

Naomi House offers asylum seekers chance to flourish

October 28, 2024

When [2019 saw a surge](#) of displaced people at the United States' southern border a Waco church with connections to missionaries in Latin America and a close relationship with the pastor of an asylum-seeker-minded Mennonite church in San Antonio didn't see a problem with the people.

The problem the members of DaySpring Baptist Church saw was in claiming fidelity to Christ but turning away from the needs of those people, explained Dennis Tucker, church member and professor of Christian Scriptures at Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary.

Getting there was a process, but in August 2022, Dayspring Baptist Church invited its first family who had been granted permission to seek asylum to move into a new residential ministry—Naomi House.



Exterior of Naomi House.
(Courtesy Photo)

[Naomi House](#) is a hospitality house that offers a “temporary place of refuge for families as they prepare for the next steps in their asylum-seeking journey,” the church website explains.

Dayspring Baptist Church had been working on the hospitality house concept since the spring of 2021, “because none of us had ever done this,” Tucker recalled.

“None of us were social workers. We were having to find out simple things like city codes for this area. What kind of insurance do we need?”

Tucker explained they spent “the better part of the year” researching, figuring out how to design teams and schedule transportation, and identifying the house—which they rent from a church member.

First steps toward Naomi House

The church had learned much from the experience of one church member whose family had agreed to a request in 2019 from Pastor John Garland at the [San Antonio Mennonite Church](#). He is the son of former Truett Seminary dean [David](#) Garland and the late [Diana Garland](#), founding dean of Baylor’s School of Social Work that now bears her name.

With a pledge of support from DaySpring members, the family agreed to help an 18-year-old from Honduras and her newborn infant son who had been granted asylum by housing them in their own home.

Housing the young family gave the church team who supported them valuable experience, but they still had more to learn before they would be ready to begin a full-fledged hospitality ministry, Tucker noted.

Coming out of COVID, the church considered whether a hospitality house like the one San Antonio Mennonite Church operates might be something they could support. Their successful teamwork with the first young family

convinced church members they could.

The San Antonio ministry, [La Casa de Maria y Marta](#), as well as most hospitality houses for asylees in Texas, was short-term oriented. But DaySpring members decided on a longer-term housing ministry model, providing at least six months' residential assistance for families.

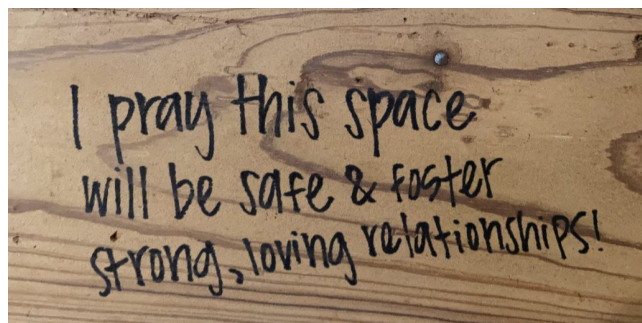
[Six months](#) is the minimum length of time individuals who have been granted asylum must reside in the country before they legally can work here.

The church had identified women and children as the most vulnerable group among migrants.

While men who cross over the border often find ways to support themselves, it is not always easy for the women. They are vulnerable, particularly to exploitation or trafficking, Tucker explained.

So, at Naomi House, the congregation thus far has housed only women and children—offering safe housing, transportation assistance to work, school, appointments and ESL classes, and additional services as needed.

Because the church has several Spanish-speaking members, the congregation decided they best could support women from Spanish-speaking backgrounds. A common language also helps in learning how to live together, when housemates previously were strangers.



The church added blessings to the framework, as they prepared Naomi House for residents. (Courtesy Photo)

The house is five bedrooms with three bathrooms and is set on about an acre of land. The women who live there can garden, if they choose, and the children have a playset and space to be kids, Tucker noted.

Naomi House has provided housing and support to 8 mothers and 14 children in the two years since it opened.

Rewarding, challenging work

Tucker said the most challenging piece of the ministry is the amount of flexibility required. Every family has a different set of dynamics and trauma they bring in, “so it’s not like we can ever say, here’s our three-page manual on how to care for people in a hospitality house.”

The ministry requires constant adjustments to meet the actual needs of each new family who resides at Naomi House.

But, Tucker noted, the most rewarding aspect of the ministry is its mutuality—this is not a story of a well-heeled, mostly-white American church saving poor migrants.

Instead, there’s an intentionality to the relationships they are building between the church and Naomi House residents. “It’s sharing life together in the belief that this will animate our own faith,” and it has, Tucker explained.

“Most people go to church an entire lifetime, and they wish they could do something to change someone else’s life because it might change their own.

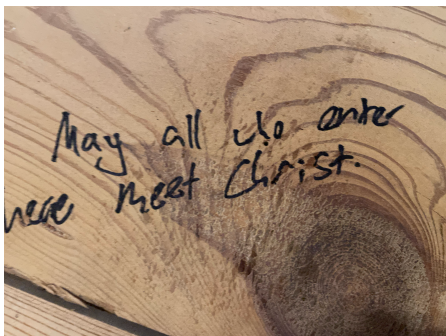
“And so, I think for those of us who are involved—you know, not every story works out perfectly [for] people who come in the house. Some find great jobs. Some don’t find great jobs.

“Sometimes it’s heartbreaking. It’s difficult work.”

But he explained for those who are involved, “it’s asked us to put our faith to work in a real way, and to allowed us to serve people who are vulnerable—not because we’re going to save them, but because that’s just what the gospel asks of us.”

They don’t have “a metric of success,” Tucker said ministry participants have to remind themselves.

“We have a metric of faithfulness. And we have to be faithful to what we’re asked to do, regardless of any particular outcome, good or bad.”



The church added blessings to the framework, as they prepared Naomi House for residents. (Courtesy Photo)

To measure success, the team asks instead, “are we being faithful to the ministry that God has called us to?”

Tiffani Harris, associate pastor of community life at DaySpring, has been in talks with several churches around Texas and beyond who have expressed

interest in beginning a hospitality house ministry.

She mentioned North Carolina has a network of Baptist churches who operate five hospitality houses in Raleigh-Durham alone.

This network is equipped to house refugees from background languages other than Spanish, so DaySpring and the North Carolina network have cooperated to provide asylum-seekers care.

But as a Texan, Harris expressed some ire that North Carolina currently has more hospitality houses. She would love to see at least five hospitality houses operated by Baptists in Texas, she said.

Reciprocity and cooperation

It is difficult work, she agreed with Tucker.

For Harris, it is most difficult to work with people who, having journeyed thousands of miles across dangerous terrain—including for many the [Darién Gap](#)—vulnerable to dangerous people, with nothing except their children—realize once they finally get here, just how difficult it's going to be.

They have been lied to by the cartels who exploit them for money. They have been told the United States has great jobs and cheap housing, Harris noted.

With the dire living conditions they leave behind, maybe the truth would not have dissuaded their journey, she pointed out.

It isn't easy to walk alongside asylum-seekers as they work through the shock of coming to terms with the reality of life in the United States for asylees, when they have no one and nothing.

But when asylees do find community through the ministry of DaySpring,

they are so grateful and bring so much to the church, Harris said.

Other churches in Waco come alongside DaySpring to help with Naomi House, sponsoring some of the monthly expenses, encouraging and partnering with the church, because ministry to asylum-seekers is meaningful.

“Once you step out in faith, when you feel that the Lord has led you to do something like this,” Harris said. “You will be surprised how many people will come around you in support.”