

UNSTOPPABLE GOSPEL

THE OFFERING

WHO WILL SEND THEM?

A \$23 million budget shortfall at the International Mission Board is making an impact on the spread of the gospel around the world as missionaries like John and Jennifer Fisher are being asked to make unexpected life choices. How will the church respond to God's call to support world missions?

John and Jennifer Fischer spent the past 16 years in East Asia sharing the Gospel of Christ with businessmen and the last 10 years mobilizing house churches to present the Gospel and disciple factory workers in a city of six million. The Fischers are supported by the International Mission Board (IMB) and were offered voluntary retirement in September as part of a restructuring program to stabilize the organization's precarious financial position. This year's World Mission Offering, "Unstoppable Gospel: The Offering" will primarily fund missionaries with the IMB, a missionary sending agency affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, so that the message and love of Christ may continue to be spread throughout the world.

The Fischers were married at Houston's First, but their careers took them to Dallas, where they discovered a love for short-term missions. In 1999, they left lucrative careers to go into fulltime missionary service. John, a former international marketing executive, and Jennifer, a physician's assistant, followed God's lead and ultimately found a niche ministering to factory workers, primarily women living in company dormitories. The women left behind home and children to make a living in the city, returning to see their families only once each year.

"My white face got us in the door," said John. "I built relationships with the factory owners, asking to share the gospel with their employees and give them health and dental check ups. These owners weren't Christians, but they never turned us away."

The couple worked hand-in-hand with local house churches, whose members would disciple and care for the workers. With a church planted, the Fischers were free to move to another factory to begin the process again. Among the 20-30 factory churches they started over the past 10 years, several thousand workers became Christians.

Chris and Jamie Suel were commissioned by Houston's First in 2008 and began serving as missionaries to Kenya the following year, where they have served as church planters in Nairobi. Over the years, they discovered a strategic advantage in engaging university students, mobilizing and training them to reach the unreached in East Africa.



Jennifer and Jeff Fischer

"There are fewer barriers when people are trained to reach out to those in their own culture," said Chris. "We provide vision, strategy and training, then we take them on mission."

The IMB funds living expenses for Chris, Jamie and their five children, ages 9 to 18. Morningstar, their Life Bible Study class, also offers moral support by writing them throughout the year, and sending e-mails and care packages to make birthdays special for the kids.

Suels survived a terrorist attack at the Nairobi Mall. The family split up and hid as they listened to machine gunfire, exploding hand grenades and helicopters circling overhead. The family kept in contact by cell phone as terrorists tried to lure people out by pretending to be police. Eventually, Jamie and four of the children made it to safety. When Chris and a son moved to locate the rest of the family, they encountered a barrage of gunfire that ricocheted off their escalator. Two hours later the two safely joined the rest of the family.

The IMB sent the family home to the States to regroup the following summer. "It's no cheap thing to send seven people to the U.S. for counseling," said Chris. "The IMB also provides living expenses, insurance, vehicles, gas for travel, even some scholarships to help our children attend college."

Chris notes that when the family returns to Kenya in February next year there will be fewer than 10 or 12 missionary families remaining in his regional "cluster." Just over 10 years ago, 100 families were on the field to minister in Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and other East African nations.

Houston's First members and friends have an opportunity in November, December and January to be difference makers, extending generosity to people groups in the farthest reaches of the world by giving to Unstoppable Gospel: The Offering — also known as the World Mission Offering. The majority of the funds will go the International Mission Board to fund missionaries around the world.

Those who are not called to serve in foreign missions can give. "How can they go unless they are sent?" said Chris. "The role of the sender is of equal importance with the one who goes."

GIVE TO UNSTOPPABLE GOSPEL: THE OFFERING AT HOUSTONSFIRST.ORG/UNSTOPPABLE

MINISTRY IMPACT YEAR-TO-DATE TOTALS FROM JAN 1 TO OCT 25, 2015

DECISIONS

933 New Church Members
169 Joined By Baptism

18% OF NEW MEMBERS
WERE BAPTIZED

ATTENDANCE

200,203 in Life Bible Studies
(4,767 weekly average)
236,872 in Worship Services
(5,509 weekly average)
24,675 on Webcast
(574 weekly average)

MISSIONS

33 Mission Trips with
2,163 Team Members



GENEROSITY

6,524 Givers to Great Commission Giving
1,737 were First-Time Givers

26% OF GIVING WAS A
FIRST TIME GIFT

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: "When the wknd schedule & the toddler's nap don't cooperate with @HoustonFirst schedule - AppleTV to the rescue!" — Ryan Patrick, @ryanpatrick177

ALL CAMPUSES

HighPoint Bible Study
Wednesdays @ 11:30a — 1010 Lamar (Tunnel Level)
This weekly downtown Bible study is open to everybody! This week, Dr. David Self will be teaching. Bring your lunch, or purchase one there for \$8. The lesson begins at 12:10p. Visit HoustonFirst.org/HighPoint to learn more.
CONTACT Diane.Bagby@HoustonFirst.org

Deacons' Meetings & Church Conference

Today — The Loop
The Deacon Administrative meeting is at 2:30p in Rm 501/502. All Deacons will meet at 3:30p in Rm 504/505 followed by the monthly Church Conference at 4:30p. Anyone may attend the Church Conference, but only church members may vote.

NEXTGEN MINISTRIES

As We Go
Fri, Nov 13 @ 5:30p-Sat, Nov 14 @ 7p — **The Loop**
As We Go is short for "AS Christians WE help people GO to Heaven." The HUB Student Ministry from all campuses will join Unstoppable Gospel: The Conference, training up students to reach this world for Christ. We'll do missions projects, games, worship and much more all weekend long! Register and learn more at HoustonFirst.org/Events.
CONTACT Susan.Newman@HoustonFirst.org

COLLEGE/SINGLES/MARRIED

The Porch Live
Every Tue thru Nov 24 @ 7:13-9p — **The Loop (Fellowship Ctr)**
Houston's First is partnering with The Porch-Dallas to bring The Porch Live worship experience to Houston! People in their 20s and 30s gather on Tuesday nights for live worship, great teaching, and fellowship. Come see what The Porch Live is all about at HoustonFirst.org/Events.
CONTACT Joshua.Bagby@HoustonFirst.org

YOUNG SINGLE ADULTS

"Under the Texas Sky" Hoedown
Sat, Nov 21 @ 6-11p — **Oil Ranch**
Experience a night of Southern hospitality and downhome charm featuring classic country music, square dancing and an all-around good ol' time under the Texas sky. There will be plenty to do, including hay rides, tasty buffet and much more. Register through Sat, Nov 7, for \$35. Saddle up soon at HoustonFirst.org/Events!
CONTACT Joshua.Bagby@HoustonFirst.org

WOMEN

Women's Christmas Banquet Spectacular
Thu, Dec 3 @ 6-9p — **The Loop (Fellowship Ctr)**
Every other year, the Women's Ministry hosts a "Dine by Design" Christmas banquet. This year, kick-off the Christmas season with special banquet guest Melanie Shankle and music by Dora Pop. Women from all life stages, Bible studies, small groups, and campuses are invited to join together for a festive time of fun, fellowship, and laughter! Go to HoustonFirst.org/Women to get your ticket and learn more about hosting a table!
CONTACT Haylee.Nelson@HoustonFirst.org

MEN

Warrior's Heart
Every Thu thru Dec 10 @ 6:30-7:30a
The Loop (Fellowship Ctr)
In our *Great Men of Faith* series, we're looking at men who show faith in all types of situations. Different men teach each week, with Dr. David Self teaching on Moses this Thursday. Breakfast is available for \$5. Registration at HoustonFirst.org/Men is encouraged, but not required.
CONTACT Emily.Brown@HoustonFirst.org

THE LOOP

MARRIED YOUNG ADULTS

MYA Block Party
Fri, Nov 6 @ 6-8:30p — **Warrior Field**
Married Young Adults from The Loop Campus will team up with members of their Life Bible Studies to enjoy food, family time, and some friendly competition! The night includes inflatables for the kids and a queso cook-off! If you're not connected with a Life Bible Study, come to the Block Party anyway — it's the perfect time to meet other families. Register at HoustonFirst.org/Events.
CONTACT Kristin.Hawkinson@HoustonFirst.org

MEN

Generation-to-Generation Training
Sat, Nov 21 @ 8a-12p — **The Loop (Rm 143)**
Generation-to-Generation mentoring encourages men to walk alongside other men and assist in their spiritual growth. Learn the fundamentals of mentoring, including listening skills, scriptural guidance, and biblical friendship. The training time is required for all men seeking to be a mentor and a mentee at Houston's First. Register at HoustonFirst.org/Men.
CONTACT Jim.Jones@HoustonFirst.org

CYPRESS

WOMEN

The Bridge
Thu, Nov 5 @ 6:30-8:30p — **Peltier Home**
Save the date for this special evening hosted by the Women's Ministry at Cypress! Expect to experience a sweet time of worship and a word from Kelly Matte. This will be a wonderful opportunity for women of many generations to connect through community and praise. Childcare is not available. Register at HoustonFirst.org/Cypress.
CONTACT Andi.Farrell@HoustonFirst.org

DOWNTOWN

PRESCHOOL

Take a Break with Mommy
Tue, Nov 10 @ 10:30a-12:30p — **Discovery Green**
Interested in meeting with other young moms in the downtown area? First Friends offers play dates for mommies and their babies in a relaxing setting, and coming up next is fresh air and friendship during Toddler Time at Discovery Green! Let the kiddos play and meet other moms while taking a break to venture outside the normal routine.
CONTACT Kristin.Fowles@HoustonFirst.org

SIENNA

MEN

2nd Annual Tailgate
Mon, Nov 16 @ 6p — **Worship Center**
Men — huddle up to watch the Houston Texans take on the Cincinnati Bengals on the BIG Screen! Take a break and enjoy a night of football, games, and chili. Dads, bring your sons! The chili cook-off and games begin at 6p, judging begins at 7p, and the kick-off is at 7:30p. Register online at HoustonFirst.org/Sienna.
CONTACT Ron.Barkley@HoustonFirst.org

SPANISH

Deepening Discipleship — Profundizando El Discipulando
Every Wed thru Nov 18 @ 7p — **The Loop (Rm 145)**
Connect with the Spanish campus midweek! Gather with us as we grow in our salvation and learn to live an effective life in Jesus Christ! This semester David Oliveras is teaching on the book of Colossians.
CONTACT Karina.Bazaldua@HoustonFirst.org

MAKE IT YOUR CHURCH ORIENTATION

On Sun, Nov 15, discover what it means to be a member of Houston's First! You'll meet staff members from your campus, hear about our mission, vision, and ministries, and learn how you can make Houston's First your church. RSVP and learn more at HoustonFirst.org/Membership.

The Loop — @ 12:30p — The Loop (Fellowship Ctr)

Downtown — @ 12:30p — 1010 Lamar

Sienna — @ 12:30p — NextGen Suite 220-D

Spanish — @ 6:30p — The Loop (Harbor Rm)

Cypress Campus will host Make It Your Church Orientation in February 2016.



OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD

Stop by the Missions Office at The Loop Campus to pick up a shoe box (and instructions) to pack for a girl or a boy. Bring it to the Missions Office by Nov 15 and Samaritan's Purse will send it around the world as a means of sharing Christ this Christmas. *All boxes must be received at the Missions Office no later than Sun, Nov 15.*

LIFE BIBLE STUDIES

Life Bible Studies are the primary method for connecting with others and growing together at Houston's First. Visit HoustonFirst.org to find one that's right for you, or ask the Welcome Team at your campus for assistance.

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
1010 Lamar • 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

WHEN THE BIBLE COMES TO LIFE



MORE STORIES:
MEANT TO BE
SLAYING THE GIANT
WHO WILL SEND THEM?

NOV 1, 2015

DEFINING MOMENTS

A painful childhood memory, an unexpected phone call, an encounter with a stranger — each experience served as a defining moment in the lives of these Houston’s First members. God turned the pain into purpose and led to ministry that is making a difference.



PASS IT ON!

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

WHEN THE BIBLE COMES TO LIFE

Celebration returns after its 2014 hiatus with pageantry, holiday heritage and evangelism that heralds Christ as the world’s ultimate gift to mankind. And as one Houston’s First member recounts, *Celebration* changed her life forever.

When drawing believers into His Kingdom, God’s creativity knows no limits. In 2013, He used *Celebration*, the Christmas program at Houston’s First, to seal the deal for Laura Kerns. Co-workers, a happenstance meeting at a dog park, and Life Bible Study opened her heart to Jesus. But at *Celebration*, all the pieces fell into place as she saw God’s story unfold before her — and Laura’s life has never been the same.

“I went to church maybe four times in my whole life,” said Laura. “I really didn’t know anything about church. People at work kept inviting me to come, but I always felt like I didn’t belong there.”



Laura Kerns and Isabella

A trip to a dog park with friends turned interesting when some guys they met there invited them to church and to their young single adults Life Bible Study. One of them sent them a text that evening as a reminder. “The people who invited me were really nice,” said Laura. “I thought maybe they wouldn’t care that I didn’t belong.”

SHARE CELEBRATION!

Celebration returns with eight presentations this December 9-13. Who will you invite to enjoy the music of Christmas and hear the Gospel? Tickets are available at TheFirstChristmas.org, by phone at 1.866.200.9569, and at kiosks in the Main Foyer at The Loop Campus.

SUPPORT CELEBRATION!

The cast is in place and rehearsals are underway, but there are still opportunities to be a part of the *Celebration* ministry. Visit TheFirstChristmas.org and click “Join Cast & Crew” to learn about serving on the Welcome Team, helping with make-up, and other roles behind the scenes.

MEANT TO BE

As two Houston’s First members have discovered, opening their hearts and lives to children in need can have beautiful and unexpected consequences.

Kelley Porter has always opened her heart — and her home — to children who needed love, guidance and a place to stay. Kelley was a single and independent 19-year-old when she met Kim* at church and opened her home to this homeless teen for more than two years. It would not be the last time Kelley stepped in to help the girl, but the thought never crossed her mind that 15 years later the tables would turn. Houston’s First members Kelley and her husband Kevin Porter would be on the receiving end of a precious gift from Kim — the thing they wanted most in life, but couldn’t have.

When Kelley married Kevin Porter in 2004, the couple looked forward to the day they would have children of their own. But after more than a decade of unexplained infertility, they decided to leave the building of a family in God’s hands.

After years of little contact, Kim called Kelley in August last year to ask if she and Kevin would agree to take her son, a twin who was born at 21 weeks and weighed in at only 1.3 pounds.

“Yes, I’ll take him!” she told Kim. “We jumped in the car to go see the baby. He was not supposed to survive, but this baby was meant to be.”

Kim had arrived at the hospital and told the staff she was in labor, but they sent her home. And it’s a good thing they did. Though the baby was born in Kim’s toilet and sustained a brain injury when his tiny head made contact with the porcelain, EMS was called to the scene and they began taking lifesaving measures. That call made all the difference. Because the baby’s gestational age was only 21 weeks, the hospital likely would only have offered comfort care, not life-sustaining treatment. The baby was stabilized, admitted and taken to the Neonatal ICU for treatment.

Jesse, the other twin, a girl, didn’t make her appearance for 47 more days. A couple had agreed to adopt the twins, but no one expected the early arrival. The adoptive parents did not sign the paperwork to take custody of the baby boy, who had extensive medical problems and an uncertain future. They were prepared to take him off life support, but Kim would not allow it. That’s when she contacted the Porters.

The baby’s medical problems did not faze the Porters one bit. “I looked at that little boy and saw a miracle,” said Kelley. “God has a journey for everybody; whatever He has for this baby, we want to be a part of it.”

And the Porters were there for all of it, the treatment that included the insertion of a tracheostomy tube (for breathing), a gastrostomy tube (for feeding) and a seven-month hospital stay. Kelley alternated her stays each week; one week she went every day, all day to see how each shift nurse cared for him. The next week she spent all night, again so she could carefully watch the nurses to learn the best methods of care. “I learned nursing skills from all kinds of NICU nurses,” said Kelley. “Before long, I was doing all the trach care so I could be completely confident when we brought him home.”

During the long stay in NICU, Kelley began reading a baby Bible storybook to him each day and singing to him as he lay in the incubator. On the day of the last Bible story, one of the NICU nurses said, “Is that your last story? Well, today is the day you’re going home!”

The Porters were able to bring home their son in late February this year. The day they left, the doctors and nurses threw a big party. One of the doctors bought the baby a pair of cowboy boots like the ones his mama often wore to the NICU. The baby went home with the trach and the G-Tube, and was provided around-the-clock nursing



care until August. But the nurses really weren’t needed. Kelley continued giving care as she had done during the hospital stay at the NICU and the nurses had little to do.

Little Kevin Tyrone Porter II attended his adoption hearing on April 23 this year by ambulance. Because he was still on life support, little Kevin arrived on a stretcher in the courtroom so the judge could pronounce him a Porter.

Milk from 266 nursing moms at Houston’s First was donated to strengthen and nourish Kevin II during and after his hospital stay — and it worked. “The church has been 100 percent supportive,” said Kelley. The church family also covered them in prayer. The baby was able to have the trach tube removed in late September. The couple brought their new son to church for the first time on October 11. He now weighs 24 pounds, and the feeding tube will be removed when he becomes more confident in swallowing food.

Kelley and Kevin are amazed, but not surprised, at Kevin II’s recovery. The brain bleed was resolved and there is no resulting brain damage, and he had a heart murmur that has completely healed. “Every obstacle is gone!” said Kelley. “The doctors told us that Kevin would never walk or talk, but he can stand and already has said a few words. He even said ‘I love you.’”

Kevin II was premature by four months and has a four-month developmental delay, but he is quickly catching up as his daddy reads to him each day (he is on his third Bible). They sing to him and work with him to close the small gap. “Kevin is an amazing husband, but what a blessing to see how he is as a father,” said Kelley. “They are so close. When Kevin walks in the door after work and the baby hears his daddy’s voice, I don’t exist.”

Kevin II and Jesse, his twin, celebrate different birthdays, but they celebrated together this year on little Kevin’s July 8 birthday. The Porters have become friends with Jesse’s adoptive parents, who live in East Texas. They plan to stay in touch so the siblings can be part of one another’s lives.

The Porters see God’s faithfulness through this process, and they are in awe of the doors He opened during the seven-month hospital stay. “God gave us opportunities for ministry like praying with parents of NICU babies; witnessing to doctors and nurses; and becoming part of the Thru the Roof Special Needs Ministry at Houston’s First,” said Kelley. “As God led us through each challenge, we have been able to pray for others and share what we’ve learned along the way.”

*Name has been changed to protect privacy.

SLAYING THE GIANT

Motivated by a family crisis, a young couple has become differencemakers at Houston’s First as they offer valuable tools and guide others to live at peace by living within their means.

In David versus Goliath fashion, Cory and Sarah Mizell, members at the Downtown Campus of Houston’s First, are not yet 30 years old but have been assisting people of all ages in conquering a most formidable foe: financial bondage.

As lead volunteer consultants in the Julianna Poor Memorial Counseling Center’s Financial Consulting Ministry, Cory and Sarah and their team equip others with a customized plan for financial freedom. The plan includes biblical wisdom, tried and true principles the Mizells themselves have adopted, and a blueprint for establishing new habits that promote order, peace and stewardship. And best of all — consulting is free for Houston’s First members and non-members alike.

Cory and Sarah began dating while attending college in their home state of New Mexico. A desire to learn more about managing finances led them to take a 12-week Crown Financial class on biblical stewardship and money management. “Crown lit a fire under us,” said Sarah. “All the other members of the class were older and many of them said, ‘We wish somebody had taught us about this earlier.’” Shortly after, Sarah and Cory began leading Crown classes.

Sarah’s painful memory of her dad’s distress after a disastrous tech stock investment played a major role in fueling her desire to help others put their financial houses in order. Her dad and mom had tried to be good stewards in funding college for four children as well as their own retirement, but the tech bubble burst in 2001 and their entire investment was lost. The devastating financial blow to her family stoked the fire for ministry. Sarah led her parents through Crown in 2007. “God provided for them and strengthened their relationship as they walked together through that difficult time,” she said. “Now empty nesters, my parents were able to help us all through college, pay off debt and prepare for their future.”

Cory and Sarah married in 2009 and put down roots at Houston’s First. Within a couple of years, they were asked to become volunteer financial consultants. Sarah, who worked on the commodities trading floor at ConocoPhillips, and Cory, a chemical engineer, began working on advanced degrees and certifications, in part, to bolster their financial consulting ministry. Sarah earned her designation as a Certified Financial Planner at Rice University in early 2015. Cory completed his MBA three months later.

The Mizells meet with people who have very little and some who have much. “If a couple is young and doesn’t have much, we encourage them to develop good habits early,” said Sarah. “Problems tend to get magnified with bigger numbers.”

Several years ago, one young couple came to Cory and Sarah for financial consulting prior to getting married. “We began talking about marriage and I had some serious concerns about the significant debt load of student loans and credit cards he had,” said Dana*. They took the step to meet with the Mizells, who gave them a “Debt Snowball” worksheet and budgeting spreadsheets.



Cory and Sarah also work with couples that are more than 20 years older than themselves. The Mizells begin by quickly acknowledging the “elephant in the room.” Before long, age becomes a non-issue when clients see the wisdom, care and professionalism with which they approach financial consulting.

The couple never asks others to do what they themselves would not. Cory and Sarah adopted biblical principles to live by a budget. While tithing on their gross salary during MISSION 1:8, the two-year generosity initiative at Houston’s First, and giving to other ministries, Sarah left her job at ConocoPhillips to be a stay-at-home mom to their newborn, Cooper, now a year-and-a-half old. The couple took a 60 percent pay cut.

Regardless of one’s motivation, getting finances in order offers tangible and, in some cases, eternal benefits. Paying off credit card debt, student loans, funding retirement or giving to favorite charities have become the legacies of those who took the first step toward financial freedom. These abilities are a by-product of a changed heart and changed habits.

“To begin, people must decide if their standard of living is worth the stress,” said Cory. “The question is do they want to trade what they want most in life for what they want now?”

*Name has been changed to protect privacy.

FINANCIAL CONSULTING MINISTRY

Financial Consultants available through the Counseling Center are volunteers; they are not paid by the church and there is no fee for their services. Visit HoustonFirst.org/Counseling to read about the team of consultants and to find various financial resources. Individuals and couples interested in meeting with a volunteer financial consultant should contact Cory & Sarah Mizell at HFBC.Financial@gmail.com about taking the next step.