

How a monster catfish provided the impetus for a Lottie Moon gift

LYONS, Ga. (BP and local reports) – Encouraging giving to Southern Baptists' Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions takes many forms each year, and First Church in Lyons Ga., even found a way to get in some good fishing during its fund-raising.

The church held its annual Lottie auction Dec 8. For a past auction, pastor Dannie Williams put his wood-working skills to the test and hand-built an impressive octagon picnic table that went for \$3,500. This year he's contributing several handmade charcuterie boards, just a few of the unique items up for sale.

Those offerings can't match one item's backstory, though. A few days ago, church members Bill Benton and Larry Brantley were fishing on the nearby Altamaha River when something big hit Benton's Zebco 33Max rod and reel. Fifteen minutes later with only a 20-pound line, Benton and Brantley wrestled a 37-pound catfish into the boat.

Brantley came up with a brilliant idea for the upcoming Lottie auction and commenced straight to Walmart to purchase an identical rod and reel to the set that had been used so successfully to land the behemoth fish. The set was auctioned on Dec. 8; the resulting donation was not available at press deadline on Dec. 9.

"It's a time to celebrate what God is doing while celebrating how we're all participating in helping share the Gospel," Williams said.

On Dec. 6, Paul Chitwood, president of Southern Baptists'

International Mission Board (IMB) and former executive director-treasurer of the Kentucky Baptist Convention, tweeted a note of appreciation about his friend, pastor Ed Amundson of High Street Church in Somerset, Ky., for the church's annual Lottie Moon Pocket Knife and Country Ham Auction.

Missionaries speak both in person and via Zoom at the event. Refreshments are served and a silent auction is held. "We're very heavily invested in missions," Amundson said.



Rick Woodside (in green shirt at top center), displays a homemade quilt holder while David Harrod (in cap) calls for bids during the Lottie auction at Graefenburg Church, Waddy, Ky. The event raised more than \$12,000 in one night for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. (Photo credit: Baptist Press)

Graefenburg Church in Waddy, Ky., has held an auction for the past 35 years where participants bid on donated and homemade items as well as baked goods. Most recently, those bids garnered \$12,153.01 in one night.

That amount will go toward the church's goal of \$35,000 for the offering. Those amounts are even more remarkable considering that Graefenburg Church averages 250 in attendance each Sunday.

A single phrase motivates church members to pay \$100 for a single Rice Krispy treat and \$300 for a painting of the nativity scene by pastor Philip Meade's 13-year-old daughter, Callie Grace. "'It's for Lottie,'" the pastor said. "Our auctioneers repeat that throughout the night. Our church has a long history of being focused on the Great Commission [Matthew 28:18-20] and they love sharing the Gospel."

The evening starts with a chili cook-off, where the winning recipe is determined by donation "voting." This year the cook-off garnered \$400 before the auction even started.

Mississippi Avenue Church in Aurora, Colo., encourages members to mail their Christmas cards through the in-church "post office" for a 25-cent per card donation to the offering goal of \$10,000. The church has given to Lottie in the past, but this is the first year in a long time that a goal has been set, said pastor Mark Spence.

"People are excited to drop off and pick up their cards," he said. "I'm encouraged about meeting our goal since in August we set out to raise \$10,000 for Afghan refugees through Send Relief. We ended up raising \$15,000 for it."

"In addition, we've been taking advantage of the great resources through the IMB such as videos, pictures, and other materials. One family on the mission field send us a direct video explaining their work."

In order to raise awareness and thereby more support for the Lottie Moon offering, pastor David Nowell of Orchard Farm Church in St. Charles, Mo., arranged "Christmas Around the World."

The event was hosted at the offices of the St. Louis Metro Association Dec. 5 and brought four sets of missionaries via Zoom or recorded address to explain their work as well as answer questions.

Orchard Farm Church nearly closed last year and at one point had only \$700 in the bank, Nowell told Baptist Press. A rebound is underway, but a keeping a continuing focus on missions is an important part of the comeback.

The missionaries' stories remind of the wins and losses that come in ministry. "We learned about their struggles as well as their accomplishments," he said. "This will be an ongoing venture. We're hoping other churches will get more involved with our missionaries."

Editor's note: Resources for the 2021 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions may be acquired at <https://www.imb.org/generosity/resources/>.