



Calvary Chapel Murrieta

Story by Robby Brumberg
Photos by Geraldine Wilkins

CC Murrieta, CA, is touching many people through their multi-faceted Reach Ministries. But it's not the numbers they're concerned with; rather, it's the changed lives.

When Marjorie Lasko found CC Murrieta in 2004, her life was at a dangerous crossroads. She had just lost her mother, was suffering from debilitating depression, and often thought of suicide. Though she quickly found a loving, restorative atmosphere at church, the tough times kept coming. Over the next three years, she and her husband both lost their jobs and had difficulty finding work. Then they lost their home. Putting food on the table became a difficult task, and there didn't seem to be any sign of help on the horizon.

When CC Murrieta's Reach Ministries started a feeding program in June 2007, Marjorie was grateful and participated. Before long, she was there every week—not just standing in the food line, but serving others. Seeing ordinary people going to extraordinary lengths to help people in need inspired her to get involved and do the

REACHING *the needs of their* COMMUNITY

Calvary Chapel Murrieta's Reach Ministries provide food, clothing, and the Word of God to those in need. Several businesses and food pantries donate goods for this once-a-week outreach.



Reach Ministries pastor, Eric Taylor, shares a Bible message.



Reach volunteer Miguel Abundis, right, shares from God's Word while people wait in line for food.



Pastor Eric Taylor and ministry assistant Cindy Chapman, center, pick up and load food, donated by Albertson's supermarket customers. The store has an ongoing food drive for CC Murrieta's food pantry.



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Pastor Brian Bell

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After much prayer and counsel with Pastor Brian, Eric started A Work of Love (AWOL), which was the precursor to Reach Ministries. CC Murrieta wanted to provide practical, hands-on ways for people to serve in both the church and the community. Both men viewed meeting practical needs as part of fulfilling Jesus' command to "go therefore and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19a) and fulfill His commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31a).

The Ministry Grows

The operation was simple at first, consisting of a few volunteers serving once a month at a local retirement community. Believers would serve the residents in any way that was needed: taking out the garbage, playing a friendly game of canasta, providing clothes, furniture, or other necessities, or just chatting with local residents.

Eric recalled another early encounter in the ministry. Believers met with an elderly woman who did not have a bed in her house to sleep on. She was sleeping on a rigid coffee table. Dismayed, they got a comfortable bed for the lady that day. The desire to serve, coupled with the realization that there were people with urgent needs—even in their



A woman waiting in line, right, is greeted by volunteer Jan Scofield with a hug.

same. Despite her circumstances, she felt compelled to help others, and cited this as a turning point in her life.

"Before getting involved with Reach Ministries, I had never helped anyone," said Marjorie. "Helping others turned my own life around. This ministry has increased my whole family's faith," Marjorie said. Today,

Marjorie's husband has found a job. The couple is still struggling, but Marjorie is trusting God's plan for her life.

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Jeremiah 29:11



Volunteers from CC Murrieta usually spend a day restocking and sorting eight racks of clothing for the assistance now volunteer at the outreach and have come to Christ.

Initial Vision: Faith in Action

In 2004, Eric Taylor was serving as a youth pastor at CC Murrieta, CA, a bustling community one hour northeast of San Diego. Eric loved working with youth, but began to feel God directing his heart toward a service-oriented ministry. He met with Senior Pastor Brian Bell and found that they were thinking along the same lines.

"I don't think God has called us to listen to sermons and not do anything about it," said Eric concerning a helps ministry. "We live out our faith when we serve people."

Brian also felt strongly that this attitude of actual service and help was the direction the Lord wanted the church to go. "I had the conviction that we as a church might be becoming professional 'Bible students,'"



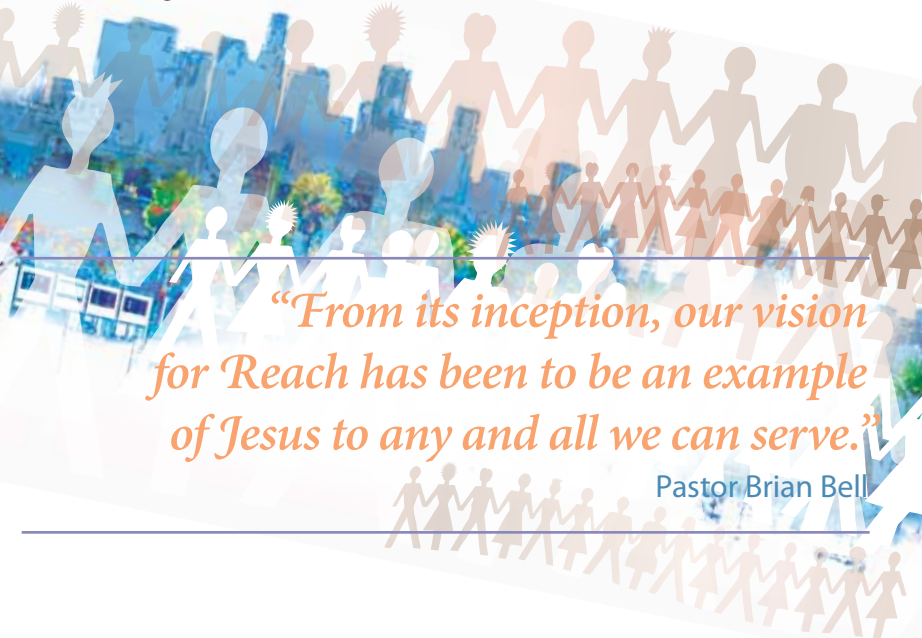
Jan Scofield entertains and ministers to children while parents load boxes and bags with groceries and clothing.



Volunteers maneuver a heavy couch through a door.



Several men from CC Murrieta pray for Julie Patterson and her daughter, left, before they help her move to a new apartment. Another branch of Reach Ministries is the Helping Hands Ministry, which helps families move who cannot do it themselves.



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Pastor Brian Bell



Lindon, Julie Patterson's daughter, receives assistance with a moving box from a team member.

relatively affluent area—led to the growth of Reach Ministries.

Brian commented, “Reach is the first ministry I’ve seen where we did not have to ask for volunteers. It spread by word of mouth ... volunteers just sharing with a friend from

church about how enjoyable it is to serve our community in this way.”

Today, Reach includes a weekly feeding ministry as well as Helping Hands, a program that provides assistance for people who are moving and cannot do it themselves.

Gordon Oney, who oversees the Helping Hands portion of Reach, understands very well how meaningful it is to help someone move. He has a stack of “Thank You” cards to prove it. For Gordon, helping someone move can be a simple yet effective way to show the love of Christ.

He describes one move in particular that touched his heart. Gordon and several other believers were helping a woman in her mid-20s who was six months pregnant and already had two young children. The woman’s husband had recently deserted the family, leaving them destitute and devastated.

“You could see the discouragement and depression in her eyes. Several of us told her how God loved her but she didn’t seem to believe it,” Gordon said about the woman. Over the progression of the day, however, the woman seemed genuinely touched by the help she was receiving until she was to the point of tears, thankful for the help and encouragement she had received.

Shelter and Sustenance

Reach also works with a housing program for the homeless called King’s Hall. Currently at full capacity with 142 residents, King’s Hall provides emergency/transitional residence, employment assistance, and job training, all in the name of Christ. They recently started a chef-training program, giving people in

the shelter a chance to pick up viable job skills and get a job.

Reach’s feeding ministry has also seen explosive growth in recent times. What began with just a few families reaching out two years ago is now an outreach of literally dozens of families serving hundreds weekly. SLEWS of volunteers show up every week in the church’s parking lot to help distribute grocery bags full of food, to translate the short outdoor sermon into Spanish for the Hispanic contingent, and to serve in any other way that is needed.

More than merely for food distribution, the outreach also shares the message of Christ with people who wouldn’t ordinarily show up for a formal church service.

Not Just for the Homeless

In these difficult economic times, the food outreach isn’t just for the homeless. According to Bureau of Labor reports, California’s unemployment rate is over 11.2 percent and continues to rise. “People are hurting. We have many people in our church coming through the food lines now,” Eric Wells said.

Eric Taylor added, “I’ve seen people come through the line that were making huge salaries two years back, but they’ve lost everything and have nowhere else to go now.”

“For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.’”

Deuteronomy 15:11

Evidence of His Care

One of the “exciting” things about this outreach, according to Eric, is that no one knows exactly what supplies will show up every week—it varies greatly from week to week. Eric noted that this can sometimes be a cause for concern, not knowing if there will be a full grocery bag for everyone, but enough is always provided.

Cindy Chapman, Reach’s administrative assistant, noted, “We’ve seen so many miracles happen. God has multiplied the food on numerous occasions.” Sometimes, it’s not just the food that’s multiplied.

A woman came who was in desperate need of size 5 diapers for her infant. After waiting in line, the woman and a volunteer sifted through the donated contents of the cargo truck. Finally, the volunteer heaved two cases of diapers—size 5—into her arms. Through tears, she explained that on that very morning, she had been so desperate that she walked into a local store with the intent to steal diapers. But before she reached the diaper aisle, she felt that the Lord spoke to her heart that He would provide. That evening, Reach provided more diapers than she could have possibly stolen—greatly encouraging her to keep trusting in God, she said.

“We’re worried about what we think are ‘big’ things, while God cares about size 5 diapers,” Eric quipped.

The feeding outreach is still going strong, serving between 100-150 families per week. Evidence of the ministry’s good work can be seen by the participation and support of the Murrieta community. Churches of many different denominations and local grocery stores have partnered with Reach to meet needs. Brian says that the local community, Christian and non-Christian alike, have embraced Reach and rallied behind it even with its clear aim of sharing the Gospel message of salvation through Christ.

Reach has provided many opportunities for the CC Murrieta congregation to connect with the local community. Brian concluded, “From its inception, our vision for Reach has been to be an example of Jesus to any and all we can serve.”

Since this story was photographed and written, the need for assistance around Murrieta, CA, has increased dramatically. The area has been hard-hit by business failures and layoffs.

For You have been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat.

Isaiah 25:4a

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