

How a Penny, a Flag, and Some Coins—Along With Prayer—Helped Raise a Record Alabaster Offering

At Hanover Church of the Nazarene in Mechanicsville, Virginia, the Alabaster Offering has been collected in the twice yearly manner seemingly since a few years after the Jamestown settlement!

Several years ago, I volunteered to be the Alabaster coordinator, speaking in adult Sunday School classes, encouraging children to collect money in Alabaster boxes and bringing small flags of countries around the world to add color to Alabaster education.

For one offering, we contacted missionary Cheri Kommel and asked for photographs of churches in Botswana built with Alabaster money. A picture of what Alabaster does in the bulletin brings it to life for the congregation. After showing the photos, we waved a Botswana flag outside as Alabaster funds were received from people in their cars as they left that day.

In Fall 2010, I decided to try something different. I told the congregation that the “official” flag for that Alabaster Offering would be the Cape Verdean flag, since one of the newest general superintendents, Eugenio R. Duarte, is from that country.

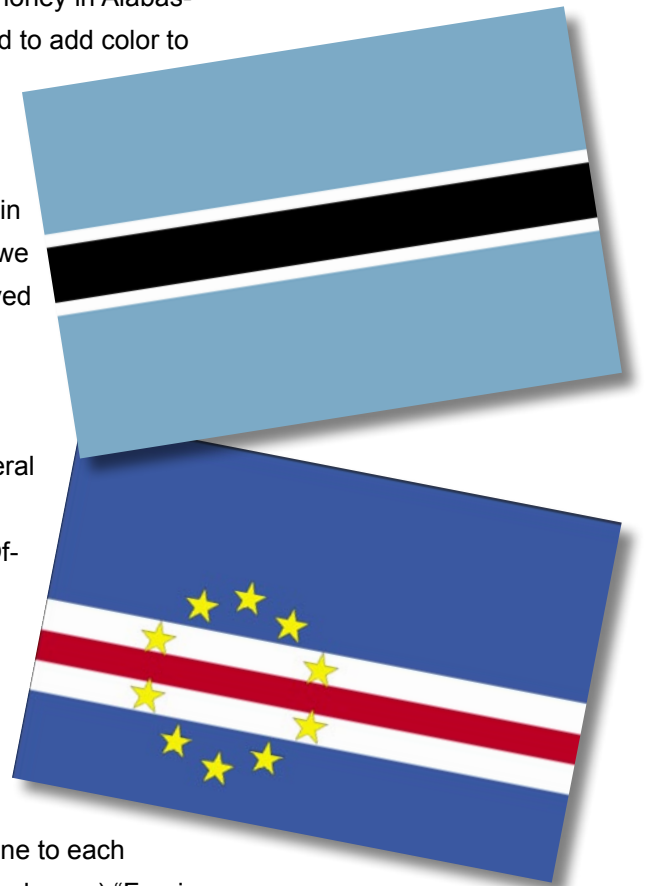
We also challenged the church to pray for that Alabaster Offering. I believe prayer is critical; we should never do anything without prayer.

Usually people collect Alabaster funds during the month in their Alabaster boxes. Each child receives a box, and many adults have participated twice a year for a long time.

After consulting with Pastor Greg Norwood, I obtained approximately 250 coins from other countries and distributed one to each parishioner. (We used silver-colored coins the size of a nickel or larger.) “Foreign Coin Day” was publicized to the church in the newsletter/bulletin.

On “Foreign Coin Day,” the week before our Alabaster Offering was to take place, the coins were placed on seats in the sanctuary and distributed in children’s church. Pastor Greg announced the coin event and then called me to the front for a game of “Let’s Make a Deal,” asking me if I would trade my Mexican peso for the Elmo purse he held in his hand. When I did, I opened the purse and pulled out United States currency worth more than the Mexican peso was worth! Excitedly telling the congregation that this money would help provide buildings in other nations, I encouraged the people to keep the coins as missions prayer reminders and to bring in United States change (and paper money, too) for Alabaster the next week.

The next week, when the Alabaster Offering was collected and counted, it totalled \$498!



One of the missions team, a coin collector, offered to look through the change for particularly good coins—such as wheat pennies and old nickels—and buy them for the value in the coin book. As the group looked through the coins, a few coins emerged—nickels from the 1940s and 1950s and a few wheat pennies. Then a member found a worn wheat penny and asked, “What’s this worth?” It turned out to be a 1913 penny in collectible condition worth a dollar! The total of the Alabaster Offering with the offering, plus the rare coin value, bested all records at Hanover Church—\$633 for Alabaster! (All of this from a church that averaged 245 in Sunday morning worship attendance in 2010.)

Pastor Greg felt that the foreign coins were a spur to get people to think about missions and Alabaster. Several of the foreign coins actually ended up in the offering plate to be recycled for future events.

Alabaster was also a spur to set up NMI in the church. An NMI president was elected, and I was asked to be treasurer and “Alabaster coordinator for life.”

I would like to try this idea with foreign paper money in the future and am now deciding what the “official” flag of the February 2011 Alabaster Offering. Maybe a European country this time....

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