

No paid staff no hurdle to Huntsville churchâs ministry to college students

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HUNTSVILLE—[University Heights Baptist Church](#) in Huntsville has no paid staff for its college ministry but still draws about 200 students on Sunday mornings and more than 250 many Tuesday nights for a mid-week Bible study.

Intentional caring relationships, hands-on ministry opportunities, fellowship and in-depth Bible studies provide the basis of the ministry, headed by volunteer college minister Bert Lyle.

Leslie Gaskin, Charly Baker, Travis Henderson, and Michael and Jacque Hausinger have found a meaningful place of service in the college ministry at University Heights Baptist Church in Huntsville.

Components of the University Heights college ministry include a Tuesday night worship and Bible study; Sunday morning Bible study; 40 small-group Bible studies that meet weekly in homes and apartments throughout city and campus; the Bridge, a ministry to Houston's homeless involving students on the third Friday evening of each month; and the Adopt-A-Student ministry, where families in the church build relationships with students and make them feel at home in Huntsville.

Charly Baker, who recently graduated from nearby [Sam Houston State University](#), said she has a different perspective after being a part of the

ministry the last five years.

"I had no idea what it meant to be out in the world, out in our culture preaching Jesus and showing the love of Jesus," she said. But that's changed now.

"I've had the opportunity to share Christ in a lot of different arenas. I've been to Bridge ministry and shared with homeless people that I thought it would never be possible for me to do. I've done prison ministry and orphan ministry in Russia," Baker said.

"God has given me a heart for the 'least of these' through this ministry. My perspective has changed—it's more about the 'least of these' than it is about me."

Involvement with the adult leaders of the college ministry has strengthened the marriage of students Michael and Jacque Hausinger, they said.

"It's made a huge impact on our relationship because of the wisdom, the advice, the leadership that the married couples we've been around, the families who have been a part of the college ministry have given us and shown us," he said.

"I think it took our relationship to a whole new level. The opportunity to be a part of that helped us to grow by leaps and bounds. I don't think our relationship would be as strong without the college ministry. The church and the families here have shown us what it means to be a couple that is not spouse-centered but God-centered."

Student Leslie Gaskin said her weekly meals with the Hendersons—her adopted family—are extremely important to her.

"It really helps to have a family that backs you up, as well as a church family that backs you up, to keep you grounded and stable in your walk

with Christ," she said.

While the college ministry has no paid leadership, its workers are no less dedicated to the students, said Travis Henderson, who has worked in the church's college ministry eight years.

"All our leaders have the same vision. We have different talents, but the thing we have in common is that we all love college kids. If people need to come over and talk, people need a shoulder to cry on, need help changing a tire or getting keys out of the car after locking them in—we're going to do that and just love on them regardless of the situation," he said.

"Sometimes its good news they want to share, and sometimes it's not good news they want to come and share. We may not always agree with the decisions they make, but at the end of the day, we still love them. The church as a whole has really grasped that and supports college students."

The church benefits from that relationship as well, Henderson added.

"It adds so much energy to the church when you have these young people in the church worshipping with you."

But the ministry extends far beyond the church's walls. Baker cited five trips to Russia to work in an orphanage University Heights sponsors as some of the most life-changing events she has experienced.

Students credit the University Heights college ministry with challenging them to move into areas of service beyond their comfort zones.

Jacque Hausinger admits she initially wasn't excited about ministering to the homeless, and she said her first experience on a rainy day made her even less enthusiastic. One she was there, however, that all changed.

She recalled seeing people standing under drainpipes to take showers and seeing their contentment in spite of how little they possessed.

"It's living for two hours what they live every single day. It's so eye opening," she said.

Gaskin has no trouble pinpointing her favorite memory from Bridge ministry—leading two men to Christ last spring.

Since the Bridge ministry began six years ago, the college students have made the trip to Houston to minister to the homeless 70 times in rain, shine, hail and snow, Lyle said. Each trip, the students take about 350 bottles of water, 500 pieces of chicken, and coffee when the weather warrants. Also, they have distributed tens of thousands of jeans, shirts, shoes, socks, blankets and gloves.

"We spend uncounted hours teaching our students how to share the love of our Savior. Explaining the gift of God has become second nature for many, and it happens all the time now," Lyle said.

Students who are so intent on ministry force the volunteer leadership to stay focused, as well, Henderson said.

"They are on top of their game, and we have to be on top of ours," he said.