

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF MINISTRY!

MAKING A *Difference*

BOXES OF LOVE 2019



PASTORS ERIC & MICHELLE JOHNS

TOYS, FOOD, AND MY FRIEND "SHOES"

PASTOR ERIC T. JOHNS

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People come and go throughout our lives. Sometimes we think someone will be our friend forever, but that doesn't always happen. Even though it rarely happens, sometimes someone comes into your life who never leaves. They are there for you. They are a true friend.

More than twenty years ago I met my friend Keith "Shoes" Cauley. He had just been released from prison and kicked out of a homeless shelter for getting into a fight. He was walking down the street when the Holy Spirit prompted me to pull over my car, get out, and shout at him saying, "Sir! I am going to pray for you today!"

That unusual introduction was the beginning of a friendship. A friendship between a preacher and an ex-convict.

Shoes ended up giving his life to Jesus at the Buffalo Dream Center. He spent many Sunday afternoons at my house, enjoying Michelle's home cooked meals. He played with my kids. We did birthdays together. We visited each other. We talked on the phone.

In 1999 I prayed about giving Christmas gifts to children who attended our programs at the Dream Center. I knew many of the children would not receive a gift unless we purchased it. I had a goal to give presents to two hundred children. But, at that time, we had a small congregation. Many of them were some of the families who needed our help.

So, on a Sunday morning, I announced to my church that I was going to live with the homeless. We would raise awareness about the needs in our city and raise money for the toys we needed to purchase.

Everyone thought it was a great idea, except Shoes. Not only did he have a criminal history, he also spent time living homeless. He knew that I couldn't fight. He was worried about me entering into a dangerous situation without any street experience.

So he went with me.

That was twenty-one years ago. As the news media covered the story, we raised money to give toys to two hundred children and host "The Biggest Christmas Party in Town". More than two decades later, we are wrapping gifts for five thousand children and packing bags of food for three thousand families. A lot has changed. Boxes of Love is now a network of churches and organizations that help thousands of people every Christmas Season.

But some things are the same. I still live with the homeless and Shoes still goes with me.

Keith "Shoes" Cauley sits right behind me every Sunday morning. I guess, although some things never change, Keith would be the first one to tell you that he has changed. Jesus has done an incredible work in a man who lived the life of a criminal and spent more than seven years in prison. We have become the "odd couple" in the City of Buffalo – hitting the streets every November to make Christmas special for families.

Thank you for being a part of Boxes of Love. I hope everyone reading this newsletter realizes that Boxes of Love is not just about the toys and the food. It is about the people. It is people like Shoes. They join the cause every year. Those are the people like the staff and volunteers at the Dream Center who can't imagine the Christmas Season without spending hours in a warehouse packing food and wrapping gifts. They can't imagine a December without loading trucks full of toys and food and going into neighborhoods that need the hope of Jesus.

It is also about the people who receive help. As you give to Boxes of Love, keep that in mind. Every toy represents a kid. Every bag of food represents a family. You are not giving to simply purchase toys and food. You are giving to make a difference in the lives of people. For that, I am truly thankful.



WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT BOXES OF LOVE

VIVI

Summer Intern

In December of 2018, I spent over four weeks interning with the Buffalo Dream Center for their Boxes of Love season. The holidays can be a difficult time for many people. Whether it's a lack of finances or maybe even loneliness, it can be a hard season for many. The Buffalo Dream Center's goal is to bring joy and provision to the families they serve during this time of year. They reach thousands of people through Boxes of Love. They give out groceries and gifts to families in need. I had the opportunity to serve during four major outreaches in the time that I was there. It was so incredible to watch the faces of children light up as we handed them a gift for Christmas. It warmed my heart so much to see that giving a gift to a child or bag of groceries to an adult, could bring so much hope and happiness. I had the privilege of taking part in blessing so many people last Christmas season, but my heart was touched too. I cherish all that I was able to see and experience through Boxes of Love last year. It definitely changed my heart by showing me to be grateful for all that I have and instilling a desire to always look for ways to serve others.

JOHN & SHIRLEY TASCH

Directors of Tasch Ministries International

It is always a joy to join together with the Buffalo Dream Center for their Boxes of Love outreach in December. The bright light of Christian love from their ministry reaches many people in need. It is always a special time of the year as we get to not only reach adults, but also the little children who are delighted to receive toys that are given to them. As important as all that is to the kingdom of God, the most wonderful part of all is seeing people receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior. We are looking forward and excited to join with them in December.

NICK CALANDRA

Hearts for the Homeless

The annual Christmas Eve Dinner for the homeless and community is one of my favorite traditions. Over the years the dinner has turned into even more of an event and it exemplifies so much about our community. The love for our fellow

brothers and sisters that is felt at the dinner radiates throughout the room. The fellowship that is shared leaves a lasting impact on everyone involved from the guests to the volunteers. Seeing the clients that we serve outside at our Mobile Soup Kitchen being able to come in, out of the elements, for a sit down meal really warms my heart and make me appreciative of the partnership between Hearts for the Homeless and the Buffalo Dream Center. At the dinner everyone gets to celebrate Christmas and be introduced to or reminded of the love of Jesus. It is my hope that during this wonderful gathering everyone involved walks through the doors and forgets their stresses and worries while being immersed in love and kindness.

KEITH

Long-time friend of Pastor Eric

Twenty-one years ago nobody was doing anything like this. It was very rare to find a church, or even a place that would be willing to help you with food, or with anything during Christmas time. This isn't something that Pastor Eric does only once a year. He is out there every day. If you go to other pastors and ask for some food to help you out most of them wouldn't do much for you, but Pastor Eric will do everything he can to put together a bag of groceries for you. Christmas is my favorite time of year and I enjoy being able to be a part of Boxes of Love. It makes me feel good.

DOMINGO

Volunteer

I have been volunteering for Boxes of Love for the last nine years. I love helping because I like the happy faces of the people who come and get blessed when they come to receive their Boxes of Love. I will definitely be there for my tenth year for Boxes of Love 2019.

JOANNE

Director of the Magdalene Project

Miracles happen at Boxes of Love. People's lives are touched and the presence of the Holy Spirit is felt by people who need the love of God.

For the past fifteen years, the Magdalene Project has been partnering with the Buffalo Dream

Center for Boxes of Love. Boxes of Love is more than a typical Christmas outreach. It is a place where people experience the presence of the Holy Spirit. Here is one story...

During Boxes of Love a woman came in who had no food or gifts for her grandchildren and was living in a home with no heat. She just happened to walk into our Boxes of Love site and was given gifts and food. However; one of our volunteers started talking to her. He found out that she was living in an apartment with no heat and no stove. He said, "Have her wait for me." That gentleman drove twenty miles to the closest store, bought her a space heater and gave her \$50.00. He then gave me \$50.00 more and said, "When she needs more money, give that to her."

The woman was touched so strongly by the kindness of this gentleman that she broke into tears. Her grandchildren are now attending Kidz Club. What words could not do, actions spoke volumes to a woman through one person, who met her need during Boxes of Love.

DEAN

Volunteer

A few years ago I was watching the Buffalo news around Thanksgiving and the media was interviewing Pastor Eric about Boxes of Love. The reporter was trying to understand why he would go "homeless" for the week. The purpose was to raise awareness for Boxes of Love. It intrigued me in such a manner that I wanted to get involved. It was that Christmas season that I led the first team from Pennsylvania to be a part of this amazing ministry. From that time I was all in. It had such an impact on me that I now lead teams back to back weekends to serve.

Boxes of Love impacts the Buffalo region, showing the love of Christ. Throughout the weekends you have the opportunity to bag groceries for distribution to families and wrap presents for children. One year, as I personally visited families in their homes to provide them with the groceries and gifts and share Christ's love, a family with young twin girls answered the door as I knocked. The expression on their beautiful faces was priceless. They said corporately, "We remember you from last year. You delivered gifts to my family and spent time with us in our home praying for our family."

I encourage you to become a part of this very rewarding ministry. Boxes of Love will change your life!

RACHEL

Choir Director

Words cannot express the joy of having the opportunity to serve and help others. Words also cannot express the deep hurt we experience seeing others suffering and broken. For the past three years Rachel's Experience has partnered with Pastor Eric Johns and the Buffalo Dream Center to support the efforts of serving and reminding our homeless population that they are loved and not forgotten. Every December in the City of Buffalo the homeless and broken spirits are lifted when Rachel's Experience and the Dream Center engage them in Christmas carols and songs of inspiration and encouragement. We see their faces light up with smiles when they receive winter items to keep them warm and when we hear them singing. For a moment, while they sing, they lose despair and grab onto hope.

BARBARA

Volunteer

Every year since Boxes of Love began, I look forward to this time. I make sure to keep my vacation time available just so I can be part of it. There is nothing more I would rather do during those two weeks in December. I enjoy the time spent with other volunteers wrapping gifts and getting to know new people. I also enjoy seeing the piles of wrapped gifts grow every day knowing where they are going. My favorite part of Boxes of Love by far are the

distribution days. I usually work at the registration table and get to talk to so many families, getting them situated to pick up their food and toys. Seeing the happy faces and looking around the room is probably the most "Christmas" feeling I ever experience. Getting the random high five from a child is a real bonus too. The heart of Christmas is love and giving. Boxes of Love is all about that and I couldn't imagine missing out on it.

PASTOR NATE

Youth Pastor

Our church has been partnering with the Buffalo Dream Center and involved with Boxes of Love for the past ten years. It started as a "youth group" thing, but after the first few years it turned into the whole church being invited to come and help. Now youth, families, and adults all get excited to come down in December and help out with this outpouring of love for the city. We love being involved in all areas from the prepping of the food bags to helping on the trucks and walking people home. This is not just "another event" for our group, but something we look forward to every year in coming alongside the Buffalo Dream Center and helping God's love be known!

DAYTUAN

Buffalo Public Schools

Over the last year many of our families in Buffalo's public schools were fortunate to be recipients of the Buffalo Dream

Center's Boxes of Love community event in the Christmas season. The holiday seasons are supposed to be a time of laughter, joy, and good times. But as we have come to see, the holiday seasons can also bring on unwanted stress, sadness, and loneliness.

Through the Buffalo Dream Center many of our families were able to have that burden lifted as their families received food, clothes and even toys provided for them that they may not otherwise have been afforded. This act of giving and kindness speaks volumes and has brought hope to many who may have felt hopeless.

SHEMY

10 years-old

I was not expecting a Christmas present because I have never received one for Christmas before. But, because of Boxes of Love, I got a present for Christmas.

YANDEL

13 years-old

Boxes of Love helps my mom to not spend much money at Christmas time.

AZARIAH

9 years-old

I like getting a Box of Love because my family doesn't always have a lot of money. With Boxes of Love we can all get Christmas presents.

MALAKAI

14 years-old

I wasn't going to be able to get much for Christmas, but because of Boxes of Love, I got a lot of gifts and food.





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DID YOU KNOW

Boxes of Love assists approximately 3,000 families in Western New York every Christmas.

Boxes of Love is completely funded & run by volunteers from more than one hundred churches & organizations throughout the United States.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Boxes of Love needs the following items to be a success:

- * Money to purchase food & toys
- * Turkeys, chickens, & hams
- * New, unwrapped toys (\$10+ value)
For children ages 0 - 17 years
- * Wrapping paper
- * Plastic grocery bags
- * Christmas cookies
- * Non-perishable food items such as:
Canned goods, boxed items, & cereal
- * Box trucks for moving food & toys
- * Volunteers to wrap gifts & pack food



BOXES OF LOVE INFO INSIDE