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Churches equip U.S. soldiers with Bibles

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Bill Krouse and Nelma Burnard sign Bibles at Shelton Park Church of God. The Bibles will be given to U.S. troops.
(THE BLADE/HERRAL LONG)

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The initial, ambitious goal of Operation Worship was to “deploy” 100,000 Bibles in 100 days to U.S. soldiers around the world. The project began June 1 and already organizers are being forced to revise their plans because they exceed their goal in 30 days.

“I’m surprised but then again I’m not. God is amazing and I’ve quit putting boundaries on what God is going to do,” said Jeff Hilliard, of Rocklin, Calif., who co-founded the nonprofit Operation Worship with his wife, Patti.

“We sold well over 100,000 Bibles in 30 days, and we could easily hit many more,” he said in an interview this week.

Mr. Hilliard said he was inspired to start the project while organizing concerts at U.S. military bases around the country, “just to bless the soldiers.”

He met a chaplain in Fort Polk, La., who had just come back from Iraq.

“I asked if there was anything we could help him with and he said, ‘Yeah, you could send some Bibles over there. We’re really short on Bibles.’ I was surprised,” he said.

The chaplain told him he held church services from the back of a Humvee in the Iraqi desert on Sunday mornings, and each week about 50 soldiers would gather and most of them lacked Bibles.

“I said, ‘Wow, that really is a problem!’” Mr. Hilliard said. “So I started working with Tyndale House [publishers] and the Billy Graham organization to provide Bibles to soldiers.”

The Rev. Scott Isham, pastor of Shelton Park Church of God in Temperance, Mich., read a few messages inscribed in the Operation Worship Bibles by church members:

- “To a soldier I admire, Your loyalty and honor are wonderful We’ll be praying for you and all your

Tyndale House created specially designed Bibles in paperback with camouflage covers, containing both the Old and New Testaments in the New Living Translation.

The books measure 4-inches-by-6-inches so they can fit in a uniform pocket, Mr. Hilliard said.

Each Bible sells for \$4.99, with bulk discounts available for churches and other groups, and Operation Worship displays have been set up in 1,000 stores across the country.

Customers pay for the Bibles and the sponsors of Operation Worship cover the shipping costs, Mr. Hilliard said. The Bibles are sent to men and women serving in war zones as well as in less hostile areas, he said.

For now, most of the recipients are Army personnel, with some in the Air Force, but organizers are hoping to include all branches of the service eventually.

One unique feature is that each Bible has three blank pages in front for people to write personal messages to the recipients.

“The blank pages are the best part of the Bible, where we can write a note of encouragement to the troops,” said Cathy DePew of Sylvania.

She and her husband, Lenny, enlisted the support of their pastor, the Rev. Scott Isham, and members of Shelton Park Church of God in Temperance, Mich., to participate in Operation Worship.

They set up a booth in their church lobby and so far have signed and shipped nearly 100 Bibles.

“It’s a wonderful privilege to do this service for our troops,” Mrs. DePew said. “I tell people that for the cost of a fast-food meal you can give the Word of God and let them [the soldiers] know how much you appreciate them.”

Mr. Isham said church members who bought Bibles and wrote messages to the troops include preteens, veterans of the Korean War, and wives of servicemen.

“Just to get a word from back home means very much to the soldiers,” he said.

Mr. Hilliard said Nassau Bay Baptist Church in Houston bought and signed 215 cases on a single Sunday — at 32 per case, that’s 6,880 Bibles.

With the level of support and enthusiasm for Operation Worship exceeding expectations, Mr. Hilliard said organizers are looking at continuing the project for at least two more years.

There are 1.4 million Americans in military service worldwide, he said, and he hopes to provide Bibles to however many servicemen and women want them.

Area stores participating in Operation Worship include LifeWay Christian Store on Talmadge Road

comrades. God bless.” — from an anonymous donor.

- “To my favorite soldier, We’re so thankful for each day you dedicate to us. Your services are greatly appreciated and you deserve to be honored. Thank you for everything. Be safe. — signed, Lauren McLaughlin.

- “Greetings in Iraq from Michigan. I would like to thank you for your service to our country. I’m a former U.S. Air Force sergeant who served in Vietnam. I know what you guys go through, but know that we support all of your efforts in defending our freedoms. Keep up the good work.” — signed, George Dombroski, Vietnam Nam Air Force Sergeant 1963-67.

- “Good job. We salute you!” — signed, Tyler, age 11.

and Family Christian Stores on Holland-Sylvania Road and Secor Road, and the bookstores in CedarCreek Church in Perrysburg Township and Cornerstone Church in Maumee. More information is available online at www.operationworship.com.

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