

FAITH IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

When the ranks are being thinned through layoffs at the workplace, what sort of family increases their tithe to the church? A Cypress Campus family shares their story.

Gary Smith has worked in the oil and gas industry nearly all his married life. For 12 years, he and his wife Candy, a teacher, have ridden the oil price rollercoaster, which determined longevity of employment and pay raises. In spite of the economic downturn, the couple has only to look back to see God's steady hand of faithfulness during times of increase and free fall.

"Layoffs at my company began about the time we were expecting our older daughter, Hannah," said Gary. "I had already begun praying and looking for job opportunities when in 2012 they announced the closing of our Houston office. That very same day I got a voicemail from another oil and gas company about a job."

MISSION 1:8, a two-year generosity initiative at Houston's First, kicked off the next year. It encouraged members to prayerfully consider giving at a higher rung on the "Generosity Ladder" to increase the church's ability to support missional endeavors in our city, our nation and our world. The Smiths participated, and as MISSION 1:8 began winding down, rumors of layoffs began — three years into Gary's current job. The Smiths decided to increase their tithe anyway.

"Even if I lost my job, God would open up something else," said Gary. "We had proof in our past that He had provided for us. We knew He would open a door."

When 700 were laid off from the company in 2015, the Lord showed the Smiths that He, not the economy, was in control of their family's future. Not only did Gary keep his job, he received a promotion and the largest pay raise of anyone ever holding that position.

"It is incredible to look back and see how God walked us through times of uncertainty," said Gary. "I looked back in my prayer journal where I had written, 'I know you'll provide for our family' — and He did."



Gary, Candy, Hannah and Audrey Smith

GIVING AT HOUSTONSFIRST.ORG

Visit the Giving page at HoustonFirst.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 JAN 1 TO OCT 31, 2016

DECISIONS

925 New Church Members
163 Joined By Baptism

18% Of New Members
were Baptized

ATTENDANCE

216,729 in Life Bible Studies
(5,040 weekly average)

244,439 in Worship Services
(5,555 weekly average)

47,242 on Webcast
(1,074 weekly average)

MISSIONS

33 Mission Trips with
1,912 Team Members



NEWS + UPDATES

ALL CAMPUSES

Deacons Meeting and Church Conference

Today — The Loop

The Deacon Administrative Committee meeting is at 2:30p in Rm 143. All Deacons will meet at 3:30p in the Oasis Rm followed by the monthly Church Conference at 4:30p. Anyone may attend the Church Conference, but only church members may vote.

HighPoint Bible Study

Wednesdays @ 11:30a — 1010 Lamar (Tunnel Level)

This weekly downtown Bible study is open to everybody! Pastor Gregg Matte is teaching this Wednesday at 12:10p. Bring your lunch, or purchase one there for \$8. Visit HoustonFirst.org to learn more.

CONTACT Diane.Bagby@HoustonFirst.org

Election Day Prayer

Tue, Nov 8 @ 10a-2p — The Loop (Chapel)

On Election Day, the Chapel at The Loop Campus will be open from 10a-2p for a self-directed time of prayer for our nation, the election and our elected officials. Whether you stay for just a few minutes, an hour, or longer, you are welcome to this "come and go" gathering as we go before the Lord on this important day in the life of the United States.

Veterans Day Chapel Service

Fri, Nov 11 @ 8:15a — The Loop (Worship Ctr)

First Baptist Academy students invite all veterans to a special chapel service honoring them for their courage and sacrifice. The morning begins with breakfast at 8:15a (Reception Rm) followed by the chapel service with special guest James W. Mehrmann, Capt. USN (Ret.), Director of Outreach for the PTSD Foundation of America, Inc. For more information, or to RSVP, contact the Advancement Office at 713.290.2511, or email Advancement@hfbfa.org.

First H.O.P.E.

Sat, Nov 12 @ 9a-12p — The Loop (Rm 253/254)

For job seekers and those wanting a career change, First H.O.P.E. job ministry offers a professional consultant, resume/interview tips, career assessment, and more. Join us for "Networking during the Holidays" with Ernie Perez and guest speaker Nancy Stroud teaching about resources for job seekers.

CONTACT Bob.Stroud@HoustonFirst.org

CanHope

Mon, Nov 14 @ 6:45p — The Loop (Reception Rm)

CanHope ministers to families touched by cancer and those who love and care about them. With special guest Les O'Neal, we will share a meal together; the entree is provided, please bring a salad, vegetable or fruit. Come enjoy this time of testimony, prayer and fellowship! RSVP to 713.957.6764 and learn more at HoustonFirst.org.

CONTACT Sherry.Oradat@HoustonFirst.org

NEXTGEN MINISTRIES

As We Go — The Loop (The HUB area)

Nov 11-12

As We Go is an event that invites and encourages our students to serve our city — and this year will be no different, with some fun added, too! At As We Go: Kingdom Come Weekend, students in 6th-12th grades from each campus will stay in host homes, serve in a variety of ways across the city, and hear from a Rushmore church planter from NYC as he encourages and challenges our students. Learn more about the weekend at HoustonFirst.org and register for \$40 by Thu, Nov 10.

CONTACT Tony.Bianco@HoustonFirst.org

THE LOOP

ADULTS AGES 60+

Fall Bus Trip to Hunt Retreat

Mon, Nov 14 @ 9a-4p — Hunt Retreat

Take a bus trip, or drive yourself, to Hunt Retreat for the day! Hunt Retreat in Brookshire is a picturesque site for our yearly get together. You'll trade the rush of the city for a rippling stream and pecans falling softly from the trees. Bring your kazoo, guitar and whittlin', too! Cost is \$10 per person and lunch is provided. Register and learn more at HoustonFirst.org or call Tracie Bowman at 713.957.7661.

CONTACT Adult.Enrichment@HoustonFirst.org

CYPRESS

Foundation of Prayer

Today @ 2-4p — Cypress Campus construction site

As a body of believers, the Cypress Campus family is laying a 'foundation of prayer' on the floor of the Worship Center of our new building by writing the names of people we are praying will receive Christ. Once the flooring is installed and the new campus launches, our church family will literally 'pray over' these names for years to come. Don't miss this come-and-go opportunity for the whole family! Directions provided online.

CONTACT Dana.Haddad@HoustonFirst.org

DOWNTOWN

Finding your PLACE in Life & Ministry

Mondays, Nov 7-Dec 5 @ 7-8:30p — Vine Street Studios (1113 Vine Street, Ste 117)

This five-week course with Peter Lee will help you discover how God has uniquely designed you to be a difference maker among your family, friends, colleagues and community. We will cover topics such as personality, spiritual gifts, abilities, passions and life experiences. Following the course, you will be given an opportunity to meet with a PLACE Coach to help you implement what you learn. Register for just \$10 at HoustonFirst.org.

CONTACT Peter.Lee@HoustonFirst.org

ESPAÑOL

MEN

EN LAS ALTURAS (ALTITUDE)

Sat, Nov 12 @ 6p — RISE Lofts

(2000 Bagby St., Houston, TX 77002)

Gather with the Español Campus men in a time of fellowship, enjoying a 15-story rooftop view of our city! We will enjoy dinner together and have a time of prayer and devotion. No RSVP required.

CONTACT Douglas.Hernandez@HoustonFirst.org

SIENNA

Thanksgiving Celebration

Sun, Nov 20 @ 4p

The Sienna Campus family will gather for a potluck-style Thanksgiving feast as we celebrate all that God has done through our community this past year! Sign up to bring a side dish through your Life Bible Study! If you're not plugged into a Life Bible Study — bring a dessert and join the family! Plan on making this Thanksgiving celebration a part of your holidays!

CONTACT Kelli.Boylan@HoustonFirst.org

TWEET OF THE WEEK

"We voted today! Grateful to be in a country where we have that right." — @GreggMatte

make it your church

Make it Your Church Orientation

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. Visit HoustonFirst.org to learn more about membership and to RSVP to an upcoming session at your campus:

- **The Loop** — Sun, Nov 20 @ 12:30p — The Loop (Fellowship Ctr)
- **Downtown** — Sun, Nov 20 @ 12:45p — 1010 Lamar
- **Español** — Sun, Nov 13 @ 6:30p — The Loop (Reception Rm)

Our Cypress and Sienna Campuses will host Make It Your Church Orientation in early 2017.

GIVING LIFE AWAY

Operation Christmas Child

Bring your shoebox packed for a girl or boy to the The Loop Missions Office or the Sienna Campus Main Foyer no later than next Sun, Nov 13, and Samaritan's Purse will send it around the world as a means of sharing Christ this Christmas. For more information on Giving Life Away, contact Charlotte.Nease@HoustonFirst.org.



A new album from Houston's First worship leaders — "Nothing Shakes The Hope" — releases next Sun, Nov 13. For now, enjoy an exclusive preview of "He Leadeth Me," an original song off the album, from Nov 4-11 by visiting HoustonFirst.org. #NothingShakesTheHope

Celebration

Eight Presentations • Dec 7-11 • The Loop Campus Tickets Now Available!

Who will you invite to enjoy the music and hear the Gospel at Celebration? Tickets to this spectacular Christmas musical experience are available now at TheFirstChristmas.org, by phone at 1.866.200.9569, and at kiosks in the Main Foyer at The Loop. Come make a memory this Christmas at Celebration! #MyCelebrationMemory

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.

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. For information, call 713.681.8000, or visit HoustonFirst.org.

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

Español Campus

7401 Katy Fwy • Houston, TX 77024

Worship 5p

Life Bible Studies 6:30p

Sienna Campus

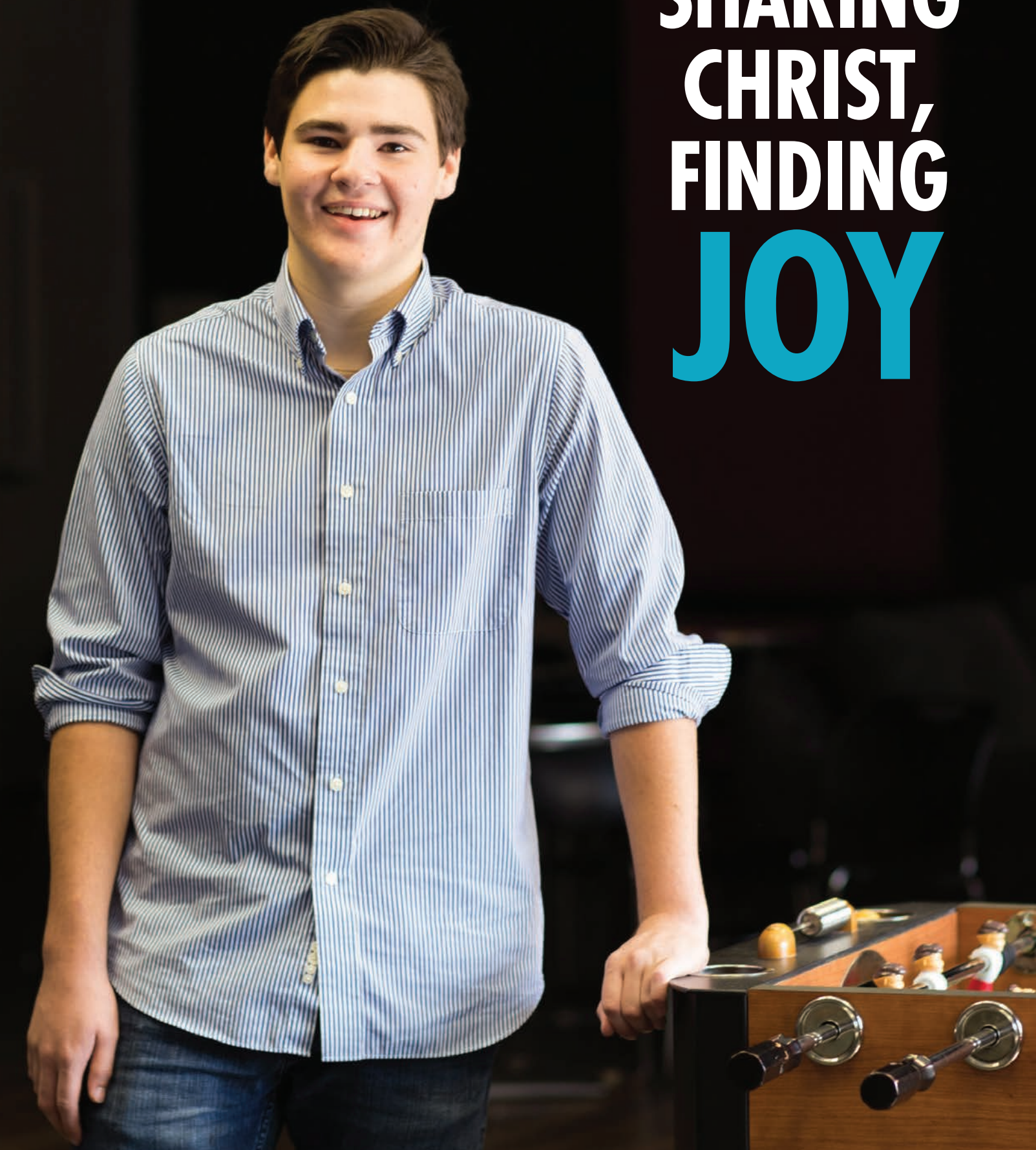
4309 Sienna Pkwy • Missouri City, TX 77459

Worship 9:30a • 11a

Life Bible Studies 9:30a • 11a



HOUSTON'S FIRST
BAPTIST CHURCH
PASTOR GREGG MATTE



SHARING CHRIST, FINDING JOY

A TEEN’S JOURNEY TO JOY

How does a self-proclaimed depressed and bitter teenager find self-acceptance, healing — even joy — that would inspire him to share the love of Christ on a mission trip? A Sienna Campus student explains his journey to healing...

“I was in a pit — in a lot of pain,” said Seth Moody, a high school senior whose physical and emotional burdens put a barrier between him and most people, even those closest to him. “I’d been believing it was impossible to have joy on this earth.”

Seth’s family moved from Mobile, Alabama, to Singapore for three years and back again before relocating to Houston in 2012. Seth’s dad, Michael, received a recommendation from his boss that Sienna Plantation was a desirable place to put down roots, and so they did. Seth was 13 when the family began attending Grace Church, the forerunner of the Sienna Campus of Houston’s First.

Dana, Seth’s mother, began seeing indications of emotional dysfunction in Seth while living overseas. Withdrawn, fearful and consumed with anxiety, Seth received clinical diagnoses that included Tourette syndrome, obsessive-compulsive disorder and anxiety. Other family members were also exhibiting signs of distress. After returning to the States, a broken relationship between Seth and his next-in-line brother, Jonathan, was the last straw in a family dynamic that seemed to be spiraling out of control.

Dana stepped out in faith to find an intensive, months-long prayer ministry-counseling course in the Houston area. Through it, God did a healing work in her own heart, so she pressed Seth and Jonathan to sign up.

“Pain was buried deep inside me,” said Seth, “and as God was clearing out the anger and emptiness, He was showing me how to fill it by understanding and loving people. I needed to learn to forgive.”

In 2015, Seth received an invitation to go to New York City to attend Rushmore, a spring mission trip for 10th–12th grade students from every campus of Houston’s First. “I was cynical about mission trips,” said Seth. “You really can’t have a heart-to-heart with anyone, I thought, so I believed the trips were pretty meaningless.” Sienna Campus Student Minister Jordan Floro continued pouring love and acceptance into Seth’s life, and he agreed to attend Rushmore this year. All that God and church members had been pouring into Seth’s heart manifested in love and concern for others.

“Seth had a different level of maturity than I had seen the previous year,” said Jordan. “He had a seriousness about the trip — he even power washed the driveways of just about everyone at Sienna to earn money for the trip. Once he was at Rushmore, he jumped in to serve — and to lead. He wasn’t seeking attention; his focus was on others.”

Rushmore proved to be a spiritual turning point for Seth as forgiveness and a love for people were taking root in his heart. “I realized that we don’t necessarily have to have a heart-to-heart with someone to minister to them; we can just open the door,” said Seth. “Handing out coffee and donuts or casually striking up a conversation is opening doors.”



Dad, Michael, and Seth Moody's mission trip to Ohio

An interaction with a man on the subway stirred confidence and fanned a flame in Seth’s heart. It was a confirmation that he could do the same kind of ministry at home. “There was no ‘Jesus’ talk with him,” said Seth. “But God spoke to my heart afterward and He said I had shown His love to the man. It made me want to love people more.”

Seth and his dad took a mission trip to Ohio together the following summer with others from the Sienna Campus. “I got to see my dad’s heart on this trip,” said Seth. “We were already close, but the bond got deeper.”

Dana marvels at all that has happened over the past year. “Seth has been going hard after God, and his body responded,” she said. “The neurologist took him off all of his medication in June.”

“I’ve had a journey of healing,” said Seth, who says the greatest thing about the Rushmore and Ohio mission trips was finding God’s joy. “The joy that God gives doesn’t depend on circumstances — like if I’m feeling depressed or under pressure. He will never leave us, and knowing that has opened my heart.”

NEXT STEP

On Nov 11–12, students in 6th–12th grades from every campus are invited to As We Go: Kingdom Come Weekend, where they will serve throughout the city and hear from a church planter in New York City. To learn more and register by Thu, Nov 10, visit HoustonsFirst.org or contact Tony.Bianco@HoustonsFirst.org.

LEGACY OF LOVE

Missionaries planted seeds that are still bearing fruit more than two generations later as a Houston’s First member faithfully carries on the work God began in her family more than 70 years ago.

Evangelism is woven into the fabric of Naomi Alvear’s life. Missionaries shared the Gospel with her grandparents in the 1940s as they sharecropped the fields in Rosenberg, a Houston bedroom community. Nominal Catholics until the message of Christ transformed their lives, the couple planted seeds of faith and a love for missions in their family that still bear fruit today. Naomi, now 74, has shared Christ and served others throughout her life and, within the past couple of years, on short-term mission trips with Houston’s First.

“Studying the Scriptures with my mentor was a turning point in my life,” said Naomi. “I began going deeper in my faith as the Lord showed me so many things. I led my husband to the Lord.”

Naomi and her husband, Roy, who passed away in 2014, were married 53 years and raised their own five children, two nieces and a nephew. Isaiah 53 was the Scripture that fanned the flame of love for Jesus, the suffering Servant, making her an even more determined evangelist. Roy’s construction job moved them to Del Rio, Texas, near the Mexican border, which created an opportunity for Naomi to live out her faith with the locals.

Her dream was to work alongside Roy fulfilling the Great Commission, but he became ill. In 2015, Naomi took her first mission trip to Costa Rica with a group of 16, half of them children, ages 10 and older, from the Cypress Campus of Houston’s First. She took a second trip this year.

“One of the members from The Loop Campus gave me his seat in first class,” said Naomi, of her 2016 trip. “During the flight I witnessed to a young man sitting next to me from The Woodlands who had a vacation home in Costa Rica,” she said. “On the way home I sat next to the owner of a Costa Rican plantation from San Diego. I told him about Jesus, too. They both were interested in what I had to say.”

The group ministered in Guanacaste, a region in northwest Costa Rica. A debilitating bout of coughing and congestion that made Naomi barely able to speak threatened to curtail her ministry of teaching and singing to the children of the village church. But once they arrived, her vocal problems cleared.

“We were allowed to go into the public schools,” said Naomi. “We told the kids about Jesus, and the teacher even asked us questions.”

Naomi was surprised to learn that the children she taught remembered Bible stories from the previous year. She shared Jesus with painters working outside the school about Jesus; she witnessed to young men and boys who stopped to pick up mangoes that had fallen to the ground; and she taught children new Bible lessons, sang songs, served snacks and fell in love with the people all over again.

“Naomi was in on the action, building relationships and boldly proclaiming the Gospel,” said Erin Ruddle, Children’s Ministry Director at the Cypress Campus and staff liaison on the Costa Rica trip. “She was so unassuming, talking and praying with maids, groundskeepers, painters and children — and they were coming to the Lord.”

Once Naomi returned to her home in Waller, the more than 150 children in three small Costa Rican village churches would not leave her mind. They had no toys — not even balls — nor would they have Christmas dinner. She made a plan.

Her four-car garage needed a good cleaning out, so Naomi enlisted a team from Daily Light, her Life Bible Study at the Cypress Campus, for help in holding a garage sale to raise money for the churches in Guanacaste. The class took up an offering of \$350 then they went to work preparing for the garage sale.

“Men from the church brought five trucks to transport heavy furniture and clothing donated by a lady from another church,” said Naomi. “Our team gathered, sorted and priced items. I even put an ad in the local paper to advertise our three-day garage sale.” When the sale was done, the team had raised a total of \$2,400.

Naomi longs to return to Costa Rica very soon, and she may just be able to find a way before next year’s church-sponsored trip. “My time there was a like a dream come true,” she said. “My heart is with those little kids in Costa Rica.”



Naomi Alvear ministers to children in Costa Rica

NEXT STEP

Houston’s First “Go” guide, published by the Houston’s First Missions team, was made available today and describes the many mission trips slated for 2017 — covering 21 countries on five continents. Prayerfully consider where you might be led to go next year. Learn more at HoustonsFirst.org or contact Ameer.Omar@HoustonsFirst.org.

TEMPORARY TATTOO LEAVES AN INDELIBLE MARK

Houston’s First mission trips come in all shapes and sizes. This fall, 25 couples simultaneously stormed New York City to share the love of Christ and retreated to fan flames of matrimonial harmony. Their unique approach to ministry opened hearts and changed lives.



Life is richer for Omar and Joanna Calderon since their mission trip to NYC.

Busy New Yorkers weren’t expecting God to step into their lives through conversation and temporary tattoos, but that’s what happened when Houston’s First couples from the As One Life Bible Study (LBS) at The Loop Campus went on mission to NYC this fall. Minister of Mobilization Jerrell Altic, also the LBS teacher, and his wife Kay purposed to give couples a break from home responsibilities to grow closer to each other and to God, worship Him and hit the streets in ministry.

“We wanted couples to encounter the power of God and victory in their marriages,” said Jerrell, “while loving people in the city in their everyday patterns of life — as they stopped for coffee, went out to eat, or just walked down the street. Giving temporary tattoos to engage people in conversation is like handing them a modern day [Gospel] tract.”

Kay came up with the idea of the “loved.” tattoo more than a year ago as a non-threatening way to break the ice. Armed with a stack of tattoos, Houston’s First couples prayed the Lord would create opportunities to talk with people as the Spirit guided them. They weren’t asked to force a Gospel presentation, but rather to engage in conversation and let spiritual talk develop naturally. Many times, “Can I pray for you?” opened doors to an unmistakable God encounter.

The group partnered with Pastor Boto Joseph, a church planter and pastor, in Jackson Heights, in the borough of Queens, an area of great ethnic diversity. Groups of four went out each afternoon to engage people on the street after spending the morning in worship, prayer and marriage building.

Joanna Calderon struck up a conversation with a woman who appeared to be studying a medical textbook. “I gave her a tattoo and asked how I could pray for her,” said Joanna. “She and her daughter had come from the Philippines five years ago and her husband was finally coming to the States to rejoin the family. After we prayed, the woman said, ‘God noticed me.’”

Joanna and her husband Omar left their six children in Houston with relatives so they could recharge their batteries and spend much-needed time reconnecting. “Besides waking up, sharing breakfast and hearing from God together, I was able to see God using Omar’s spiritual gifts in a way I had never seen before,” she said. “After Jerrell led a prayer time, Omar stood and began speaking truth over groups of praying couples, many in tears, as God brought emotional and spiritual healing to lives and marriages. We actually felt the Holy Spirit covering us — it was not a typical church experience.”

Jason and Brielle Gage were relative newcomers to As One when they signed up for the NYC trip. The Gages prayed for God to pair them with just the right couple for ministry. As they stood to leave, classmates Matt and Sayure Cotter walked up and asked to join them.

They made their way to a restaurant where Jason struck up a conversation with an older man who identified himself as Muslim. Jason asked if he could pray for him and he said he had already prayed that morning, but he conceded, and Jason covered the man’s hand with his and began praying. At “Amen,” he grabbed Jason’s hand, put it over his own heart and said, “Now pray for my heart.” Brielle, two tables over, saw joy and life in the man’s face. “The man treated Jason as he would a family member after they prayed together,” she said.

On the street, Matt and Jason approached a man, and after a lengthy conversation offered to pray for him. He seemed hesitant, but agreed to pray. Laying their hands on his shoulders, the men boldly prayed while Sayure and Brielle prayed nearby. They heard the man’s response: “Wow, I feel different,” he said, “I feel peace.” They dug in their pockets for Boto’s business card and found their last one, hoping he would make a connection.

“We had never talked to Matt and Sayure before,” said Brielle. “Now we feel a crazy closeness and bonding after spending time doing ministry together.” She says it wasn’t easy to be vulnerable as they opened themselves up to others.

“We were initially timid about going up to strangers on the street — we didn’t want to be yelled at or rejected,” she said. “But we had to choose to ‘get out of the boat.’ We didn’t have an agenda or plan in advance what to say; we just trusted God to give us the words to show His love.”



NEXT STEP

Serving together on a short-term mission trip — or in a local ministry — can strengthen and enrich relationships between married couples and within families. Explore the opportunities in the “Go” guide and at HoustonsFirst.org and find a place where you can make a difference together.