

CHRISTIAN STANDARD

Jennifer Taylor
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Balloon Ministry Blesses Children

Delivering Smiles

A few years ago, **Northeast Christian Church (Louisville, Kentucky)** challenged 100 members to make a difference in the community with \$100. The project inspired **Gina McQuillen**, a member at Northeast, to develop her own community initiative—one that now reaches thousands of people each month.

"Our young daughter had recently been hospitalized because of asthma," she says. "When my husband brought her a balloon at the end of her stay, it was the first time she smiled in five days. I knew this could be a gift to other children."

McQuillen gave 10 balloons to children at a local hospital; the 10 became 100, and the 100 grew to thousands. Today, 30 volunteers deliver balloons to children at three hospitals in Louisville each week.

"We talk to the kids and their families, and pray with them if they ask us," McQuillen says. "We see many of these kids over and over and have really built relationships with the families."

The spirit of giving extends from the "**Balloon Angels**" volunteers to the children themselves. Northeast's newsletter shared that one young girl, who received a balloon each Tuesday during her struggle with cancer in a local hospital, made arrangements for friends and family to send balloons instead of flowers to her funeral. Because of her request, more than 200 children received balloons after she passed away in January.

Last year Balloon Angels gave away almost 10,000 free balloons. Although these small treats are a gift to the children, McQuillen says, "Sharing them is more of a gift to us."



www.balloonangels.org

www.necchurch.org