

A Blessed Bounty
By Joan Wester Anderson

Early on Christmas morning in 1986, members of the Gospel Lighthouse Church in Blytheville, Arkansas, were preparing to serve dinner to the needy. "Fifteen or twenty families had brought their own turkey and trimmings to the church and had made extra to share, explains Jeanne Templeton, a church member and mother of two. Word of the free dinner had spread, and the volunteers expected a crowd. Would there be enough to go around?"

At about eleven that morning, church members took their places at the serving tables, the doors opened and guests streamed in, each taking a plate and passing it along, cafeteria-style. So many to be fed! Jeanne sliced turkey, scooped mashed potatoes and prayed that the food would last.

Time passed, but the needy kept arriving. Odd, Jeanne mused. They weren't running out of anything. Even the pans of dressing, which had been few in number when dinner began, still seemed full. She caught the eye of a perplexed friend spooning vegetables from a seemingly bottomless bowl. What was going on?

Finally, as the last guest was served a brimming plate of all the church group had to offer, Jeanne looked at her watch. Four o'clock! Could it be? There was still food remaining. Baffled, the volunteers packed the leftovers. "The men carried everything to the church buses and drove away," Jeanne recalls. "They would go door-to-door, to make sure no one in the area had missed the dinner." The woman went back to the empty kitchen and, still somewhat dazed, they scoured, tidied and compared notes.

"Was it my imagination...?"

"No, I saw it, too. The turkeys seemed to...to multiply!"

"But we had only six or seven. How...?"

"Two thousand," Jeanne murmured. "I think we fed almost two thousand people."

Just then a knock sounded on the kitchen door. A volunteer opened it to a man, a woman and eight young children, all of them shabbily dressed. "We're a little late," the man acknowledged shyly. "Would you have anything left over from dinner?"

Oh no! The women glanced around the spotless kitchen. All the food was gone, they had put it on the buses themselves. But how could they turn this hungry group away?

"Come and sit down," said one helper, leading the family to a table, while the others quickly conferred. Perhaps there was a store open, or a restaurant in town where they could buy something. Suddenly someone pointed: "Look!" The others turned to stare. Sitting on a counter in plain view was a freshly baked loaf of bread. It had not been there moments before, Jeanne knew. But no one had come to the kitchen except the family, and they had been empty-handed.

"How did we miss this?" Jeanne's friend cried in astonishment. She had found an institutional-sized can of green beans and corn in a cupboard. Another woman peeked under a cabinet.

There on a shelf she had previously inspected now sat a large tray of dressing with big chunks of cut-up turkey in it.

"We packed up the containers and sent the family home to enjoy their holiday," Jeanne said. Then, tears spilling down their cheeks, the women praised the Lord for his wonderful care. They had offered him an early birthday present by caring for the least of his children. But he had multiplied their gift a hundred-fold and given them a Christmas they would never forget.