

May 7, 2019

To the Churches of Three Rivers District of the Holston Conference:

The West View Elementary Traveling Library began in 2016 with a grant from the Holston Conference of the United Methodist Church and as a call for the churches to reach out and minister in ways that would improve the lives of children in poverty. The lessons at the Holston Annual Conference presented by Dr. Tammy Pawloski and other seminars throughout the year taught us how poverty impairs physical and mental development in children in different ways and how reading can many times restore brain function and other areas of development to normal. Also, how, unfortunately, this is the same group of children that will not take books from the public or school libraries home to read due to late fees, lost or stolen fees or just not being able to get it back to the correct library due to the often transient lifestyle of the family AND we did a comparison the first year to find that that percentage is above 90% in almost all grades K-8. Mt. Wesley UMC began writing grants and seeking donations until the first distribution of books at the 2016 Back to School Bash at West View Elementary. Through 2018 we had expanded this lending concept to 2/3rds of the Washington County Elementary Schools.

Children are encouraged to take 2-3 books home to read currently during each of the Fall, Winter, Spring and Summer breaks from school. There are no fees or replacement costs and quite often if a child loves a book they can keep it. While the average number of children checking out books from the school library is less than 10% there was and still is a 99% participation in taking books from the Traveling Library in grades 1-6. And amazingly, the return rate each exchange has been 90% and better for most exchanges.

In 2017 with another Children and Poverty Grant from Holston Annual Conference, the Johnson City Monday Morning Club, book donations from caring individuals, sales at the Scholastic Book Warehouse, volunteers from Mt. Wesley United Methodist Church and the unending enthusiasm and knowledge of Sandra Knight (West View Elementary Librarian) we were able to expand the Library to South Central and Lamar schools.

In 2018 the Traveling Library received a grant from Holston Conference's Change for Children and three churches have thus far come on board in a big way! Jonesborough United Methodist, Marvin's Chapel United Methodist and God's Corner, a mission outreach of East Pine Grove United Methodist Church have just this year donated hundreds of books for the Traveling Library to use and trade for other children's book. The result has been a presence at the 2018 Summer School programs and an expansion to Fall Branch, Grandview, Jonesborough Elementary and Jonesborough Middle Schools for the 2018-2019 school year and that is HUGE. They tell me they are not done and the dream of reaching all of Washington County's school children begins looking more and more like reality.

FAST FORWARD TO TODAY. We are no longer associated with the public school system but the travelling library will continue as the **Three Rivers Traveling Library**. THIS IS THE VISION:

Adults and older youth that will commit to reading with the children that come to the bus stops or your churches. There is a lot of healing and confidence that comes to our youth when mentors that are willing to create 'community' become involved. This is not to be a short-term project that just helps some children learn to read, but a long-term presence that does its part in developing a generation of literate, confident and involved young persons that continue to reach generations to come.

Churches willing to host book exchanges during the summer and school breaks at their church. This can be as simple as a couple of hours once a month or as involved as your church wants to become in your neighborhood. Examples: Breakfast and folks to read and help choose books, a UMYF group that wants to hold an exchange before Wednesday evening meeting and maybe a meal and games or even just a couple of people willing to put the books on a table and be a presence. The possibilities are endless in how you may get your church involved in nurturing children and meeting the families close by.

Also, churches that have vans or buses and would be willing to take books to places that have many children, i.e. trailer parks, apartment complexes, basketball courts that are close to your church. Here again you are free to tailor your own time, place and amount of involvement.

Right now, the Traveling Library is accepting monetary donations specifically for the Scholastic Warehouse Sale in Alcoa on the 13th of May. The grants we have received thus far cannot be renewed until next year.

We are also looking for those that are aware of book grants and willing to help write grants, folks that may be willing to help relabel all of the previous books we have collected and help distribute to the churches that become involved, those willing to help get books to Mr. K's to exchange for credit for children's books and as always those that are willing to continue to donate books.

There will be a new website up shortly and we are going to include a calendar where you will be able to see where and when book exchanges are being held and add yours to the calendar as well.

We will contact WCYB and WJHL as well as the Morning Show as soon as we have our books back from the public schools and the website is up in order to promote the first exchanges.

Pastors, please make sure that I have either your contact information or that of someone from your church that will be heading this endeavor. Pass out lots of my business cards to anyone you may think would like to become involved. I will get a list made and distributed to all involved via email in the near future.

Thank you so much for all that have chosen to become involved in this venture from donating, to cleaning and labeling and sorting, to the miles of delivering and rotating all the books. Each moment you have helped is cherished! To God Be All the Glory!

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