

## **“Prayer Quilt Ministry: A Patchwork of Hope”**

Our God is full of surprises. Whether it be turning a few loaves and fishes into a feast, a tiny mustard seed into something grand, or having the Son of the Almighty enter our lives in a manger. God so often enters through the unexpected.

The truth of this has come through once again at Foothills United Methodist Church of La Mesa, in East County San Diego. My first memory of what has become one of the most significant ministries in our church, was a quick conversation on the patio with Marjorie Ketchum, a member of Foothills. She had just attended a workshop on prayer quilt ministry, and was excited about getting such a ministry started at our church. I had had quilting groups in other churches, and thought it would be a nice additional small group fellowship that should draw a few people. Little did I know the surprise God had in store.

It was something akin to Pentecost II. The winds of the Spirit came rushing in through the Prayer Quilt ministry. Person after person was ignited with interest and creativity. It seemed as if over night there were prayer quilts ready for delivery, and recipients of every kind of need offered up. Each Sunday the quilt was before us in the chancel area. The recipients need and request for prayer was shared, and then following the service members of the church stopped in the narthex to tie knots that represented the prayers they had offered up. I wondered how these quilts were being received. Were they worth all the effort? Were they important enough to have in worship on a weekly basis? Then it happened: “Ask and ye shall receive...”, that surprising God stepped in to answer my question with a first hand experience.

In February of 1999, I was told I needed neck surgery to remove the disks between my 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup> vertebrae. Due to a cancellation, I found out on a Friday that I would have surgery the next Tuesday. Through nothing less than a miraculous chain of events, on Sunday morning there was a prayer quilt in worship for me.

From the time I entered the hospital my prayer quilt was with me. The rich and warm colors transformed the sterile room. But more than that, the quilt transformed every person that entered. It was unavoidable. The quilt covered me. For the doctors and nurses to get to me, they had to go through the quilt. Again and again I shared the story of the prayer quilt. Each time the sharing brought us into a relationship that was more than procedures and treatment. It tied us to a relationship of healing as one nurse exemplified when she left my room with a wink and a whisper saying, “I’ll pray for you too!”

I know from first hand the power of the prayer quilt. It is a tangible sign of the intangible hope of faith. It is a tie that binds our hearts in Christian love. It is a warming embrace of faith, hope and love.

These days on any given Sunday you may see not one but two or even three prayer quilts in worship. To date we have distributed over 100 quilts (*over 550 as of 12/02*) to people of all ages and needs. It is a powerful way to put prayer into action, to offer a visible sign of the invisible grace of God day after day. Sometimes Pastors are too consumed by the many tasks of working in the church. We think we know what works and what doesn't. But then, many religious leaders in Jesus' time thought they knew how the Messiah would come. More confident in their knowledge than God's inspiration they did not receive him. We need to be open to the unexpected new avenues that God sends our way. If the church does not seek to change the way it does ministry in the world, it will cease to be a ministry that changes the world.

I have recovered completely from my surgery. Through medicine I was repaired, but it was through the Prayer Quilt Ministry that I was restored.

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