

A FOREVER HOME

More than 150 million orphans are living vulnerably in the world today, and while it's an overwhelming number, some children are finding their 'forever home' with families like those at Houston's First who feel the call to adopt.

By their second date, Megan Creamer and Jonathan Hala established a litmus test for continuing the relationship. They laid their cards on the table and discovered each had a commitment to adoption someday.

"God called me to adopt when I was just a teenager," said Megan. "Jonathan was in college when adoption became his priority. We had to decide that adoption was in our future together — or we couldn't continue dating."

The Halases joined Houston's First in 2009 and soon learned about Legacy685 Adoption, Foster & Orphan Care Ministry, a support community for those who have a heart for fostering and adoption. They were drawn to give to the Adoption Assistance Fund after forfeiting the right to their own 'someday' adoption savings account in favor of funding those who were already trying to adopt.

"We weren't planning on adopting anytime soon, so when Jonathan got a Christmas bonus, we decided to give it to the adoption fund," said Megan, "We knew that keeping it for ourselves wasn't what God wanted us to do."

In 2013, the couple started the adoption process and chose the Gladney Center in Fort Worth. By the end of the year, they were approved, but waited seven months before their daughter, Evangeline Ruth, was born.

"While we waited, all the Legacy685 people came alongside us and helped us every step of the way," said Megan. "Our Life Bible Study organized a garage sale to help

The couple sent off every penny they had at the time, but it didn't even cover initial adoption expenses. They had applied to the Fund for a matching grant and were awarded a direct grant that covered one-third of their agency costs. "Private adoption is astronomically expensive," said Megan. "The Assistance Fund committee awarded us way more than we were ever able to donate to the Fund."

The couple began the process a second time after their adoption was finalized in February 2015. They are still waiting, but the Assistance Fund came through again for the couple — and they are so grateful.

"We couldn't have paid for the adoption without help from the Assistance Fund," said Megan. "Being part of Legacy685 and receiving the grants have completely changed



NEXT STEP

More than \$1.5 million has been given to Houston's First members and non-members alike to defray adoption expenses, and the Fund needs replenishing. When our church family observes the Lord's Supper on Sun, Oct 16, we will receive a special offering during worship services at every campus to benefit the Legacy685 Adoption Assistance Fund.

GIVING AT HOUSTONSFIRST.ORG

Visit the Giving page at HoustonsFirst.org to read more generosity stories, make one-time or recurring contributions, give to mission trips, and more.

MINISTRY IMPACT YEAR-TO-DATE TOTALS FROM IAN 1 TO SEP 30, 2016

DECISIONS

853 New Church Members 150 Joined By Baptism



ATTENDANCE

196.422 in Life Bible Studies (5,036 weekly average) 223,387 in Worship Services (5,585 weekly average) 43,190 on Webcast (1,080 weekly average)

MISSIONS

31 Mission Trips with 1,906 Team Members



NEWS UPDATES

TWEET OF THE WEEK: "Thanks, @GreggMatte! It was a beautiful privilege to be able to minister again, thanks for shepherding such a godly, loving church!" — Nabeel Qureshi, @NAQureshi

ALL CAMPUSES

HighPoint Bible Study

Wednesdays @ 11:30a - 1010 Lamar (Tunnel Level) This weekly downtown Bible study is open to everybody! Downtown Campus Pastor Lee Hsia is teaching this Wednesday at 12:10p. Bring your lunch, or purchase one there for \$8. Visit HoustonsFirst.org to learn more.

CONTACT Diane.Bagby@HoustonsFirst.org

Mon, Oct 10 @ 6:45-8p — The Loop (Reception Rm)

CanHope ministers to families touched by cancer and those who love and care about them. Special guest Shane Hall, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Del City, OK, is a cancer survivor and former Hope House quest. We will share a meal together; an entree is provided, so please bring a salad, vegetable or dessert. Come enjoy this time of testimony, prayer and fellowship! RSVP to 713.957.6764.

CONTACT Sherry.Oradat@HoustonsFirst.org

Celebration Ticket Sales Launch Sat, Oct 15 @ 8-11a - The Loop (Main Foyer)

Be among the first in town to get tickets to Celebration — our musical Christmas production this Dec 7-11 at The Loop Campus! Enjoy Christmas music while our Ticket Sales team answers your questions and assists you in finding seats for the presentation you plan to attend. Visit TheFirstChristmas.org for presentation times, ticket prices, childcare information and more.

CONTACT Support@BrushFireTech.com

The Greater Houston Solemn Assembly Sat, Oct 22 @ 9a-1p — Husky Stadium @'HBU Our Pastor Emeritus Dr. John Bisagno and others invite you to come together with other Houstonians — across denominational racial, generational and political lines — to meet at the cross of Christ on behalf of our city and nation. Pre-worship begins at 8:30a, with the solemn assembly beginning at 9a. Visit TheGHSA.org for more about this citywide gathering. CONTACT The GHSA 2016@qmail.com

Under the Texas Sky Hoedown

Sat, Oct 29 @ 6-10p

The George Ranch Historical Park

Experience a boot stompin' good time at the Summit Hoedown! Young single adults (20s-30s) will gather at George Ranch Historical Park and enjoy a night of Texas dining, dancing, and an all-around good ol' time under the Texas sky! Tickets are available now, so saddle up soon at HoustonsFirst.org! CONTACT Joshua.Bagby@HoustonsFirst.org

Warrior's Heart

Thursdays @ 6:30-7:30a — The Loop (Garden Rm) In our new series, The Kingdom, we examine the Kingdom of God in the Old and New Testaments and all its implications on all of life, covering success, marriage, decision-making, conflict, friendship, career, and more. Different men teach each week, with Dallas Theological Professor, Dr. Willie Bolden teaching this Thursday. Breakfast is available for purchase in the Café. Registration at HoustonsFirst.org is encouraged, but not required. CONTACT Emily.Brown@HoustonsFirst.org

THE LOOP

MS Bonfire

Fri, Oct 21 @ 6-10:30p — Redweik Ranch

Middle School students are invited to chill and hangout with The HUB around a huge bonfire! We'll play outdoor games & activities, cook our dinner and dessert over the fire, plus hear the Word and worship. All who attend get a limited edition retreat sabbatical "MS Bonfire T-Shirt"! Bring a friend and don't miss out! Register for just \$20 (includes meal & shirt) at HoustonsFirst.org. CONTACT Tony.Bianco@HoustonsFirst.org

MARRIED YOUNG ADULTS

Re | Create Date Night

Fri, Oct 21 @ 6-10p - The Loop

Life is busy and schedules can quickly get away from us. Before we know it, it's been weeks since we've spent quality one-on-one time with our spouse. We can help make date nights with your spouse a reality! You decide where you're going to eat. We'll provide a kit with discussion questions to help you be intentional about the time you spend together. Safe, fun and inexpensive childcare is provided at The Loop Campus for children birth through 5th grade. Registration is required at HoustonsFirst.org.

CONTACT Ashley.Gillaspia@HoustonsFirst.org

CYPRESS

HUB Service: Boys & Girls Country Sat, Oct 22 @ 8:30a-1p

Cypress student ministry will head out to Boys & Girls Country, a Cypress Campus Ministry Partner, to support their mission by working the grounds and cleaning the residence facilities. Cost is \$20 per student to cover transportation and lunch. Meet at the Cypress Ministry Center. Registration is required at HoustonsFirst.org. CONTACT Hannah.Stovall@HoustonsFirst.org

DOWNTOWN

Share Your Faith Workshop Sat, Oct 15 @10a-2p

Vine Street Studios (1113 Vine St, Ste 117) The Share Your Faith Workshop is a comprehensive tool condensed into a one-day training session. In this workshop taught by Lee Hsia, you will learn and practice how to share the Gospel in five easy steps. Find out more and register by Thu, Oct 13, at HoustonsFirst.org.

CONTACT Lee. Hsig@HoustonsFirst.org

New Life Bible Studies Sundays @ 6:30p — The Loop

Get connected and grow deeper with the Español Campus! Try out one of our newly restructured Life Bible Studies on Sunday

- evenings following our 5p worship service: Nido Vacio: Empty nesters
- For adults with children no longer at home (Rm 262) • Nico Lleno: Couples & single parents
- For adults with children at home (Rm 258) • Solteros: Singles—Singles, 21 and up (Rm 261) Nuevos a la Familia: New to the church family
- For adults new to the church (Rm 263)

CONTACT Douglas.Hernandez@HoustonsFirst.org

SIENNA

Mon, Oct 24 @ 6p — Sienna Campus

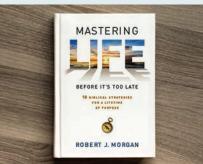
Watch the Houston Texans take on the Denver Broncos! Our chili cookoff begins at 6p and kick-off of the game is at 7:30p. The tailgate is free to attend, but register at HoustonsFirst.org to participate in the chili cook-off and to sign up for some "athletic" events (longest punt, bean bag toss, field goal, etc.) — with awards for the winners!

CONTACT Ron.Barkley@HoustonsFirst.org

LIFE BIBLE STUDIES

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





MASTERING LIFE

Mastering Life Before It's Too Late: 10 Biblical Strategies for a Lifetime of Purpose Pastor Gregg's essential reading this fall provides 10 workable routines for aligning your daily agenda with God's perfect will. *Mastering Life* is available from CornerBooks, and author Robert J. Morgan will be our guest speaker at The Loop Campus on Sun, Nov 27.



WEDNESDAY EVENINGS — THE LOOP

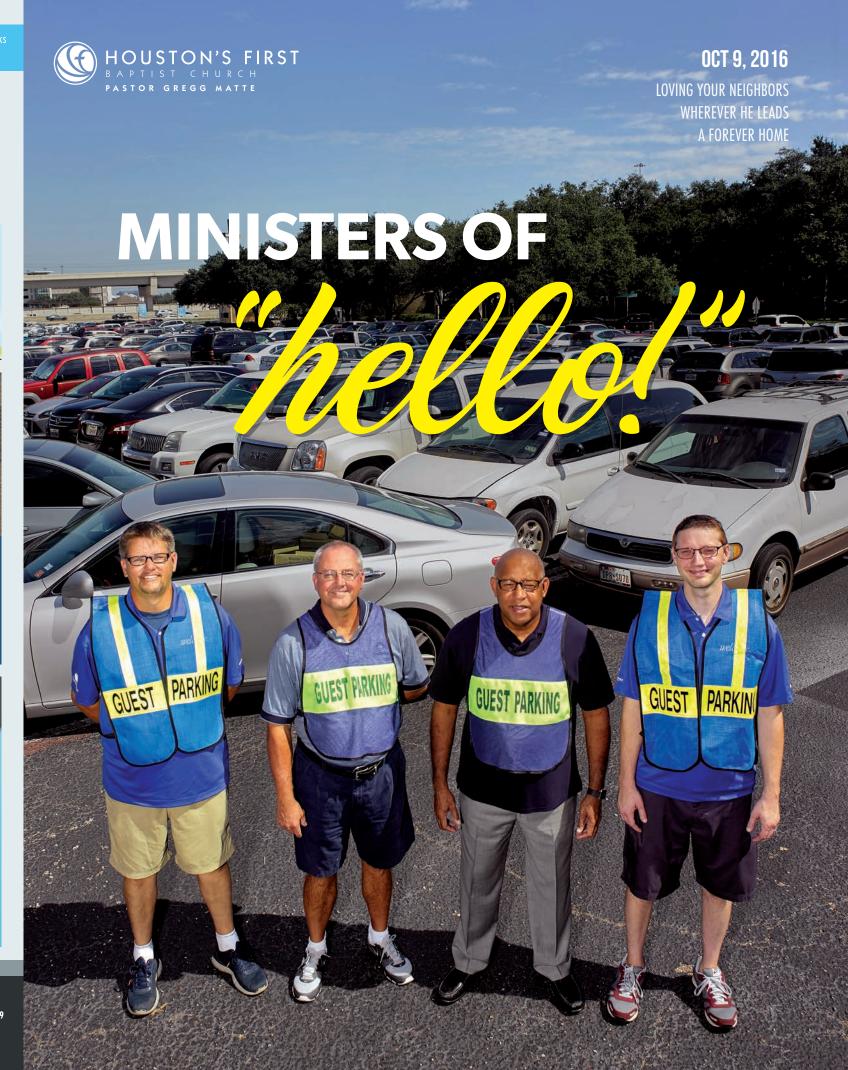
rams designed just for them. Pick up a Milestones Guide HoustonsFirst.org for more information, and to learn abo Inesday night options at our other campuses, too.

NidLink Cafe @ 4:45-6:15p — Fellowship Ctr ofundizando el Discipulado — Deepening Discipleship (Adult Spanish Bible Study) @ 7-8p — Rm 145 lestones classes @ 6:30-8p — various locations

SUNDAYS AT HOUSTON'S FIRST

The Loop Campus **Worship** 9:15a • 11a • 5p **Life Bible Studies** 8a • 9:15a • 10:45a • 6:30p

Sienna Campus 4309 Sienna Pkwy • Missouri City, TX 77459 Life Bible Studies 9:30a • 11a



FRIENDLY FACES

Jesus calls His followers the salt of the earth and the light of the world, but what does that mean in practical terms? We're to be a welcoming presence to the people we encounter, regardless of our physical location. In practicing hospitality, these Houston's First members are ushering people into the love of Christ.

MINISTERS OF "HELLO!"

Making a good first impression is not just vanity. One Houston's First couple believes it could actually be a deal-breaker for some guests who have a less-than-favorable first experience at church.

Houston's First member Charlie Murphy was a professional parker, first as a valet and later as general manager of a parking service that brought him and his wife Becky to Houston nearly 20 years ago, where they didn't know a soul. God used his background and the couple's experience being new people in a large church to create a ministry for guests that would make people of all ages feel right at home.

"We attended a church in Alabama with 500 people," said Charlie. "At Houston's First, there can be 500 in the parking lot alone."

For the past 18 years, Becky Murphy has directed the Guest Experience (GX) Team (formerly the Welcome Team) at The Loop Campus, recruiting, managing and training volunteers inside and outside to help guests feel welcome. Team members also help them find their way at The Loop, a daunting 450,000 square feet. But the "welcome" experience truly begins in the parking lot, and that's Charlie's territory.

"We have one chance to make a good first impression," said Charlie, "— about 3.5 minutes — before guests wonder if they should have stayed home."

Charlie and the team of 12 "ministers of parking" in the first-time guest parking area take their responsibility seriously, believing their job is bigger than making sure guests have a place to park. Each parking attendant is sensitive to why guests are coming to church in the first place.

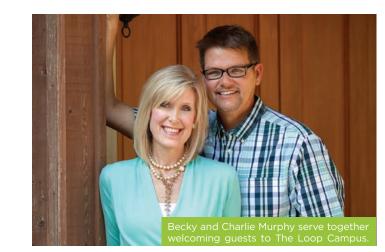
"We have one chance to make a good first impression — about 3.5 minutes — before guests wonder if they should have stayed home."

Charlie Murphy

"It's a privilege to be the first people guests see," said Gary Steen, a 12-year veteran in the guest parking area at the corner of Memorial Woods Drive and Katy Freeway. "We want to make it a good start to their day." Gary and his wife Misty grew up in Brenham, and went to a 65-member church.

"We thought going to a megachurch would be different," said Gary, "but we found ways to be close to others through the Parking Team and Life Bible Study — we've got a good, tight class, one that gets together often."

Ebony Grady gives credit to Becky for helping her get plugged into a worship service and Life Bible Study. Originally from Michigan, Ebony initially became a member of a much smaller church in Houston for two years but couldn't seem to meet people or find her place. On the advice of a friend, she visited Houston's First. Becky was the first person she encountered, and after getting counsel on which service to attend, she helped Ebony choose an LBS. "Houston's First is much bigger than where I had gone before, and it was a little overwhelming," she said. "But Becky introduced me to a class and I love all the people in it. Now, I'm on the class Welcome Team and the activity leader. I've also recently begun volunteering for CornerBooks."



Brandon Burke heads up the Parking Team at the Cypress Campus. "It's little things, like holding an umbrella for someone when it's raining, noticing if kids are in the car and directing them to the kids' area or working on learning people's names," he said. "We start recognizing cars and people, and we want to greet them and receive them in a way that makes them feel good about being here."

Wally James moved from San Antonio almost 15 years ago with his wife Nina and two children, Austin and Courtney. Their relationship with Houston's First began with First Baptist Academy, where the kids attended school. Wally loves connecting with the people he sees in the parking lot and makes it a point to speak to people. He says one encounter in particular seemed God-ordained.

"A guy got out of his car and looked really sad," said Wally. "I struck up a conversation and he told me he had just been diagnosed with cancer." Wally was quick to encourage him first by listening, and then sharing with the man that he was a cancer survivor, too. "We talked for about 10 minutes in the lot," said Wally. "He thanked me for sharing my story."

Becky has seen the GX Team grow from 21 volunteers in 1998 to nearly 165 today. "We would need 200 for every spot to be filled," she said. "Parking is one way the enemy keeps people from getting here, so it really is a mission field. We can't all go to Africa or China, but we can park in nearby garages and ride the shuttle. The guys in the lot are just another way we help guests to come see what God has in store for them that day."

NEXT STEP

Pastor Gregg has commissioned all Houston's First family members to be on the "welcome team" as we each contribute to a culture of hospitality at our church. In addition, each campus has a dedicated team of men and women who serve on Sundays at key points along a guest's journey—from parking lots to building doors, Welcome Centers to Worship Centers. Visit HoustonsFirst.org and search for "Guest Experience Team" to learn how you can join the team at your campus!

LOVING YOUR NEIGHBORS

Befriending neighbors almost seems like a relic of the past as busy schedules, social media and entertainment fills up free time. Some Houston's First members are intentional about forming relationships in their neighborhoods, creating opportunities to be a friend and extending an invitation to know Jesus.



"Our house is positioned conveniently so that people on the street gather to hang out in our driveway," said Brandi Cabiro, a 10-year Sienna Plantation resident and member of Houston's First. "Sometimes Mike and I set up a tent and everyone brings something to share. We're constantly reaching out to fellowship with people in our neighborhood."

Brandi and her husband Mike attended The Loop Campus when they were newlyweds and later directed a married young adult Life Bible Study before making the transition to a neighborhood church in Sienna Plantation, which became the Sienna Campus of Houston's First in 2013. "We felt God calling us out to the neighborhood," said Brandi. "Now there are about three or four families on the street who are strong Christians and are intentional about sharing the love of Christ."

The Cabiros and other Houston's First couples on their street, Tyler and Courtney Scott and Patrick and Megan Thompson, host Backyard Kids' Club and other events that promote adult fellowship and introduce neighborhood children to Jesus.

Light the Night is a special gathering of families in neighborhoods throughout Houston on Oct 31. Church members host gatherings that include games, food and giveaways for the neighborhood. The party atmosphere opens the door to new and/or improved relationships with neighbors. Last year, Courtney and Tyler, who's also the new director of Children's Ministry at the Sienna Campus, purchased supplies to create games like a football throw with Hula-Hoops and other sports games for neighborhood kids.

"We do group trick-or-treating early and then gather with the adults later in the evening to socialize," said Tyler. "We watch out for each other's kids."

Dan and Kristen Hilgart, residents of Towne Lake and members at the Cypress Campus of Houston's First decided to reverse trick-or-treat the neighbors more than two years ago while their new house was under construction. "We went around the neighborhood and knocked on doors," said Dan. "We brought candy and introduced ourselves. People invited us into their homes and we began building relationships before we even moved into the neighborhood."

Though it may seem unnatural to strike up conversations with people on the street, Kristin and Dan have made friends that way. "A couple of relationships we built started very casually," said Kristin. "We are intentional about meeting new people and having conversations to get to know them." Kristin passes out flyers for book clubs, the neighborhood moms' group, Backyard Kids' Club, and MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) to bring neighbors together throughout the year.

When the Hilgarts' neighbor across the street had brain surgery, Kristin left a note on the door to say she was praying for her. "She said it meant so much to her," said Kristin. "We didn't know each other well and it opened the door to have spiritual conversations and invite her to church — and she came. Everything turned out well with her health and they moved away, but when she left I know she was seeking God."

FALL FESTIVITIES AT HOUSTON'S FIRST

Visit HoustonsFirst.org to learn more about these activities — and invite others to come, too!

Fall Festival Sat, Oct 29 @ 10a-1p

officers at this community event.

Clubcreek New Life Community Baptist Church Impact Singles (late 30s/40s/50s) will run carnival games, pray with people, share the Gospel, provide meals, and show appreciation to police

Trunk or Treat Sun, Oct 30 @ 4–6p — Sienna Campus

Plenty of candy, fun carnival games and kids' bounce houses to safely enjoy the evening before Halloween! Costumes are encouraged!

The Great Pumpkin Theme Party Sun, Oct 30 @ 6-8p — Cypress Ministry Center Students in 6th-12th grades are invited to celebrate fall at the most pumpkinny pumpkin party ever! Bring a friend and wear a costume for this

FirstFest Mon, Oct 31 — The Loop Campus

An action packed evening of rides, games, candy and more! It's FREE and open for the whole community! Wear costumes and invite friends for a fun evening at The Loop!

Light the Night Oct 31

FREE fall fun event!

Make a difference in your neighborhood! Plan a block party, reverse trick-or-treating or small gathering in your driveway — any opportunity to know your neighbors and build relationships! Find tips and tools at HoustonsFirst.org.

WHEREVER HE LEADS

Life doesn't always go according to our own carefully drawn blueprint, even when we are walking closely in step with the Lord. A couple at Houston's First is giving hope to refugees while trusting God through their own illness, disappointment, and a significant change of address.

"We had to let go of our timeline," said Justin Seale, who along with his wife Tiffany was an International Mission Board (IMB) missionary in South Asia for nearly four years before returning to the United States in 2014. News that the baby Tiffany was carrying had significant medical issues and needed specialized care rocked their world, but even in the trial they believed God had a plan.

Justin joined Houston's First in 1993 and was chosen as one of the first Missions interns in the late '90s. He and Tiffany met in Summit Young Single Adult Ministry at Houston's First while ministering to refugees at Glendale Park Apartments in southwest Houston. The work there brought them together and fostered a desire to live out the Great Commission on foreign soil, which took them to South Asia in 2011.

"South Asia has the highest concentration of lost people — those who have never heard the name Jesus," said Justin. He and Tiffany studied Hindi and perfected it watching Bollywood (Hindi cinema) and cartoons. They began introducing the locals to Christ, discipling and training them to make an impact for Jesus among their own people.

Justin tells the story of a Hindu man he worked with who preached the Gospel to a village where there were no believers or a church. As he shared the message, a group of agitators began stirring up the crowd. Soon, a sea of angry Hindus surrounded the preacher. He thought, 'I'm too fat to run,' so he just kept preaching. "Most of the village followed Jesus that day," said Justin. A church trainer went back two weeks later and several of the troublemakers walked into the training room. The men had accepted Christ that day and were there for discipleship training.

Tiffany and Justin saw powerful conversions during their time in South Asia as Christ began saving locals, who, in turn, began sharing the Gospel. "It was like the book of Acts coming alive," said Justin.

The Seales rented a home in South Asia and had planned to live, train people and plant churches there indefinitely. But God had another plan.

The couple thought they were finished having babies after the births of Jonathan, Anna and Abigail, but in 2014, Tiffany became pregnant again. They planned to go back to Louisiana, where Tiffany's parents lived, deliver the baby, stay several months and return to South Asia. Seven months along in the pregnancy, however, the obstetrician detected problems with the baby. She was diagnosed with Greig's Syndrome, a rare disorder that could have a major impact on her physical and cognitive development.

After an emergency C-section, Baby Alissa was whisked to the NICU for a weeklong stay. At six weeks old, she stopped eating and was readmitted. At age three months, Alissa had surgery on her skull, and later a feeding tube was inserted.

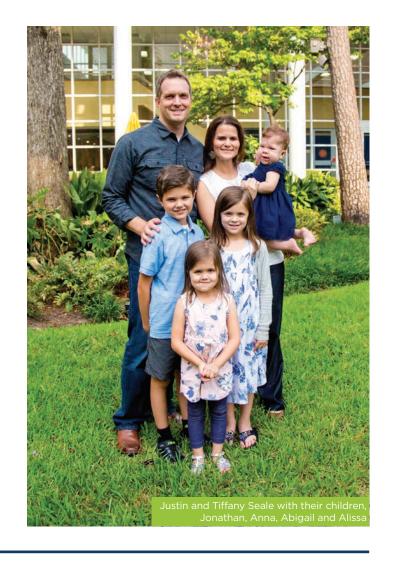
The immediate future was clear; the family would not be returning to South Asia. More surgeries followed to help with eating, and at age one-and-a-half, Alissa is showing signs of developmental delays.

"Our situation has been extremely difficult — it's been the loss of a dream," said Tiffany,
"— the disappointment of not returning to the work we love; the devastation of having a
child with so many special needs; and of having to start over here in America. But never
before in my life have I felt the Lord's nearness, presence and power as I do now."

After Alissa's birth, Justin reached out to his old "boss," William Taylor, missions pastor at Houston's First, for any career opportunities that would allow the family to be closer to top-tier health care. And as it happened, William was looking for an associate director for Faith Center-Harwin to minister to refugees in Southwest Houston. "Justin had the experience working with refugees, and he speaks Hindi, which many of the nearby residents also speak," said William. "We already had a relationship with Justin, and he understands the culture of Houston's First. It seemed an easy transition."

Justin oversees and manages social services at Faith Center-Harwin, with the goal of making disciples of the refugees, who represent almost 350 people groups living in the area.

"We don't know the future," said Justin, "but God is leading our family." Tiffany agrees. "We may not know what the days ahead will look like for us," she said, "but I know He does and I know He is in control. That is all I need for today."



NEXT STEP

Both Faith Center-Harwin and Faith Center-Spring Branch have opportunities to serve throughout the week, including teaching ESL, helping in the Food Pantry & Clothes Closets, assisting with Kids' Clubs on Saturdays, and many more options. Contact Justin.Seale@HoustonsFirst.org / 982.209.6651 (Harwin) or Claudia.Reyes@HoustonsFirst.org / 713.554.8817 (Spring Branch) about being a part of the Faith Center teams!