

Morristown churches send 100 jackets to Iraqi police officers

By Kathy Hemsworth



Maj. Gordon Hilbun (far right) shows a jacket to the police chief of Iraq's Anbar Province, a gift from several United Methodist churches near Morristown, Tenn.

When Dorinda Hilbun asked her son, a U.S. Marine stationed in Iraq, what he needed from her church, he said he was fine.

He did have one request, however. He wanted 100 jackets that all looked alike – for the Iraqi policemen he was assigned to train.

Dorinda Hilbun brought the request back to Grant's Chapel United Methodist Church, where it was quickly forwarded to the Jefferson County Cluster United Methodist Men. The men took it on as a project, and on Feb. 1, 100 navy blue windbreakers were shipped to Maj. Gordon Hilbun in the Anbar Province.

The Jefferson County Cluster United Methodist Men is comprised of members of Grant's Chapel, George Street, Chestnut Grove, and Ebenezer United Methodist churches in Morristown District. Shady Grove and First Dandridge also gave money to purchase the jackets.

"This project involved a lot of people, and each person played a very important role in the success of this project," explained the Rev. Ginger Isom, pastor at Grant's Chapel and George Street. Isom and her husband, Greg, are district directors of missions.

The group started collecting donations in December, Isom said. They made arrangements with a Sevierville company to purchase the large quantity of identical jackets. The order was split into sizes large and extra-large, at a cost of \$1,375.

"We wanted to make sure the jackets were large enough so the men could wear a sweater under them if they wish," Isom said. "Everybody got involved ... The kids really had a great time putting the labels on," she said.

Each jacket contained a label which read, "A gift to you from ... " with the name of a donor inserted. Labels also included the word, "Salaam," which means "peace" in Arabic. Children at George Street UMC put the labels in the jackets on a Wednesday evening. The jackets were then taken to Grant's Chapel UMC where they were prayed over by the congregation before being shipped to Iraq.

"The congregation prayed over each jacket and for each man who would receive a jacket," Isom said. "Labels were used to enable a personal connection with each man who receives a jacket."

According to Isom, several United Methodist Men groups in the Morristown district hope to continue to assist military troops. "Whether it be more jackets for other police trainees in other areas, or other things that are needed, this has opened the door," she said.

Three weeks after the 13 boxes were shipped to Iraq, Maj. Hilbun sent an e-mail to his mother's congregation, announcing that the jackets had arrived. He wrote: "Know that your patriotism and sacrifice from shores far from here are appreciated as our Iraqi partners view you as fellow compatriots making our world a better, safer place one act at a time."

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Reprinted from the Holston Conference *The Call*, Vol. E, Number 6 and distributed by SEJUMM, www.sejumm.org