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Ministry aids homeless '20 Days of Giving' from Granger church



Lumber is moved in, while boxes of food are moved out to make room for the shelving units that will be built at the Center for the Homeless by members of Granger Community Church. Tribune Photo/SANTIAGO FLORES

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Tribune Staff Writer

"Let's move out!" Jason Miller sounded like Ty Pennington of "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition."

Miller is the college-aged (MERGE) ministry leader at Granger Community Church.

On Dec. 4, he led over 40 18- to 25-year-old volunteers in an extreme makeover on storage space at the Center

for the Homeless in South Bend.

Cleaning, installing and organizing shelving at the Center was the third day of GCC's 20 Days of Giving.

Celebrating its 20th anniversary, GCC is using its Christmas offerings to give back to the community. On day one, church volunteers bought an industrial coffeemaker for Monroe Circle Community Center.



Thousands of volunteers help load boxes of food into semi-trucks outside Granger Community Church on Saturday as part of 20 Days of Giving. Tribune Photo/JOE KLINE

Day two, free gas was pumped by the church's high school association. Unsuspecting motorists pulling in to the gas stations reacted with disbelief. Some, on empty with no money, had tears and hugs for the volunteers, said GCC youth associate John Keim.

By the end of the 20 days, GCC plans to pump a half a million dollars back into the community.

And the Center for the Homeless couldn't be happier about it.

"They certainly practice what they preach," said Tammy Oehm, the center's director of operations. Before MERGE volunteers were given their assignments for the evening, Miller led a prayer.

"Lord help us make this place better off," he said. "This place that does your work day after day."

Then the human assembly line started hauling out food

donations, stored in boxes and stacked on the floor. They returned to the storage room carrying lumber to build decent shelving and repair walls.

In the basement, a flood had damaged goods piled so high there was no room to walk, said Maribeth Roncz, the GCC ministry leader at the center.

Building up to the storage makeover night, 30 volunteers had formed a human chain, handing 50 bags of trash to fill a Dumpster outside, Roncz said. With one of the basement storage rooms containing cardboard boxes of toiletries, MERGE volunteers worked until midnight, replacing the boxes with plastic containers.



Sarah Beutter, left, and Lindsey Dewitt of Granger Community Church move personal care items from cardboard boxes into plastic containers at the Center for the Homeless. Tribune Photo/SANTIAGO FLORES

Another group of volunteers was sent to the store to buy items posted on the center's critical needs list. They returned with vacuum cleaners, coats, shoes, hats and gloves.

Heather Kitchen, 22, drove from Kalamazoo to offer her labor to the homeless center. She said the newly formed MERGE group fills a void for college students who want to be involved in their church.

"This is a part of that, providing college students the chance to give something back to the community," she said. Dustin Maust, 24, of Granger, said MERGE unifies his age group and allows him to connect with new people.

"And we get to do stuff like this ... to change the community," Maust said.

On Saturday, volunteers delivered truckloads of food during GCC's annual Food Drop.

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