

Christmas Outreach Programs at Woodlawn United Church---2015

The preparations for Christmas Families annual program is becoming quite familiar to the members of the Outreach Committee. We contact Feed Nova Scotia in early October to ask for the names of the 25 Families whom we hope to support at Christmas.

The date for the White Gift service is usually the first Sunday in Advent, which was Nov. 27 this year. As we do not begin our program until after the Remembrance Day service is held, that did not give us much time to hand out Shoe Boxes and Back Packs. The various agencies were contacted to let them know that the congregation would again be donating Christmas boxes to them—Metro Non-Profit Housing and Regional Independent Students Assoc. (Shoe Boxes); Dartmouth Family Center (Back Packs) and Brunswick Street Mission, for whom we collect new underwear (Tops and Bottoms). The Mitten Tree was set up in the sanctuary and information about Sleeping Children Around the World available in the hall following the morning services. Members of the Outreach committee handed out the boxes and back packs, with suggestions as to suitable gifts to pack them with.

The UCW Units and the choir, plus an outside group, selected a Family from our list to care for and contacted the Family. We assure the Families that we stress the confidentiality of the contact information. Outreach members contacted Families to let them know that we would be delivering grocery orders, a \$35.00 Gift card from Sobeys and to ask if there were special requests for Christmas gifts that we could provide for them. We usually suggest a \$50.00 limit for each member of the Family. The requests are printed on slips of paper and put on a small table at the front of the sanctuary to be picked up by interested congregation members to purchase and return on White Gift Sunday.

The Sunday School presented the White Gifts service on Sunday, Nov. 27. The White Gifts were brought forward just prior to the congregational offering and all were dedicated to the work of God in the community.

As articles were brought in for each Family, they were wrapped if necessary and packed into bags for delivery. The mittens, hats, scarves, etc. were distributed to each Family, after checking the ages and sex of the Family members. The rest of the mitts, plus other donated articles (a used man's jacket, several lap robes, etc.) were packed in larger bags to take to Ian Forsyth or Nelson Whynder schools, FOOD, Phoenix Youth and EDCFB.

Meanwhile, Outreach members were negotiating with Sobeys at Baker's Drive pack 35 orders of groceries, plus the recyclable bags (two per Family) and 35x \$35.00 gift cards. Arrangements were made for fresh produce from Dave's Fruit and Vegetable Stand. Beside the 25 Families from Feed Nova Scotia, we always include some Families from the church who could use some support. Volunteers were recruited to help with picking up the groceries and also to deliver everything to the Families. The Christmas letter, prepared by Rev. Phillip, was included in a card for each Family.

Each Family was phoned on the weekend to make arrangements for someone to be at home on Dec. 16, Delivery Day. Maps of the Dartmouth area were printed to aid in delivering the Gifts as the addresses were in various parts of the city.

The agencies for whom we had collected the Shoe Boxes, etc. were phoned and each sent people to pick up their items (27 Adult Females, 19 Adult Males for MNPH; 10 Teen Boys and 10 Teen Girls: 28 Back Packs) on Dec. 14. A large blue bag of new underwear was delivered to Brunswick Street Mission.

Tuesday, Dec. 15 was a rainy windy day, but Sobeys had the groceries all packed to be paid for and picked up by 10:00 am. These were brought to the church and set up on tables in Room B. Produce from Dave's was packed into small Sobeys bags, so that each Family received clementines, apples, potatoes, onions, turnip and carrots. The sudden arrival of a clerk from Sobeys, with a box of Kraft cheese slices which had been overlooked when the groceries were packed, was much appreciated. The weather was just horrid by that time.

Luckily, Dec. 16, Delivery Day, was sunny and mild and the volunteers were enthusiastic, ready to make several trips with the Gifts and groceries. Some of the Units and the choir chose to deliver to their own Family and came in to collect the groceries and \$35.00 gift cards. The whole operation went very smoothly and was done by 11:30 am. Some of the recipients were very thankful for the support, exclaiming over the amount of gifts and groceries and even giving Thank You cards, which are posted on the bulletin board.

Six Families from the congregation were among our Christmas Families, which left 4 bags of groceries to be given out by the church staff when people called in need.

A local restaurant manager phoned the church office on Dec. 18 asking if we could recommend three families which the restaurant could assist—a meal plus a gift card from Wal-Mart. A quick call to the East Dartmouth Christian FB, provided four families whose names were given to the manager. He contacted three of the families on Dec. 21 or 22 and they were thrilled.

On Dec. 24, a man from a local car dealership offered some frozen turkeys to the church, and places were found for two of them. Another turkey was left in the refrigerator in the kitchen on the 24th. By Dec. 29th, the turkey plus several boxes and bags of groceries and one pie, which had been collecting in the church lobby, were taken to Margaret's House. The Christian Christmas generosity continues, thanks to the congregation and the community of Woodlawn United Church.