

Lambs symbolize love for fragile children, worried families

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GARLAND—Nine years ago, Chaplain Karen Black wanted to find a tangible way to link concerned Christians to families whose children were receiving medical treatment for serious illnesses or injuries. She found the answer in stuffed lambs.

Caitlin McCallum places a stuffed lamb on the Lord's Supper table at South Garland Baptist Church. (PHOTOS/Ken Camp)

At the time, Black served as a chaplain with Our Children's House, a pediatric acute care hospital at Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas.

After she learned through Pediatric Chaplains Network about a program that provided teddy bears to hospitalized children, she decided to adapt that idea by using stuffed lambs and directing appeals specifically to churches and Christian schools.

"The Love Lamb Prayer Ministry is a way to connect the faith community to the hospital and the hospital to the faith community," Black explained.

Churches ask their members to buy fluffy stuffed lambs—the kinds stores typically stock between Valentine's Day and Easter—small enough to fit into a bassinet.

Members are encouraged to pray individually for the families who will receive the stuffed animals. Then, on the day the lambs are brought to church for collection, the congregation as a whole joins in a litany of blessing for the Love Lambs.



Examining the stuffed animals donated to the Love Lamb Prayer Ministry of the Baylor Health Care System chaplains' program by member of South Garland Baptist Church on Palm Sunday are (left to right) Karen Black, head chaplain at Baylor Regional Medical Center at Grapevine and originator of the Love Lamb Prayer Ministry; Ines Lowe, chaplain at Baylor-Garland; Jerald Garner, music minister at South Garland Baptist and chaplaincy resident at Baylor-Grapevine; and Pam Woodberry, vice chair of the missions/evangelism committee at South Garland Baptist. (PHOTOS/Ken Camp)

Hospital chaplains present the cuddly lambs to the parents of hospitalized children and explain that they were the gifts of caring Christians who already prayed for the families who would receive them.

“They are only given out by chaplains. These are not just toys. They are a symbol of hope, of love and of the prayers that have been offered,” said Black, a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship-endorsed chaplain.

“It’s something tangible for the family to hold onto. And it’s a way for us to

say, ‘Christian people care about you.’”

At Baylor Regional Medical Center at Grapevine, where Black is manager of pastoral care, chaplains distribute the Love Lambs to families whose babies are in the neonatal intensive care unit.

Jerald Garner, a chaplain resident at Baylor Regional Medical Center at Grapevine, participated in the Love Lambs ministry and presented the idea to the missions/evangelism committee at South Garland Baptist Church, where he serves as minister of music.

The church, which averages about 225 in attendance, gathered on Palm Sunday for the blessing of 534 Love Lambs—by far the largest number collected at a single site in the Love Lamb Prayer Ministry’s nine-year history. And the church continued to receive lambs in the days that followed.



Jerald Garner, minister of music at South Garland Baptist Church, leads a prayer of blessing for the families of hospitalized children who will receive stuffed lambs donated by the church. Garner serves as a chaplain resident at Baylor Regional Medical Center at Grapevine, where many of the lambs will be presented by chaplains to neonatal intensive care unit patients.

The church originally planned to give all its donated lambs to the Baylor-Grapevine NICU, but due to the response, the stuffed lambs will be shared with chaplains at Baylor's Garland and downtown Dallas facilities, Garner said.

None will go to waste. After distributing about 4,000 lambs in nine years, Black noted no one ever has refused a Love Lamb. People of all faiths and no faith receive the stuffed lambs just as readily as Christian families, she noted.

"It's at a point in their lives when they want to believe in something bigger than themselves," she said.

Older pediatric patients also have been touched by the Love Lambs ministry. Black, who was minister of missions at First Baptist Church in Keller before she became a chaplain, fondly remembered an encounter with a 17-year-old paraplegic former gang member when she served at Our Children's House.

"When he saw me giving away the lambs, he said: 'Why can't I have one? There's nothing soft in my life,'" she recalled.

Black gave the young man the lamb, and she used it as an opportunity to share the gospel.

"I told him about how the lamb represented God's Son and about what Jesus did for him," she said.