

Children Near and Far: First Church is Making Connections

Editor's note: The following article first appeared in the Shenandoah Update and is the third in an ongoing series about how the congregations in the Shenandoah District are rebounding after the challenges wrought by COVID-19. Congregations experiencing similar growth and resiliency after the previous two years are encouraged to contact Director of Communications Brenda Diehl to share more of these exciting stories.

Christine Legge of First Church Harrisonburg is exuberant about their neighborhood outreach last month, which impacted children near and far. Not only did the recent event reach into the neighborhoods near the church, but they also found a way to reach all the way to Ukraine.

The children at First Church are affectionately known as the Praize Kidz, and they have lived up to their names. Earlier this year, the children "... were having a conversation about how richly blessed they are and counting their blessings as they learned about situations within and outside the United States that put children in unsafe conditions," according to Legge. She remembers they were "Encouraged by their teacher to look at the beautiful orange globe in the children's class; they located Ukraine, which led to questions about the ongoing war that has left many victims, especially innocent children."

With growing concern for other children, the Praize Kidz expressed their desire to do something to help. Legge said, "The willingness to reach out reflects the spirit of the Brethren in wanting to help those in need or struck by natural and man-made disasters like senseless wars."

Legge observed, "What seemed like a spontaneous light bulb moment became a concrete action plan! What better day to reach out than July Fourth, where we celebrate our heritage as a nation, its humble beginnings, and the challenges that led to accomplishments and manifold blessings?" She said the "Praize Kidz were all for it with the help of their church family, parents and church leaders. It was a family fun time from making lots of lemonade and baking cookies to raise funds in the church kitchen to preparing lots of books, stuffed animals and toys to give out to children within the community."

On the appointed day, "Families came out for a memorable time of relaxation with their children to play various games while the children could not get enough of the hot shot and colorful bounce house stationed in the vast open green space," Legge noted. "What a day! \$1,529 was raised in support of the Brethren Disaster Ministries' effort to help children in Ukraine," she reported.

"Praize Kidz are counting their blessings and sharing them with other children," Legge explained, and they were "... excited to know that their willingness to count their blessings could lead to meaningful action."

Adapted from an In Touch article by Christine Legg

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August 24, 2022