

# Generosity

AT HOUSTON'S FIRST

## PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

How can anything good possibly come from loss, we often wonder. In hindsight, for one young Houston's First couple, a painful death is "being worked out for good" in their family across two generations.

Amanda Westberry never considered dating Adam Dunlap in the early days of attending the same Life Bible Study — until five years ago when he began requesting prayer after the death of his father. Mourning took him from prayer requests to positions of leadership, and Amanda saw God doing a work of healing, spiritual growth and focus in Adam's life. Now married two years, the Dunlaps are reaping lessons from his death by planning for the future of their five month-old daughter, Amory.

"Adam's dad passed away suddenly from a heart attack, and his mother is still dealing with the paperwork," said Amanda. "That motivated Adam and me to plan for the future, including making sure Amory is taken care of in case something should happen to us."

The couple heard church member Ty Camp, a lawyer, speak in the Newlywed or Close Life Bible Study, encouraging young couples to set up their own giving fund as he and his wife had done. "We believe in having margin in our time and money," said Amanda. "We want to make sure once our needs are covered to give money to the ministries that our hearts are drawn to." Those seeds planted along the way led them to make a formal plan.

Though only in their early 30s, Adam and Amanda reached out to PhilanthroCorp, a partner of Houston's First, to put a plan in place for their future, which includes a provision for giving to the church as well as their favorite charities. Bryon Swanson from PhilanthroCorp walked the couple through the steps of getting their finances in order as well as setting up a guardianship document for Amory. The couple contacted Ty to seal the deal. The Dunlaps had the added bonus of knowing the fee Ty charged them would become part of the Camp family's giving budget.

"The process took several weeks," said Amanda, "but now we don't have to worry about imposing on our parents if something should happen to both of us. We aren't guaranteed any number of years, so we're learning to hold everything loosely. God can use legal tools to help us."



## NEXT STEP

To learn more about PhilanthroCorp, visit [PhilanthroCorp.com](http://PhilanthroCorp.com) or contact the church by emailing [Sara.Johnson@HoustonFirst.org](mailto:Sara.Johnson@HoustonFirst.org) or calling 713.957.5806.

Visit the Giving page at [HoustonFirst.org](http://HoustonFirst.org) to read more generosity stories, make one-time or recurring contributions, give to mission trips and more.

## GIVING AT HOUSTONSFIRST.ORG

## MINISTRY IMPACT YEAR-TO-DATE TOTALS FROM JAN 1 TO NOV 27, 2016

### DECISIONS

987 New Church Members  
172 Joined By Baptism

17%

Of New Members  
were Baptized

### ATTENDANCE

231,910 in Life Bible Studies  
(5,042 weekly average)  
264,693 in Worship Services  
(5,514 weekly average)  
52,006 on Webcast  
(1,083 weekly average)

### MISSIONS

34 Mission Trips with  
1,926 Team Members



## NEWS + UPDATES

### ALL CAMPUSES

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

### SoFA Spring Registration

The School of Fine Arts (SoFA) at The Loop Campus is open to church members and the public, offering excellent private instruction to all ages. The spring semester begins Mon, Jan 9, with classes in voice, piano, guitar, brass, woodwinds strings, dance, photography, and graphic design. Visit [HoustonFirst.org](http://HoustonFirst.org) or call 713.957.5889 for more details. Space is limited, so register soon!

**CONTACT Eric.Belvin@HoustonFirst.org**

### NEXTGEN MINISTRIES

#### Rushmore

#### Mar 11-16 — New York City

Rushmore is a next-level trip for students in 10th-12th grades of all campuses. After working with local community churches at Rush Week, Rushmore focuses on church plants in the NYC area through a partnership with the Metro New York Baptist Assn (MNYBA). Get details about cost and how you can go at [HoustonFirst.org](http://HoustonFirst.org). Registration is only available through Sun, Jan 29. Step up for this next missional experience with The HUB Student Ministry!

**CONTACT Tony.Bianco@HoustonFirst.org**

### YOUNG SINGLE ADULTS

#### Summit NYE 2017

#### Sat, Dec 31 @ 9p-1a — NRG Stadium

This New Year's Eve, Go Big or Go Home at Summit NYE 2017! Celebrate another New Year while throwing it back to the glitz and glam of Old Hollywood. Sure to be an instant classic, the party will have heavy hors d'oeuvres, DJ & dancing, karaoke, stadium tours, and more! So, ring in 2017 in a BIG way at Summit NYE 2017! Find out more and register at [HoustonFirst.org](http://HoustonFirst.org).

**CONTACT Joshua.Bagby@HoustonFirst.org**

### MARRIED YOUNG ADULTS

#### Mingling of Souls

#### Feb 10-11 — The Loop (Worship Center)

Houston's First welcomes back Matt and Lauren Chandler as they present the Mingling of Souls Marriage Conference live at The Loop Campus on Feb 10-11, 2017. With new content to share, Matt and Lauren will cover the following areas at this event open to married couples of all ages: The Covenant, Progress, Common Grace, and The Long Game. Find out more about pricing, childcare and registration at [HoustonFirst.org](http://HoustonFirst.org).

**CONTACT Kristin.Hawkinson@HoustonFirst.org**

### MEN

#### Warrior's Heart

#### Thursdays @ 6:30-7:30a — The Loop (Garden Rm)

Warrior's Heart continues our series, The Kingdom, examining the Kingdom of God in the Old and New Testaments and its implications on success, marriage, decision making, conflict, friendship, career and more. Dr. Darrell Back from Dallas Theological Seminary will teach this Thursday for our last meeting of 2016. Breakfast is available for purchase in the Cafe. Registration at [HoustonFirst.org](http://HoustonFirst.org) is encouraged, but not required.

**CONTACT Emily.Brown@HoustonFirst.org**

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](http://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



**TWEET OF THE WEEK** "People come from far and wide to experience Celebration. We invite you to come make a memory this Christmas! Tix @ TheFirstChristmas.org" — @HoustonFirst

### THE LOOP

#### NEXTGEN MINISTRIES

#### Christmaspalooza

#### Today @ 1-7p — The Loop (HUB area)

Make Christmaspalooza your first Christmas Party of 2016! Join The HUB for an amazing afternoon of fun, food and funtivities. High School (9th-12th grades) will grab lunch and head to Hunt Retreat, and Middle School (6th-8th grades) will gather for a quick lunch in The HUB before heading out to have some fun off-site! Walk-ins are welcome! All participants receive the limited edition Christmaspalooza "Ugly Christmas Sweater" T-Shirt!  
**CONTACT Tony.Bianco@HoustonFirst.org**

### SINGLE ADULTS

#### Impact New Years Eve Party

#### Sat, Dec 31 @ 8:30p — Hunt Retreat

Ring in 2017 with an evening of hilarity and fun! Enjoy a show, hors d'oeuvres, games, music, smiles and more. Robb Brunson from InterActive Theater Company will emcee the night's entertainment, Impact's Got Talent Variety Show! Enjoy the performance or join the show and let your talents shine — whatever they are! The deadline to enter the Variety Show is Sun, Dec 18. Rooms are available if you want to stay the night, but space is limited, so reserve your spot before they are gone. Get all the details at [HoustonFirst.org](http://HoustonFirst.org)!

**CONTACT Chris.Heitman@HoustonFirst.org**

### CYPRESS

#### NEXTGEN MINISTRIES

#### Surge: Sanctuary

#### Today @ 6p — Cypress Ministry Center

In the midst of a busy fall season of elections, sports, papers, projects and impending finals, take a moment to sit and be still with your friends and family so that we might know HE is God. HUB Students (6th-12th grades), don't miss this special night of worship, prayer and reflection for you and your parents!

**CONTACT Hannah.Stoval@HoustonFirst.org**

### DOWNTOWN

#### Marathon Sunday

#### Sun, Jan 15 — 1010 Lamar

The Downtown Campus will cheer for runners in the Houston Marathon beginning at 8a as they pass by our front door at 1010 Lamar! We'll exercise our hospitality by engaging in conversation with fellow spectators, and offering hot cocoa and coffee, too. Come worship with us later that evening at 5p.

**CONTACT Nikki.Moss@HoustonFirst.org**

### ESPAÑOL

#### The Christmas Store

#### Wed, Dec 14, 6:30-8:30p — The Loop (Chapel & Reception Rm)

Calling volunteers who would like to serve in this community outreach event! It will be a night to let our hospitality shine by welcoming people to our Español Campus family for the first time. Don't forget to donate a gift and join in being a blessing to a family this Christmas!

**CONTACT: Douglas.Hernandez@HoustonFirst.org**

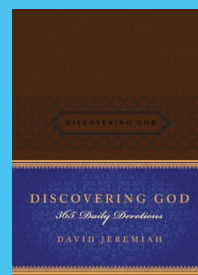
### SIENNA

#### Second Mile Toy Drive

#### Sundays thru Dec 11 — Sienna Campus

This Christmas season, we're partnering with Second Mile Mission Center's "Christmas Gifts of Love" program to make a difference in the lives of underprivileged children in Fort Bend County. Please bring new, unwrapped gifts for children up to 12 years old with a recommended value of \$10-15. Simply place your donated gifts in the Second Mile collection boxes in the Foyer!

**CONTACT Kelli.Boylan@HoustonFirst.org**



## 2017 DEVOTIONALS

Pastor Gregg recommends two devotional options for our church family to use in 2017 — *Discovering God: 365 Daily Devotionals* by David Jeremiah, and *Simple Pursuit: A Heart After Jesus* by the Passion Movement. Both are available from CornerBooks for \$15 each.

### MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM



Visit [HoustonFirst.org](http://HoustonFirst.org) to download two original songs as our gift to you —

"Let's Celebrate Christmas Again" and "Make a Memory for Christmas"

## Celebrate the Season

Visit your campus' page at [HoustonFirst.org](http://HoustonFirst.org) for details about the following services and other events and opportunities taking place this holiday season!

#### Christmas Eve — Sat, Dec 24

- The Loop @ 2p, 4p, & 6p
- Cypress @ 4p & 6p
- Downtown @ 2-6p (Open Door Mission)
- Español @ 5p (Chapel)
- Sienna @ 4p & 6p

#### Christmas Day — Sun, Dec 25

- All campuses gathering at The Loop @ 5p

#### New Year's Day — Sun, Jan 1

- The Loop @ 10a
- Cypress @ 9:30a
- Downtown @ 11a
- Español @ 5p (Chapel)
- Sienna @ 10a



HOUSTON'S FIRST  
BAPTIST CHURCH  
PASTOR GREGG MATTE

# A SONG TO SING



DEC 4, 2016

HEARING GOD'S VOICE  
JOURNEY THROUGH GRIEF  
PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE



# JOY & LOSS

The holidays are exciting times for many, while for others upsetting memories and feelings are stirred during the days leading up to Thanksgiving through the New Year. In this issue, Houston's First members share the ways God gave them joy during the holidays in spite of loss.

## A SONG TO SING

**Holding a healthy baby in their arms is the joyful anticipation of all expectant couples. But in the heartbreak of arms left empty, God ministered peace and joy in the hearts of a Houston's First couple and gave them a song to sing.**

"The community we have at church is an integral part of our marriage," said Jessica Barnes, who volunteers in many ministries with her husband Terence, including a seven-year run as members of the *Celebration* cast. The two have portrayed a variety of characters during the long-running Houston's First musical Christmas production. Along the way, they found friendship and comfort from their *Celebration* "family" during life's most difficult seasons.

Terence grew up in Anaheim, California, in the shadow of Disneyland, during its "glory days," as he recalls. His mom worked as a manager in operations, and he spent many days of his youth hanging out in the park. "I have a love for Disney," said Terence. "It was theatrical, magical. I'm sure my love for Disney plays a huge part in my involvement in the *Celebration* cast."

Jessica and Terence have been married 12 years, and until 2014 she worked as a pharmacist in a Montrose-area nonprofit organization for HIV patients and with in vitro fertilization (IVF) patients in Houston's Texas Medical Center. In addition to serving in the *Celebration* cast, the couple buys blocks of tickets to give away to people who might not ordinarily go to church. "We invite people we randomly meet, many of different faiths or walks of life," said Terence. "Jessica gave tickets to some of the clients at her old job in Montrose. Giving away *Celebration* tickets has become our family tradition — a great opportunity to share Christ's story."

**"When you're going through a crisis, being involved makes all the difference."**

Most of their years together have been spent praying for a child, but it didn't appear to be part of God's plan. They joined Waiting in Hope, a Houston's First support ministry aimed at couples walking through infertility. Jessica began IVF treatments eight years ago, and since 2009 they have lost six babies. She became pregnant in 2013 and they were overjoyed. At 22 weeks along in the pregnancy, Jessica miscarried during the week of *Celebration*.

"We love kids so much," she said. "It was upsetting and traumatic, but it was wonderful that we had already built relationships with our *Celebration* family. We got so much support and love; they brought food, sent cards and called to check on us during those difficult days."

Another IVF of five embryos implanted in 2014 resulted in the birth of their daughter Penelope the following February, but they lost Penelope's twin and three others. Jessica had been pregnant during *Celebration*'s hiatus year in 2014, so she never missed an opportunity to be involved. After Penelope's delivery, when *Celebration* returned, Jessica was back in the cast, going to rehearsals while Terence stayed with Penelope. "We have an amazing daughter," said Terence. "It's been a long journey to parenthood."

During the past eight years, the Barnes family has been through tremendously trying times in their walk through infertility and loss, but they have never felt alone. "The center of our world is Jesus," said Jessica, "and volunteering our time for *Celebration* helped get the focus off our loss and made us feel so much better inside."

God showed up in flesh and blood. "Our lives would not be where they are today without our *Celebration* family," said Jessica. "When you're going through a crisis, being involved makes all the difference."



### NEXT STEP

Jessica, Terence and more than 1,000 other cast and crew members will light up the holidays during eight presentations of *Celebration* on Dec 7-11! Great tickets are still available at [TheFirstChristmas.org](http://TheFirstChristmas.org). You can make a difference and find community using your God-given gifts to serve alongside other believers at Houston's First in a variety of ministries and roles. Find out more at [HoustonsFirst.org](http://HoustonsFirst.org) or contact a ministry leader at your campus.

## HEARING GOD'S VOICE

**When the unthinkable happens and your heart is shattered, how is it possible to cut through the pain to hear from God? A daughter shares her story.**

A week before Easter more than four years ago, Houston's First member Holli Davila heard her phone vibrating as she sat at the head of her classroom. It was unusual to receive a call from her dad during the workday.

"Mom had been killed in a head-on collision on her way to work," said Holli. "When it came to my faith, that was the day the rubber met the road."

Holli's parents, Derenda and Jimmy Davila, were high school sweethearts from Lubbock who built a loving home for her and Charlie, Holli's younger brother. Early on in the marriage, Derenda had decided to get her life right with the Lord, and had been Holli's role model as she lived a life dedicated to following Jesus. "I was a rule follower and thought I could earn my way to Jesus," said Holli. "Mom showed me the meaning of grace."

A tent revival followed by a heart-to-heart with Mom changed Holli's life. "My mom led me to the Lord," she remembers. "I had excellent parents. My dad has great discernment and is a good picture of Jesus, but he had gotten away from the church. After my brother and I left for college, my dad became receptive to the Holy Spirit and intentional about walking with Him."

Jesus loved Holli's dad back into the church, and he and Derenda began serving Him together. "My mom prayed for my dad for 20 years," she said. "It was cool to see them serving together."

More than 1,000 people gathered for Derenda's funeral. "She lived her quiet life really well," said Holli. After everyone went home, Holli had to consider who Jesus was and if she would cling to Him — or not.

"I yelled and cried out to God, and asked Him, 'Why?'" she said. "I tried to do my quiet time, but it was so hard; I didn't know what to do."

Holli began journaling and realized the foundation she already laid by having God's word rooted in her heart helped her to be still. "God had already taught me His voice," she said. "I had already dealt with questions like 'Is God good?' and 'Is He sovereign?' If I hadn't learned to be quiet in His presence I wouldn't have heard the Holy Spirit say, 'Knowing what you know, would you want to be Derenda Davila's daughter, or would you have picked another mom for your life?'" Holli wanted to honor her mother by carrying on her legacy.

She let two years go by after Derenda's death without keeping the traditions she had established as matriarch of the family. "Though we didn't want to at first — it was too painful — we had to keep her traditions alive for our family," said Holli. "We celebrate and value tradition."

### NEXT STEP

Learn to hear God's voice more clearly as you lean into God and His word in a Life Bible Study. Classes are available at every campus. Visit [HoustonsFirst.org](http://HoustonsFirst.org) to find a Life Bible Study that fits your age or stage of life, or ask a Guest Experience Team member for more information.

## JOURNEY THROUGH GRIEF

**The Bible says much about caring for widows, but how do men find healing after the death of a spouse? Widowers can always use friends to lean on who have walked in their shoes as they journey through grief.**



Death visited the home of Houston's First member Rodger Cody not once — but twice. Heart disease then Parkinson's robbed him of two loves: Jean, his wife of 40 years and the mother of their six children, and Carolyn, whom he lost in 2015 after 17 years of marriage.

"I've been spoiled twice," said Rodger. "And I grieved the losses of Jean and Carolyn so differently."

Jean was in and out of the hospital 20 times over six years before she died. Stroke, open-heart surgery, and finally, congestive heart failure parted the couple in 1995. "The good Lord allowed me to let go gradually," said Rodger. "The night Jean passed away I read a bumper sticker, 'God Listens.' It hit me like a ton of bricks."

Rodger spent more than a year grieving Jean and politely refusing attempts by caring friends to set him up on dates. On his way to a yearly out-of-town golf engagement with his sons, Rodger spotted a woman in the Baltimore airport at Baggage Claim that he knew he had to meet. "Don't be picking up my golf clubs," I said to her. We exchanged business cards, and later met for dinner back in Houston, where she lived with her son and daughter-in-law," said Rodger. "We courted for a year before setting a wedding date."

Rodger had been raised Catholic and attended a Lutheran church with Jean, but it wasn't until he began to attend Houston's First during his engagement to Carolyn that he understood it was possible to have a personal relationship with Christ. The couple tied the knot in June 1998, and Minister of Pastoral Care Rick Jones baptized Rodger on Super Bowl Sunday the following year. "Brother John's (Bisagno) messages set the stage for my transformation," he said.

A hard worker and natural leader in business and as a volunteer, Rodger jumped in to serve Houston's First on various committees, as a deacon, in prison ministry, and as he led the charge during reconstruction and remodeling of the Worship Center at The Loop Campus over nearly three years.

### NEXT STEP

Iron 2 Iron meets the third Monday of each month at 11:45a, Phase 2 meets the second Thursday at 5:30p, and GriefShare meets Thursdays from 7-8:30p. All meet at The Loop Campus, but are open to people from every campus. Contact [Janette.Arterburn@HoustonsFirst.org](mailto:Janette.Arterburn@HoustonsFirst.org) in the Pastoral Care office for more information, or call 713.957.6762.

Later in their marriage, Carolyn and Rodger attended Rick and Peggy Jones' Life Bible Study, so the pair walked alongside Rodger and Carolyn after she was diagnosed with Parkinson's in 2010. "Parkinson's totally diminished her ability to write and speak," said Rodger. "She was a unique individual. Her dedication to the Lord was exceptional."

One Sunday after Rodger buried Carolyn, he received an invitation to attend GriefShare, a 13-week class for those grieving a loss. "GriefShare allowed me to get 'out of my box,'" he said. "It reminded me that other people were hurting like I was."

**"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."**

— 2 Corinthians 1:3a, 4

As many as 85 men on the rolls at Houston's First are identified as widowers, and Peggy and Rick had been praying for years that the Lord would raise up leaders to begin a ministry for them at the church. In the spring this year, the Joneses received God's answer. They asked both Rodger and Vernon Tyger, whose first wife succumbed to breast cancer. Both men possess a combination of leadership ability and experience to compassionately serve and support fellow widowers as they learn to adapt to a new normal. The ministry, Iron 2 Iron, a reference to Proverbs 27:17, "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another," began meeting regularly last summer.

Iron 2 Iron and GriefShare are just two resources at Houston's First focusing on specialized care for the widowed. Phase 2 addresses the needs and concerns of widows as does Men: Serve, which organizes volunteers to attend to home maintenance needs widows often face, but may not have the ability or means to repair. Stephen Ministers are also available for one-on-one encouragement to widows, widowers or anyone who may need a listening ear.

"Lean on the Lord in your private times and reach out to others who have been there when you experience loss," said Rodger. "I learned that we can be honest about what we are feeling, but we don't have to be driven by our feelings."