

# Castroville church rallies to provide family for orphaned twins

July 7, 2016

CASTROVILLE—When Sara and Sly Alvarado heard their mom fall on the floor last Oct. 29, they panicked.

Sara started calling people she knew at First Baptist Church of Castroville until Linda Rifenburgh answered.

Within 10 minutes of Rifenburgh's arrival, Laurie Alvarado was pronounced dead from a blood clot. The terrified 15-year-old twins feared they would become part of the foster system.

## Church family meets needs

The people at First Baptist Church were ultra-important to the Alvarado family, because they had no relatives nearby. Sly and Sara started attending First Baptist five years ago with a friend. One Sunday, they convinced their mom to attend.

At church, she met Rifenburgh, who found out she loved to bake and invited her to join the kitchen crew. Laurie Alvarado, an oil field truck driver, was on disability, so she had time to become active in church activities, including youth events and the monthly food distribution.

After their mother's death, Rifenburgh took the teenagers home with her. That started a chain of events that resulted in God using a church family to create another family.



Linda Rifenburgh (left) and her husband, Ace, and Sara Payne (right) and her husband, Nathan, shared caretaking duties for Sara and Sly Alvarado until the Fordyce family opened their home to the twins. Sara and Nathan Payne learned about the situation, and for the next few months, Sly and Sara shuffled between the Rifenburgh and Payne homes. Nathan Payne, a special education teacher, had taught both children in his classes.

In November, Sara Payne sponsored a Mother-Son Dance, using a fund set up by her family to do random acts of kindness. The fund is a tribute to her deceased father, a minister, based on his favorite slogan: "We need each other."

The DJ was Skot Fordyce, the sound engineer at First Baptist in Castroville.

### **God forms a new family**

That's when God's plan started taking hold. Sly told the group about losing his mom and how thankful he was the church had helped, and he mentioned Fordyce.

Then sister Sara took the microphone, saying, "Skot Fordyce is like a father to us," catching Fordyce totally off-guard.

"The kids were balcony hounds, sitting by the sound booth during services

and always hugging people,” Fordyce recalled. He told them, “If you need anything, I’ll be here for you.”

While Fordyce was putting away his equipment, his wife, Laura, talked at length with Sara Payne about the situation.



Skot Fordyce (left) and his wife, Laura (2nd from right), have established a new family with twins Sara and Sly Alvarado in the home members of First Baptist Church in Castroville remodeled. Meanwhile, God was working on the Fordyces from Thanksgiving to Christmas. Sly and Sara’s comments “started working on my heart,” Skot Fordyce said.

“I was wrestling with it for a week or two,” he said. He already had two adult children from his first marriage, and she never had children but helped raise his during visitation times.

“I was trying to put aside my fear and self-doubt,” he recalled. “I was hoping for someone to step in, but realized that nobody else was doing it.”

### **God made his plan known**

God gave him signs, he insisted.

“I’d be watching a *Bonanza* rerun, and the Cartwrights rescue a blind orphan with an excellent outcome. Or I’m watching the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade, and there’s a marching band, featuring two kids

with special needs who have blossomed by being in the band.”

He started confiding in First Baptist Pastor Joel Warren because “every time I turned around, God was telling me to listen,” Fordyce said. “I told Pastor Joel I thought I was being called, but I was scared to death.”

Meanwhile, God was confirming with Fordyce that he and his wife were going to seek legal guardianship of children.

“Whenever I said, ‘What if?’ God had the answer for it,” he said.

The Fordyces told Sly and Sara about their decision, and the four spent Christmas together.

### **Preparing a home**



Volunteers from First Baptist Church in Castroville work on a home renovation project for the Fordyce family and the twin teenagers whom they welcomed into their family. That prompted a flurry of activity that involved families from throughout the church getting the mobile home Laurie Alvarado had owned ready for a married couple with two teenagers.

“They accepted Laura and Skot immediately as their Mom and Dad,”

Rifenburgh said.

Linda and Ace Rifenburgh hired a contractor to replace the rickety steps at the home with a deck. Other church members put up a fence.

At a church business meeting, members voted to use \$11,000 from the general fund to immediately renovate the home and then create an ongoing fund and take up a special love offering for Sly and Sara's needs. That first Sunday, the congregation of 400 members gave \$5,000 in donations.

### **An act of love**

With the idea of giving this family a fresh start, Sara Payne organized her inner circle of friends to spruce up the house. As people heard the story, they opened their wallets to purchase gift cards, donate items and decorate the home. Sly got a bedroom with a fire department motif, and Sara's was decorated with a Hunger Games theme.



Pastor Joel Warren and members of First Baptist Church in Castroville gather to pray outside the newly remodeled home of Skot and Laura Fordyce and the twins they have welcomed into their family. "This is how a church is supposed to act," said Associate Minister René Maciel, president of Baptist University of the Americas.

Rifenburgh was impressed with the young families who helped.

“They’re so busy trying to raise a family,” she said. “I was very humbled by it. It shows the heart of this church.”

Those involved in this situation strongly agree.

“This is a congregation that loves God, and they love their people,” Sara Payne said. They’re doing exactly what God called them to do. We can’t stop helping Sly and Sara and their parents.”

“We have a good thing going here,” Rifenburgh added. “This situation is a testimony to the congregation listening to God and being obedient to him.”

### **Grateful for being part of God’s plan**

Fordyce thanked the congregation.

“I’m excited for the opportunities we have as a new family going forward,” he said. “Thank you for your help, your tireless devotion and energy in watching out for these two until we could get involved. And thank you, most of all, to God for putting all this together.”

Their pastor led a prayer during a reveal of their home in February, saying: “Lord, we are blown away by your hand moving through this entire event. Once again, you have proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that you can take even the most tragic of circumstances and bring about something good.”