



RAILS & RUNGS Newsletter

GOD USES EVERYTHING FOR HIS GLORY

By Brian Beckman

As I was sitting outside watching a hummingbird at the feeder, a small branch fell off the tree above and struck my foot, scaring the hummingbird away. At first, I was annoyed. I then made a conscious effort to praise the LORD for being able to sit outside to view a hummingbird and to enjoy a beautiful summer day. Am I going to focus on the daily annoyances (the stick) or the daily blessings (the hummingbird)? I want to be a person who is thankful to the LORD for the daily blessings—both large and small.

Your investment in The Ladder is a huge blessing. I can't thank you enough. I thank God for you and I shout it out to anybody that will listen about your investment in The Ladder. Yes, you are an answer to prayer. I testify to God's goodness in providing you as God's instrument stepping up to the plate to help struggling people who have real names, beautiful faces, and hurting hearts. Thank you for caring.

Throughout the Bible, there are countless passages that speak of God's glory. Here is just one example:

Romans 11:33-36

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways!

³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the LORD, or who has been His counselor?"

³⁵ "Or who has given a gift to Him that he might be repaid?"

³⁶ For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen.

God uses everything for his glory. On the last half day of school, we invited all students and parents for ice cream at The Ladder parking lot. We were given many gallons of ice cream, and we wanted to share it with our community. We were about an hour into dipping ice cream, when I saw a woman standing in the background with a young man and a young lady. I could see that the woman was a bit uncomfortable. Earlier I had noticed Mechele, our Youth and Family Coach, conversing with her in Spanish, so I walked over to her and pulled Mechele into the conversation to translate.

I welcomed the woman, whose name was *Maria, to The Ladder and told her how glad we were that she came. Maria said she wanted to talk to us

about her son *Victor, who had gotten in trouble with the police and needed to do community service for the courts. Maria went on to say that her 22-year-old son, *Alejandro, recommended she come. She said, "Alejandro said, 'Mom, you need to take Victor and Isabel to The Ladder. They will help you.'"

I said, "You mean to say that Alejandro is your son and he recommended you bring Victor to The Ladder? Really?" Alejandro had attended our youth program in high school. He was a joy sometimes, but he had his moments of misbehaving many times. I was flabbergasted! We had disciplined him on several occasions. But because of this recommendation to his mom, I could see that he respected us. God uses everything for his Glory.

Maria returned to The Ladder the following week to sign Victor up for community service. She also registered Victor and his sister *Isabel for Summer Break Out. A few days a week, Victor performs his service duties at The Ladder, and he joins the rest of the youth during the Bible lesson. Both he and Isabel go on each Tuesday's youth adventures, and they do the service projects in Shelby with the other youth on Thursdays. Victor needs this program because he is showered with love by our great volunteers, and the program offers consistency and accountability.

During the last week of June, Summer Fam Fest was the community service project for the week. With adult leadership, the youth prepared a meal and served their parents and families. Victor and Isabel donned hairnets and gloves to make salads and cook spaghetti. They also decorated the tables and served dinner to their mom and 3-year-old brother, *Daniel.

After dinner, games were on tap. The joy for all the staff and volunteers was being a witness to Maria's family playing together. Except for Daniel (who was too young), the rest entered a team game of water balloon volleyball, slinging water balloons with a bed sheet and laughing cheerfully. After that they tossed water balloons at each other; even little Daniel joined in the fun. Maria played the game with her daughter Isabel. The look on Maria's face was priceless as the balloon broke and soaked her with water. Once the initial shock wore off, she broke out in laughter. What a heart-warming scene of a family having fun together.

It is not an accident that a few years back, Alejandro hung out at The Ladder; then for Alejandro to suggest to his mom to go to The Ladder for help with her teenage son and preteen daughter; then for both Victor and Isabel to become involved with Summer Break Out. The icing on the cake was Maria's family joining in the fun at Summer Fam Fest. God uses everything for His glory.

Thank you for investing in this struggling family who have real names, beautiful faces, and hurting hearts. Coach Love reports that Victor has been smiling more, and he doesn't roll his eyes when it is time for the Bible lesson to happen—in fact, no one does. That is a real change from Victor's beginning days here. Your investment is being used to bring this family together and turn their hearts to God and his ways. God uses everything for his glory.

*This name has been changed to maintain privacy.

YOUTH & FAMILY

The Blessing of Baccalaureate

By Troy Love

In a day when many people grumble because it seems as if God and His Word are being shoved out of the public schools, what a blessing that Shelby High School has preserved, supported, and even promoted a baccalaureate service for its graduates. A baccalaureate is a service before graduation where the senior class gathers to hear a sermon. The service has been organized the past few years by a local pastor. Upon his retirement, The Ladder enthusiastically took on the responsibility and opportunity to organize the 2024 baccalaureate.

Months of planning with a group of seniors from Young Life (a group that meets at The Ladder every other Sunday afternoon) resulted in an evening of blessing on Tuesday, May 14 that honored and glorified our great God and uplifted every person present. I pray that, as I share what happened that night, you may also be blessed.

As people entered the Shelby High School auditorium, they were surrounded by the smooth sounds of the Shelby Tiger Jazz Band. The Ladder's Youth and Family Coach, Mechele Martinez Gonzales, and I emceed the event. Seniors Wyatt Dickman and Josh Neuman opened with prayer and the reading of God's Word. Senior class President Mauricio Castillo provided the Spanish translation. Every part of the program was translated to serve our Spanish-speaking friends. Three members of the senior class then shared their stories. Hanna Frees encouraged all of us "to hold onto the hope that God is always with us and is enough to get us through the hard trials, and it's comforting knowing that He will never leave us." Logan Selig talked about how his relationship with Jesus has helped him deal with great loss in his family. Remington Johnson explained, "I knew I needed a fresh start, and I did not know a better way than to start a new life with Jesus." She then read Proverbs 16:3 and followed it up with a prayer for her classmates. Wow!

Young Life leader, Brenda Dickman, used object lessons as she presented the Gospel of Jesus so clearly in a message from John 15:1-5 about the need and the importance of staying connected to the vine (Jesus). The graduates were gripped. Several seniors stepped up to the podium and publicly thanked individuals who had a tremendous impact in their lives. It was special—and emotional—as students acknowledged a bus driver, teacher, and even the school officer. They were blessed.

One of the most powerful moments was when 12 local pastors and ministry leaders filed onto the stage and took turns offering prayers of appreciation and blessing for everyone from food service workers and secretaries to the superintendent. And finally, each pastor prayed a blessing over the graduates.

When it was over, Superintendent Mark Olmstead said, "I wish my whole staff would have been here tonight so they could see and feel the support they have in this community." I want to encourage every person reading this to attend next year's baccalaureate to support our graduates, to praise God, and to be blessed.



Wyatt, Mauricio and Josh



Young Life seniors and their friends after Baccalaureate.

School's Out, Ice Cream's In!

By Troy Love

Friday, June 7 marked the end of the school year. What's the best way to welcome summer vacation? ICE CREAM!

For one hour, The Ladder parking lot became an ice cream parlor, with music, celebration, and smiles aplenty. We served 143 ice cream cones to students of all ages and their parents. We'd like to thank House of Flavors, who donated several large tubs of ice cream for the event. One mother brought her two children, who had never been to The Ladder's youth program, Summer Break Out. Since that celebration, they have attended every day of Summer Break Out. They're meeting new friends, having a ton of fun, and learning about Jesus from the Bible every day. God does amazing things through ice cream!



Kids of all ages love ice cream!

We went through four huge tubs of House of Flavors ice cream in just one hour!



Our Mission

- Loving God by knowing and serving Jesus
- Loving people by building caring relationships and sharing God's Word boldly.

Beyond Math & Reading

By Sue Beckman



Scrabble Tiles are a great way to not only strengthen reading but also math as students try to create words with the greatest point value. The word L.O.V.E. has seven points!

But the L.O.V.E. of Jesus, shared with a student through our Kids Hope Mentors is beyond measure. It's incalculable.

An elementary teacher recently commented, "We can teach a child to read if you can convince them that they are loved." Our teachers can do amazing things with a full bucket.

This past school year, 16 mentors from The Ladder met one day each week with their student at Shelby Elementary through a program called Kids Hope. Yes, they worked on math and reading, but their focus was pouring the love of Jesus into the children. They encouraged them. They affirmed them. They celebrated them. They loved them. And on the last day of school, they knew how important their commitment meant in the life of a child.

One third grader told his mentor, "If you don't come back next year, I'm dropping out of school."

Kara VanderWeele, the principal at Shelby Elementary, observed over the year that these 16 Kids Hope students were more "motivated to learn," their "work completion increased," they were "quicker to regulate their emotions," and they "had brightened spirits"!

The teachers, too, were thankful for the impact of these mentors. Here are some of their comments:

- *"Jacob was so excited on Tuesdays, knowing it was the day he got to meet with his Kids Hope mentor." As the year went on, Jacob was "less angry" and "more attentive to his school work."*
- *"Raul was more positive about coming to school, and his math scores vastly improved."*
- *"Tressa had amazing social and emotional growth this year. She was able to regulate her emotions and deal with frustration a lot better. She thought about her words and actions more. I was very pleased with the changes I saw in Tressa."*
- *"I absolutely love this program! I wish all students had this opportunity. Thank you so much for all you are doing to make a huge difference in our students' lives. I know that mentors make a big commitment when they sign up. We appreciate them."*

And finally, the words of our mentors when asked what they love most about their experience:

- *"Seeing my student's excitement when expressing kindness to other students."*
- *"The sincere smiles and hugs, knowing that *Ben looked forward to our time together."*
- *"I was so grateful to be a part of this precious child's life. Through Christ, I can help a child know they are special."*
- *"We CAN make a difference in the life of a child."*

We are so grateful for the invitation and support of the Shelby Elementary teachers and staff.

We are so grateful for the invitation given to us by Jesus to be His hands and feet. He has called us to love as He loves. His incalculable love towards us has made all the difference in our lives. It's worth so much more than seven points!

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 ESV

¹⁴For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that One has died for all... that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised.

And we get to love others with the same incalculable love that Christ has loved us! LORD willing, we will return to Shelby Elementary this fall, believing His love in and through us will make an eternal difference in the life of a child.

For more details, scan this QR code or visit theladdercommunitycenter.com/kids-hope.

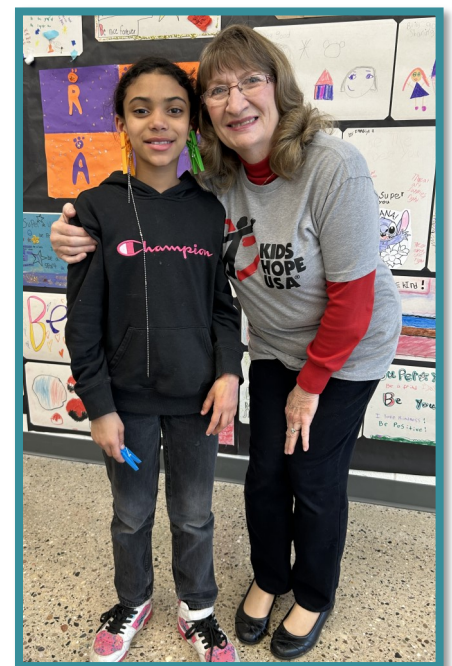
If you are interested in becoming a Kids Hope Mentor or Prayer Partner, please contact Sue:

- Call (231) 259-0211 or
- Email sue@theladdercommunitycenter.com



THE
POWER
OF
ONE

ONE CHILD
ONE MENTOR
ONE HOUR A WEEK
ONE SCHOOL YEAR



Mentor Jan with her Kids Hope student.

*This name has been changed to maintain privacy.

Our Vision

The Ladder is God's movement intent on mobilizing and equipping men, women, youth and children to bring the love of Jesus to every person and every home so that Oceana County is transformed in the name of Christ.

LIVE WELL

Pursuing God's best in mind, body & spirit

National Day of Prayer Revisited

By Sue Beckman

May 2, 2024. It's a DAY on the calendar. Each year, the first Thursday of May is the National Day of Prayer.

The first call to prayer began with our founding fathers. In 1775, the Continental Congress asked the colonies to pray for wisdom in forming a nation. They understood the teaching and examples in Scripture.

Psalm 33:12
Blessed is the Nation whose God is the LORD. (ESV)

I love how the original Hebrew of this verse is translated in The Message Bible:

Blessed is the country with GOD for God; (MSG)

This first call to prayer has continued through our history, including President Lincoln's proclamation in 1863 of a day of "humiliation, fasting, and prayer." In 1952 a joint resolution by Congress, signed by President Truman, declared an annual national day of prayer. In 1988, the law was amended and signed by President Reagan, permanently setting the day as the first Thursday of every May. Each year, the president signs a proclamation, encouraging all Americans to pray on this day. Last year, all 50 state governors plus the governors of several U.S. territories signed similar proclamations.

Clearly, the National Day of Prayer is more than a DAY. It is a CALL upon every Christian to pray for our nation. Scripture makes it clear that it is the Christian duty to pray for our nation, to pray for our government leaders, to pray for the people of God, that we would stand against evil and pursue that which is good. God created government, established leaders, and is the sovereign LORD over it all. Our eyes are to be focused on Him daily as we consider the needs and challenges and blessings of our nation.

If My People

1 Timothy 2:1-2 (ESV)
First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ²for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

2 Chronicles 7:14 (ESV)
if My people who are called by My name humble themselves, and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

On May 2, 50 people from our community came together to pray for our nation. They came because it was a Day set aside to gather and pray. But they also came because God is stirring, humbling the hearts of Christians across the land to rise up, to seek, and to call out to our God who has created and ordained government for His purposes. He has CALLED us to pray for our nation. And He was faithful to be among us. How did we see God among us?

- The people of the Ladder have been praying for unity among Christian believers. Twenty different churches were represented at this National Day of Prayer gathering.
- One attendee commented, "The atmosphere was focused. People came here to pray!"
- The people of The Ladder have been praying that God would stir the hearts of people to pray. Several who came said they were challenged to come and had never been a part of a prayer gathering before.

- One local business closed their doors from 12-1 so all employees had the opportunity to come and pray.
- Although we brought our time to a close after an hour, many stayed and continued to pray in small groups.
- We began our time singing "The Star Spangled Banner." Several commented that instead, we need to begin our time with a hymn of worship to our God. They are right! At such a time as this, God is calling us not to put our trust in political parties or elected officials but to put our trust, our hope, and our allegiance in our God.

Blessed is the Nation Whose God is the LORD

We give praise to our God for this DAY of National Prayer and we heed the CALL to persevere in prayer for our nation. We continue to gather at The Ladder on the first Thursday of every month from 12 to 1 pm to pray for our nation. We would love to have you join us!

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Meal Program Update

By Michelle Deuling

We praise God for three faithful donors who gave above and beyond to meet our reported deficit (\$1,746.50) for March and April, with an additional \$1,000 to be put toward meal costs for May and June.

JANUARY—JUNE	
NUMBER OF MEALS SERVED	2,907
COST OF MEALS (NOT INCLUDING COST OF SUPPLIES OR STAFFING)	\$8,712
COLLECTED FROM PARTICIPANTS	\$3,343.26
TOTAL DEFICIT	\$5,368.74
SPECIAL DONATIONS RECEIVED	\$4,746.50
AMOUNT STILL NEEDED MAY & JUNE	\$622.24

DONATION OPTIONS:

- One time gift \$ _____
- I/We want to invest monthly:
 - \$100 \$50 \$25
 - \$10 \$5 \$ _____

Please make checks payable to:
The Ladder Community Center
or TLCC

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____