

Ministry Spotlight: Tax Day

The weeks leading up to April 15 are most accountants' busiest time. The last thing they need is one more commitment during that time. About ten years ago, though, Bernie Avrit, a career Internal Revenue Service agent and Donelson Church of Christ deacon, suggested that he and other accountants at Donelson spend a Saturday in March offering to help other Donelson members with their tax returns at no charge.



Doug Williams, who helped that first time, remembers that three volunteers helped prepare 10-12 returns. This year, five volunteers, Connie Seal, David Best, Don Campbell, Tom Burns and Williams, prepared 18 plus a couple of returns which had to be completed later. In addition to Bernie Avrit, volunteers through the years have included Tim McVey, John Sanders, Laura Beth Oliver, Lindsey Sanders, Steve Gaines and Paul Agee.

Williams recalls some particularly memorable experiences. Once “we prepared a return for a single mother with two children who, despite being unable to claim both of her children as dependents, was able to include both children for purposes of calculating her Earned Income Credit and, therefore, received a refund of over \$4,000. This mother was in tears as she left as \$4,000 was, seemingly, ‘all of the money in the world.’”

“Another time,” Williams said, a single mother came “who was going to utilize a tax return preparation company to prepare her return and provide her with a Refund Anticipation Loan. These loans effectively charge a rate of interest in excess of 100%. We were able to persuade her to wait and let us prepare her return. She got her refund in about seven days, saving probably \$500.”



One year, a community event was taking place at church on Tax Day. A woman who was lost and trying to find the auditorium found the Tax Day team instead. She “asked if we would prepare hers. She went home, got her information and came back to the church. We prepared her return that year and probably the next two or three years.”

The men and women who come for help on Tax Day, though, are generally Donelson members or their friends or family. “In order for us to make this service available to the community,” Williams said, “we would need more church involvement. Unfortunately, many CPAs/accountants are working 70-plus hours” each week in March, “and it is hard to get commitments.” And volunteers without tax return preparation experience could offer very limited help as “everyone involved is meeting with ‘clients’ and compiling information or preparing the returns or reviewing the completed returns for accuracy.”



Elizabeth Gwin’s math-free help, though, is truly appreciated. She has brought volunteers “a wonderful, home-prepared lunch feast” for the past two years.

She does that because she recognizes the sacrifice that March Saturday represents to the very busy men and women who have an important talent, a talent that they want to share, in the busiest weeks of their year, with their brothers and sisters.