



A Framework for Love

When Pastor Bonnie Cassida of Bethel Church heard about Love INC's *Extra Mile* program she thought it might be the perfect way for her congregation to assist a young woman who had begun attending their services. Christa Strange was newly divorced with a six month old baby and making just enough to keep her from qualifying for food stamps or childcare assistance. Pastor Bonnie and other church members were impressed with how hard she was trying to make ends meet and by her desire to improve her life by becoming a nurse. They wanted to help but didn't feel equipped.

Bethel Church member, Nancy Fagan, received *Extra Mile* Coach training from Love INC and began meeting weekly with Christa. They set goals and created a budget. Weekly program incentives, such as a gasoline or store gift card or in kind items from the *Extra Mile* closet, helped Christa stretch her dollars. Coach Nancy helped Christa lower her car payments through refinancing. Church members supplemented her income by helping out with groceries and child care and the congregation occasionally assisted with rent and utilities. Christa was at times paid to provide childcare for church functions.

Pastor Bonnie says, "We felt comfortable helping her because of Christa's high level of transparency and work ethic."



Pastor Bonnie Cassida, former coach Nancy Fagan, Susan Houston, Christa holding Mikaelah, Connie Adams and her Grandson Ty

Christa told us she was raised by her grandmother, who had recently passed away. "I went from having no family to having all kinds of moms." Connie Adams and Susan Houston, in particular, took her in as a family member and have also become grandmothers to Christa's daughter, Mikaelah. Christa says, "We are now expected at all of their holiday gatherings."

Christa advises others interested in *Extra Mile*, "You need to be willing and ready for change. You also need to be willing to work for it, but it's worth it." Christa has paid off her car and will soon receive her Associate's Degree in Nursing from Columbia College.

Christa is already giving back. As president of her nursing class, she organized a drive to provide hygiene products for Love INC clients. She hopes to help others at her church by giving classes on patient advocacy and basic nutrition.