Computer system works behind the scenes to help churches meet needs

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DALLAS—Dallas Baptist Association recently improved its online [CityServe](#) system to link community needs, church resources and volunteers.

Congregations and individuals who use the upgraded online resource may appreciate the way the association has made it easier to post needs and respond to them. Most will know nothing about the [Meet the Need](#) management system that makes it possible.

That's exactly the way the man who spent 10 years developing and testing the system wants it.

"Meet the Need is behind the scenes. The community and members of the congregation need to know about the church's heart for ministry—not ours," said Jim Morgan, founder and executive director of Meet the Need.

In 2000, Morgan worked as a strategist for an Internet consulting firm. His job took him on the road most weekdays, but he wanted to become more involved in community ministry on weekends through his local congregation, North Point Community Church in suburban Atlanta, Ga.

However, he discovered the rapidly growing church lacked the ability to link members to volunteer opportunities effectively.

"I was disappointed, and God put it on my heart to take what I had learned working with Fortune 500 companies and apply it to the church," Morgan said.

"As long as we are still living in the 1980s in terms of how we use technology, the church can't do as much as we should be doing and accomplishing as much as God intends."

Using emerging technologies related to online shopping and social networking, he developed a computer system to help his church make needs known and mobilize members to meet those needs.

Morgan worked about two years on the design and another two years piloting the system. He recognized the system's effectiveness could grow exponentially more effective as additional churches and ministries posted needs and Meet the Need operated as the hub to manage the information.

With the backing of some key donors who saw the system's potential, Meet the Need was founded as a nonprofit ministry committed to making its tools available to churches and groups of churches at minimal cost. For churches that average 500 or fewer in attendance each week, annual cost is $100. Larger churches are charged on a sliding scale.

Meet the Need licenses its software to churches and runs through each church's website. Participating churches have access to outreach software and services, including a call center, as well as a database and search engine that allows people to decide when and where they want to volunteer. An account management and reporting system helps churches track needs and responses.

Meet the Need launched in South Florida last year and is expanding to three other areas—including Dallas—this year. In 2012, Morgan hopes the program will be ready to become national in scope.

Jana Jackson, director of family and community ministries at Dallas Baptist Association, had been working the last couple of years to post volunteer opportunities on the associational website as a resource for churches that want to schedule a service project day.

"We found it worked better if churches could go to our website and see dozens of options," she said. "I was OK with what we had but not entirely satisfied."

Through a local network of nondenominational churches, she learned about Meet the Need and its outreach management system.

"It offers our churches a much broader selection of opportunities for service" when they visit the association's CityServe section of its website, Jackson said.

[Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas](#) saw Meet the Need's system as a way to help engage members not only in service opportunities externally, but also internally through Sunday school classes and on-campus programs, said Brandon Boyd, associate minister of missions.

"We are going to use it as a resource for our members to become involved in missions opportunities throughout the community through our ministry partners, as well as responding to volunteer needs on our campus," Boyd said.

Morgan sees the Meet the Need technology as a tool with tremendous potential, but its impact depends on how churches and their members respond once needs are identified.

"All we can do is fix the process issue. Meet the Need can facilitate the initial interaction. But it's up to churches to go out and serve," he said.