

New Salem Baptist

Sumter, SC

Kevin Massey, Pastor

When you talk with Kevin Massey, pastor of New Salem Baptist Church in Sumter, SC, it is obvious that he and his church are passionate about expanding the kingdom and impacting their local community. One way they have done this is through a partnership with Cherryvale Elementary School. Five years ago, they chose to partner with this school even though it was not the closest to them in proximity. Cherryvale had scored in the bottom 25% of the state report card for reading and most of the students were in low income and single parent homes. Kevin had recently heard the correctional system uses the number of illiterate third graders to forecast inmate populations. He says, "I knew that our church, even as small as it is, could make a difference."

Since Covid, New Salem has averaged around 35 in worship on Sunday with 69% of those attending over the age of 65. This has not stopped them from making a great impact! Church members were excited to serve. "Our seniors were making a difference in the lives of these children, and they felt alive and excited to go each week and spend time with their buddies." Volunteers took prizes for reading and would often bring a Happy Meal when students reached a preset goal. The congregation was shocked to discover that many of the children had never had a Happy Meal before.

During the second year of partnership, the church learned that many students struggled because they lost ground over the summer with no books to read at home. Since they were a smaller congregation, they had to be creative in how they would address this need. Church members were asked to give \$1 each Sunday. After collecting money for months and working with the reading interventionist to get a discount through Scholastic books, they were able to send every student home with three books! "This was an amazing feat that God did!"

The next year, they expanded their partnership by providing support and encouragement to teachers. "We worked hard and shopped very frugally and made welcome back "Survival Kits" for all the teachers. We purchased small compartment storage containers at a local store and filled them with items they would need like aspirin, hand gel, gum, Band-Aids, and of course chocolate."

They personally passed out the kits and began a relationship with the teachers. They also continued to serve as Reading Buddies with 60% of their congregation participating in this ministry!

While Covid restrictions kept volunteers out of the schools the last two years, New Salem continued to love on teachers. They provided a box lunch for teachers and had Kona Ice come by for an afternoon treat. "We would have never been able to accomplish this without the Serve/Heart4Schools Grant from the SCBC. We then followed up with notes and little treats throughout the year in teachers' boxes. The continual connection resulted in an incredible relationship with the principal." At the end of the school year, she contacted the church to ask them to do something to bless and encourage her staff. As a result, they were able to serve breakfast and pray with any teachers who desired prayer.

Pastor Kevin sees the partnership with Cherryvale Elementary as an invaluable relationship. "It has helped the New Salem family put feet to the concept of being the church. It also has given them a place to serve and live out their faith outside the walls of the church.... We acknowledge that we are a very small church that has limited resources. Nevertheless, we do not let that reality define us. We have embraced the truth that we are to be seeking ways to expand the Kingdom and impact our community. Our goal is to continue to find creative ways to touch the lives of our neighbors so that they can see the Gospel in action."

