

# Spreading Hope and Good Tidings

BY AUDREY HANES  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MELISSA DONNER

*Editor's note: For safety reasons, the last name of one of the Good Tidings organizers, who also serves in the mission field overseas, has been omitted from the story.*

This holiday season, one area church has a mission to continue spreading joy and love to those in Jonesboro who need it most with Good Tidings, a longstanding seasonal charity that shares Christ-like compassion along with food, toys, prayer support and church connections.

Good Tidings, formerly known as Goodfellows, was established in 1950 by *The Evening Sun*. The local newspaper's employees wanted to do something to assist underprivileged families in the community during the holiday season, so they began by delivering baskets of food to local families. The Jonesboro Jaycees became involved two years later; *The Sun* would raise funds needed for the project, and the Jaycees would collect applications and handle distribution, eventually growing to the Friday night food-only distribution and Saturday morning Christmas present distribution format that it currently uses.

Thanks to year-round fundraising, the Good Tidings program provides a week's worth of groceries for each family, along with toys for children 12 and under for Christmas. Families qualify by applying with a valid ID and proof of need in the form of a current bill and current public assistance documentation.

"Serving with the missions team (at Nettleton Baptist Church), we were approached by the former Jaycees about continuing the Goodfellows and Christmas for Kids project once their organization disbanded since our church had previously hosted and provided the facilities for the event for several years prior to the transition," said Jim Bryant, the business development manager for Pinnacle IT. "They were so invested in helping hundreds of families in NEA for so many years that they didn't want to see it end. I was so moved by their passion for the people of NEA and the impact it has had in this community for 70 years that I recommended that Nettleton Baptist Church agree to keep it going."

Amber Warren, a former Jonesboro Jaycee, held several different offices and chaired numerous projects during her time with the former organization, one of them being what was then

Goodfellows. Warren, who has continued to be a part of the project in an advisory role, brought the holiday program to Nettleton Baptist Church along with two fellow former Jaycees, Catie Wade and Jeff Taylor.

"The Jaycees were so thankful that the program would continue through Nettleton Baptist Church, and while we were there to guide them and share the knowledge we had, we felt it was important for them to take the program and make it their own," said Warren. "We were fortunate to grow the distribution over the years as the needs grew, as well. The Goodfellows program was so dear to our hearts, it's one of the projects we worked all year to be able to execute. So many families would have lost out on a need that we were able to fill if this program were to go away."

Warren says the church has done a great job of continuing the longstanding program and adding in the component of Christian connection.

"When the Jaycees had ownership of the program, we provided a week's worth of food to deserving families in need at Christmas," she said. "To some families this food may have been the only way to provide a meal at Christmas to their families. We don't want anyone to go hungry, but especially during the holidays. This was just a small part that we could play in making someone's Christmas better. And now that Nettleton Baptist Church has acquired the project, they are able to love on and fellowship with the recipients."

Brad K., Nettleton Baptist Church's groups and missions pastor, says that the addition of a Christian component has added even more to the already much-needed project.

"Beyond the material needs we try to meet, we also seek to meet spiritual needs," he said. "This can give purpose and meaning to people's lives, as well as lasting peace and hope for the future. Being able to create a space for meaningful conversations and future connections is special."

Bryant and Brad K., along with Cody Wood, have taken over the leadership of the project, which has served between 222 and 450 families per year in recent years depending on funding.

"The charitable community event is important because it serves so many people," said Bryant. "Over the past 10 years it has served between ... 700 and 1,800 people each year. The majority

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— Jim Bryant



Good Tidings' organizers: Brad K., Jim Bryant and Cody Wood





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of those are from Craighead County, along with many from Greene and Poinsett counties. Jonesboro, Paragould, Trumann and surrounding cities can help continue this effort by making monetary donations. This project is funded by many donations of all sizes. It will cost close to \$200 to provide the food and toys this year (per family), so no donation is too small. If we could get 1,400 people to donate \$50, roughly the price of eating out for a family meal, we could fund this for 350 families.

“Our goal is to increase awareness and to increase the number of people and organizations in NEA who support Good Tidings. As people give, we are able to help more families. We could easily serve over 500 families if we had the resources.”

“The needs are great in our community and often go unnoticed or ignored,” added Brad K. “This event is a way to bring awareness and address needs during a season that should be joyful to all – Christmas.”

Organizers hope that several new additions to Good Tidings 2024 will make the program more effective and be able to impact more families this season, especially with the rising cost of groceries and other goods.

“There are three exciting changes to highlight this year,” said Bryant. “We are so excited that we have several new donors this year. We added event sponsorships, so we encourage businesses and organizations to consider those sponsorships. We also partnered with the Foodbank of NEA to help source some of the food and lower our costs. Finally, Nettleton Baptist Church has remodeled the building, so we will have a new flow for distribution for entering and exiting the building. Look for signs and hosts to point the way.”

Nettleton Baptist Church covers the cost of all administrative work required by Good Tidings, allowing each and every dollar raised to go towards blessing those in need. The event’s organizers

are adamant about it being for all of Jonesboro and the surrounding areas, not just for those involved with their own church.

“Good Tidings ... is not intended to be a ‘Nettleton Baptist Church event,’ but rather an NEA community event,” said Wood, the church’s communications director. “It’s hard to consider the truth that there are people in our community, whether it be children, adults or elderly, who are in need during a time where we celebrate giving and loving one another. Good Tidings is a very easy way for us to reach out to those people in need and say, ‘Merry Christmas,’ in a way that is very tangible and hopefully very impactful.”

Bryant says what he enjoys most is interacting with the people who come for help and hearing how much this means and how genuinely grateful they are.

“What means the most to me is that people are warmly welcomed, the environment is joyful, and the impact is both practical and eternal,” he said. “We live in a dark and broken world. Experiencing the peace and joy of Christmas with neighbors who find a safe respite while receiving gifts from neighbors creates hope for everyone involved.”

“We cannot do this without the donations of all sizes. We appreciate our individual, small business, corporate, civic and anonymous donors more than we can say. Thank you, Northeast Arkansas, for keeping this event going. Those who truly need it are humbly grateful to receive the groceries and toys.”

For more information or to make a donation, call (870) 520-0478, email [jbryant@pinnacleit.com](mailto:jbryant@pinnacleit.com) or mail a check to Good Tidings, c/o Nettleton Baptist Church, P.O. Box 2415, Jonesboro, AR 72402.

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# GOOD TIDINGS

*formerly known as Goodfellows*

# 2024

**Nettleton Baptist**  
CHURCH