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### **Couple ask churches to 'Pay It Forward'**

A former pastor and his wife will give \$1,000 each to 50 congregations that promise to help hurricane victims.

**By LORI BASHEDA**

The Orange County Register

Ask, and you shall receive.

Beginning today, a former Aliso Viejo pastor and his wife will write \$1,000 checks to the first 50 churches – one from each state – that e-mail them simply asking for money.

All church officials have to do is promise to hand out the \$1,000 they receive to parishioners, who in turn must use the money to help Hurricane Katrina victims.

"We're ready to write checks," said Leesa Bellesi, wife of former Coast Hills Community Church pastor Denny Bellesi.

**RETURN ON INVESTMENTS:** Denny and Leesa Bellesi saw \$10,000 they distributed to their Aliso Viejo church members in 2000 grow into \$1 million under Kingdom Assignment.



*Eugene Garcia, The Orange County Register*

Bellesi said the \$50,000 has been sitting in her bank account for a year. She and her husband put it there after making a profit on the Aliso Viejo house they sold shortly before Denny stepped down as the church's senior pastor.

The couple, their children grown, moved into a trailer home on Coast Highway in Laguna Beach. For a year, they questioned what to do with the money and whom to help.

The answer came to Leesa Bellesi last week while she was listening to morning talk radio. On station after station, people were criticizing the government for failing to do enough for Katrina victims.

That's where the community church comes in, she thought. "We feel like the local church can do more than any government," she said.

She's seen it happen firsthand. In 2000, her husband handed out \$100 bills to 100 Coast Hills members. He called it the Kingdom Assignment, a living Bible lesson on the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30.

The parable is about recognizing that we all have a gift, be it for listening or making money or making peace, and then recognizing that we are accountable for what we do with that gift. The \$100 is a metaphor for their gift.

Denny gave his flock 90 days to report back on what they did with their money. The results were astounding. The \$10,000 had grown into \$1 million.

Using their wits, their connections, their artistic talents and other skills, people turned their 100 bucks into thousands for good deeds, one of which was the creation of a south-county domestic violence shelter called Hopes House which serves women to this day.

As word spread, churches copied Coast Hills. "It's kind of this little underground movement," Bellesi said. Punch the words "Kingdom Assignment" into an Internet search engine, and 1.3 million Web sites pop up from churches as far away as Australia.

The \$50,000 to 50 churches will be the latest chapter in a story that doesn't seem to have an end. The Bellesis are hoping that small, poorer churches jump at the chance. It will be up to the pastors who get the money to decide how to distribute it. They can hand out \$10 bills to 100 church members. Or \$100 bills to 10 church members.

If Coast Hills churchgoers turned \$10,000 into a million, Bellesi said, imagine what good \$50,000 can do. "How amazing it will be to have all these denominations really come together," Bellesi said. "To serve this one goal."

That goal being to help the hurricane victims - or "to care for the least of these," Bellesi quotes from the Gospels.

"And they are the least of these right now. They're poor in spirit. They've lost everything." Churches can e-mail the Bellesi through [kingdomassignment.com](http://kingdomassignment.com)

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