

Joanna Calhoun of Katy at the
Shishu Bhavan Orphanage

Katy Teens Giving Back

Local students
experience
life-changing
journey
at Mother
Teresa's homes
in Kolkata

Written by Kelly Isenberger

Mother Teresa won a Nobel Peace Prize for her work in Kolkata, India among the poor, sick, and orphaned in 1979, yet she has to be the humblest of all winners. She gave her life to the destitute and lived in a small, meager room in the center of the loudest, filthiest street in one of the poorest cities in the world. A group of Katy ISD high school graduates recently traveled thousands of miles to learn more about serving like Mother Teresa. They stretched themselves beyond their comfortable limits and served the poor, sick, and orphaned.

Reaching out to the Destitute

Omar Garcia, mission pastor of Kingsland Baptist Church, led the student trip. Being his fifth trip to Kolkata and Mother Teresa's homes, this was his second time to take a group of students. "I am no stranger to the sight of extreme poverty and suffering," explains Garcia. "I have seen a lot of human suffering from a relatively sterile distance. And I have always returned to my comfortable home."

But he knew this trip would be different, because of its sole focus on helping the less fortunate and the destitute. "This trip put us in direct contact with the least of these in a way that few other things do," Garcia shares. "You have to touch people in need, look them in the eye, hear their groans, and assist them with their most basic needs. In essence, it forces you to close the distance between yourself and those in need."

Mother Teresa has many different homes around the city of Kolkata and throughout the world. With thousands of volunteers coming from around the world to serve annually, there is no online sign-up or pre-registration. Volunteers coming to learn from the Missionaries of Charity simply attend an orientation where the sisters assign volunteers. The group from Katy served at three of Mother Teresa's homes: an orphanage named Shishu Bhavan, a home for the terminally ill called Prem Dan, and Daya Dan, a home for children who are severely handicapped or mentally challenged.

Connecting with Children in Need

Rachel Leiby, a recent graduate of Cinco Ranch High School, admits she felt nervous at first about traveling to India, but knew it would be a once-in-a-lifetime experience. "The first few days were sensory overload, with all the sights and smells, but I was fascinated by it and I wasn't scared at all," she shares.

At the Shishu Bhavan orphanage, Leiby worked with children ages 2 to 6. The Katy grads spent time playing with the children and helping to feed them. "We loved on the kids, which was the main reason we were there," Leiby says. "That is what they lacked the most." By the last day, she had a hard time leaving the kids. "I think the hardest part was knowing that they've grown up without a family and how we take that for granted," she explains. "These children never had the opportunity to experience a family, and leaving them, I knew I would never see them again."

Another group from the Katy team went to Daya Dan, a home for young mentally or physically challenged children. George Sinclair, a graduate of Cinco Ranch High School, recalls how the Katy group would spend the day playing and talking with the children. "The hardest part was communicating and talking with them," recalls Sinclair. "We are so different."

Yet, the team was able to play basic games like Duck, Duck, Goose with the children. Sinclair explains, "The littlest things you can do for people can go a long way. I would blow on a boy's stomach, and he would laugh forever. It's really so easy."

Touching the Lives of the Terminally Ill

A recent Taylor High School graduate, Wes Kerr proved a leader among the well-rounded group of Katy students. He has taken a mission trip almost every summer since junior high and couldn't pass up the opportunity to go and serve others in need. For Kerr and the rest of the Katy team, a day spent serving at Prem Dan involved putting on an apron and getting to work applying lotion to the hands, feet, and legs of physically weak, terminally ill residents. "The joy we brought to the residents was apparent," describes Kerr.

The team would talk to the residents as they worked, also helping them to exercise, delivering dinner, feeding them, and even helping them go to the restroom. Kerr



Hayley Edmonson of Katy with a girl at Shishu Bhavan orphanage

“Go out into the world today and love the people you meet. Let your presence light new light in the hearts of people.”

– Mother Teresa



Rachel Leiby and Hayley Edmonson with children at the Shishu Bhavan orphanage in India



Rachel Leiby shares a smile and a hug with a boy at the Shishu Bhavan orphanage in India

explains, "Every time that Mother Teresa served, she would see them as God's children or Jesus himself. Knowing that really encouraged and strengthened me." Kerr had an opportunity to spend one of his days with a resident, and it ended up being the man's last day here on earth. Kerr remembers, "They brought in one guy who was in bad condition. It was shocking, and just looking at him it was obvious that he wouldn't last long. I spent the majority of that day saying encouraging things to him. He passed away in the night. I felt reassured that God had taken care of him."

Changed Hearts

Sinclair enjoyed the chance to serve the less fortunate in India. "Serving people is something I really like to do," he explains. "It is God's gift to me." Kerr adds, "Seeing such a high level of poverty and knowing that I will never personally face this challenge has humbled me and made me so aware of my privileges. This trip has opened my heart." Leiby echoes his words, saying, "I think God was really tugging at my heart strings." Mother Teresa once said, "We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop." The students from Katy truly were a drop of love in an ocean full of suffering.

In their time of service, they reached out to touch the destitute and helpless, gazed upon those who slip through the cracks unnoticed, and met the basic needs of those who have been abandoned by society. They learned firsthand about the love and charity taught by Mother Teresa, who once said, "The success of love is in the loving; it is not in the result of loving. Of course, it is natural in love to want the best for the other person, but whether it turns out that way or not does not determine the value of what we have done." **KM**

KELLY ISENBERGER is a Katy mom of two and has traveled to Kolkata, India to serve at Mother Teresa's homes with two student groups.



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Inspiring Words

from Mother Teresa on Life

“Life is an opportunity, benefit from it. Life is beauty, admire it. Life is a dream, realize it. Life is a challenge, meet it. Life is a duty, complete it. Life is a game, play it. Life is a promise, fulfill it. Life is sorrow, overcome it. Life is a song, sing it. Life is struggle, accept it. Life is tragedy, confront it. Life is an adventure, dare it. Life is luck, make it. Life is too precious, do not destroy it. Life is life, fight for it.”

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