

THE BARNABAS PAL PROJECT

By Alan Winkenhofer

The Barnabas Pal Project is a way to have two different age groups become more involved with one another. It connects adults with youth via a “secret pal” program. With the Barnabas Pal program, each Adult Pal makes a difference in the life of one youth. The following is how the project got started and is still being used in Kentucky.

About 25 years ago, Dr. David Byrd of Louisville, KY, an interim minister at Valley View Baptist Church (VVBC), spoke of Barnabas as being the Great Encourager of the Bible. Dr. Byrd described Barnabas’ work with Paul and his words to encourage Paul in his journeys as an illuminating example of Christian friendship. A few years later and as a follow-up to the sermon, Judge Winkenhofer Shumate started a program at VVBC called the Barnabas Project. The idea was to encourage VVBC youth by pairing each youth with one adult, similar to a “secret pal” program. Since that time, the Barnabas Pal Project has been adopted at other churches in our local area . . . Baptist, Methodist, Church of Christ, and Presbyterian. In January, 2020, we at First Presbyterian Church in Elizabethtown, KY, will begin our ninth cycle of Barnabas Pals.

As Barnabas was an encourager to Paul, we strive to encourage our youth in their walk with Christ. Our youth face struggles every day in their schools and in their activities to be strong in the Lord and to show Christ’s light to the world. Barnabas Pals work to give the youth outside, positive influences in wholesome settings.

Adult Pals leave cards, notes, and small gifts for the youth on Wednesdays and Sundays. A simple note of encouragement goes a long way when the going gets tough. Sometimes, an Adult Pal leaves clues to his/her identity. The youth especially enjoy trying to guess who their Pals are. Special, lasting friendships are often created through these acts of caring and encouragement.

The Barnabas Pal Project involves four groups of people:

- Project Managers are the only ones who know the adult/youth pairings. They help facilitate the program by recruiting adults and youth and by standing in for Adult Pals when needed;
- Parents, who grant permission for their youth to participate;
- The youth themselves;
- The Adult Pals.

There are required forms that must be completed and returned to the Project Managers. The Adult Pal form specifies participation standards and lists do’s and don’ts in compliance with the Presbytery Boundary Policy. Sample forms are available via email to winkenhofer@gmail.com.

Usually, each Barnabas Pal Project is a six-month cycle. It concludes with a dinner for church members during which the youth try to guess their Adult Pals before identities are revealed. We’ve used dates like Pentecost and Epiphany to make the dinners more attractive and meaningful.

Each Barnabas Pal Project concludes with a Dinner – and the Youth trying to guess the identity of their Barnabus Pal

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