

TV celebrity craftsman urges hunger fighters to persevere

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WACO—Move beyond failure and reach for seemingly unattainable dreams, such as a world without hunger, TV celebrity woodworker Clint Harp urged participants at the Together at the Table Hunger and Poverty Summit.

In the process, keep in mind the importance of being willing to “get in the middle of the mess” of broken people’s lives, just like Jesus did, a pioneer in Christian community development told the summit.

Harp, who founded Harp Design Company with his wife Kelly, and Jimmy Dorrell, who founded [Mission Waco/Mission World](#) and Waco’s [Church Under the Bridge](#) with his wife Janet, spoke at the summit, sponsored by Baylor University’s Texas Hunger Initiative.

Try something ‘totally outrageous’

“Try for something that seems totally outrageous,” said Harp, who made a name for himself creating furniture from scrap lumber on the Waco-based HGTV hit *Fixer Upper* before launching his own *Wood Work* series on the DIY Network.

He described a series of failed ventures before he landed a lucrative sales job in Houston, which he quit to pursue his dream of building furniture like his grandfather.

“He was kind of a scoundrel, but he could really build things,” Harp recalled.

Without any formal training or financial backing, Harp struggled financially

to start his woodworking business. He was at the point of giving up when he met Chip Gaines from Magnolia Construction at a gas station.

A few nights later at dinner, Gaines' wife, Joanna, asked Harp if he could build a table if she sketched a general design of what she had in mind. Harp told her that would be no problem—although he had no idea how to do it or where he could build it.

Harp went to the director of Waco Habitat for Humanity, where he had volunteered, asking if the director knew about any place where he could set up a woodworking shop. Habitat had moved from its original cabinet-making shop, and the director offered to let Harp rent the 1,600-square-foot facility for \$25 a month.

His initial table-building project for [Chip and Joanna Gaines](#) led to a long-term relationship with the couple that continued throughout the five-year run of their *Fixer Upper* TV show and continues. Today, he operates [Harp Design Company](#) a few blocks from the headquarters of Mission Waco/Mission World.

Harp insisted he fulfilled his dream not because he had all the answers, but because he “decided to take one more step” when he almost was ready to quit. He urged anti-hunger activists to persevere in their goal of eradicating hunger, saying, “The answer is often right around the corner.”

‘Get in the middle of the mess’

In the late 1970s, most people avoided the crime-ridden and poverty-stricken area around Waco’s North 15th St., but Jimmy and Janet Dorrell moved into the neighborhood with their young children as an act of Christian obedience.



Jimmy Dorrell, who founded Mission Waco/Mission World and Waco's Church Under the Bridge with his wife Janet, challenged participants at the Together at the Table Hunger and Poverty Summit to "get in the middle of the mess" of broken people's lives. (Photo / Ken Camp)

"God gave us enough courage to get in the middle of the mess," Dorrell told the summit.

For \$12,000, the couple purchased and moved into a 4,000-square-foot house in an area surrounded by prostitutes and drug dealers.

"Location, location, location—it goes both ways," Dorrell said.

They built a basketball court next to their home, inviting young people from the neighborhood to play there. That led to more structured programs for children and teenagers and ever-deepening relationships with parents.

As the Dorrells continue to learn from their neighbors, one ministry after another emerged and Mission Waco took shape. Later, as they launched programs in Mexico, Haiti and India, the international Mission World component of their ministry developed.

In the process, Mission Waco began transforming a blighted neighborhood. The ministry launched the Jubilee Theater—a community showcase for locally produced drama, poetry readings and cultural dance performances—in what had at one time been a porno theater.

Mission Waco opened the World Cup Café and Fair Trade Market to provide unemployed or underemployed workers an opportunity to learn

food-service job skills, give neighborhood residents a nice place to gather and offer artisans in the developing world a place to sell their handcrafts.

Two years ago, Mission Waco opened the Jubilee Food Market, a non-profit grocery store to serve what had been a food desert, located at least two miles from the closest full-service supermarket.

“The neighborhood is becoming healthy,” Dorrell said. “It’s taken 40 years.”

Transformation takes time, and it demands the kind of commitment God demonstrated through the Incarnation, he said. Christ showed God’s love when he entered into “the middle of the mess” of humanity and willingly “walked into the pain,” he said.

“We can change the world if we learn to love people,” he said.