

# BWE GIVES BACK

We work to change our communities and our world

## TONYA PASCHAL:

**HER MESSAGE IS SIMPLE - NO FORM OF GIVING BACK IS TOO SMALL**

When it comes to giving back, no effort is too small or insignificant.

From a decade of coordinating the supply of monthly meals for more than 200 people at a men's shelter, to advocating and offering support for victims of human trafficking, over the years Tonya Paschal – a senior closer at Bellwether Enterprise in the Charlotte office – has been involved with various organizations working to support countless causes.

Some of her volunteering and charitable work is more visible than others, like when she raised donations and prepared over 21,000 meals sent to children in Haiti in 2013. But the smaller-scale efforts, which can often go unnoticed, are just as important and can have some of the biggest impact.

"I have a heart to serve on all levels," she said, "but my main focus has always been helping women and young girls know their value."



*Tonya with a group of girls she mentors through ADVANCE Student Ministry, (2013)*

**“ People, and kids especially, spell ‘love’ ‘T’-‘I’-‘M’-‘E.’  
And when you’re willing to invest your time into someone,  
that means more to them than anything.”**

For the last decade, Tonya has dedicated much of her time to volunteering with the ADVANCE Student Ministry at her church. She serves as a mentor for a group of girls in middle and high school. Part of Tonya's passion comes from lacking a mentor when she was that age.



*Tonya with a group of girls she mentors through ADVANCE Student Ministry, (2013)*

"I didn't have that mentor when I was growing up, that person I could go to and talk with about things going on in my life," she said. "I feel like I could have made a lot of different decisions if I would have had that. So I try to be that person to people within our church and our community."

At any given time, Tonya mentors about 15 girls who are in grades 7-12 through ADVANCE. While part of the mentoring consists of meeting with the girls at the church at least once each week, her involvement in their lives expands well beyond their place of worship. Tonya explained how she hosts get-togethers at her home, is available to take the girls places, and regularly attends events the girls are participating in such as dances or recitals.

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“Just showing up and being present in their lives, regardless of what that looks like,” Tonya said when asked what her mentorship style looks like.

Whether it’s been losses of loved ones, divorce, or other difficult circumstances in their lives, Tonya has been a supporting mentor and someone for the girls to talk to and confide in.

The most important goal in her mentoring is “ensuring that these young women and girls know their value is not found in things or people.”

Reflecting back on her own childhood and the lack of mentors in her life, Tonya said she recognizes how easy it can be for young girls to see their personal value in outside things and other people.



Tonya at her wedding with a group of girls she mentors through ADVANCE Student Ministry, (2014)

“We live in a society where we want to be people pleasers. And especially in middle school and high school, these girls want to fit in. We’re ensuring the girls build confidence and recognize their value and it’s about helping them find their joy and peace within themselves.”

Promoting that sense of self-worth in young women is also at the heart of her volunteer work with End Slavery Charlotte. Established in 2014, End Slavery Charlotte is a nonprofit organization dedicated to ending human trafficking through raising awareness, resourcing advocacy, and creating safehouses for victims.

One of the regular actions Tonya is involved in with End Slavery Charlotte is leading prayer walks through some of the city’s hot spots where a lot of human trafficking takes place. The goal of these walks is for victims to see that there are people willing and able to help them escape their situation and encourage them to reach out and seek help.

Seeing how easily young girls can fall victim to human trafficking is another reason why she volunteers with the ADVANCE Student Ministry. She said traffickers often seek girls and young women who have low self-esteem and are vulnerable.

“By loving on these girls, and spending time with them, and making sure they feel valued and important, you’re helping to keep them from falling victim.”

Her passion is to help these girls in any way she can. Serving as a mentor for them may seem very simple, but it’s far from insignificant.

“It’s an investment that you’re making into someone’s life and it’s very intentional,” Tonya said. “Giving money to something is great, and there are many causes that we do give money to, but people, and kids especially, spell ‘love’ ‘T’-‘I’-‘M’-‘E.’ And when you’re willing to invest your time into someone, that means more to them than anything.

“When you set aside time to listen to them and be involved in their life, they feel valued, they feel cared for, and they feel important.”

In addition to directly mentoring the girls, Tonya has increased the capacity of her role in the ADVANCE program by now teaching other women volunteers how to best serve the girls in the student ministry.

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Ellie Lacey, who is on staff with the ADVANCE Student Ministry, said Tonya has “been a vital part of the community and the success of our organization. Since day one of serving with ADVANCE she has been leading, loving, and sacrificing all so that our students can feel known, valued, and loved.”

Tonya doesn’t have a direct call to action for the student ministry program or any of the other organizations she volunteers for. Instead, she wants to encourage people to give back any way they can. Everyone has a role to play in making the world a better place, she said, and no effort, cause, or donation is too small.

“We’re all called to do this. You may not have to be in a church, or out on the streets fighting human trafficking, or mentoring girls, or raising money for an event. It’s all different and we all have a part to play.

“Loving on people and caring for people, and meeting people where they are — we all do this in different ways and that’s what’s important.”



Tonya with a group of girls she mentors through ADVANCE Student Ministry, (2014)