

Open Hearts Bakery

A ministry of St. Matthews United Methodist Church

MISSION: To make a change in people's lives by employing them and giving them "a hand up instead of a handout"



Morganton, North Carolina

County	Burke
Population	16,918
Median Household Income	\$38,782
Individuals Below Poverty Level	24.4%
Unemployment Rate in Burke County	4.9%

Sources: U.S. Census, communitycommons.org

OVERVIEW

Open Hearts Bakery is not your typical bakery. Unlike most storefront bakeries, it operates out of a 230 square-foot kitchen at St. Matthews United Methodist Church in Morganton, North Carolina. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, a small number of employees and volunteers bake from 7:00am to 10:00pm, making sourdough breads, sweet breads, pies, and cakes in a variety of flavors and sizes. Because the bakery doesn't have a storefront, they sell at three local farmers markets and to three local businesses. They also take orders for holiday bakes and occasional special events like weddings or conferences. The bakery purchases as many [local ingredients](#) as possible, buying berries and apples from growers right in Morganton and from the farmers markets where they sell. There are many different jobs to make the bakery run smoothly – purchasing ingredients, keeping track of funds, baking, washing dishes, weighing, wrapping, and labeling the goods, and selling at the markets. Employees and volunteers stagger their baking times because not everyone can use the ovens at once. The bakery currently employs four paid staff and engages about 15 volunteers.



Why It's Unique

So, what's unique about a church that bakes and sells? [The bakery makes over \\$50,000 a year, and almost all of the profit goes towards local and international missions. And the bakery is completely self-sustaining!](#) Sales from baked goods pay for all of their ingredients, utilities the bakery uses during operation, *and* they give 10% of what's made to their host church. This leaves Open Hearts with plenty of funds to support missions and outreach.

The bakery's most important mission is employing 3-5 part-time workers a season. There are usually two criteria for employment: the person is both economically and employment challenged. This means that they are struggling financially and they experience some barrier to employment. Open Hearts often gets workers from the Burke County Circles Initiative, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and referrals from Burke United Christian Ministries. The goal is that an employee will work for nine months at the bakery and then "fly away" to a more permanent job. [Hiring economically and employment challenged people is great for two reasons. First, it boosts the individual's income. Second, it allows people to strengthen their work skills to become more employable.](#) Both of these things help the individual and the local economy. When someone hasn't held a job for many years, even things like showing up on time for work can be hard. Therefore, Open Hearts focuses on basic skills and keeps a short list of rules posted for everyone to see. As Madelyn Russ, Open Hearts Bakery coordinator states, *"The goal is to help people make a change in their life. We understand that we're not the people that are going to make the change, we're just a vehicle to help them make the change"*.

Inspirations

The inspiration for Open Hearts Bakery came about in 2009 when the pastor at the time was thinking about building a “Campus B” for the church, including a community center. The question was how to pay for it. A retired baker at the church offered to sell her recipes and baking supplies to the church, which could then make the land payment for the new building by selling baked goods. The idea of a bakery excited the pastor and the church, but not everyone agreed on the mission. The bakery started, but the money made went to helping people with emergency needs, such as [rent](#), [doctors bills](#), and [gas bills](#), instead of a new building.

Soon a new pastor arrived, along with a new vision. The new pastor led the church in a book study on [Toxic Charity](#), by Robert Lupton. This got members thinking about how to support more lasting change in the lives of those they were serving. Consultants also provided services to strengthen their business plan. Their top recommendation?

The bakery could not sustain itself if it was run entirely with volunteers. Open Hearts needed baking staff. After the Toxic Charity book study and feedback from the consultants, the vision of the bakery changed. Open Hearts now hires people from the community and overall supports more sustainable change.



Now there is a mission team that decides where the money will go for outreach. The biggest mission is employing people, but there are excess funds. Some of the excess goes to Burke United Christian Ministries (a local organization providing food, crisis counseling, and financial assistance to those in need) for them to use as they see fit. The mission team also supports the church’s backpack ministry and diaper supply closet. They’ve helped people purchase cars and wheelchairs, and provided funds for a well in Haiti. The mission team is open to innovative ways to use the money.

What's Needed for a Ministry Like This

- Business plan*
- Product to sell
- Commercial kitchen (if it is a value-added product)
- Places to sell (farmers markets, local businesses, etc.)
- Paid staff
- Volunteers
 - More volunteers than employees make it possible to support outreach
- Mission team to decide where money goes
- A community that wants to help make lasting change in other's lives
- Compassion and understanding when working with employees from different backgrounds

*A small ministry just needs a simple business plan. This includes things like a mission, protocol for how the “business” will operate, and realistic budgeting (what are necessary costs and expenses, where will revenue come from?).

Open Hearts Bakery shows that it's possible to sustain an incredible amount of outreach and mission work. *“We truly believe that the bakery is a God thing”*. – Madelyn



Visions for the Future

In the future, Open Hearts would like to become more of a community bakery. They still will be housed at St. Matthews UMC, but they are hoping to get more volunteers from the community to be able to bake more and sell at more locations. [Drawing in more community members will also help the missions team hear about new ways to serve Burke County.](#)