

Mission projects precede CBF General Assembly in Memphis

June 19, 2008

More than 60 participants at the June 18-20 CBF General Assembly in Memphis, Tenn., arrived early to take part in local missions projects. Above, students work at the Memphis Food Bank.

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (ABP) — Andrea Zintzun, 16, knows she's been blessed by others, so packing boxes of rice at the Memphis Food Bank just seemed like a good thing to do.

"There are people who blessed us, and we need to bless back," said Zintzun, one of 13 Homestead, Fla., teenagers who traveled to Memphis for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's annual General Assembly.

The teens are from Open House Ministries, a CBF partner ministry that serves a poor area of Miami-Dade County. They arrived the day before the assembly so they could serve at the food bank.

"We want [the teenagers] to be a part of our kingdom work, and they can," said Wanda Ashworth, one of CBF's field personnel who directs Open House Ministries.

The group also traveled to Memphis to support Open House associate director Leah Crowley, who was commissioned as one of CBF's field personnel during the assembly. Most of Crowley's ministry is with children and teenagers, so having a group present "will make it meaningful," Ashworth said.

The 20-hour journey to Memphis included stops in each state for everybody to put their feet on the ground and have it count as a state they had visited. After the Assembly, the group will travel to summer camp in North Carolina and back to Homestead — stopping at several of the ministry’s supporting churches along the way.

The Homestead group was among more than 60 people that arrived before the General Assembly to serve at Memphis-area ministry sites. One site was Girls Inc., where members of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Lee’s Summit, Mo., helped serve lunch to approximately 100 girls.

There, Cornerstone member Kaylea Burke, 7, started the serving assembly line by adding a pint of milk to each lunch tray. She pointed to her dad, Ethan, who was busily handing out trays to girls.

“That’s my dad,” she said. “He’s the messy one. He’s been working hard.”

Seventeen members of Cornerstone also helped at the Memphis Food Bank labeling boxes and sorting food. Already coming to speak at a General Assembly workshop, Ethan Burke said, “We said, ‘Why not just combine the two trips?’”

An hour south of Memphis, about 20 college students spent two days serving in Helena-West Helena, Ark., where CBF field personnel Ben and Leonora Newell live and minister. The service project was part of the Memphis Sessions, CBF’s first collegiate event at the annual General Assembly.

The students played kickball, made jewelry, read books and played board games with children in the community center. They also worked at a new 4-acre community garden, where they helped pull weeds, till the ground and make stands for growing tomato plants.

Ben Newell said community gardens will not only provide up to 10 tons of

produce this year, but will also encourage the community. And, ultimately, the community is what all mission efforts are about.

“We come to realize that the end product — though important — is not the most important. It’s the relationship” with community members, Newell said. “A lot of times people come on mission trips and it’s like, ‘How much can I accomplish? How much can I work?’ But it’s the relationships that really make the difference.”

Casey Green, a student at Jacksonville State University in Alabama, served as a student intern last summer in Helena-West Helena and was excited to return and serve.

“I jumped at the shot to come back to Helena,” she said. “What the garden produces makes a big difference here.”

“For years, the Fellowship has been gathering at annual assemblies. We felt it was time we actually got out there and worked in the community we were visiting,” said Chris Boltin, CBF’s short-term and partnerships manager who organized the mission projects. “Memphis is a convention city. The people are used to having people come and go. I wanted us to leave a positive touch on the city and to be the presence of Christ.”