

# Fort Worth: Going ‘all-in’ for missions

February 2, 2017

The University of Texas at Austin Baptist Student Ministry spent three cold days in Fort Worth on an “All-In” mission trip. From a crowded refugee apartment church, to playing with kids, to teaching youth line dancing, we definitely had to be “all-in.”

We partnered with Steven White of World Relief and Karen Morrow of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship to serve at the LaDera Palms apartment complex. That’s where they lead programs and minister among Bhutanese, Nepali and Congolese refugees who live in the 700-plus-unit apartment complex.

During our orientation, kids from the complex flocked to the clubhouse and began pounding on the windows in excitement. All I could do was smile. The pure joy of these refugee children and their desire to make friends with us warmed my heart.



When the orientation finally ended, we went out to meet the kids, and a spontaneous game of something broke out. No rules were instituted and no consistent way of scoring established, but we had a ball, and that is all they needed. As the yells echoed throughout the apartment complex, more kids began appearing. The game moved to a tennis court, and the rest of the group came to entertain the growing crowd. What a sight it must have

been.



We had kids on shoulders, freeze tag, duck-duck goose, sharks and minnows, and kids climbing on the fence doing backflips. It was chaos. But within two-and-a-half hours of chaos, bonds were formed between the kids and us. Kids refused to let go of our legs until we promised to come back the next day.

We went to a house church within the complex called Eternal Life, a Bhutanese church consisting of 35 families. If you have ever lived in a college dorm room, imagine upwards of 30 people all sitting on the floor in a space only slightly larger. Sitting with legs criss-cross for more than an hour with no leg room in a house church where everyone is speaking a language you don't understand doesn't seem like a great experience. But when the music started to play, all my complaints dissipated. Even though I didn't understand a single word of the songs, I felt the love for the Lord that these people had. They weren't ashamed to sing their hearts out to glorify God. The families graciously served us a Bhutanese dinner, and we assembled in groups to go visit families in the community.



My group visited a family with a paralyzed son. As we walked through the door, it was like entering another country. The floor was completely covered in rugs, and the walls were decorated with posters of Hindu gods. The family was sitting around the dinner table eating noodles with their

hands, while the mother cleaned the dishes. The living room had two couches, a TV and an elevated bed where the youngest was jumping, despite his father's commands. Our translator sat in a chair in the middle of the room between the family and us. It seemed like a perfect personification of the barrier between us.

One student, Alex, talked about her community rallying around her in a time of need, and she said she hoped the family could find the same support within the complex. Before we prayed over the family, the mother brought us cans of Sprite. We politely declined, but she insisted. We prayed and said "*dhanyavad*" which means "thank you" in their language.

The next day, after eating lunch at the Stockyards, we prepared for our youth program. As the kids walked home in a freezing monsoon, we handed them fliers with the American flag and invitation to a Texas dance night. It was sad to see so many young children having to walk home in horrible conditions, but their enthusiasm and camaraderie gave me hope.

As we distributed fliers, another group visited in the apartments. When they first arrived, Asha, a 40-year-old mother of a 3-month old boy, made them "chai" (tea). While her husband, Daniel, who is a pastor, worked on his sermon for the night, Asha told them about her struggles as a refugee—moving, motherhood and adjusting to everyday life in America. She and her immediate family moved from Nepal only five months before, leaving behind their extended family. In their culture, names hold important meaning. When they are born again in Christ, the pastor changed their name to their "Christian name."

"It shows how much their life changes when they find Christ, because they go so far as to change their names," Gracie, a freshman student, said.

At 6 p.m., the youth night began with around 20 kids of all ages. We mingled for a while, getting to know a few of the older students. Caleb

taught and led the kids in Texas line dances. After transitioning from line dances to modern hits, we separated into groups to tell Bible stories. Maria, our BSM intern, sat down with the younger kids and told them the story of Jesus' birth. While the raucous elementary school kids yelled out all the things God created, another group of BSM students talked to the older youth in a back room, including a young man named Jon. Jon is a Congolese refugee and a believer. He told us about his family and school, and he proudly said he will be the first person in his family to go to college, attending UT-Arlington in the fall.

We saw Jon again the next day when we led a youth service at the house church. We played a game and sang a few worship songs. Shiva, a freshman at UT, gave his testimony to the youth. He talked about his difficulties moving from Panama and how hard it was to be a Christian when his parents are Hindu. We wrapped up the weekend with a message from Jon, a senior at UT, and another awesome, home-cooked Bhutanese meal.

All in all, (pun intended) the All-In mission trip was an amazing way to serve the nations in Texas neighborhoods. It pushed me out of my comfort zone and into God's hands. It showed me that not everyone in America is as fortunate as I am, but that doesn't mean they aren't filled with the love of the Holy Spirit.

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