

# Until All Are Fed

by Lisa Rose, Coordinator Back Pack Pals  
First Baptist Church, Madison

Dear Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of  
North Carolina Missions Council:

I want to personally thank the members of your Council for selecting my church, First Baptist Church of Madison, to receive a \$1000 grant to help fund the Back Pack Pals Ministry. I also want to share with you my experience with this amazing program.

This is a program I have been involved with since our church was invited to team up with Madison Presbyterian Church, in 2009, to help alleviate childhood hunger in our community. The Back Pack Pals program was the creation of a family at the Presbyterian church, whose eldest daughter was inspired to try this ministry after seeing how a similar program succeeded in another town. I was personally intrigued by its seeming simplicity and promising impact: help kids get enough to eat on weekends by gathering back packs (purchased new at the beginning of each school year), filling them with food, delivering the back packs, and repeating the process every week.

It was hard for me to imagine my then toddler son not having enough to eat. My heart ached for kids in our community for whom this was a common occurrence; nearly 60% of students in the Rockingham County School District receive free or reduced-cost lunches. I knew I wanted to get involved.

Five years and more than 10,000 filled bags later (wow!) the program is still going strong. Volunteers from at least three local churches (six from FBC and another handful from the Methodist Church, in addition to the Presbyterians) gather every Wednesday morning at the Presbyterian church to pack approximately 65 bags and deliver them to two elementary schools. A typical packing session takes only about 25 minutes. The food items, purchased in bulk from SAMS, are brought out from the church's pantry (where they are stored after purchase), and sorted into piles on the kitchen counter. These items are kid-friendly, both in taste and ease of opening (cans have pop-top lids, for example) and include such things as stew, soup, pudding, juice boxes and cereal bars. Each child receives twelve items every week.

Amidst good-natured chatter and obvious camaraderie, the bags are packed in assembly-line fashion and loaded into vehicles. It's amazing how quickly the process goes and how well it flows. As Pastor Chuck McGathy observed at the program's onset years ago, "that's one organized group of Christians!"

One of the great things about the Back Pack Pals program is that it isn't just church volunteers who want to see this program succeed. Consider



the Parent Teacher Organization of the elementary school receiving the majority of the back packs; they purchased the bags this year, a donation of approximately \$500. And also keep in mind a little girl at the other elementary school; she anonymously donated a small box of food, insisting that the children at her school who get the back packs needed it. And there are many others who quietly donate to this program, with money or time or prayers.

I feel fortunate to be a part First Baptist Church, and the larger community within Madison, that is helping children to be well-fed on the weekends. I am pleased that my son, who is now seven and helps pack bags from time to time, is immersed in a church that shows love to others beyond the Sunday morning worship services. I am thankful that I have the time to participate.

Two FBC church members shared stories with me recently about how the Back Pack Pals program has touched their hearts. The first comes from Nancy, one of our regular BPP volunteers, who also substitutes as a teacher from time to time. She was especially touched by one little boy's comments. She had been working as a substitute at his school one day when the announcement came over the PA for the kids to come collect their Back Pack Pal back packs.

When her class was called, six children left to get their bags. When they returned, this little boy asked Nancy, "can I share this with my brother?" She said she was so moved by his question, that he thought of his brother who was obviously in need of extra food, too; perhaps he was not yet in school or maybe he was older. Either way, this little boy was willing to share what he had.

Another story comes from Lloyd, who serves as a mentor for a little girl through Kids Hope, a ministry our church provides to children in need within our community (this is not a hunger-based program). One day when Lloyd was working with her at her school, the call came over the PA for backpacks: "First graders, time for back packs." "Second graders, come and get your back packs." After a few minutes of hearing these announcements, the little girl said to Lloyd, "I wish I could get a back pack." Lloyd said it really moved him to hear her say that; it brought home how special these bags are to the kids who get them, and also to the other kids who don't. Even kids who don't need the bags, want them; they know they are special! Lloyd was so touched by her comment that he and his wife dug up an extra back pack they had at home and filled it with things like books and crayons, school supplies, etc... He then gave the little girl the bag for Christmas. It is easy to imagine how happy she was to receive her own special back pack!



The sign in front of the Presbyterian Church says "We're the Back Pack Pals. Until all are fed." I'm proud to be a part of a ministry to do just that.