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## **Assignment from God brings Oprah**

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Denny Bellesi, pastor at Coast Hills Community Church

ALISO VIEJO – Giving away money was easy. Giving away time was something altogether different.

Coast Hills Community Church - made famous by giving 100 of its members \$100 bills and telling them to use the money for good - has completed another life-affirming task. Two thousand members of the congregation pledged to give away 90 minutes of their time to help someone else.

They called them assignments from God.

And now their good works have been recognized by a slightly lower power - Oprah.

Today, Coast Hills will be featured on the "The Oprah Winfrey Show" in a segment called "The Best Money I Ever Spent." Oprah's production team was in Aliso Viejo last week taping the 12-minute segment that features the \$100 giveaway and the worldwide inspiration it created.

But the \$100 giveaway is only part of Coast Hills' plan to inspire its congregation. The "Kingdom Assignment," as it is called by the church, is actually three tasks - giving away money, selling a possession and donating the proceeds, and giving away time.

They learned that sacrificing time is tough.

"It ended up being the most difficult one," said Leesa Bellesi, who along with her husband, Pastor Denny Bellesi, created the assignments. "Time is hard to give."

Ask Steve Briggs, 51, of Laguna Niguel.

Briggs works as a lounge singer at the Holiday Inn in Laguna Hills. One night, he volunteered to give a ride home to a busboy named George, who recently arrived from Peru and didn't speak English.

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George jumped at the chance.

They worked out a few key directional words - derecha (right), izquierda (left) and de frente (straight) - so George could tell him how to get home. Briggs thought he would give George a couple of rides to fulfill his 90-minute pledge.

But George kept asking for more rides.

So Briggs kept driving. Then George moved all the way to Rancho Santa Margarita.

"That's a real long way in the wrong direction, but he needed the help," Briggs said. "I was in a position to help, and God put me in that position, so I did it."

And Briggs kept driving, even though it was 40 minutes out of his way.

Along the way, Briggs learned a little about himself.

"I should help people more often," Briggs said. "I have a tendency to be not that helpful."

Briggs learned how to say right and left in Spanish, and George learned a couple of words in English.

"He calls me 'brother,'" Briggs said.

Joany Silvestri, 42, of Mission Viejo, said that when she tried to give her time away, people looked at her funny.

Silvestri went to the parking lot at Trader Joe's in Laguna Hills and asked the elderly people in the parking lot if they needed help pushing carts or unloading groceries.

"I said, 'I'm Joany and I want to help,' and some people – especially couples – kept walking," she said.

She tried to help one woman, who refused to let her. She helped one man to his car and he gave her 20 cents. Silvestri gave it back his wife when he wasn't looking.

Another woman only had one bag, but she wanted Silvestri to walk with her to the car just so she would have someone to talk to.

Near the end of the day, Silvestri saw a woman with a bewildered look on her face and asked if she needed help to her car.

"I don't have a car," said the woman, who had missed her bus.

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Silvestri offered to give her a ride home.

The woman, who said her name was Irene, got choked up. She was overcome by the kindness.

"I knew it meant so much to her," Silvestri said.

Irene told Silvestri that she had put her husband, who has Alzheimer's disease, into a home a year ago, and that she was very lonely.

"She said, 'God told me not to cry today,'" Silvestri said. "Then she called me her angel."

Time, as it turns out, was well-spent.

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