

Following Jesus



One of the core values of Agape is *to derive power and direction from the redemptive life and message of Jesus Christ*. Put simply, we follow Jesus. Many organizations provide career services, financial education, case management, and college readiness. So what does Jesus have to do with getting a job or finishing college? I believe with all my heart that Jesus has everything to do with a healthy adulthood.

I was recently explaining to someone the culture of Agape as wholly dedicated to Jesus and unapologetic. I gave the example of a particular young woman who was sexually molested throughout her childhood by a male relative. This continued until she left home, and even in her adulthood, this woman cannot relate to men other than through sex. She stays in abusive, parasitic relationships because she has learned a false idea of love. Unfortunately, many women and men from our community share a similar story of pain and shame. If not

for Jesus' atoning death on the cross, on what basis should she forgive her abusers? Without His payment, she would be left to seek out her own repayment, which could never really satisfy. Without Jesus' resurrection from the tomb, what power exists that can heal addictions and deep wounds? Without supernatural intervention, the obstacles and shackles of sin are insurmountable.

In more affluent communities, a façade has hidden the need for Jesus for many years. The recent financial crises and corporate scandals have brought to light the universal need for Jesus in our world. Jesus does not live in our educational and economic system; He lives in us. God can affect our world, our workplace, our schools, our government, and our communities. But slapping the label "Christian" on a program and saying the word "Jesus" in a school doesn't change what's inside anymore than a Ferrari bumper sticker changes a Ford Pick-Up. Our following Jesus in every aspect of life brings the Light into the darkness.

I was watching a political talk show where a man answered a question by saying, "No, No. There's nothing wrong with greed." He was trying to defend an economic theory, but you cannot follow Jesus and keep your greed. You cannot follow Jesus and sell poisonous drugs simultaneously. Following Jesus will call both rich and poor to change direction and take new path toward abundant life.

By Kirk Craig

Following Jesus is one of four core values of Agape. Each newsletter this year will talk about our core values.

Celebration Dessert 2008 & Pledges for 2009

On November 13th, about 130 people gathered together to hear the story of Agape's past 3 years. The attendees at the Celebration Dessert 2008 saw and heard first hand what God has been doing in the Third Ward through our young adults. That night alone we raised over \$28,000 and more money continues to come in as a result of your generosity!! We have big budget to raise for 2009 because we want to expand the Gateway House to more residents who will commit to a year of life changing training. David and Melissa Hill, Kirk and Amanda Craig, and our volunteers will continually give intense, hands-on teaching about health in the 5 PEERS areas: Physical, Economic, Educational, Relational, and Spiritual. Operating the Gateway House in an effective, life-giving manner will require adding several resident interns to our staff as well more housing. Our previous budget of about \$170,000 will expand to fund the new additions.



Donors meet the members.



Gateway House sings a gospel song together at the celebration!

We invite you to participate in our fundraising campaign for 2009. Please pray about how you want to impact the Third Ward for generations to come, and return the enclosed pledge card from our Celebration Dessert. The back of the pledge card demonstrates that whether \$50 for dinner at women's bible study or \$5000 to furnish an apartment, every gift makes lasting, tangible changes in the lives of inner city young adults.

Thanks for your support!!

Gateway House

For the past three months, Gateway House has been transforming the lives of several young adults thru Bible study, service projects, life skills classes, nutritional and cooking classes, individual counseling, and your prayers. September and October were difficult months due to Hurricane Ike changing many of our plans. Our retreat moved from September to October and from Huntsville to Katy. David and Melissa Hill led Bible study and worship times in between trips to Katy Mills Mall. The Hills set the tone for what the year long commitment would be, and everyone came back unified and ready to work.



Line dancing at the community cookout!



A Whole Family Feast!

During the month of November, the Gateway hosted a complete community cookout. Agape staff set the goal, but the residents created flyers, invited the surrounding neighbors, decorated the lawn, planned the meal, cooked the food, and provided the music. Children, young adults, volunteers, parents, sisters, and grandparents all enjoyed the afternoon. We even got into a little line dancing at the end! The community really understood that these young adults are here to make a difference.

For Thanksgiving, the group showed a similar independence by assigning the various menu items to each other. "Everyone can bring something," they said. So the table was filled with mashed potatoes, cake, jambalaya, stuffing, turkey, and gravy. I can't think of a better re-creation of the First Thanksgiving than our assortment of friends and neighbors pitching in to make a joyous celebration!!

Everyday I see the residents growing in responsibility and initiative. Through prayers, direct confrontation, patience, and hard work, these young adults prepare themselves to lead the community into a new era, a new kind of neighborhood. We are excited to see what happens next!

Creating Opportunities

When I was 12 years old, I had the opportunity to go to work for the family business. At age 17, a high school coach told me about a summer basketball coaching job. At age 21, a church member referred me to an investment company for a summer internship. While I was qualified for each of the positions, my connections opened the door of opportunity. At Agape, we want to open those same doors of opportunity for the residents of Third Ward who need a connection. The mere hope of such opportunity can shift the mindset to one of action rather than self pity, from excuses to initiative.

One the young adults in our discipleship program told me he had no chance of getting a job at a particular restaurant. I entered the restaurant and asked about openings. The manager quickly handed me an application and asked when could I interview. The next day, our Agape member inquired at the same restaurant only to hear, "We're not hiring right now." I was furious, and I realized that the young man's words had some truth to them. Agape is committed to opening doors into employment and education for everyone. In the future, we plan to create opportunities ourselves like owning small businesses, assisting 1st time home buyers, and ensuring degree completion.



An opportunity seized!

While we are offering gateways to an abundant spiritual life, Agape can open doors to a new financial, family, and educational life as well. For the next generation of Third Ward residents, we will have summer jobs at family businesses, basketball camps, and even investment firms!

Creating Opportunities is one of four core values of Agape. Each newsletter this year will talk about our core values.

GIFTS IN KIND

SMALL LAWN SHED: a place to store lawnmower, grill, and weed-eater away from kids and rain.

PAPER FOLDER : a small electric paper folder to save staff time on newsletters, receipts, and mailers.

BOARD GAMES & MOVIES : healthy and appropriate for stimulating young adult minds.

For questions or delivery details, please contact Agape at 713-658-1001 or donate@agapedevelopment.org

GATEWAY NEEDS VOLUNTEERS

Family Mentoring invest in a young adult with your whole family: laundry, movies, family dinner, friendship

Childcare care for the children of the participants during Bible study, workshops etc.

Life-Skills Workshops on Parenting & Conflict Resolution

For details and a complete list, please contact Agape at 713-658-1001 or volunteer@agapedevelopment.org