

Written By Rick Couch

The South Alabamian

From Carson Road, Pine Grove United Methodist Church appears to be just another small country church. On the inside, however, there is a congregation with a very big heart.

The church recently made a \$3,000 donation to Pilots for Christ to help with the purchase of a new plane. The presentation was even more special because Sadie Margaret Richardson, a member of the church who recently used the service to fly to Houston, Texas for treatment and surgery, handed over the check to Rosalyn and Johnny Sales.

Sadie Margaret, who has been referred to as the Leroy community's Christmas miracle, returned home from M.D. Anderson soon after the holidays with her parents Miranda and David following surgery to remove a tumor located on her spine.

Fortunately, surgeons eventually discovered that the tumor was benign, and she is expected to make a full recovery.

Friday, the miracle was clearly visible when Sadie Margaret was racing up and down the aisles of the church and climbing stairs. At one point, her parents had been told she might be paralyzed.

Throughout the process, the Pilots for Christ Facebook page offered frequent updates leading up to and following the surgery. They reported shortly after the procedure that the neurosurgeon was "very pleased with how things are progressing."

The surgeon was able to remove 90 percent of the tumor, and no radiation treatments were necessary.

Pine Grove United Methodist Church pastor the Rev. Jennifer Gregory said the series of events that led to their Christmas miracle also helped the congregation realize just how much of a blessing Pilots for Christ has been to the community.

"Pilots for Christ is such an awesome, awesome ministry," she said.

The church held a fellowship dinner to raise money for the service which was followed by an auction featuring baked goods and jewelry. Gregory said one member of the church baked 25 dozen cookies that sold for \$45 per platter. She also provided a cake that eventually sold for \$120.

Pilots for Christ and Sadie Margaret's challenges created an even tighter bond for an already close-knit congregation, Gregory said.

"When they found out the money was going to Pilots for Christ for what they had done for Sadie Margaret, it just brought everyone together," she said. "The Holy Spirit got involved, and we had so much fun."

Gregory said they have not heard the last of Sadie Margaret. She said she feels God's hand is upon her, and she is destined for great things.

Pilots for Christ, Inc. is a 501©3 nonprofit ministry that was established in Monroeville April 4, 1994 to serve southwest Alabama.

It has grown to serve the southeastern United States in specialized aviation transportation.

The nonprofit is more than just a service, Rosalyn said, it is an opportunity to share their testimony.

“We serve those in need who are physically unable to travel by other means, and in doing so, share the love of Christ,” she said. PFC transports ambulatory patients and never charges for the services provided, reducing the patient’s emotional stress, physical discomfort and financial burden.”

Pilot for Christ also serves pastors, missionaries and veterans along with assisting in disaster relief when hurricanes, earthquakes or fires occur by delivering medical and humanitarian supplies.

For the past three years, PFC has grown tremendously and now has a full-time professional staff. With this staff, PFC has grown from flying an average of 60 times per year to 324 families/flights in 2016 for a total of 1,940 served in 22 years.

Fortunately, community support has grown as well. Donations increased from \$177,700 in 2013 to \$894,600 in 2015. The 2016 numbers topped \$1 million.

This allowed PFC to acquire the aircraft and hangar in 2016. With a professional staff on board, PFC has been able to increase the reach and scope of public awareness through social media in eight different venues including videos, speaking engagements, grant writing, print, corporate proposals and television. To date, social media pages are reaching more than 200,000 people per week. With this type of awareness, the need has never been greater for contributions.

Rosalyn said PFC believes their ministry is essential to the area and that they are called by God to help fulfill this need as they depend solely on His provision and protection.

PFC does not receive any government funding, nor are they reimbursed by insurance. Everyone is encouraged to follow them on Facebook and check out their website, www.pilotsforchrist.net.

Shoppers who frequently use Amazon can also use AmazonSmile as a way to donate to Pilots for Christ. When you shop at smile.amazon.com, you’ll find the exact same low prices, vast selection and convenient shopping experience as Amazon.com, with the added bonus that Amazon will donate a portion of the purchase price to Pilots for Christ.