

Clothing Giveaway/Exchange

HOW IT BEGAN: As a first time Mom, I was overwhelmed with the task and expense of keeping my daughter clothed in the correct season and size. Several other moms in our congregation mentioned that they had things I could use. So it came to mind to organize an exchange. It began as a group of Moms getting together with the things they would be willing to part with (or loan) to someone else in the congregation. An exchange of children's clothes grew into what is now a community event. Twice a year, in April and October, we take donations of any size or season of clothing, shoes, coats, boots, and bedding to freely distribute to the people of the church first, and the community second.

COMMUNICATION: It begins with getting the word out. Approximately **one month** before the scheduled date, I put an announcement in the newspaper telling the community the date of the event, a phone number to call with questions and a place where they can drop off donations. I also call local consignment stores to arrange for picking up the things they did not sell. The stores are grateful to do this for several reasons, but mainly because it keeps them from having to find something to do with their leftovers and because they are freely given to people who will use them (recycling). At one point, I was also receiving donations of the forgotten things from the dry cleaner. Approximately **one week** before the scheduled date, I put up flyers around town, and ask the local radio, cable and newspapers to do a Public Service Announcement or PSA. I have also contacted the head of the Chamber of Commerce who sends out an email to all the Chamber members who then forward it to all their employees, thus making contact with a huge number of people with very little effort. All advertising is free, this making it possible for a church on any budget. The day of the event, I have signs stuck in the ground at several key intersections around town.

ORGANIZATION: The fun begins on the **Wednesday** evening preceding the Saturday event. Following Bible classes, the fellowship hall is prepared by taking down all the dividing walls, taking down and storing all the chairs and setting up every available table. They are organized in long rows of 2-3 tables with each row labeled as to the size or type of clothing they are to hold. We set up hanging racks along the outside walls. Then, all the donations are brought in from their storage area. **Thursday** morning, the sorting begins. With all the rows labeled, each person can take a bag or box and put the appropriate items on the appropriate tables. OR, each box can be sorted into piles that can later be taken to the appropriate tables. While we are sorting, we are also removing stained, torn, damaged, inappropriate or immodest items. These are either saved for miscellaneous sewing projects (like quilts) or tossed in the trash. I have no desire to hear someone wearing a super short skirt and inappropriate saying on their shirt telling people they got it at the clothing exchange. This generally continues all day **Thursday and Friday** with breaks for meals. As time allows, we can also sort the adult clothing for size and season. All children's clothing from Newborn to size 12 is sorted into gender and size piles.

Our tables generally consist of:

Women's

- short sleeve shirts,
- long sleeve shirts,
- jeans,
- other pants,
- shorts and skirts,
- pajamas

Men's

- shirts
- pants
- pajamas, underclothing and undershirts

Junior's

- shirts
- pants

Children's (sorted by size and gender)

- 0-3 months
- 3-6 months
- 6-12 months
- 12 months
- 18 months
- 24 mos & 2T
- 3-4
- 5-6
- 7-8

- 9-10

- 11-12

There are also hanging racks for **Women's** dresses, two piece outfits, skirts and dress shirts, **Men's** dress shirts and suits, **Children's** dresses and suits and a **general rack** of coats for adults and children. Near the back, we also have a table for bedding and miscellaneous.

Friday evening, the congregation is invited to come and take what they can use. Then Saturday morning from 8-12, the doors are open to the public. People can come and take what they can use without restrictions or strings attached. We do post signs reminding people that this is NOT for profit and we are not making these things available for them to sell. As people walk in the door, they are given an empty bag and asked if there is anything specific they are looking for. If there is, they are guided to that area. If not, we point out the labels for each row and let them begin the hunt. At the end of the event, leftovers are boxed and given to a local thrift store or charity, as they are available and willing to take them.

THE REASON BEHIND IT: I cannot tell you how rewarding this project has become. It allows us to make contact with people in the community that we might not otherwise meet. It allows us to meet needs without people having to ask, thus allowing them to maintain some dignity. Plus, it allows us to clothe our families for little to no expense. Most importantly, though, it allows me to do what Jesus commanded and clothe those who are "naked". Who knows, maybe he or one of his angels have been through those doors a time or two and picked up a couple of things!