

Back to School with Jesus! *You make it possible ...*



Noah stood next to the megachurch pastors, his 13-year-old face beaming as he waited to be baptized.

It was a rare moment when the adolescent wasn't distracted or fidgeting.

Instead, he was *all in* — thrilled to be outwardly professing his newfound faith in Jesus!

It all started with a PowerPack® distribution at The Crossing, a three-campus church serving the greater Tampa area. Cru® Inner City provides PowerPacks® — brightly colored backpacks filled with school supplies and gospel literature — as a resource gift to local partner ministries.

In all, 700 PowerPacks were handed out in Tampa last year through the support of friends like you. **Noah was a beneficiary of your kindness.**

During the annual event, church volunteers met in intimate settings with students and parents as they demonstrated the love of Christ to their neighbors,

They are spreading the word ... **and the Word** ... throughout their community, inviting others to take part, and sharing the hope of Jesus.



most of them migrants. *The message resonated profoundly with Noah, who professed faith in Jesus and asked to be baptized.*

The teen and his family have remained active in the church since the PowerPack distribution. The change in Noah's life prompted his older sister,

Maria, 15, to also dedicate her life to Christ, and be baptized. When it was Maria's turn, the pastors invited Noah to help. The family's emotion was palpable.

Along with Noah and Maria, several other families

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Back to School with Jesus!

You make it possible ...

who received the blessing of school supplies last year continue to attend The Crossing faithfully. They are spreading the word ... **and the Word** ... throughout their community, inviting others to take part, and sharing the hope of Jesus.



You made it possible. We're so grateful for your partnership. Thank you for your compassionate support of Cru serving the inner city!

Connected to Christ ... and GROWING in Faith!

Cru® Inner City staff were gathered for a meeting late last year, discussing day-to-day operations at Chicago's S.A.Y. Yes!® Center, when the doorbell rang.

Standing outside looking in was Elliott, a former student, who, along with three older brothers, had spent hours at the facility, one of 56 Cru Inner City's S.A.Y. Yes! Centers for Youth Development® nationwide.



Our awesome S.A.Y. Yes! Centers for Youth Development® are located in areas of need in America's inner cities ... offering after-school programs mentoring at-risk children. With tutoring, homework help, healthy snacks, athletics, arts and crafts, Bible studies, and so much more, we're reaching children with the life-changing love of Christ!



Elliott, who recently moved back to the Windy City, was there to enroll one of his sons in the S.A.Y. Yes! after-school program.

Now, as a 30-year-old father, he shared that since the time he spent in the program as a young man, he's strived to stay connected to the Lord through life's ups and downs.

We invited Elliott to join one of our adult discipleship courses, provided at the center. Elliott jumped at the opportunity!

Today, Elliott and his young son are "regulars" at the S.A.Y. Yes! Center — and growing strong in their relationship with each other ... and Jesus.

Praise God that the seeds planted over 20 years ago are continuing to bear fruit! And thank you for your faithfulness and support.



One Life-Changing “YES”

Janelle was no stranger to Chicago’s S.A.Y. Yes! Center for Youth Development®, a youth-oriented community hub operated by Cru® Inner City. She lives just down the street from the center, which offers a myriad of after-school programs for kids.

And that’s not all, Janelle is also Brad Harry’s neighbor. Brad is the co-team director of the S.A.Y. Yes!® Center. Despite frequent invitations to come to the Center, Janelle always declined.

Brad kept asking. Finally, his persistence won as Janelle and her sister, Jennifer, showed up for a teen Bible study at the center.

“As she kept consistently coming to programs, I began to form a friendship with Janelle,” said Anilda Barbosa, one of our staff members who works at the center. “Soon Janelle was showing up at the S.A.Y. Yes! Center every Monday night just to spend time with me.”

In addition to Bible study, Anilda has taken Janelle out to dinner and encouraged her to serve others by helping to prepare gospel bead packets for the annual Boxes of Love campaign!

“I started to mentor Janelle, checking in on different areas of her life, reading the Bible with her,

and getting to know her on a deeper level,” Anilda shared, adding that earlier this year one of Janelle’s relatives was hospitalized for two weeks.

“It was a really scary and uncertain situation. But still, Janelle showed up like clockwork at the S.A.Y. Yes! Center to hang out. She shared about the scary stuff going on at home, and the conversation led to spiritual things.”

Following the lead of the Holy Spirit, Anilda asked a pointed question.

“How is your relationship with God going?”

“I don’t think I have a relationship with God,” Janelle confessed.

“Would you like to?” Anilda asked.

Janelle’s answer was immediate: “Yes!!”

“She received Christ right then and there,” Anilda said. “This is such a beautiful example of whole-person discipleship. Our desire is to walk with our kids, like Janelle and Jennifer, through the ups and downs of life and to help them know Jesus.”

She received Christ right then and there!

God is reaching children with His love through our 56 S.A.Y. Yes! Centers for Youth Development across America. Thank you for making it possible — because of your awesome support, Janelle said “YES” to Jesus!

In Her Own Words ...

“Milwaukee changed me”

Jordan, from rural South Carolina, was part of a team of college students from across the country joining up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for a Summer Missions project through Cru® Inner City.

While leading children and families to faith in Jesus is the ultimate goal, Summer Missions is also a place where young adults receive life-changing training on how to effectively share the gospel with strangers. In the process, they are also profoundly impacted.

In Milwaukee, Jordan participated with nine other students, spending 14 hours a day serving and learning together.

“Milwaukee has changed me,” she said, adding that, as a southerner, “seeing diversity and embracing it was a rare occasion.”

The experience was so impactful for her, Jordan is open to returning to inner-city work in Milwaukee after graduation.

“My heart is being pulled toward the city,” she said, “and if God opens the door for me to return, I will walk eagerly through it.”

Every summer with the support of friends like you, college students hit the streets of urban America to minister in a variety of ways among Cru® Inner City’s ministry partners. They help run camps, engage children in fun activities, serve the homeless in soup kitchens, and more ... all designed to lead others to Christ.



A Posture for the Poor



Milton Massie
Executive Director/
Steward

It was another cold Christmas Day in Chicago and most families were sequestered together celebrating the holiday.

We, too, were with family — our extended church family — as we gathered to celebrate Jesus' birth.

Even though it was some 30 years ago, I remember it well. During the service,

there was a knock on the door. We opened it to find several homeless brothers standing on the stairs looking for something to eat since food and shelter providers had closed down to observe Christmas.

Responding to the need, several of the sisters quickly went home and gathered food for an impromptu spread. The heartfelt response from our visitors was filled with gratitude — and the next week, they were back, bringing others with them. Week after week, they kept coming back, leading the church to establish a breakfast ministry.

The Christmas encounter inspired an outreach to the poor. God jumpstarted the process by bringing the vulnerable right to our doorstep. His intervention should be of no surprise because it reflects His tender heart for the poor. In fact, more than 2,000 verses directly teach us about God's heart for the poor, the needy, the orphan, and the widow.

In Romans 15:25-29, for instance, Paul writes that, after numerous delays, a door opened to finally visit the Italian city of Rome, in hopes of sharing the gospel. Although he intended to travel straight there, an unexpected surprise prompted a quick detour. The reason, Paul shared, was the Gentiles who — poor in their own right — demonstrated a sincere act of brotherly love by taking up a collection benefitting Jewish believers in Jerusalem. He gladly accepted the travel delay as prompted by the Holy Spirit.



Paul shows us in this passage that he didn't see serving the poor as a distraction. It was, instead, a demonstration of commitment to the gospel's message. It was an outpouring of his own discipleship. In Galatians 2:10, Paul describes having an “eager” posture when it came to the needs of the poor.

Cru[®] Inner City carries the same posture. **We focus on this space because Jesus called us here.** We are committed to what Christ calls the Great Commandment, to love God and to love your neighbor.

This foundational commandment is the bedrock of the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations. It addresses heart attitudes, including the sins of prejudice, narcissism, materialism, sexism, and racism. When we view the world as Jesus does, through the filter of the Great Commandment, those sins pale in comparison as we can now clearly see poor image bearers as Imago Dei, regardless of skin color or economic and social status.

That's the same view that prompts strangers to interrupt their own holiday plans to provide a hearty, spontaneous meal for someone in need.

Ready for a seat at the table?

Grateful for your partnership,



Milton Massie

Executive Director/Steward

Pens, Glue, Paper ... and JESUS PowerPacks® Rule!!!



Word spread fast.

Advocate United Church of Christ in Chicago was hosting a back-to-school outreach. The main event: a free giveaway of PowerPacks® from Cru® Inner City — colorful backpacks filled with school supplies and gospel literature.

Little Celeste needed school supplies. Badly. But her mom, Tania, knew she couldn't go to the event. *There's no way a church would welcome someone like her, she thought.*

But God's love knows no bounds ... and neither does yours!

When Celeste didn't show up at the outreach, volunteers from the church went to her. They hand delivered Celeste's special backpack filled with school supplies — and shared the love of Christ.

Tania and her little daughter were struggling. Because of a past police record, Tania couldn't find solid work. She was ashamed of some of the ways she had found to make money. Tania believed her history, coupled with anger at God, disqualified her from going to church.

The volunteers spoke the gospel into Tania's life that day. A week later, they had secured a job for Tania. Soon after, Tania joined a Bible study class and is now faithfully attending church with Celeste! She is turning her life around ... and it all began with the gift of a PowerPack®.



Today, you can offer PowerPacks — and HOPE — to children and families of the inner city. How many can you help us give this year? Please be as generous as possible!



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