

# CROSSCULTURAL

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Tommy Foster, First Church of Mountain Home youth pastor



## First Church of Mountain Home youth cross cultures in Dallas/Fort Worth

Ministering to another ethnic group with a different language and from a unique culture is never easy. At times it feels almost impossible.

This concern weighed heavy on the mind of Tommy Foster, youth pastor at First Church of Mountain Home, as he planned a mission trip.

"We wanted to communicate to our youth that the gospel is a global message," Foster said. "The Great Commission commands us to go to all nations, languages and people groups."

The group originally planned to serve in Mexico, but because of instability there, they went to the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex to minister to inner city children of Hispanic and African American descent.

First Church's youth trained for more than four months to lead soccer and basketball camps and a backyard Bible club for younger children, according to Foster.

"We partnered with a program called 'Mission Arlington' that assigned us to two apartment complexes," Foster explained. "One was primarily African American, while the other was Hispanic. The basketball camp was a huge success for the African American children while the Hispanic children at the other complex loved the soccer program."

While there were adults on the trip, all three mission programs were completely student led. Each camp and club had a student leader who planned and trained the students on their team with the help of youth

interns and an adult leader.

"The goal was to train the youth to lead a mission trip similar to this when they become adults," Foster said. "We wanted them to struggle with the process. This was important so that they learned all the details that went into planning and leading all types of ministry events."

Those working the basketball and soccer camps gave away more than 75 soccer and basketballs donated by the church and its members. They also donated homemade soccer goals to Mission Arlington.

During the backyard Bible club, youth gave away over 200 stuffed animals that were donated as well as other toys appropriate for the age group. The youth group also gave away over 160 Bibles to children and adults. This included Spanish Bibles to moms and dads who did not speak English.

"We were amazed at how much the Bibles meant to the children and adults," Foster said. "Some received them with tears in their eyes. We had the youth write notes in them and highlight passages of Scripture in the Bibles for the children and adults to read at a later time."

The backyard Bible club programs included puppets, recreation, arts and crafts, refreshments and a Bible story time.

"As the week progressed, we realized that some of the children were receiving their only meal of the day during our refreshment time," Foster noted. "Many of the children wore the same pair of clothes every day. All of our youth took up money to help one family pay their water and



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electric bill. This was an emotional time for our youth and adults, as we were reminded how blessed we are in Mountain Home."

By the end of the week, more than 100 children had attended the camps and Bible club program. Twenty-three of the children prayed to receive Christ and other decisions were made. Mission Arlington staff will follow up the decisions.

"It was difficult to say goodbye to these children," Foster said. "Many of them would not stop hugging our youth. There were a lot of tears along with prolonged waves as we pulled away from the apartment complex. Needless to say, it was very difficult to leave the children behind."

The students and adults on the trip learned that something as simple as a basketball or soccer ball helps

break down cultural barriers when attempting to share the gospel.

"It was amazing to watch how quickly the children and teens from the apartment complex forgot that the color of our skin was different when we introduced a ball and a goal," Foster explained. "Language was no longer an issue. Our youth did a wonderful job of loving them by playing with them. Children who were standing in the shadows of their doorways on day one were sitting in the laps of our youth reading the Bible by day three."

"We saw children who started fights early in the week pray to receive Christ and hug people by the end of the week. It was amazing how the love of Christ was able to permeate the camps and the Bible club time."