

Church uses technology to spread word

By Justin Much

Statesman Journal

November 16, 2011

The earliest accounts of Biblical stories and the inspiration that emanated from them are rooted in an oral tradition.

That storytelling foundation is something outreach advocates in West Salem hope to retrieve with help from 21st Century technology — MP3 players.

Soma Church pastor Dwayne Hilty and Corban University student and outreach volunteer Michael Hecht have collaborated on an effort to furnish MP3 players to some area homeless, especially those whose Bible reading is thwarted by illiteracy.

The idea emerged while Hecht was involved in a reading-based church activity during which he noticed some people were left out even though they seemed eager to participate.

"We were having a little different type of church service with prayer stations," Hecht recalled. "A few of the homeless were not taking part and seemed like they wanted to but they couldn't."

Hecht said upon reflection he wondered how much of an obstacle this was and to how many?

The outreach has furnished Bibles to many homeless and "urban campers" (those who consistently stay at specific camps), but he realized that reading was a barrier for many.

"It really hit me that we've been handing out Bibles, but the word is (unattainable for many)," Hecht said.

He approached Hilty with the idea of gathering MP3 players from those who had upgraded and didn't need their old ones. Hecht said Biblical downloads are available with various sizes and of various scripture.

Soma, which hosts Dinner on the Green on Fridays and participates in other outreaches, is advocating the drive. Hecht said drop-off sites will be held at the church and at Corban.

"A lot of folks from different camps come to our worship services, and we give out free Bibles," Hilty said, adding that among the adjustments in the past were getting large-print Bibles for

Got a spare mp3?

Two locations for donations:

Soma Church, 735 Edgewater St. NW

Student Life Center at Corban University, (main building, second floor), 5000 Deer Park Drive SE, Salem

For information, contact Dwayne Hilty (503) 580-4118, email Dwayne@somasalem.org; Michael Hecht: (503) 991-4263, email freespiritbiker1@hotmail.com

those who needed them. "This is still a new program, but hopefully these MP3s will help
… It's all about how do we make the community a better place."

While the idea and its implementation are new in West Salem, the oral storytelling tradition is far from novel; it's actually where the seeds of Christianity were planted.

Early Christianity scholar L. Michael White, a Ronald Nelson Smith Chair in Classics and Christian Origins at the University of Texas at Austin, explored in depth early Christian traditions.

In the opening of his discourse "Importance of the Oral Tradition" White wrote: "It's rather clear from the way that the stories develop in the gospels that the Christians who are writing the gospels a generation after the death of Jesus are doing so from a stock of oral memory, that is, stories that had been passed down to probably by followers."

He added: "Story telling was at the center of the beginnings of the Jesus movement."

Hilty and Hecht hope it's the beginnings of something in West Salem as well.

jmuch@StatesmanJournal.com or (503) 399-6736 or follow at twitter.com/justinmuch