



"Real Answers For Real Needs"

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Rev. Michael Douglass, President

Needs in the City

Big, deep, desperate needs

Believers in the pews having what the needy people need

The BIG Challenge?

Connect the people in the pews and their churches...with the needy people in the City

AVC came through. We're doing it!

Now, we need Kingdom Financiers

to help take it to the next level of city saturation

using our ***proven*** strategy

to flood our community

with the love, compassion, and mercy of Jesus Christ

by personally meeting the needs of the people

through Believers in the pews!

We are relying upon Kingdom Financiers and churches to fund this powerful, proven connecting ministry. Need some proof? See the enclosed front page story from the Easter Sunday edition of the Modesto Bee! I would be happy to discuss the monthly budget of Advancing Vibrant Communities with you, and to connect you with the fastest growing, church networking, independent ministry in the Central Valley!

With blessings,

Rev. Michael Douglass

President, Advancing Vibrant Communities • 209-544-9571 • www.vibrantcommunities.org

Christian group finds, fills needs in community

By AMY WHITE

BEE STAFF WRITER

Jimmy Young's eyes widened when Larry Koch pulled the pair of bright red, white and blue sneakers from the box.

"What do you think of these?" Koch asked. Jimmy beamed, eager to pull off his tattered black tennis shoes to try on the new pair.

"They're cool," the 14-year-old uttered, before dashing around the duplex he shares with his mother and sister and then running outside to test the Nikes on the driveway.

Sneakers were only one need Jimmy, 13-year-old sister Christine and mother Lisa have had in recent months. Most of the family's possessions were damaged by water in a storage unit about four months ago. They moved to their Modesto home on Capistrano Drive with next to nothing.

But they have had many needs fulfilled, thanks to Advancing Vibrant Communities, a nondenominational Christian organization in Modesto that connects volunteers' talents, time and donations with people who have needs.

Within 48 hours of learning the family had almost no furniture -- and that Lisa, 41, and Christine were sleeping on the floor - - volunteers delivered beds, couches, tables, chairs, kitchen appliances and decor.

"I was shocked," Jimmy said. "They just backed up (a truck) and unloaded all this stuff."

Lisa Young, who is separated from her husband and on a fixed income because of a disability, said raising the children on her own is a handful.

It's challenging, not only because both are teens, but because they have special needs. Christine has brain damage from a birth injury, and Jimmy, though energetic and successful at school, has a heart condition.

Still, Lisa said she isn't the type who asks for things.

Which is exactly why Advancing Vibrant Communities was eager to help.

"God gives us gifts so we are able to share them," said Koch, 49, a Modesto Realtor who volunteers with AVC. He also offered to take Lisa Young to Easter services today at Big Valley Grace Community Church. She accepted.

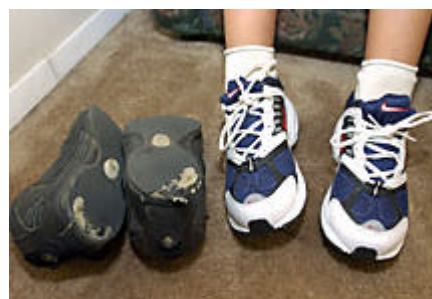
Easter is an ideal time to consider the mission of Advancing Vibrant Communities, which encourages Christians to "love



Larry Koch, a volunteer with Advancing Vibrant Communities, gives Jimmy Young, 14, a new pair of shoes. The group donated many home furnishings after learning of the plight of Jimmy's family.
DEBBIE NODA / THE BEE



Jimmy Young finds his new Nikes are a nice fit and look cool.
DEBBIE NODA / THE BEE



Jimmy Young's new shoes arrived just in the nick of time, as the photo showing his tattered, old sneakers attests.
DEBBIE NODA / THE BEE

your neighbor as yourself," said Michael Douglass, AVC president and chief executive officer.

"Jesus came to serve, not to be served," said Douglass, 48, who is also an ordained minister. "His sacrifice for us is the ultimate act of humbling himself, even unto death, and serving humanity."

Focus outside of church

Founded in June 2002, Advancing Vibrant Communities aims to both help people and show a side of Christianity sometimes overlooked.

"If we focus most of our attention inside the church, we're missing all the needy people outside the church," Douglass said. "We have to balance what we do inside the church, which is radically important, with what we do outside the four walls."

His hope is that when people think of the Christian church they think: "Oh yes, the church serves the needs of the community."

Those needs, Douglass said, "are huge, like peeling the layers off an onion." When people sign up to volunteer, categories range from street cleanup and painting over graffiti to tutoring children, driving elderly people to medical appointments, auto repair and mentoring young couples.

They include singing, playing an instrument and baking, as well.

"God has given us all talents," Douglass said. "Our job is to administer them."

Volunteers aim to go beyond immediate needs to help others develop as productive members of society, Douglass said. In turn, he hopes that "those we are serving now turn around and help someone else further along."

Working quietly

The approach is to work behind the scenes to make volunteering simple -- and a lifestyle.

"So many people want to serve and have things to offer," AVC volunteer coordinator Elaine Harlan said. "They just don't know how to go about doing it, or what the needs are."

Prospective volunteers fill out confidential surveys, which are added to a secure database. When there is a need, e-mails go out to the volunteers -- who can fill out volunteer forms on the AVC Web site, where "need" alerts are regularly posted. Phone calls are made for those without e-mail. Needs are also discussed on the radio show "Lighthouse Live!" on KCBC 770 AM.

Sometimes they find a volunteer within an hour, Douglass said.

There are about 400 volunteers in the AVC database; Douglass is the only employee of the independent nonprofit organization.

In addition to coordinating volunteering, AVC offers premarital, marriage enrichment and couple communication classes, Christ-centered 12-step recovery groups and marriage reconciliation ministries. It also does community outreach for the Greater Modesto Ministerial Association.

Jim Money, emergency services director for the American Red Cross, Stanislaus County chapter, recently worked with AVC helping families displaced by fire. He praised the AVC network and volunteers.

"We're just thankful that they're there and that they are able to step forward and help," Money said. "I know the people that use them are really thankful they are there (as well)."

Success stories

Volunteers said they get as much -- or more -- from their efforts as those they help.

Pam Dumas, 45, a Modesto bookkeeper, expected to clean house when she volunteered to help a 70-year-old woman with multiple sclerosis. The woman's daughter -- about Dumas' age -- had committed suicide.

"Instead of being a cleaning woman, I ended up being her friend," Dumas said. "I did some laundry, but mostly we just talked."

Lee Ockey, 59, a Modesto commercial Realtor, signed on to serve dinner at the downtown homeless shelter. She nearly panicked when she learned other church members were busy that night.

But things fell into place. A friend's husband donated hot dogs and buns. A delivery man supplied bread for sandwiches. Friends and family helped out.

"I do believe God intervenes," Ockey said. "I will never be afraid again to step out and serve."

Douglass calls it "connecting the dots."

"When God is at work, all these dots start to get connected," he said.

Lisa Young and her family are thankful for those dots.

"I've been blessed," Young said. "There are a lot of nice people in the world."

Advancing Vibrant Communities is at 422-B Coffee Road, Modesto. A lunch meeting to learn about the agency is being held from noon to 1 p.m. April 22. Tune in to hear AVC updates on "Lighthouse Live! radio show, at 6 p.m. Sundays and 9 p.m. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays on KCBC 770 AM. The agency accepts contributions, which are tax-deductible.

For information, see www.vibrantcommunities.org, e-mail info@vibrantcommunities.org or call 544-9571.

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