

Serve 757

On a Saturday in October 2018, Pastor Doug Echols and a group of volunteers from **Bethel Baptist Church** in Yorktown, VA, cleared debris from the yard of an elderly woman in York County. They were there as part of a community outreach ministry called Serve 757. Pastor Doug Echols created this opportunity for the church body to reach their area code (757) with the Gospel by having a greater presence in the community.

“Serve 757 is a way that we can take the Gospel outside of the four walls of our church,” Echols explains.

On that Saturday, 103 volunteers gathered at the church to receive their assignments from Serve 757 coordinator Kay Phillips and prepare to go out to their ministry sites.

“Serve 757 gives people from all ages the opportunity to serve in many different ways,” says Echols. “One of the highlights of the day was seeing people from age 4 to 74 serving side by side.”

Volunteers served in a variety of ways:

- Making baby blankets for CareNet, an organization working to support and encourage women facing a crisis pregnancy situation. CareNet helps them see that there are alternatives to abortion and helps meet their needs.
- Serving at THRIVE, an organization that works with the needy in Hampton Roads. Teams assisted with several tasks, like sorting food and shoe donations.
- Doing ground maintenance at the Natasha House, which provides temporary housing to women and children in need.
- Writing encouraging notes for church members deployed with the military and for those in

nursing homes or in the hospital.

- Fixing trays of cookies and goody bags to deliver to first responders.
- Visiting four nursing homes and encouraging residents through music and singing.
- Paying for customers’ laundry at laundromats and offering to pray with them. Because of the unusual nature of this act of kindness, many doors were opened to engage in Gospel conversations.

Debbie Messick, who volunteered at the laundromat, recalls that day:

We encountered many thankful people at the laundromat who were amazed that we were there to greet them and pay for their laundry. We had the opportunity to pray with each person. I think there was only one who refused prayer... My prayer is that those we talked to who do not yet have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ will come to know Him. We continue to pray for those we met, and we do plan to return. We feel this had a great impact on our community—to go outside the walls of our church and meet people where they are and share the love of Christ and the Word of God for His glory.

Serve 757 brought the church to the people instead of waiting for the people to come to the church. Bethel Baptist Church members were the visible representation of Jesus reaching out in a practical way to those who desperately need a Savior. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life—a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45, HCSB).

