

## Local Church Adopts Community Affected by Hurricane Rita as Mission Field

By M.I. Torres

Hurricane season is upon us, bringing with it the memories of the 2005 season. We have passed the anniversary of Katrina and are nearing that of Rita at the end of this month. As many of us still remember the images in the media or the personal experiences with disaster and tragedy, one church has taken knowledge a step further by making one affected community their own mission field.



Tomball's CrossPoint Church has brought the message of healing, repair, love and the gospel of Christ to Navy Park in Orange, Texas. In the past two years, the church has made two trips, donated thousands of dollars and repaired several homes and yards to the low-income neighborhood that was left in disarray after Hurricane Rita.

In September of 2005, Heather Nelson had recently been hired as Missions Leader at CrossPoint. A few weeks after came Hurricane Rita. Pastor Eddie Skinner asked Nelson to look into a mission trip for the Thanksgiving holiday, the first family mission trip the church had offered its congregation. As she started researching local areas, Nelson continuously came across people in Louisiana and Beaumont that needed help.

She found Don Ball who runs Navy Park, a predominantly African-American, low-income neighborhood of roughly 200 homes. To be a resident, tenants must first meet housing qualifications and are then offered several services in order to assist them in getting their lives back on track. Ball stated that the community was greatly in need but was not getting as much attention as Louisiana or Beaumont due to being a small town.



CrossPoint decided that this would be the place for the family mission trip. Three weeks before the Thanksgiving holiday, Nelson and a coworker went to Navy Park to videotape the area and interview the community.

"Each home was damaged. Not one home was left unscathed. There was roofing damage or debris all over the yard. People were living with trees on their house or stuck in a window," says Nelson.

After reporting to the church and showing the interviews and footage, the church responded with 75 people signing up and others donating thousands of dollars to purchase food and toys. Nelson, Skinner and the church staff made sure they were very organized and made a plan for how they would reach the community. The families joined together during their holiday break to clean up debris, chop down fallen trees and clear out trash.

On the first day of the trip, 25 children went door-to-door handing out flyers to invite the kids to the community center for "Kid Day," a vacation bible school type event. 35 kids arrived the next day for singing, crafts, bible stories, lunch and an age appropriate toy. Many children would not be receiving Christmas gifts that year, making the families grateful that their kids did receive a new toy.

Ladies from the congregation had also gone door-to-door seeking people who would not be having a Thanksgiving meal. On that day, the group did not clean but cooked and delivered Thanksgiving dinner to all who did not have the means to make their own.

Though all outreach was done from the community center, the congregation stayed a few blocks away at First Baptist Church of Orange. The church building was also affected, but CrossPoint was grateful to have a floor to sleep on in such a damaged area. Every evening the congregation held a time of worship to give thanks and discuss what God was doing and what blessings were witnessed. Everyone agreed that it was the best Thanksgiving they had experienced.

This year CrossPoint returned to Navy Park with its second family mission trip. The response from the previous trip was overwhelming, but many families had plans for their Thanksgiving. So the congregation offered the trip in the summer with 86 people responding -- 15 of whom were on the previous trip. The church planned for a second children's program.

Since the Thanksgiving trip gave kids toys for Christmas, the church offered school supplies for the summer trip. CrossPoint held a school supplies drive at the church before leaving, challenging the congregation kids to bring in school supplies for mission trips. Sixty kids brought in bags of supplies. Upon arrival, the congregation children again passed out flyers announcing the program. With the success of the school supplies drive, CrossPoint was able to give all 37 kids who attended Kid Days a new backpack full of school supplies. This time the church brought a carnival moonbounce for the kids to play. They also had crafts, lunch, snacks and bible stories. The kids went through the "wordless book" which described the Gospel of Salvation to each child.

As most of the debris had been cleared, the church focused on rebuilding. There was still a lot of roof damage and blue tarps covering buildings. Government roofing had not been taken care of at this point. The church roofed three buildings during the trip.

Before CrossPoint arrived, Don Ball had discovered a man in the area whose house was still badly damaged from Hurricane Rita. His porch had collapsed, his plumbing did not work and he never had air conditioning. Mr. Sam was a war veteran in his eighties who had lived in the house for thirty years. He also had a group of trees growing near his home which Ball and a crew cleared up. Nelson and the congregation reached out to Mr. Sam by tearing down and rebuilding his porch, painting his house, installing a window unit air conditioning system. The day the congregation left the community, Mr. Sam sat on his porch waving goodbye.

CrossPoint has built a foundation and many relationships in the Navy Park community which has become Crosspoint's adopted mission field. Nelson plans on offering the family mission trip every year rotating Thanksgiving and summer trips.

The church has discovered the advantage of family mission trips, having each member of the family work together and experience a community in need while sharing the Gospel. Nelson also takes her own family, having her husband and kids accompany her each trip.

"It's awesome to be able to live out what I teach and have them with me sharing that," says Nelson. Her daughter Faith, a second grader, learned what it is to be in poverty during the last trip. She observed to Nelson that the Navy Park kids "don't have what I have" and now gathers the toys she doesn't use to bring on the next trip.

Nelson observed similar epiphanies amongst the church youth saying, "Our kids were loving on all the other kids, playing with them, being open and sweet and caring. They were able to understand that God wants us to help people. As my kids get older, every year we'll go and learn, process and get a different view of how big God is and how He loves everyone."

Another lesson Nelson learned in working with Navy Park was how varied community troubles do affect the children. Though the trip was initiated by the damage of Hurricane Rita, Nelson learned that many of the residents are addicts or in recovery. In seeing the tremendous response to the Kid Day programs, Nelson met many community youth affected by their environment.

"Those kids are so starved for attention and unconditional love. Lots of the kids – we have no idea what their lives have been like for the five to fifteen years they've been on this planet," she said while recalling a nine year old girl who asked her to move there. Children were the anticipated participants at the Kid Day events, but Nelson mentioned a group of 15- and 16- year-old boys walking by watching the kids. "They were dressed and walking around being tough. You thought they'd think it was stupid to do crafts and sing, but they wanted to participate. They still need that, to feel a part of something," she says.

The relationships built in their new mission ground do not leave Nelson's or the churches prayers. She keeps in mind all that that Navy Park still needs saying, "We're not done. There's still so much to be done and when I'm there, I don't want to leave."

**Crosspoint's Sunday morning services are held at Concordia High School, 700 Main St, Tomball, TX. The north campus and church office are located at 11602 Kuykendahl-Huffsmith, Tomball, TX. Sunday services are at 9 and 10:30 am. Call 281-516-1135 for more information or visit [www.crosspointcc.net](http://www.crosspointcc.net).**