

SUBJECT: Community Outreach Ideas – Holiday Spirit Every Month
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HOLIDAY SPIRIT EVERY MONTH

Holiday Spirit Every Month is the local heart of the Global Heart. It is a year round program which enables churches and study groups to celebrate the givingness of Spirit every month of the year. Through Holiday Spirit, churches are able to reach out to up to twelve different community groups in one year; members are able to choose the organization or activity that best fits his or her own talents or desires; community groups benefit by having some of their needs fulfilled; and the church benefits by its presence being made known in the community. This is a win-win-win program.

Each group receives a donation of time, talents, goods, services, or participation in an activity. Cash gifts are not given; we do not want to serve as a collection agency for the groups. These are gifts of the heart; too often people give money because it is "required." That is not what Holiday Spirit is about. It is a sharing of the Spirit that is each of us, a gift of love.

In it's first year of operation at the Antelope Valley Church, we shared our abundance with the following groups:

Domestic Violence Shelter: snacks for children to enjoy while their parents are in meetings. The grant money that they had been using ran out.

Homeless Solutions Access: hats, jackets, scarves, gloves, mittens, and toiletries. They offer nighttime shelter for the homeless during the cold winters.

Boys and Girls Club: paint a wall at their facilities

Valley Child Guidance Center, a counseling center: bicycles so that their clients with low income could have transportation to work

SARS (Sexual Assault Response Service, a rape counseling and support program): underwear and clothing, toys, games, and videos. Sometimes the clothing of the women is held for evidence; the other things are for the children while waiting at the hospital or other places.

Families Caring For Families (a support group for families with disabled members): Attended their casino night.

S.A.V.E.S. (South Antelope Valley Emergency Services, an emergency food bank that only serves clients on a referral basis from other agencies): powdered milk. It is one product that they must consistently purchase.

Domestic Violence Shelter: Dinner Basket Auction. This was our fifth year of participating in this event.

American Cancer Society: Relay for Life Team. This is a twenty-four hour relay. Each team must have at least one person on the track at all times.

Salvation Army (although this is a religious group, they were included because they do so much good work): underwear and socks for children. They said that when they give clothing vouchers to their clients, the clients often forget about these items.

The other two months of the year are different.

November, we had an Angel Tree. A tree was set up in the social hall with slips of paper. Instead of having the usual child's name and needs and desires, our slips had the name of groups and their needs and desires for gifts for clients. We included groups that we weren't able to serve during the year. This was done in November so that the groups would have time to easily distribute them to clients.

In December, we had an organ donor information night. We had medical personnel and an organ recipient speak about donating organs and the various types of donations. People were given the opportunity to register to donate. After spending an hour or two at the busy holiday season, people were able to give the gift of life or a better life to someone.

The program should be started in the early fall with visioning. In choosing people for the visioning, it is recommended to include someone who works for a non-profit organization or has some familiarities with them. The purpose of the visioning is to create the Vision and a Mission Statement for the program. At the Antelope Valley Church, our vision for the group is "to celebrate the giving spirit of the holidays every month through serving the community". Our mission is:

1. Honor the givingness of Spirit by sharing the Holiday Spirit.
2. Give our members opportunities to serve our community
3. Make our presence known as a center of light
4. Be a part of the Global Heart.

At the Antelope Valley Church, we decided to exclude any direct cash donations. The visioning also includes a brainstorming of possible groups to be recipients or projects to be included. After the initial list is made, those groups or projects that really were not practical or did not fit the criteria. One such project was a community garden. The final list after visioning should have more than twelve groups or projects.

To make a longer list, consult the phone book and look in the community pages for a list of helping agencies. We also watched the local paper for stories about various groups.

By early mid October, the list should be complete and a team organized to make the initial contact with the various groups. During the initial contact, determine the following:

- The groups willingness to participate, including the willingness to have someone attend a Sunday service to receive their gift
- The needs or desires of the group
- If there is a month that would best suit their needs or the month in which an activity takes place, such as the Relay for Life
- The name and phone number of a contact person

The initial contact should be completed by the end of November or even earlier. The initial contact information is given to the coordinator or coordinating team who then make the schedule for the coming year. The coordinator should recontact the groups and confirm the information and set the month with each group.

This should be done before the deadline for the final newsletter of the year. There should be an article in the end of the year newsletter to announce the program. This article should include the calendar for the whole year. The groups for the first month or two should be emphasized. By including the whole year in the first article, people can see the whole program and choose which groups, collections, or activities best suit their own needs, talents, and desires.

Create a bulletin board, calendar, or some large display to put in an area of high traffic. The Antelope Valley Church has a bulletin board devoted just to Holiday Spirit. Each month of the current year has a section. Each section has the name of the group, and their needs. A colorful frame is placed around the current month. Pictures of the presentation of the gifts or of the activity are posted on past months. Letters of appreciation are posted on the bottom of the bulletin board. On the floor near the bulletin board is the collection box which is decorated with calendars and labeled "Holiday Spirit Every Month." During the month, as donations come in, they are placed in the box.

The middle of each month, touch base again with the contact person for that month's group. Any remaining details, such as time of service, location of church, and name of the representative who will be at the service, are made.

Before the Sunday service when the gifts are presented, all of the donations are boxed and placed in a convenient place near the pulpit. All of the boxes are labeled with a colorful sign that has the icons that are used for each month. The sign says, "Special Gifts from you friends at Antelope Valley Church of Religious Science who like to share the Holiday Spirit Every Month". The name of the church is in red print, "Holiday Spirit Every Month" is in blue, and the rest is in black.

Each Sunday, during the announcements, Holiday Spirit is mentioned along with the group, a brief description of what they do, if needed, and their need. Each edition of the newsletter has an article about Holiday Spirit. The article highlights the giving done since the previous newsletter, a thank you to all who participated, a listing of the month or months that are covered by that edition, and if needed or desirable, future months.

On the Sunday of the presentation, the Greeters are given the name of the representative so when that person arrives, he or she is directed to the program coordinator or whoever is going to make the presentation. The minister is also given the name of the representative so that the person can be acknowledged during the service. Photographs are taken of each presentation. Double prints are made, the church keeps one copy and the other is sent to the organization.

As of the mid-point of the first year, our two most successful months, in terms of goods collected, were the bicycles and the donations for the homeless. People were very willing to donate bicycles that they no longer used. In conjunction with the collection for Homeless Solutions Access, we had a class in knitting and crocheting. The fee for the class was the completed scarf to be donated. Even some men and a boy caught the vision and crocheted scarves.

Throughout the year, information about potential groups for the following year are gathered. In September, the process of contacting the groups begins anew. Each year new groups are added and some of the ones gifted this year will be replaced.

We have seen a renewed enthusiasm in our congregation. People who might not otherwise participate in church events are becoming active in this program. Our members are feeling good about reaching out into the community. People who attended sporadically are now attending regularly because we are becoming active in helping the community. New members can become active immediately. We have gained new members from the representatives who have attended to accept their donations.

Holiday Spirit Every Month is a simple program which benefits the church, the members, and the community. Everyone benefits. Once the initial planning is done, only a little time is needed to run the program each month. It is the local heart portion of the Global Heart.

If you would like help in setting up your own Holiday Spirit Every Month, contact Joy Gauldin, RScP, at 661-285-9721 or joybob@antelecom.net. Available for consultation on a love offering basis.