

Irving church stays focused on missions over spring break

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IRVING—Instead of hitting the beach or other vacation spots during spring break, volunteers from [First Baptist Church in Irving](#) hit the streets of south Irving on a mission for Jesus.

Through a variety of service projects, sports camps and casual conversations, team members built relationships and found ways to share Christ's love throughout their community.

The group worked at the [Baptist Benevolent Ministries of Irving](#), cleaned at the Salvation Army, served widows, played games with residents at a retirement home and painted houses for single mothers.

By partnering with City of Irving Code Enforcement and the nonprofit organization [Keep Irving Beautiful](#), volunteers from First Baptist Church spruced up the city by picking up trash in the Trinity River bottom and local parks, as well as trimming trees.

“What has driven the vision for Mission South Irving is a desire to see the people in our neighborhood the same way we see people when we travel on mission trips elsewhere, as Christ sees them, and to look for opportunities to share the gospel in our everyday surroundings,” said Jason Hatch, college and men’s minister at First Baptist Church and coordinator of the weeklong missions endeavor.

“We wanted to look at how missional living could become a lifestyle and not just a one-week trip. We began to look at what it would look like to really share the gospel with south Irving, loving them, serving them and making sure that the city would know that First Baptist Irving is here to help meet

their needs.

"I hope the community sees that First Baptist Irving loves them and wants to serve them—whether it's cleaning up the parks, painting houses or helping the homeless. Not just that we talk about love, but that we really do love them and the reason behind our love is Jesus."



Fifth-grader Maison Stanphill enjoyed helping with Mission South Irving service projects during spring break.
(PHOTOS/Courtesy of First Baptist Church in Irving)

Volunteers representing various ages participated in projects. Students on spring break insisted they didn't regret trading sleep for service.

"I've been on mission trips a lot but have never done anything like this one before— where I can witness to the guy at McDonald's and share Jesus with him," said Jonathan Hoogendoorn, a student from Dallas Baptist University.

"I've already taken away so much from this week about how to live a missional lifestyle. I'm excited to look for opportunities to reach out and share Christ with those around me. I hope that people will see Jesus clearly as he is, in his pureness and holiness, as a result of us reaching out and serving others."

"I have never done anything like this before, but I can't wait to do it again,"

fifth-grader Maison Stanphill said. "I loved being able to help people, and I hope that these projects will help the people we met to love Jesus as well."



Chris Baik trims trees, while Brad Ledbetter mows a yard during Mission South Irving. (PHOTOS/Courtesy of First Baptist Church in Irving)



Janelle Hartsfield and women's minister Michelle Stanphill were among the volunteers serving the community by picking up trash in the Trinity River bottom and local parks.

(PHOTOS/Courtesy of First Baptist Church in Irving)

Throughout the week, volunteers communicated the gospel message, and many saw God touch hearts and begin to change lives.

"When it gets down to it, it's all about Jesus," Jeff Phillips said. "I've had the opportunity to share the gospel six or seven times just in the last day and half. We're really trying to discern, inquire and find out where their relationship with Jesus is."

One of the team members, Janelle Hartsfield, used involvement in Mission South Irving to teach her 5-year-old daughter about the importance of

serving others and living for Christ.

"This was my daughter's first experience to do anything mission-minded, so I've been trying to teach her this week why we're doing things like picking up trash out of a park," Hartsfield said.

"I told her that we're called to serve people and to love them, and this is a way we can serve others by cleaning up a park for them. ... It's not always pretty or it's not necessarily fun, but it's about looking outside of yourself and not being selfish or self-centered. It's about looking outside the box at how you can help people around you. That's so important for her to learn at an early age."



Ella Hartsfield, age 5, helps clean up area parks as part of Mission South Irving. (PHOTOS/Courtesy of First Baptist Church in Irving)

During basketball camps at the church campus during each afternoon, children were taught how to improve their skills and also presented with

the gospel message.

"The sports camps gave the kids a unique way of looking at God's word and applying it to their life," Brad Ledbetter said. "We were able to use the game of basketball and little things about sports to point the kids to truths in Scripture and life.

"By far, I think the coolest thing about the focus of this week is just trying to be purposeful with everything that we do. Whether it's painting a house, leading a basketball camp for kids, or going out and sharing the gospel. We're trying to be purposeful in what our goal is, and that's hopefully going to translate over into the way we live our life—not only through our actions, but through our words as well and trying to be more purposeful with our words.

"That's an area that a lot of Christians will shy away from. They'll serve others, but they never want to open their mouth to share about Christ. We need to be intentional about sharing Christ with others and looking for opportunities to open our mouths about who we worship and who we follow. We need to give people a name, not just an action to follow.

"Our goal is that this won't just be a week of focusing on missions and serving others, but that this will become a lifestyle for us. For me, it's a challenge because I'm very protective of my schedule. I have my personal time and time for work, and I kind of break my life up into smaller parts. But if I can be willing to be obedient, allow the Lord to interrupt my schedule, take the time to love people and not always be in a rush to get where I'm going, I think the journey in life is what makes it all worth it anyway. I think this whole week is kind of pointing to that and the experiences that we so often take for granted that are opportunities to share the gospel every day."



During sports camps offered as part of Mission South Irving, Brad Ledbetter used basketball to point children to truths in Scripture and life. (PHOTOS/Courtesy of First Baptist Church in Irving)

Several team members also had opportunities to minister to the homeless throughout the week.

The experience not only provided beneficial services and met needs throughout the community, but it also reminded the team about the importance of looking for opportunities to share their faith on a regular basis.

"I hope that the team realizes that it's easy to share the gospel," Missions Director Allison James said. "It's made for sharing, and we should be doing it all the time. I hope that we all begin to do it more often as a result of this experience. I also hope that they realize that there are so many different ways to help in our city."

As a result of this experience, team members were reminded of the tremendous need to view their schools, workplace and community as their mission field.

“Often, churches pay a lot of attention to going overseas or outside of the U.S. to do mission trips,” Tim Stamps said. “We know that this is our mission field every day, but to focus an entire week effort and hitting our Jerusalem is a neat experience. We’re excited to be able to do this and to remind ourselves that Irving is our mission field, not just Honduras or Mongolia.”

His wife, Elisa, added: “When we were walking around, we also used that time to pray for the neighborhood—that God would open up hearts and use this time to be a time of harvest, that people would be willing to listen, and if they didn’t receive Christ this week at least the door would be opened. That’s why it’s important to get out there and reach the community.”

While serving as a bilingual translator, college ministry associate Jonathan Galvan was presented with many opportunities to minister throughout the week.

“The whole point of the experience is for people to realize the importance of taking on a missional lifestyle and to realize that missions isn’t something you need to travel far away to do. It begins at home. Every day there are opportunities to share Christ with our neighbors, but most people live their lives completely oblivious to those around them.

“To truly make a difference and impact people for Christ, we need to be intentional and try to learn the waitress’ name at the restaurant, the bank teller that we always go to, and try to build relationships with our neighbors. If we do that, think of the difference they would see and how many people would be reached for Christ.”