

Generosity

AT HOUSTON'S FIRST

GOD'S MONEY

Committed, intentional generosity gave longtime Houston's First members an up-close look at some of God's most amazing works — even in the leanest of times.

When Lonnie and Connie Hamilton lost their income not once, but three times, during the '80s oil bust, they decided to talk to God about a request they received to “double tithe” during an early building program at Houston's First. What they learned was twenty percent of nothing is nothing — except in God's economy.

The exact day Lonnie and Connie committed to a two-year double tithe to help build the education wing and Fitness & Recreation Center at The Loop Campus, he lost his job. “We tried putting a budget on paper to see how giving 20 percent without an income was going to work,” said Connie, “but we never figured it out.” God would give them an up close-and-personal object lesson on His provision during unemployment.

“We just went month to month and gave 20 percent of anything that came through the door,” said Lonnie. “Our income was way less than the amount to support our pledge.” And an amazing thing happened over that two-year period: they exceeded their \$10,000 pledge by \$67.

That Ebenezer stone (1 Samuel 7:12) would guide them in giving generously — no, hilariously, in the future. Lonnie went to work in Tulsa in 1988 and the couple plugged into a church for the next 20 years. They had had a taste of mission work before, but this time it became a 'boots on the ground' experience. They began supporting two couples that decided to “sell it all” and move to Cambodia to set up English clubs and spread the Gospel in Vietnam.

The Hamiltons made yearly trips to Cambodia to see firsthand the ministry they were supporting. “The missionaries established an orphanage that opened the door to share Jesus in the surrounding villages,” said Lonnie. “Each year, we raised enough money to feed more than 500 families during those visits and each time nearly 150 people accepted



Christ. They were baptized in front of the other villagers as a testament to their faith.” Seeing God at work in those ways prompted in them a desire for greater giving.

“We wondered what it would be like to set aside an account specifically for missions,” said Lonnie. “We decided it was God's money anyway, and we would do it and wait for Him to tell us where to spend it.”

They tithed on their salary and anything they earned above it they put into the missions account. “As God blessed us, the account grew significantly,” said Lonnie. “We tried to clear out the account every year. We sat down to write checks to the missionaries and we would giggle as we gave.”

Connie and Lonnie moved back to Houston in 2008, and again joined Houston's First. They were led to participate in MISSION 1:8, the two-year Houston's First generosity initiative that supported missionaries, church plants, and parachurch organizations in Houston and across the globe. Seeing the generosity ladder illustration used by Pastor Gregg challenged the Hamiltons to an even higher level of giving. “You can't outgive God!” said Connie.

As they were sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leadership in giving, the Hamiltons discovered that over time the Lord had provided a way for them to help people on five continents — “Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth,” said Connie. “The cool part is, it's not ours. When the Holy Spirit says give, it's easy to let go of something you've already given.”

WHAT IS YOUR GENEROSITY STORY?

Share it at HoustonFirst.org/MyStory.

NEWS + UPDATES

Houston's First Baptist Church is a relevant, biblical community where we **gather our hearts**, **grow our souls** and **give our lives** as we seek to fulfill the Great Commission.

TWEET OF THE WEEK: “32.4 acres for @HFBCYcypress in Bridgeland is officially closed/fully funded! Praise God from whom all blessings flow!” — Jason Swiggart, @Jswigg

ALL CAMPUSES

HighPoint Bible Study

Wednesdays @ 11:30a

This weekly downtown Bible study will return on Sep 16 in the Wells Fargo Plaza auditorium (1000 Louisiana) with Dr. David Self speaking. Bring your lunch and be ready for the lesson at 12:10p. Visit HoustonFirst.org/HighPoint to learn more.

CONTACT Diane.Bagby@HoustonFirst.org

Three Strands Marriage Retreat

Fri, Nov 6-Sun, Nov 8 — Jordan Ranch, Schulenburg

Gain a better understanding of yourself and your spouse and increase the joy and intimacy of your marriage at this retreat facilitated by Sienna Campus Pastor Jeff Rees and his wife, Martha. The weekend is open to members and non-members. Register at HoustonFirst.org/Sienna at \$595 per couple before Oct 9.

CONTACT Kelli.Boylan@HoustonFirst.org

MARRIED YOUNG ADULTS

Re|Create Date Night

Fri, Oct 9 @ 6-10p — The Loop

Plan ahead to enjoy a night out with your spouse! We'll provide “date kits” for download from HoustonFirst.org designed to help you be intentional about the time you spend together. Registration for childcare at The Loop (Birth-Kindergarten) opens on Wed, Sep 9, at HoustonFirst.org/Events. Space is limited!

CONTACT Melanie.Russell@HoustonFirst.org

WOMEN

Living Proof Live Simulcast

Sat, Sep 12 @ 9:15a-4:15p

The Loop and Sienna Campuses

Gather with women of all ages for a live simulcast of Beth Moore teaching on *Audacious* — her new book that dives into the message that has compelled her to serve women around the globe. Register for The Loop or Sienna Campuses at HoustonFirst.org/Events.

CONTACT Haylee.Nelson@HoustonFirst.org

MEN

Warrior's Heart

Every Thursday, Sep 10-Dec 10 @ 6:30-7:30a

The Loop (Fellowship Ctr)

Starting this fall, in a new series entitled Great Men of Faith, we'll look at men who show themselves to have faith in all types of situations. Gather with other men each week for godly teaching by different speakers. Breakfast is available for \$5. Registration at HoustonFirst.org/Men is encouraged, but not required.

CONTACT Emily.Brown@HoustonFirst.org

Man Up! Men's Retreat

Oct 23-24 — Trinity Pines Conf Center

Wherever you are in your journey, the God of the universe is excited to help you take the next step. Gather with men from every campus for an action-packed time of adventure, inspiration, and connection with keynote speaker Ben Stuart, worship leader Ryan Langford, and numerous breakout leaders. Details and registration at HoustonFirst.org/Men.

CONTACT Emily.Brown@HoustonFirst.org

THE LOOP

Life Bible Study Leadership Luncheon

Sun, Sep 13 @ 11:30a-1:45p — The Loop (Fitness & Rec Ctr)

Leaders with any role in a Life Bible Study are invited to this kick-off of the new semester! Hear how God is using Life Bible Studies to impact lives of members, leaders, and those in the community. People interested in leading are encouraged to come, too. RSVP at HoustonFirst.org/Events, and register for childcare if needed (Birth-5th grade).

CONTACT Judy.Cox@HoustonFirst.org

Make It Your Church Orientation

Sun, Sep 20 @ 12:30-1:45p — The Loop (Fellowship Ctr)

Discover what it means to be a member of Houston's First! You'll meet staff members, hear about our mission, vision, and ministries, and learn how you can make Houston's First your church. RSVP and learn more about membership at HoustonFirst.org/Membership.

CONTACT Malcolm.Marshall@HoustonFirst.org

NEXTGEN MINISTRIES

Middle School Retreat

Fri, Oct 2 @ 6p-Sun, Oct 4 @ 4p

Lake Tomahawk, Livingston

Ready to get away? Leave school, homework, and distractions behind and spend a weekend with The HUB! Meet new people, connect with others, experience great worship, play crazy games — and enjoy a few surprises! Don't let anything keep you from Middle School Retreat! Register for \$90 by Wed, Sep 30, at HoustonFirst.org/Events.

CONTACT Susan.Newman@HoustonFirst.org

COLLEGE

Fajita Dinner

Sun, Sep 13 @ 6:30p — The Loop (Fitness & Rec Ctr)

Gather with the College Ministry for a FREE fajita dinner! Meet Pastor Gregg, the College Ministry team, and other college students while you hear about what we're doing this year. Visit HoustonFirst.org/Events for info on free transportation from UH and HBU, or text/call 832.791.4685. Students from all colleges are welcome!

CONTACT Natalie.Stotts@HoustonFirst.org

WOMEN

Called

Every Monday, Sep 14-Oct 19 @ 6:30-8p

The Loop (Fellowship Ctr)

To be called by God doesn't mean being sent to a remote village to do hard work. The call of God is “know Me,” not “show Me.” Gather with other women of all ages as Gari Meacham teaches a six-week study on how to better understand your calling. Learn more at HoustonFirst.org/Women.

CONTACT Haylee.Nelson@HoustonFirst.org

MEN

Men: Serve

Sat, Sep 19 @ 8a-1p — The Loop (Oasis Rm)

Men will gather at The Loop then head out in teams to serve the widows of our church family around the city. Yard work, home repairs, car maintenance, and other tasks — there is a place for you to serve! Register by Fri, Sep 11, at HoustonFirst.org/Men.

CONTACT Emily.Brown@HoustonFirst.org

CYPRESS

PLACE Cypress

Every Wednesday, Sep 9-30 @ 6-8p — Cypress Ministry Ctr

Are you aware of your spiritual gifts? Interested in learning how your personality, passions, abilities, and life experiences interweave with your spiritual gifts to create a place for you in ministry? In this course, learn more and find your PLACE at the Cypress Campus. Register at HoustonFirst.org/Cypress.

CONTACT Kathi.Johnson@swbell.net

DOWNTOWN

PLACE Downtown

Every Wednesday, Sep 16-Oct 14 @ 7-8:30p

Vine Street Studios

God calls all Christians to love and minister to others in their everyday lives. PLACE is designed to help you discover how your personality, spiritual gifts, passions, and life experiences can work together to make a difference for His Kingdom. Register at HoustonFirst.org/Downtown. Vine Street Studios is located at 1113 Vine St., Suite 117.

CONTACT Peter.Lee@HoustonFirst.org

SIENNA

Sienna Mission Trip to New York

Oct 28-Nov 1, 2015

Jordan Floro and Jeff Rees are leading a mission team team to New York City. The team will encourage, support and assist the Connection Church in Astoria, Queens, as they plan for their Halloween Outreach. Visit HoustonFirst.org/Missions to fill out a Mission Trip Interest Form by Tue, Sep 15.

CONTACT Jeff.Rees@HoustonFirst.org

SPANISH

Celebración Familiar

Tue, Sep 15 @ 6:30-8:30p — The Loop (Harbor Rm)

The Spanish Campus is coming together for a Family Night with food and fun! Bring your family and invite your friends for bowling, games, laughs, and much more. This is a great time to introduce others to your church family, so RSVP at HoustonFirst.org/Espanol.

CONTACT Karina.Bazaldua@HoustonFirst.org

UNSTOPPABLE GOSPEL

MISSIONS CONFERENCE

Nov 13-14 — The Loop

At this first-of-its-kind event at Houston's First, discover how you can be part of spreading the unstoppable Gospel at home and around the world. Learn from keynote speakers, explore topics in breakout sessions, and find out where our mission trips are headed in 2016. Register at HoustonFirst.org/Unstoppable.

MINISTRY IMPACT YEAR-TO-DATE TOTALS FROM JAN 1 TO AUG 23, 2015

DECISIONS

770 New Church Members
133 Joined By Baptism



ATTENDANCE

155,430 in Life Bible Studies
(4,571 weekly average)

187,673 in Worship Services
(5,520 weekly average)

19,649 on Webcast
(578 weekly average)

MISSIONS

27 Mission Trips with
2,074 Team Members



GENEROSITY

6,115 Givers to Great Commission Giving
1,426 were First-Time Givers



SUNDAYS AT HOUSTON'S FIRST

The Loop Campus

7401 Katy Fwy • Houston, TX 77024

Worship 9:15a-11a-5p

Life Bible Studies 8a-9:15a-10:45a-6:30p

Cypress Campus

10300 Warner Smith Blvd • Cypress, TX 77433

Worship 9:30a-11a

Life Bible Studies 9:30a-11a

Downtown Campus

1200 Louisiana St • Houston, TX 77002

Worship 11a

Life Bible Studies 9:30a

Sienna Campus

4309 Sienna Pkwy • Missouri City, TX 77459

Worship 9:30a-11a

Life Bible Studies 9:30a-11a

Spanish Campus

7401 Katy Fwy • Houston, TX 77024

Worship 5p

Life Bible Studies 6:30p



HOUSTON'S FIRST
BAPTIST CHURCH
PASTOR GREGG MATTE

D I F F E R E N C E M A K E R S

MORE STORIES:

'TIL DEATH DO US PART

GIVING BACK

FINDING COMMON GROUND

GOD'S MONEY

SEP 6, 2015

GROWING OTHERS WITH YOUR STORY

At Houston's First, mentoring programs connect members with a desire to invest in others with those seeking to grow in their faith — and what it means to live it out. Mentors don't have to have all the answers. They can make a difference simply by being available, listening, and sharing their stories.



PASS IT ON!

Stories are meant to be told. Visit HoustonsFirst.org/MyStory to share these stories via social media or email.

‘TIL DEATH DO US PART

What's the secret to a happy and fulfilling marriage that lasts? Many young couples at Houston's First have found a ringside seat to some of the most godly and enduring marriages. Might yours be one of them?

Are divorce rates the same for Christians and non-Christians? Statistics cited in the media for years would lead you to think so. Drilling deeper into the details of Christian couples' relationships that include an active, daily prayer life, regular church attendance and seeking out mature, longer-married couples for counsel and friendship may prove to discredit questionable statistics.

"When we got married, we thought we had it all figured out," said Houston's First member Ken Kapp, who celebrated 29 years of marriage with Cindy at the end of June this year. "It surprised us when things kind of started to unravel in the early years. It was as if God said, 'Hey, if you think you can do it on your own — go for it!'" The Kapps decided, in fact, that they could not do marriage without God.

After about 15 years of actively seeking the Lord and working through some of their own marital bumps and potholes, Ken and Cindy began helping with premarital counseling through the Julianna Poor Memorial Counseling Center at Houston's First. Beginning in 2000, they were asked to assist with weekend workshops — 11 couples at a time — going through the preparation for marriage program. Seven years into the program, the Kapps agreed to meet in their home to work through the premarital curriculum with an engaged couple who was unable to attend the workshop. This meeting became the prototype for "2-on-2," a personalized counseling ministry for nearly- and newlyweds.

Now, engaged couples who prefer a more in-depth approach to marriage preparation may choose 2-on-2 as a counseling option. "2-on-2 exploded!" said Ken. "In just a short time we had to start limiting the number of couples we counseled." Ken and Cindy have mentored more than 230 couples through the program over the past eight years. Only eight other mentor couples are facilitating 2-on-2 currently, a number that cannot support the demand for the program.

"The Kapps were very open and honest with us about their marriage and encouraged us to learn from their mistakes," said Porter Nelson, a former 2-on-2 mentee with Chelsea, his wife of four months. "They were so hospitable as we met in their home each week. They fostered a safe and welcoming environment

where we felt comfortable opening up to them about anything and everything that had to do with our relationship."

Premarital counseling opportunities also include the Newlywed or Close Life Bible Study, a 50-week curriculum that includes marital hot-button topics such as communication, finances and resolving conflict. "There is a 90 percent-plus success rate for couples involved in the preparation for marriage and Newlywed or Close programs at Houston's First," said Ken. "We figure the divorce rate in the programs to be about seven percent." Spending time learning God's principles and how to apply them in marriage creates an environment for lasting success.

Though mentoring opportunities are scheduled through the Counseling Center, the Newlywed or Close Life Bible Study allows couples the flexibility of starting anytime. And, they can work their way through all the modules until they are finished. "Marriage is vital," said Cindy, "and biblical counseling is needed in our society. Many young couples haven't had parents that modeled a good marriage. They need someone they can observe — and who has a heart for mentoring them."

Ken and Cindy admit to not having a perfect marriage. No one does. As they walk with Christ in a committed marriage and have opened their lives to help young couples build their own strong marriages, they hope to encourage others who feel called to do the same. "Married couples who have a willingness to spend time with those just starting out are needed as mentors," said Cindy. "And what a blessing it has been to build solid relationships with these couples. Even after they get married, they know if they have trouble in their marriage, they can always call us."



GIVING BACK

What would you offer to encourage a young man in his faith? One Houston's First mentor found that a weekly conversation over breakfast made a world of difference.

Remembering where we have been, seeing a need and taking action is what it takes for God to use our unique talents for His Kingdom. Houston's First member Dan Barrett turned 50 last year and decided it was time to give back. A video message by well-known Christian pastor John Piper motivated him to sign up for a preparatory class sponsored by Generation to Generation, a mentoring ministry for men at Houston's First. Piper spoke a sentence that moved Dan to act: "Only what's done for Christ will last."

Dan had grown up a Catholic and was committed to the Lord early in life, but over time had stopped walking with Him. In 2001, a series of events left Dan reeling and reconsidering his relationship with God. "My dad had a heart attack, my uncle passed away, the house flooded, my wife Shawn had a bad wreck, and her father died," said Dan. "I felt I had to get right with God — to give up my anger and begin listening again."

Dan and Shawn, who had been a member of Houston's First when she and Dan were dating, found their way back in 2006, now with their girls, Grace and Lauren, who attended First Baptist Academy. In addition to mentoring, the Barretts are members of Followers of the Way Life Bible Study and they volunteer for student ministry events.

Dan's involvement in Generation to Generation began last fall with a three-week training session preparing Dan and other men to be mentors. In February this year, Dan began meeting David Adame, 24, for breakfast each week. "David is a remarkable young man," said Dan. "Our time together was casual. I wasn't teaching or counseling — it was conversation. I was listening and sharing experiences from my own life that I thought might benefit him."

David and Dan are both associated with commercial real estate and often talked about practical issues over breakfast. "God used Dan to pour wisdom and insight into my life," said David. "One of the most important areas of discipleship going into the program was to learn how to live out the Gospel in the workplace."

Work wasn't the only topic of discussion. Dan prayed and encouraged David in his calling as a missionary, something he had been praying about for some time. David left last month for a long-term mission trip.



"David's generation is stepping up," said Dan. "It's refreshing to see what's going on with young men his age." Dan hopes to find others he can encourage through mentoring.

"Lots of young men didn't have fathers while growing up," he said. "For them there was no modeling of things that a man should know, even something as simple as jump-starting a car. Christian men are needed to fill those roles."

GENERATION TO GENERATION

Generation to Generation is a 'lifestyle' mentoring ministry where men invest in the lives of each other through loving, laughing, listening, encouragement and biblical guidance. The goal of lifestyle mentoring is for mentors to bring younger men into their current season of life. Along the way, Generation to Generation helps men form relationships that are a source of support, growth and strength.

Open to men from every campus, Generation to Generation trainings are set for Sun, Sep 20, from 12:30-4p and Sat, Nov 21, from 8a-12p, both at The Loop Campus. To reserve your spot or learn more about becoming a mentor, contact Jim Jones (Jim.Jones@HoustonsFirst.org, 713.957.7681) or visit HoustonsFirst.org/Men.

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEN

Visit HoustonsFirst.org/Men to learn about these and more:

Warrior's Heart
Thursdays, Sep 10-Dec 10 @ 6:30-7:30a
The Loop (Fellowship Ctr)

Man Up! Men's Retreat
Oct 23-24
Trinity Pines Conference Center

FINDING COMMON GROUND

A mentor in the Women's Ministry shares her story of pain and discouragement to speak truth and healing into the lives of other women.

"There's just something different about the ladies at Houston's First," said Anna Hasselbring, who joined the church in 2004. She initially visited while attending Beth Moore's Tuesday night Bible study during Beth's long service here. The Prayer Ministry and ladies in First Place 4 Health, a biblical health management program, provided guidance and support as Anna sought the Lord and continued on a long road of emotional healing. His healing and her spiritual growth prepared Anna to mentor young women who need a prayer partner, an encourager or just a listening ear.

Anna was born in El Salvador, where she grew up on a tropical coffee plantation. She was raised Catholic and felt God's pursuit of her at an early age. Anna didn't hear the Gospel until age 17 when she moved to the capital, San Salvador. She



readily accepted Christ, but wasn't discipled until she moved to the States where two older brothers had settled. "I had no one to walk alongside me," she said. "I believe I'm passionate about mentoring because during the years from 18 through my early 20s I had no mentor."

Her first marriage at 22 was her "ticket out" from the care of her brothers, who kept a

tight rein on their baby sister. "It was a foolish decision," she said. "I married an alcoholic like my father, but the Lord protected me those six years." Though Anna had no relationship with her father (he had never even lived with the family), she had followed in her mother's footsteps when choosing a husband.

A new Christian in a new country, Anna lost her mother, just 54 years old, in the Salvadorian earthquake of 1986. "I felt abandoned by God," she said. "I felt rejected by Him, and the enemy came against me with lies."

Anna finds common ground with young women who have been disappointed or abandoned by their earthly fathers or who have lost a dear loved one. "Some women have had no real relationship with their father," she explains, "and it often affects the relationship they have with their Heavenly Father."

But God proved to be a compassionate Father to Anna in providing a loving and godly husband, Kris Hasselbring, whom she met in Divorce Recovery at another Houston area church in 1992. They married two years later.

Women of all ages are drawn to Anna's warm and caring nature. She became involved with T.A.G., Touching Another Generation, a mentoring

ministry for women at Houston's First, and has mentored five women in the last two years.

"I really connect with Millennials," said Anna. "During a mission trip to Indonesia last year, I met a young woman, also on the trip, who had lost her sister to cancer. It's a sorrow that only another person who has lost someone can understand."

As Anna was encouraged by the ladies she met at Houston's First, so she now encourages others. Anna met Laura Brown in Crossing the Jordan Life Bible Study and became her friend and unofficial mentor. "When I was struggling terribly with doubt, she spoke the truth of the Word of God to me," said Laura. "When I am baffled as to the correct step to take, her gift of wisdom and her knowledge of Scripture directs me."



The Women's Ministry not only desires for all women to know they are uniquely designed and loved, but for all women to feel connected to the body of Christ. Through their mentoring ministry, Touching Another Generation (T.A.G.), the Women's Ministry enables mentors to touch the lives of individuals and speak truth into their lives on a more intimate level.

Touching Another Generation applications for 2016 will be available at every campus beginning Sun, Nov 8. Women wanting to be a mentor or a merea (Hebrew for *young friend*) can learn more at HoustonsFirst.org/Women or by contacting T.A.G. Coordinator Nancy Taylor (Nancy.Taylor@HoustonsFirst.org, 713.957.7641).

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN

Visit HoustonsFirst.org/Women to learn about these and more:

Living Proof Live Simulcast with Beth Moore
Sat, Sep 12 @ 9:15a-4:15p
The Loop and Sienna Campuses

Becoming a Woman of Influence
Wednesdays, Sep 28-Nov 2 @ 6:30-8:30p
Cypress Campus Ministry Center

Called with Gari Meacham
Mondays, Sep 14-Oct 19 @ 6:30-8p
The Loop (Fellowship Center)

Becoming a Woman of Purpose
Wednesdays, Oct 14-Nov 18 @ 6:30-8p
The Loop (Rm 258)