

FIRSTwords

TO REACH PEOPLE FOR JESUS CHRIST & TOGETHER BECOME MORE LIKE HIM



SPRING UP A WELL: AN EL SALVADORIAN JOURNEY

By: Kristian Spencer

“Jesus said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life’”

John 4:13-14 ESV

Let me paint you a picture of a community which has become dear to my heart, the community named Milagro. Your vehicle pulls up to tall white walls, topped with barbed wire, opening up to a winding dirt road. Lining the entrance into this unknown, you pass dozens of children with stark white button down shirts and crisp navy skirts and pants. Their skin is dark from the sun, but their smiles are bright with light and joy. After entering the compound, you climb out of the vehicle to hands eagerly reaching for yours and Spanish being spoken with the speed only a child can manage when their stories are bursting from within. You greet the Mamas and Papas, the hermanos and hermanas, the familias.

The community surrounds you as they guide amongst their homes, whose walls range from metal sheets to cinderblock and whose floors are packed dirt. You see la escuela, where the teacher to student ratio is 1:70. You clamber down a ravine to the stream used for washing clothes and bathing, the stream shared by families from 4 o'clock every morning until dusk. As you stand amongst the people of Milagro, the poverty that sticks like the humidity seems it will never wash away, but then a name begins to be a chant of Hope in your very soul....

“Milagro...Milagro...Milagro...Miracle....”

How incredibly prophetic is the name of the community our team from FBC Abilene and Living Water has partnered with, a name that literally means Miracle.

Many miracles were present during our time in El Salvador. One miracle in particular goes by the name of Jefferson. Jefferson is 12 years old and has a mother (Marina), sister (Gabriella), brother (Harrison), and a dog named Dixie. Jefferson wants to grow up to be a scientist

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words

FOR THE JOURNEY

This past week, Mary and I were in Washington, D.C. with HSU students in the Doctorate of Leadership Program, which Mary directs. This summer course in the nation's capital serves as a learning lab for the students to explore the challenges of leadership.

On the day the students were in Philadelphia, Mary and I went to Arlington National Cemetery. Numerous sacred stories come to mind as I reflect about our visit. However, watching the changing of the guard at the *Tomb of the Unknown Soldier*, even in the rain, grabbed my soul. As much as that extraordinary event brings obvious respect, reverence, and gratitude for our country and those who served, several applications emerged about our journey of faith.

First, the setting involves a sense of the holy. On a magnificent hill-side, the Memorial Amphitheater which seats 5,000 rests behind you. The marble steps overlooking the tomb with a tree-lined pathway below have Washington, D.C. as the backdrop. It feels like a sanctuary, standing on holy ground. The visitors recognize this is a special place, even without the sign which says, "No gum chewing...." It reminded me, in our world where we have trampled on decency, civility, and respect, we need holy places, sanctuaries of reverence that "*Lift our eyes to the hills.*" (Psalm 121) We need experiences which call us "*to take off our shoes for we are on holy ground.*" Churches need to serve more as a sanctuary, than a theater. We will dry up spiritually without times of holy awe and mystery where we realize God is God. When was the last time you stood speechless before the presence of the holy?

Second, ritual and routine are powerful. Even before the changing of the guard which happens on the hour, the enormous crowd stands in hushed silence and reverence as they watch the guard take 21 steps across in front of the tomb, stop and face the tomb for 21 seconds, and then march 21 steps back. The 21-step ritual is based on the tradition of the 21-gun salute. You watch continuously as the guard marches back and forth...with no spectacular

show or special effects. It is difficult to leave as we watch this age-old ritual of guarding the tomb. Some people have a negative idea about "rituals." They say, "That's only a ritual...." It is unfortunate the Church often loses the significance of rituals. The reoccurring and repetitive acts in worship we call rituals give meaning and order to our lives. We lose our roots and rudders without rituals.

Third, tradition has its place. The 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment guard the tomb. This Regiment is the oldest serving unit in our armed-services, dating back to 1784. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier honors the past. It also recognizes the place of history and tradition in the service of the 3rd Regiment. I stood remembering the place of traditions in our worship and faith. Avoid thinking the past is "out of touch" living. Tradition and the past keep us in touch with God and the stories of faith.

Fourth, this ritual teaches humility. The guards wear no name tags, since the unidentified soldier they guard is unknown. They wear no rank, since the rank of the unidentified soldier is unknown. Even in their impressive dress-blue uniforms and flawless steps, the guards teach us it is not about our rank or making a name, but serving with the spirit of humility. Let our nation and leaders take on that attitude of humbleness, where rank and name do not matter.

Fifth, you are dearly known by God. The inscription on the tomb reads: "***Here rests in honored glory an American soldier known but to God.***" As you stand there, questions about who this person was naturally arise.... One thing we do know about him: "***Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for his friends.***" Regardless of who you are, you are known by our gracious God. As a living sacrifice, let us "***lay down***" our lives for others as we realize the authentic leader lives and dies as a servant-leader.

On the road...

Phil

and I consider him a dear friend. Our native tongue may differ, but love transcends a language barrier. His hand in mine, my backpack proudly resting on his shoulders, the letters we exchanged before parting...these spoke more than any conversation.

The miracle I see in Jefferson is the Hope of a child in an environment where many of us would see no future, no story worth telling. Jefferson's story is only beginning and it is a story I will pray over the rest of my days. Jefferson's name is etched on my heart as it is on the palms of God.

Another miracle in Milagro is motherhood. The average age of girls becoming mothers is 13 years old. Motherhood in Milagro literally takes a village. Babies are passed from hand to hand, chest to chest, heart to heart. The beauty of families in this community is you can't clearly identify them. In your eyes this may seem a tragedy, but in mine it's a beautiful reminder of the all-inclusive family we are called to be with our Heavenly Father. These mothers work from dawn to dusk in the endless task of providing and caring for their families. The local women worked together to provide us with a fresh, hot meal every day for lunch. They served us the way Jesus has called His people to, with abundant generosity and selflessness.

There is a very particular miracle which has taken place in Milagro, the miracle that called me to El Salvador, the miracle of clean water. Our team of men, ranging from teens to some in their 80s, partnered with drillers from Living Water, along with men from the community, to drill a well 116 feet under the ground. This well is going to provide the community with clean water, a miracle we take for granted every single day. The men of Milagro work tirelessly, shouldering the heaviest burdens, placing their own touch in the craftsmanship. The celebration of the community upon completion of the well reminds me of the public declaration we make of our own Living Water in baptism.

Hand in hand with a lack of clean water is a lack of knowledge regarding germs and how to avoid water contamination. Our hygiene team spent the afternoons in the community center teaching hygiene lessons, acting out bible stories, crafting, painting nails, playing alongside and creating relationships with our El Salvadorian brothers and sisters through word and deed.

We gathered on our final day amongst the community to share in a ceremony honoring the work the Lord has

done. We performed a drama of The Good Samaritan parable, watched a puppet show, heard the gospel shared by our lead driller to his people, and were the recipients of a laying of hands ritual. During the laying of hands, we were seated while the community thanked us in song, placed paper crowns on each of our heads, then came by the masses to hug us tightly while expressing their gratitude and love. My friends, I could have filled a well of my own with the tears shed in joy for the new family I now have, but also sadness for the years we will spend apart until Heaven brings us together once again.

I could spend hours across a cup of El Salvadorian coffee sharing with you the day to day miracles we experienced. The Lord has overwhelmed my soul with His goodness and faithfulness. Thank you, FBC Abilene, for believing in our call to make disciples among all the nations. Thank you, Living Water, for creating a ministry that literally changes lives.

Brothers and Sisters, I ask you: when was the last time you clung to the Father the way these children clung to us? Have you ever cried out in worship to Him, advocating for His children in a language different from your native tongue? How often do you celebrate the presence of His Living Water in your life, the way these communities celebrate their well with passion? When will we step outside the trappings of formal worship and praise God in the midst of our discomfort and in a place of total humility?

I pray you will consider these questions and what the Lord is saying to you in response. My hope for each of us is this: May the stirring of our souls and our empathies not require foreign borders and a mission trip itinerary, but instead only the simple fact of being a child of God.

A song by Ellie Holcomb has been the soundtrack of my journey. A portion of the song is below...its name is Living Water.

*Spirit fill us, with living water
We know Your well will not run dry
So come revive us, come wash over
In Your presence we'll find our life
Spring up a well (spring up a well)
Spring up a well (spring up a well)
Spring up a well within our souls
Spring up a well (spring up a well)
Spring up a well (spring up a well)
Come fill us up till we overflow
Fill us up till we overflow.*

Summer FUN NIGHTS at the flc

The last Wednesday Summer Fun Night will be August 8. We have had a wonderful time this summer eating, playing, and fellowshiping together. If you haven't had the opportunity to join us this summer, please come for our final fun night on August 8.



ROUND UP SUNDAY - AUGUST 26

It is so hard to believe that school is about to begin. With the excitement of school starting, we also have an exciting new start in Sunday school as our preschoolers through high schoolers promote to new classes. Not only is this Sunday an exciting time for children and students; but as a church we have the opportunity, after a wonderful time of worship, to gather for a great brisket lunch and enjoy a time of fellowship. Sign up for the lunch in Sunday school or contact Debra (675-8116 or debra.clemmer@fbcabilene.org). Cost is \$5 for adults, \$3 for children (K-5th grade) and preschool is free. There will also be inflatable games for children and students. This is an important Sunday for our church and we hope you will make every effort to attend on August 26.

Volunteers Needed For Round Up Sunday

In order to make Round Up Sunday a success, we are in need of volunteers to help man the inflatable games, set them up, and take them down. If you are willing to serve for an hour, please call the missions' office.

WE NEED YOU! 675-8112 or rebecca.hunt@fbcabilene.org.

FBC Foundation Grant Request Forms Are Available

Forms are available in the office.
*Deadline to return the form is noon,
Friday, September 7.*

STAFF UPDATE

The Recreation Ministry Board, along with the personnel committee, is pleased to announce the hiring of Mike Brady as the Director of the Family Life Center. Mike has been serving as the associate director for the past year and a half and has given wonderful leadership to the running of the facility. Mike, and his wife Vicki, who currently serves as the Big A director, are a vital part of not only the staff, but also the life of our church. If you have not met Mike, why not drop by the FLC and not only meet him, but take a look around at our incredible facility.

ON MISSION IN MISSION, TEXAS

By Katie Broyles

On the first Sunday after returning from McAllen, I walked into church feeling a little more at home at FBC. As I walked into church, new friends I spent hours serving with in the heat and humidity of South Texas greeted me. This was my first experience on a mission trip, and I was uncertain what to expect. I gained more than I could have ever imagined through service, friendship, sweat, and laughter. On our first Sunday in South Texas, John challenged the group to think about the bigger picture of our mission during the week. Each morning as I woke, I prayed for God to reveal my bigger picture as I served.

We had the opportunity to help build a house, which was in Mission, Texas, and organize the Buckner International warehouse in McAllen, Texas. There were two groups working in partnership with Buckner International. Group 1 worked on building a house for the family. Group 2 aided Buckner at the warehouse delivering the 600 pairs of shoes that the church collected, processing those shoes, and organizing other items donated by other churches. Each day we gathered at lunch at the house-building site and ate our sack lunches in fellowship.

Group 1 started the week by raising the walls of the house as well as the trusses. Lots of help went into raising the heavy trusses! I loved watching the skills of the building team and their willingness to teach a willing team member a new skill. The building team also added to the house the roof decking, shingles, siding, and some electrical and plumbing. During my time at the building site in the afternoon, with a little bit of hesitancy, I was able to use a nail gun and a chop saw for the first time. I quickly realized I was best at keeping everybody hydrated!

Group 2 started the week by processing all of the donated shoes we collected at FBC. We took off the tags, checked the sizes, and then sorted them by size and gender. During this time, we were able to get to know each other, and I was able to form new friendships. As a teacher, I loved the idea that there are people who spend their free time in the summer helping students to feel ready and confident for the start of a new school year. Buckner International does many amazing things with relief aid and it was neat to be able to help get them organized to help others in need.

As the week came to an end, we were exhausted, but joy-filled with our bigger picture service experience in McAllen. My bigger picture involved forming new relationships and feeling God's grace in big life changes. On this trip, I found that my team members' joy in serving was contagious. I find myself renewed instead of exhausted. The bigger picture of serving brothers and sisters in Christ is quite the conundrum. Instead of feeling exhausted, I felt transformed and rejuvenated to share the love of Christ through service. Instead of fearing the unknown, I felt joy in opening myself to new experiences and new people.

If you've never been on a mission trip, I encourage you to join us next time! It seems like a sacrifice of time in the beginning, but afterward you realize it was not a sacrifice, but a privilege. I'm thankful to be a part of a church who makes serving others a priority.



ACTING IN *love*

CITY LIGHT RE-VISION UPDATE

By Carolyn Shelburn

When I was asked to write a few words about my excitement for the Re-vision endeavor, my thoughts went back to when I first became aware of this ministry. One Sunday morning in April, Richard and I were watching First Baptist on TV because of his recent knee injury. John was presenting the facts about the Re-vision plan, City Light, and Catalyst Kitchens. When he started talking about Case Management, I felt Jesus was calling out to me! I heard, "Here is where I want you to share your past work experience while sharing my love." I told my husband, "I think we need to move our membership back to First Baptist. I think I need to volunteer with this ministry." That's all it took! The next Sunday that Richard could hobble, God brought us back to First Baptist!

As I've learned more about the Re-vision plan, my mind has exploded with ideas, but mostly HOPE! After attending a recent meeting with the 'movers and shakers' of this project, Community Leaders, and the Catalyst Kitchens Consultants, I quickly realized God was planting these same exciting ideas in all involved in that room. It was EXPLOSIVE! I keep going back to that old saying, "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime."

As a retired RN and Certified Case Manager, I know there is more to the success of this endeavor than teaching someone to cook. All areas of these students' lives need to be working toward the same goal for a successful, self-sufficient life that centers on the love for Jesus! Please join me in praying for the Re-vision project, and if you are a Social Worker, Case Manager, or someone with the knowledge of community resources, please consider volunteering just a few hours a week and give the gift of hope to those in need.

Thank you to everyone who gave toward
our 2017 Unified Missions Offering!

This month, FBC was honored with the
award for being one of the top 10 givers
to the Texas Baptist Hunger Offering,
which is part of our Unified Missions
Offering. Thank you for being a church
who faithfully gives and supports this
important offering.





ACTS OF SERVICE

By Tyler Gaddis

On Sunday, July 22, our Sunday school class, Ten Twenty-Five, was able to take part in serving at City Light during the breakfast and worship hour. Our class served breakfast, led worship, prayed over everyone, and delivered a sermon. I was able to take part in serving eggs, bacon, and potatoes. I have volunteered in similar settings growing up and it surprises me every time how the people who come to get a meal are so happy and grateful for you. I went in with the intention of blessing the people of City Light, but in return was blessed myself. It was a rewarding feeling to be able to bring some joy to their hearts that morning. Everyone should give time out of their schedule to volunteer there and spend time with them to show God's love.



BIG A NEEDS YOUR HELP!

Big A, an outreach ministry of First Baptist Church, serves 1st - 5th grade students of Abilene who are considered high-risk at school. Many of these children do not attend church and our ministry is the only opportunity they have to learn about God's love. Meetings take place Wednesday nights from 5:30 - 7:00 p.m. during the school year. The students are wonderful to work with and we have a great year full of activities planned. The prayer curriculum is complete, so no outside preparation is necessary. We are thrilled to have you and will make your volunteer time work as easily as possible into your busy schedules. Big A can use bus drivers and bus riders to help with transportation (4:30 - 5:30 p.m. and/or 7:00 - 8:00 p.m.), teachers and assistants (5:30 - 7:00 p.m.), and special volunteers to help with events like holiday activities and the Big A Store. If you are interested in helping in any way with Big A, we can use you! Please prayerfully consider a role in this ministry. If you feel called, please contact Vicki Brady at 325-673-6686 or bigaclub@hotmail.com.

STAFF ANNIVERSARIES

August 1, 13 years

Cody Favor

Pastor for Students

August 1, 3 years

Donna Lee

GLO Teacher

August 2, 17 years

Steve Queen

*Director of Counseling &
Family Enrichment*

August 5, 5 years
Jennifer Woodard

First Friends Director

August 7, 1 year

Vicki Brady

Big A Director

August 8, 7 years

Jennifer Miller

*M.A. to Pastors for
Children & Preschool*

August 9, 1 year

Michelle DeLaMater

GLO Teacher

August 12, 10 years

Rosalinda Garcia

GLO Teacher

August 24, 3 years

Kim Cummings

M.A. to FLC Director

August 29, 12 years

Suzanne Shaw

Receptionist/Church Clerk

August 29, 7 years

Becky Tucker

Pastor for Children

August 31, 19 years

Eric Couvion

*Superintendent of
Buildings & Grounds*

EVENT CALENDAR:

AUGUST

- 5 City Light Campaign Meeting
Personnel Committee
5th Grade Good-Bye/Hello Party
- 6 Capital Campaign Meeting
Youth Lunch Bunch
5th grade Zoo trip
- 7 Deeper (High School Bible Study)
- 8 LAST Wednesday Fun Night
GLO Search Committee
Buildings & Grounds Committee
- 9 Kids Fun Night @ Play Faire (K-5)
- 12-16 Pastoral Staff Retreat
- 13 Youth Lunch Bunch
PAWS for People
- 14 Rockin' Moms
- 19 Missions Committee
- 20 PAWS for People
- 21 Finance Committee
Deacons' Meeting
- 23 Healing Hearts Meeting
- 26 Round-Up Sunday
- 27 PAWS for People
- 29 Church Conference
Children's Choir & Missions
Enrollment Party
Wednesday Night Meals/Activities Begin

STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

July 2018

Budget	July	Year-to-Date
Required	\$255,000	\$1,828,803
Given	\$360,094	\$1,942,964

*God continues to bless our faithfulness through
the tithes and offerings given to His Kingdom work.*



FIRST BAPTIST
CHURCH • ABILENE

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