



**This Is Our Story!
\$2,500 of Encouragement and
Resources Went to
Barryton Elementary**

MICHIGAN CHURCH CHANGING THE STORY AS SCHOOLS REOPEN AMID COVID-19

By chogministries Posted November 12, 2020 In All Church of God, Change the Story, CHOG, Great Lakes

By Kevin Spear

Barryton, Michigan, is a beautiful, rural area known for two activities—fishing and The Lilac Festival. The county has over one hundred lakes and the village of Barryton is located where the north and south branches of the Chippewa River meet. This makes it a great place for fishing. Also, in June, the annual Lilac Festival typically includes a parade, car show and races. It's the event locals anticipate each year. But even before COVID-19, Barryton faced some challenges.

This pristine area of western Michigan has a poverty rate three times the national average. Nearly seventy percent of the elementary students are on free or reduced lunch assistance. So, when COVID-19 came into the picture, Barryton Elementary teachers were deeply concerned how the new school year would look.

Pre-COVID-19

Gerald Roesly became the pastor of Barryton Church of God in the spring of 2019. His wife, Veronica, had been involved in other schools where they had served the church. Mrs. Roesly was excited to learn their new church had a history of helping Barryton Elementary School.

Mrs. Roesly commented, “The majority of children’s ministry workers in our new church were also teachers in the local school. The school counselor, nurse and district president also attended the church.” Also, the church had a bus ministry that brought about fifty students to the church for after school Bible teaching each week.

Mrs. Roesly said, “These are children in the most-depressed area households. They may have one parent or grandparent present. They remind me of Matthew 25:40, for they are the ‘least of these’ in our area.”

The connections and involvement allowed Barryton Church of God to brainstorm with the elementary principal on what more the church could do. In the fall of 2019, they held a back-to-school bash. Through the event, the church and sponsors were able to do the following for students:

- Free haircuts
- Backpack giveaways
- A tour of the school bus garage
- Dental kits
- Vaccinations

Over five hundred people participated. Mrs. Roesly was excited by the outcome. Plus, the church was excited to see what else the Lord could do through them in 2020.



Photo: Assembling food for students.

COVID-19 Adjustments

But when COVID-19 hit Michigan last spring, the needs changed dramatically. What would the 2020 school year look like? Mrs. Roesly connected with the school to see what they needed and what the church could provide. She found that the teachers expressed deep concern over the students' return. Would they be able to provide a safe learning environment? How did underprivileged students fare during the lockdown? It was obvious the teachers, as well as the parents and caretakers, were extremely stressed.

Mrs. Roesly said, "It took some time to identify what could help the school." The school district president told her that they were moving things in the classrooms to make the school more COVID-friendly. She took inventory of what they already had and what the school needed.

Then the church sought financial assistance through Church of God Ministries' Change the Story fund, which empowers churches to "change the story" in their communities. It provides seed money for local churches to imagine and implement creative, outcome-based programs to support their communities.

In a follow-up to this article down the road, we will see what kind of impact Barryton Church of God and your contribution to the Change the Story fund has had on the community of Barryton, Michigan. Stay tuned!

HELP CHURCHES LIKE THESE RESPOND TO URGENT NEEDS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES AS A RESULT OF COVID-19:

GIVE NOW

Barryton Church of God is one of several congregations this year to receive a Change the Story grant. In these dire times communities are experiencing desperate need, and churches are struggling to respond. The Change the Story Fund exists to help congregations meet local, critical needs. Your gift of as little as \$10 will provide micro grants that empower churches to Change the Story in their communities. Learn more and invest with your generous gift today at www.jesusisthesubject.org/change-the-story.

Kevin Spear has worked for Warner Christian Resources (formerly Warner Press) and has regularly contributed time and talent to the work of Church of God Ministries. He is a ministry partner with his wife Paula, an ordained minister in the Church of God.