



Union Mills Community Christmas

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The first annual Union Mills Community Christmas was a larger success than we could have imagined when we came up with the idea three weeks before Christmas. Our idea was simple but different than other programs we have seen, we created a free store. We arranged all of our toys and gifts on tables in our gym from the youngest kids around to the oldest, then we added in some necessary clothing items (socks, underwear, winter PJ's). We also provided a table of stocking stuffers; on that table we included things like small notebooks/pens, small toys, candy, toothbrushes and toothpaste, hairbrushes and accessories, razors, and deodorant. Another thing we did with some donations this year was to purchase nice used snow boots, pants, and coats to give away. We left them in the front room, not to be confused as a gift, and told people to take what they needed on the way out.

On our open shop day, we were open to the public for anyone to be able to come out and shop our toys to find the perfect gifts for their specific children. Parents who needed help with Christmas were also able to schedule a private appointment to shop for their children. When they came out they were met by Heather Martin or Pastor Josh Martin, and their experience was kept completely anonymous. In addition to providing gifts, we provided wrapping supplies and helped those who wanted a hand to wrap their gifts.

When we opened on our open shop day we had appointments for the week for about 30 children, then on our open shop day we helped 33 children and scheduled more appointments all week long. Thanks to the amazing generosity of our community, when we ended our program on Christmas Eve we had helped 110 children from 37 different families.

We helped children in foster care centers with no one for Christmas, a couple of families who recently lost employment, a family with a seriously ill child, and so many other families this year. We were able to help them provide their children with Christmas gifts, snow gear, necessities and hopefully those families will see the love that our community poured out for them as the hands of Jesus helping them along, providing some hope for their lives.

The 2022 Christmas Program is over, but our program has not ended, just reset for the new year.

We will be shopping year-round to be able to provide this service to our community every year to come. We will be on the lookout for discounted toys and clothing items so that each year we can do more for the families in need in our community.

We have told the social workers we worked with this year to let us know if there were children placed into the system this year who had nothing (a commonality we are coming to learn) so that we could come together and provide for those kiddos not just at Christmas but as the needs presented themselves.

We'd like to personally thank everyone who helped this year turn out so well. We had people donate gifts, gift wrapping supplies, and monetary donations. We had people organize toy drives and fundraise on our behalf and we had people willing to go out and turn those monetary donations into gift items the week before Christmas. We could not have had the success we did without the community coming together for this!

If you would like to learn more about our plans to continue to grow this program, what we were able to accomplish this year or how you could be a part of what we are doing for our community please reach out.

Love in Christ,
Pastor Josh & Heather Martin
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