Fund...This talent idea spawned some conversation in our Von Maur office - we've decided that instead of giving gifts to each other or a holiday office party we will contribute the money that would have been spent to this Fund...Glad you and your church are doing something so rewarding. Let me know how it turns out!"

My sister, Verna, wrote: "I told a lady at the church about your anonymous donor and what you're doing. I saw the wheels turning to do something similar at our church. It is pretty cool, and if you take into account the possibility of my church doing something similar, it really turns into something. Since we've missed the Christmas season, we'll probably see where in the church year that parable comes up in the lessons and do it then. The pastors seem really excited about the prospect of it."

My cousin, Luella, wrote: "I think the "Talent Keeper" idea is a great one. It provides a unique opportunity to make a donation and have fun doing so. We have chosen to make a donation to Allegheny Lutheran Prison Ministries. It is not only being matched by your anonymous donor and you but it's also matched by Thrivent Financial for Lutherans through their "Giving Plus Program" so this is turning out to be really great and their services have been such a great help to Andy. God bless you and what your church is doing."
-Ann Rittiger

A Talent for Storytelling



I took one of the talents without having any definite idea of how I could make it grow financially. The envelope sat stuck on my kitchen cupboard for a week while ideas trundled through my mind. Making, baking or creating something was not a problem. Marketing the creation was.

Since storytelling is the only money making activity I do, I finally settled on using the Talent Challenge to challenge myself into a new area of storytelling. The twenty dollars was spent to purchase three books on Christian based storytelling. My intention was to develop some stories of hope and healing to incorporate in my storytelling programs and to return to the church the pay I received for telling those stories up through February 22. I also decided to donate a program of these stories a local assisted living facility.

The process of reading the books I purchased and some others borrowed from Joanna Demarest has been exciting and rewarding. I have gained some new ideas and perspective on telling bible stories and on choosing non-biblical stories that still offer a message of hope. It has helped me expand my repertoire of teaching and sharing stories that are the real heart of effective storytelling.

Alas, as I said, marketing is not my strong suite. So far, there have been only a couple of opportunities to use any of the new stories. Financially, the \$20 has been returned and doubled to \$40, but I was hoping for more.

On February 17, I will be presenting a donated program at Redstone Highlands in Greensburg, using several of the new stories. So far, the new stories have been well received. I'm looking forward to sharing them with the seniors in Greensburg.

For the long run, the Talent Challenge has motivated me to offer programs of more depth, with stories that will challenge listeners to reflect on their relationship with God, with other people, and with our earth.

The parable of the talents tells us that God expects that we use whatever talents He has given us. This Talent Challenge has helped stretch my talent, puny though it may be, in a new direction.

-Judy Seeley

Another Purse Story



I used my talent to make two handbags. I sold them for \$35.00 each. After the cost of the fabric and zipper the total earned with the gift for the talent was about \$60.00.

-Liz Symonds

Haiti sees Fruit

I used my talent money towards Haiti gifts and its promotion. From my \$20.00 I bought construction paper and markers for the wall trees. I had \$15.00 left, so I bought a fruit tree for the La Croix Mission. From this \$20.00 gift and a little help from my friends and the Lord, I generated \$7,390 for the La Croix Mission in Haiti. It enabled the purchase of 341/2 hundred pound bags of rice, 47 shade trees, 81 fruit trees and \$2,386 towards school lunches. It was a blessing to see this gift grow and know that it will help feed and better the lives of many people.



-Kathie Lukitsch

Bake Sale

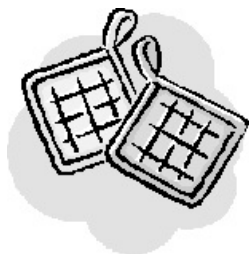


The Kindelbergers baked brownies with special icing and made another special recipe cookie and sold them at a bake sale. The talent bought the ingredients and all the proceeds were returned.

-Beth, Jenna, and Ali Kindelberger

Steeler Potholders

Steeler potholders were a hot item at the Election Day Craft Fair for the kitchen so when the talent project came up I made a few more. I could not have spent \$20.00 on supplies so just donated the proceeds to the fund.



-Anne Nevin