

## A Planted Seed



**Brian Gardner waited in the parking lot with yet another gift.** This time,

a PowerPack® — a colorful backpack filled with school supplies. *Gerald will be thrilled, he thought with a smile.*

Throughout the summer Brian had been working with the 11-year-old through a COVID-modified summer day camp offered by Cru® Inner City Chicago.

Brian and a Cru intern waited as Gerald's mom, Christine, pulled into the parking lot of the Agape Center where, in pre-pandemic years, the day camps were hosted. Brian introduced the intern to Gerald and asked the child to share what he learned during the home-based day camp.

"I know that He's the Son of God and I know that He helped create the world and I know that He died for me," the child declared.

Brian, who led his team through a month of chaotic planning to pivot their annual day camps away from the center to comply with pandemic restrictions, was almost giddy. Six weeks after the camp, Gerald still remembered what he learned about Jesus.

"For me that was *it*," Brian said. "When He says some plant, some water, for God brings the increase, I feel like I've planted. We're all doing some watering now and we have to keep praying and trusting God, but He's got it."



Gerald and his mom were one of 30 families served through the modified day camp, presented through weekly day camp kits delivered to their homes.

The kits included daily activity sheets, snacks and a family game such as Connect 4 or Uno. For the lessons, the children linked to a special "Jesus Journey" video series on YouTube, as well as how-to clips for craft projects and workout sessions — all created on the fly. The project illuminated God's hand at work in the chaos, and the creativity He provided our teams to think outside the "in-person camp" box.

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“We’re not going to let it stop the gospel from going forward,” Brian said of the coronavirus. “God can use broken people, broken places, pandemics, racial violence, whatever craziness is going on — and He can still save lives.”

Even now, nearly a year later, Brian still follows up with Christine, Gerald, and his 4-year-old brother,

Chade. While the resources may be an entry point, Brian sees it more like a relationship investment. After receiving an Easter Bag last month, Gerald accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior.

An investment still being made and bearing fruit today because of the prayers and generous giving of friends like you!

## Hope for the Poor



**Charles Gilbert has more roommates that he can count.**

Under the Dallas I-35 bridge, Charles’ wall-less home, there’s a constant ebb and flow of men and women of all backgrounds — some with no names, some struggling with addiction, all of them bearing the mark of indignity that comes from poverty and homelessness.

Tragically, Charles has even been a sad witness to those driven by despair to escape off the edge of that bridge.

“When people look at me like I’m not a human being it makes me feel like I have no hope,” said Charles, one of several homeless people who share their stories in Cru® Inner City’s powerful Bible study, *OptionsTogether™*. “I only find hope in Jesus Christ and that’s the only way I can find hope, because if I allow people to judge me the way that they’re judging

“I only find hope in Jesus Christ,” says Charles.

me — and let it hurt me — I would be one of those people jumping off the bridge right now.”

Issues of poverty aren’t tied to a calendar. Hunger and homelessness are persistent year-round. They don’t pause for the stifling heat of summer or the chill of wet, winter weather, both of which intensify the loneliness of those without a home or family.

“Don’t judge us,” he said. “Talk to us, find out what we’re like and make your judgment based on what you’ve learned from us.”

To learn more about the free Bible study, visit **[optionstogether.org](http://optionstogether.org)**.



# An Easter Gift & A New Disciple!



**LaToria was a first-grader when she first laid eyes on the simple bracelet with the colorful beads.** Each color on

the leather strap, she was told, represents an aspect of the gospel story.

She found the bracelet inside an Easter Bag, along with treats and gospel literature. The bags were donated by Cru® Inner City and distributed by Crown of Life Ministries during a park outreach in Bakersfield, California.

“She took that bracelet with her everywhere she went,” said LaVonne Jarrow, the outreach coordinator for Crown of Life Ministries.

After hearing the gospel message of the beads, all three kids accepted Christ and began regularly attending Crown of Life, but LaToria seemed especially intrigued.

LaToria explains the bracelets to her peers and what each color signifies, making sure they understand.

“She was so happy to get the Easter Bag,” LaVonne said. “When we did our little stories with them and sat down with them and talked to them, she wanted to start coming to church.”

The stories of Jesus provided hope for a little girl whose parents wrestled with substance abuse. Despite their struggle, Mom and Dad never stopped LaVonne from taking the kids to church.

Now 13, LaToria has become an ambassador for Christ as she helps deliver not only Easter Bags, but also the gospel message.



“She wanted to go with me, so I let her go and the kids took to her really good,” LaVonne shared, adding that LaToria has an innate ability to break the information down to their level. “I know that they can relate to her a little bit better. And they tend to receive her a little bit better. It’s just been awesome.”

As they spend time in the neighborhood, LaToria explains the bracelets to her peers and what each color signifies, making sure they understand Jesus loves them:

● YELLOW — THE LIGHT OF GOD’S LOVE

● BLUE — THE SADNESS THAT SIN CAUSES

● RED — THE BLOOD OF JESUS, SHED FOR OUR SALVATION

● CLEAR (OR “SEE-THROUGH”) — THE CLEANSING OF OUR SINS

● GREEN — FOR GROWING IN CHRIST

Sometimes LaToria also engages them with games. She always ends the sessions by inviting them to church.

LaVonne, who also serves as LaToria’s Sunday school teacher, noted the young teen’s tender heart.

“What impresses me most about LaToria is that she has a genuine love, for not only God, but just for people,” the teacher said. “You know, I feel that if we would have never done [the Easter Bags], and they were never invited, she might not have ever been the way she is now,” she said.

# A Personal Word



Milton Massie  
Executive Director/  
Steward

**There is something magical about the early days of the baseball season.** After a long, brutal winter, the green turf signals the comforting start of spring and the advent of summer. In ballfields nationwide — from Little League to the majors — teams duke it out to defend their turf. While it's fun

to watch at a game, the results of protecting our territory are disastrous in ministry.

Jesus calls us to a better way, which is why being Church-based is one of Cru® Inner City's three key principles of ministry. The other two are being Christ-centered, which we highlighted in our previous National Report, and Compassion-driven, which we will explore in our next edition.

Being Church-based is essential because, although we are a parachurch organization, we are members of the "body of Christ." Romans 12:5 and 1 Corinthians 12:27 remind us we are members of One Body. Even today, the Church — His Church — is His chosen agent to take the gospel to the lost. The good news is, because of the Good News, we get to partner and participate with inner-city churches in that anointed mission.

**Our Church-based principle also allows us to live out the Christlike traits of submission and service.** Ephesians 5:21 compels us to "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (NIV). This act of humbling is also seen when Jesus teaches us "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40, NIV).

Even secular baseball understands — to a certain extent — the concept of serving. One of the most exciting plays in the sport is the "sacrifice bunt," in which a player hits the ball in what will likely become an out, so that his teammate may advance to another base. Doing so negatively impacts his personal statistics, but, if orchestrated correctly, benefits the entire team.

When we partner with inner-city pastors and their churches, we, too, elevate the team, but with far greater stakes. We are fulfilling biblical instructions to be servant leaders. Serving with, and among, the least of these is "our calling."

That, believers, is an epic home run.

Grateful for your partnership,

Milton Massie  
Executive Director/Steward

## COVID-19 Relief — By the Numbers



**12-15**

Semis filled with food distributed to partners



**50,000**  
masks



**500,000**

gospel exposures



**250-300**

Christ-centered churches



**100,000**

families served



# Discipled in Christ!

**At only 15, Laura wasn't even driving age when she fled her family home.**

She had been forced by her single father to work the grape crops in the sweltering sun, southwest of Fresno, California. She hadn't been inside a classroom for six years.

Although the money she earned helped feed her younger siblings, Laura was demoralized by the incessant demands of her dad. So, the broken teen sought refuge in the wider world — but didn't fare much better.

By the time she was 19, Laura had two children and was on her second marriage. When that relationship turned violent, she was forced to run again.

That's when Laura met Millie, who operated a shelter for battered women. The 70-year-old woman loved Jesus and helped Laura put her faith in God and learn to love Him, too. But although her focus shifted away from an anything-goes lifestyle, she started striving to earn God's favor, much as she did with her strict father. Laura convinced herself she was not worthy of God's love as she was unable to meet others' high expectations.

"I was ignorant to the things of God so I just became a people pleaser," Laura said, later adding, "I felt like I could never measure up."

Laura wanted to change, but how does someone who doesn't even know how to read learn about God's character from His Word?

Laura found the answer through Cru® Inner City's 2 Timothy 2:2 Discipleship Training class, where she discovered a safe place to explore a relationship with God. This training — made possible through your ongoing prayers and financial support — helps to



Discipleship groups provide opportunities to build relationships, but more importantly, to study the word of God and draw near to Him.

develop the whole person and reinforces our core value to be Christ-centered in our ministry to others.

The discipleship training class helped her to realize God's mercy and grace — biblical principles that inspired her to stay on the path to spiritual maturity.

"It's not just a book that you open up and you say, 'Well, I just don't understand it,' and you just close it. You have to really seek Him out."

After missing so much school, Laura was reading at about a fourth-grade level. But as she sits at the table, studying God's Word with her new friends, her reading ability continues to improve.

"They make it so easy, and they're very patient with me," she said. "They explain things to me."

Laura has developed a new confidence and boldness by seeking God and persevering in discipleship. In fact, at a recent meeting, Laura eagerly volunteered to read part of the lesson.

"I'm learning to be teachable through the Holy Spirit and people that He brings into my life," she said.

With her growing understanding of God, Laura is now spreading that knowledge on to others, including her children and grandchildren.

Thank you for helping Laura — and others like her — to grow in experiencing God's love. Please pray that transformed lives would multiply throughout inner-city communities across the nation.

# A Summer of God's Love!

**It's hard to believe that summer is just a few weeks away.**

Even more remarkable: *College students are willing to give this summer up.*

After a year of uncertainty, instead of taking vacations or enjoying time off with friends and family, they're committing themselves to do whatever it takes to reach inner-city children and families for Jesus as "missionary interns" for our Summer Missions 2021 outreach.

The students are even paying for most of their own expenses ...

**But they can't cover the whole budget alone. They need someone — a friend like you — to send them. Equip them. And pray for them.**

By God's grace, we've made progress in closing the financial gap, but we still face a shortfall of \$64 per student per week for this outreach.

In years past, we've seen tremendous results — lives touched by God's love in action, hearts committed to Christ, impoverished communities built into and lifted up, and students able to explore the possibility of entering full-time ministry so they can lead others to Jesus.

It happened to a second-grader named Matthew. He lost a sister. He hoped she was in heaven ... and wanted to go there, too. "How do I do that?" he asked

Shanice, a college student who was teaching him that summer.

Shanice led Matthew to Jesus. Gave him his own Bible. Connected him to a local ministry. His life will never be the same ... because of Summer Missions!

We're grateful to "get back at it" after a year off amid the pandemic — and we're expecting God to move in big and exciting ways this year.

Please, prayerfully consider being a part of it. Your generous gift of support for Summer Missions today will empower a college student to share Jesus with inner-city children and families this summer ... making an impact that will last for years to come. *Thank you!*



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