



# HEART4SCHOOLS

NEWSLETTER



***And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. Galatians 6:9***

## **Angela McNeal**

As leaders, you have had a tough year navigating this pandemic - with your congregation and with your partnership school. I think it is safe to say that we are all weary! Covid has changed our lives in countless ways. The most frustrating has been the way that it has distanced us from those we care about. I talk with pastors and Heart4School leaders who are longing for the day when they can go back into their local school to actually "see" and talk with their students and teachers.

Many of you have experienced difficulties in connecting with school administrators during the pandemic. As their circumstances change daily, they are super busy doing all their "normal" tasks - as well as working to keep students and teachers safe, communicating changes to teachers and parents, providing extra technical support, and working to ensure uninterrupted instruction. If you have had trouble connecting, please do not give up! Pray for your administrators. In personal conversations with school leaders, I hear each of them say "prayers are felt" and greatly appreciated!

You might find it helpful to email an administrator, introduce yourself and your desire to serve in any way that would be helpful to them. Let them know you appreciate their work and recognize this is a difficult year for everyone. You might even let them know that you don't have an agenda - other than to provide support and encouragement. If the administrator doesn't respond, remember they have a lot on their plate. They may also hesitate to respond if they do not know what you can do to help at this time. I've had an administrator tell me that it is helpful if you bring some ideas. If you want to do teacher support and they do not have a specific request (they don't know your resources), you might offer to do something as simple as providing snacks for the teacher lounge once a month. This might be donuts or bagels and coffee one month, and a basket of goodies another. Check out the rest of the newsletter for more ideas. Remember, always Under Promise - and Over Deliver.

Did you know that schools are required to have a School Improvement Council (SIC)? Many times, they do not have enough community or parent volunteers. If there is a need, consider volunteering to be a part of this group. This is a great opportunity to serve and learn more about the needs in the school. It will also give you an opportunity to build trust with the principal. Check out the "Ministry Spotlight" article to read about how serving on the SIC was the beginning of a great partnership in the upstate.

Once you establish a relationship with the principal, be sure to stay in touch at least monthly. Call to let them know you are thinking of them and ask if there is any way you can help. As you continue to develop a relationship with the administration, eventually doors will open to connect with students and staff. Through our consistency, we will bring honor and glory to our Heavenly Father.

# SERVING STUDENTS AND TEACHERS DURING A PANDEMIC



## Student Needs

Sit down with your principal and ask about student needs.  
Here are some you may find:

Since the pandemic, there are many more students in need of food on the weekends (Backpack Buddies).

Elementary schools need extra clothes: underwear, socks, pants, shirts for students who have accidents.

There are children who do not have shoes to wear: shoes are too small or falling apart; tennis shoes are needed for PE. (This includes middle and high school.)

Hygiene items are needed: shampoo, soap, deodorant, toothbrushes, and toothpaste.

Families in poverty may need laundry detergent to clean the few clothes they have.

Many students need coats or jackets when the weather gets cooler.

There is an extra need for food for families over long weekends, holidays, or school closures.

Books are needed for elementary students to read at home over breaks and the summer.

Feminine products are needed for middle and high school girls. These are not covered by EBT cards.

"Hot spots" are needed for families without internet access.

School supplies are needed, especially in December/January when back-to-school supplies are gone.

## Serving Teachers/Staff

Ask your administrator how you can assist them in serving their staff. Here are ideas from some of our church partnerships:

- Write personal notes of encouragement.
- Provide a basket of snacks and a note of appreciation for the teacher workroom.
- Provide breakfast (donuts or bagels and coffee) periodically.
- Enlist small groups to provide monthly snacks for after-school faculty meetings.
- Celebrate teacher birthdays throughout the year.
- "Adopt" first year teachers and help them get needed classroom supplies and encourage them throughout the year.
- Create gift bags for all teachers at the beginning of the year, Christmas, or Teacher Appreciation Week.
- Have a school supply drive for the teachers. Ask about the specific needs.
- Purchase playground equipment for recess.
- Put up an angel tree with all staff names and have church members send notes and treats throughout the year.
- Ask if there is a time that providing a teacher meal would be helpful.
- Consider hosting a special Christmas lunch or dinner for teachers/faculty.
- Serve as a volunteer to help in the office, library, or anywhere needed.
- Be sure to encourage other staff: nurses, custodians, food service providers, social workers, and bus drivers.
- Pray for our teachers, administrators, and support staff!

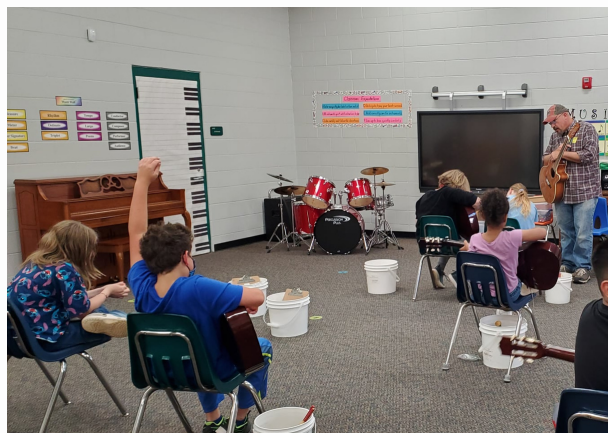
# Ministry Spotlight

## Slater Baptist Church, Slater, SC

### Scott Catoe, Pastor

Slater Baptist Church is invested in our school in every way we possibly can be, and we love it! This school year, we will serve in many ways:

- We read on Wednesday mornings to K4 children
- We volunteer in the library
- We teach guitar lessons to 5th graders
- We provide shoes and clothes for children in need at the school
- We have cookouts and incentive days for the children
- We provide resources and supplies for teachers as the school year goes on
- We serve on PTA and SIC (School Improvement Council)
- We help take care of physical needs in and around the building.



These are just a few of the areas we are involved in! But we didn't start this way. In fact, we started with just one thing. Which one thing, you may ask? I believe that is the biggest factor to a successful school partnership: We began with what the school needed!

Five years ago, when we began, the administration was extremely reluctant to have a partnership with a local church. In order to establish trust, we committed to do two things:

1. We found the areas in which volunteers were needed. Rather than coming in with a preconceived notion of what we could do for the school, we wanted to be a blank slate, looking to see the needs of the school, and praying for opportunities to fill those needs. The first need that we were able to fill was to volunteer on the School Improvement Council. This board needed a community volunteer to serve, and it gave us an opportunity to hear the vision of the school, as well as see other needs that existed. From that first service opportunity has come every other opportunity we have been able to participate in.
2. We played by their rules. We were careful and intentional to partner with them in ways in which they were comfortable and do the things they were comfortable with us doing. Whether that was painting bleachers, sweeping floors, or reading books, we did so within the parameters given, and according to the policies of the school. This commitment has never resulted in us feeling hindered from seeing the Gospel advanced; in fact, the opposite has most often been the case!

And now? At the beginning of every school year, I am asked to attend the first teacher workday to intentionally pray for all of them. Any given week, I'm talking to kids about their week, praying for teachers who are experiencing hardships, hurts and difficulties, and having incredible conversations and building relationships in every corner of the building. Our partnership with Slater Marietta Elementary is our primary means of community engagement and has been an incredible blessing to me personally, and to our congregation.



Public Education Partners Summer Reading Night: 51 children and parents came for reading fun and a burger/hot dog cook out provided by Slater Baptist Church.

For the 6th Day of the "12 Days Before Christmas", the leadership gave the staff the gift of ENERGY! Slater Baptist Church provided Starbucks gift cards and reusable hot cups!





We asked Holly Hadden, Assistant General Counsel, Office of General Counsel, South Carolina Department of Education, to help us understand church/state separation so that our churches would have an answer when they are asked how they are able to lawfully serve in public schools. Here are her answers to a few questions:

*In light of church/state separation, what allows our South Carolina churches to serve in local schools?*

The American idea of the separation between church and state is rooted in what is called the Establishment clause of the First Amendment. This clause states “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.” Historically, this was to protect the church from the corruption of government and to protect those of other faiths from being forced to support any government-established religion through taxation.

This history is shared to note that there is nothing forbidding a church or other religious group from supporting a public school. Care should be taken so that it does not appear that the school itself is endorsing a particular religion or forcing any member of the school community to participate in a religion. Schools should always be neutral on the subject of religion.

*Are there specific guidelines that we should be aware of as we serve students and teachers?*

There are no specific guidelines for religious volunteers in schools. However, many places online, such as the Heart4Schools website, have good tips to follow. The most important thing is to respect the boundaries of church and state. As noted in the Heart4Schools’ “Building Trust and Serving Well” document, people “can demonstrate the love of God without verbally sharing our faith.”

Districts and schools will most likely have general guidelines and policies for all school volunteers. These rules will apply to everyone, so any volunteer should be prepared to follow those policies. Anytime a volunteer or group is uncertain about a certain procedure, they should ask the district or school contact for the group.

## What does this mean for us?

- Churches have the legal right to volunteer in schools, but as invited guests, we cannot put those who have invited us into a compromising situation by openly sharing our faith.
- The administration and teachers know that we are Christians. Our actions (and respect for boundaries) should speak for us. As they see us serving and loving others, we reflect our Heavenly Father.
- I often hear of teachers voluntarily coming to our Heart4Schools pastors and volunteers and asking for prayer. They know who we are, and they appreciate our care - and our prayers.
- Always be sure that you know the boundaries for your school. Have open conversations with your administrators. They will appreciate your desire to follow school policies.
- Know that even as we do not openly share our faith, our actions speak louder than words. Your love and service make Christianity and the God you serve very appealing!



# Building Trust and Serving Well



## Building Trust

- Pray for your school, administrators, teachers and staff.
- Go in with no agenda. Under promise and over deliver.
- Be sensitive to church/state boundaries. We are invited guests. We can demonstrate the love of God without verbally sharing our faith.
- Maintain a relationship with the principal, meeting at least once a month to show your support and to ask how you can help.
- Get involved in the PTO or School Improvement Council. You may learn of school and classroom needs through these groups.
- Focus on encouraging and supporting teachers/staff. Send them notes of encouragement. Find tangible ways to bless them.
- Be present for school activities and events, being intentional about talking with staff and getting to know them.
- Partner with other churches and local agencies to meet needs in a school. You will increase your impact and the school will be blessed.



- Be available and provide support during times of crisis (illness, death, fire, hospitalization).
- Plan to stay for the "long-haul". Long-term commitment is essential to building trust and to making a difference in mentoring relationships.

## Practical Ways to Serve

- Support and affirm the work of teachers:
  - Write notes of encouragement
  - Provide snacks for the breakroom
  - Give modest gifts or gift cards
  - Host a meal (First week, Teacher appreciation, Staff development day, etc.)
  - Serve international teachers
- Help students succeed:
  - Serve as a Reading Buddy, tutor, or mentor
  - Provide food for the food insecure on the weekend (Backpack Buddy)
  - Offer after-school tutoring or summer academic camp
  - Mentor high school students at risk of not graduating
  - Provide job shadowing opportunities for high school students (40 hours are needed to be "career ready")
- Supply student needs:
  - Fill backpacks with school supplies
  - Give hats, coats, gloves in the winter
  - Furnish the elementary school with extra clothes for when a student needs to change
  - Organize a book drive to gift students with books at Christmas and before summer vacation
- Offer your church facilities for events.
- Encourage your church to consistently pray for the school: administrators, teachers, staff and students.

This SCBC resource is made possible through the Cooperative Program giving of South Carolina Baptist churches.

# Reading Buddies...

## changing lives, one student at a time

### Literacy Facts

Did you know that 1 in 5 adults in the US struggle to read basic sentences? Low literacy has far-reaching implications. In areas where low literacy rates are highest, populations are at-risk for unemployment, low educational attainment, and lack of access to healthcare. "Our basic quality of life depends on our ability to read, write, and comprehend." (Barbara Bush Foundation for Literacy)

### Literacy Statistics

- When a third grader doesn't read at grade level, they are 4 times more likely to drop out before graduation. If they also live in poverty, they are 8 times more likely to drop out.
- Prior to the pandemic, 45% of 4th grade students were not reading on grade level.
- School closures and virtual learning disrupted learning in 2020-2021. Projections showed that 7 out of 10 students were not expected to meet grade level requirements in English Language Arts and math.
- Data shows that reading with a student on a weekly basis increases their reading abilities. An elementary school in Williston, SC kept data on their Reading Buddies pre-pandemic. All 22 students who worked with volunteers saw a great increase in their MAP scores at the end of the year.

“As a retired teacher of 40 years it excites me to see people reaching out to our children. Having worked with Learning Disabled children I have seen first hand the difference it makes when children read with others. Supporting our struggling readers is life changing.”

*Pat Buerhig, retired SC teacher*

### How can we help?

- Consider serving as a Reading Buddy, reading 30 minutes each week with a student.
- Meet now with your school administrator and ask if they would like to have Reading Buddies when schools reopen to volunteers.
- If the answer is "yes", begin enlisting volunteers. Look beyond your congregation. Consider enlisting friends in other churches or community service workers such as in the fire or police department.
- Get volunteer background checks and plan to train your volunteers.

### A Few Tips...

- Each school is different, but most focus on working with 1st or 2nd grade students.
- You are not there to teach/tutor, but to instill the love of reading with the student.
- As you read with the student, talk about the story, and ask questions.
- Take time to get to know your student and connect the first few minutes of each session.
- Consistently pray for your student.
- Consider enlisting a prayer partner to pray over you and your student each week.
- For a complete training and tips for working with students, contact Heart4Schools. The training can be done in person or by Zoom.



## Fall 2021 Heart4Schools Training



## RECAP: Serving Schools in a Post Pandemic World September 2021

Despite Covid, 84 attendees from 34 churches participated!

There was a great amount of excitement and energy as participants learned from Reggie McNeal, shared ideas with one another, and planned for the school year.

## A Few Take A-Ways . . .

As a result of the pandemic, 70% of students are behind. The faith community has an opportunity to step up and help these students, who are made in the image of God, experience the abundant life God intended.

We must "pivot" and approach our partnerships in new ways:

- Enlist church members to serve as much needed substitute teachers.
- Let teachers know they are appreciated: Systemized monthly notes of encouragement; let them know you are praying for them and share your email; offer to help; give gift certificates (ask what is needed); hot breakfasts; and lunches.
- Pray for our schools, administrators, teachers, staff, and students.
- Use church buildings for student internet access - afterschool or during school when there are closings.
- Provide afterschool care and tutoring.
- Make church buildings a gift to the community.
- Encourage retired nurses to volunteer in schools who are desperate for this help.
- Consider the resources/skills in your church. How can you provide a service? CPAs could help parents fill out a FASFA form; IT specialists can provide technical support.
- Be sure to celebrate the work of your volunteers! Tell stories and let them know what a difference they are making!

## Resource Development

Ask your principal about the scope of needs in the school and work with others in the community to meet those needs.

- Don't wait! Prepare now for reentering schools as volunteers.
- When you discover needs, ask local businesses to help with projects through volunteering time, resources, or financial help.
- Look within your congregation to identify business owners or businesses who might be willing to collaborate.
- If you serve as Reading Buddies, consider asking businesses if they will give their employees 30 minutes a week to read with students.
- Ask community helpers such as firemen and police officers to serve with you or help with special projects.
- Consider hosting a garage sale or bake sale with all funds going to school support.
- Enlist your WMU group to be involved in a school partnership. These ladies can be great developers and strategic planners.
- When enlisting volunteers, try to recruit people in pairs. Ask each volunteer to bring someone with them and do not limit this to your church.

If you are feeling "stuck" in your partnership, contact Angela McNeal, [angelamcneal@scbaptist.org](mailto:angelamcneal@scbaptist.org). She would be happy to discuss your partnership, brainstorm with you, and connect you with other churches who can share ideas from personal experience.