

PROFILE OF GIVING

WITH HELP FROM CONVOY OF HOPE, A SMALL CHURCH REACHES ITS INNER-CITY NEIGHBORS

By Kirk Noonan



Phillip Baugh as an inner-city minister.

For Phillip Baugh, life used to be like riding a roller-coaster blindfolded. Because of an insatiable drug addiction and years of poor choices, he was never sure what a day would bring him. One moment he could be on top of the world; the next he could be plummeting downhill. Drugs and crime threw Baugh for a loop time and again.

But in late 1992 the fast living caught up with Baugh. He was sent to a Southern California prison on a felony conviction. Baugh now says his lockup was one of the best things that ever happened to him.

“It was a divine appointment,” he says of his incarceration. “I was being set up by God.”

Part of the *setup* was a Christian prison counselor who got Baugh talking about his past, the mistakes he had made, the people he had let down and the Christian faith he had left as a child. As tears rolled down Baugh’s cheeks, the counselor asked another inmate, who was at least 30 years Baugh’s senior, to come into the room and pray.

“It moved me when the other inmate prayed,” Baugh, 41, says. “I committed my life to Christ that day in the counselor’s office.”

According to Baugh he was immediately delivered from drugs and alcohol.

Soon after, he began working in the prison’s chapel where he was disciplined by the chaplain and other inmates. The experience proved formative and set Baugh on a path that would eventually lead to a poverty-stricken section of Port Arthur, Texas, where he currently serves as senior pastor of The Rock Community Outreach Center.

“God provided the way for our family to come here,” Baugh says of his move to Texas from the Northwest three years ago. “But it wasn’t easy. When we arrived we had a building with no people.”

Hurricane Katrina would help change that.

Ever since the church was started, Baugh has told his burgeoning congregation of 65 that reaching into the community with Christ’s message of love and hope is paramount.

“God wants the people that no one wants,” he says. “Because of that, so do we.”

Making contact with those who are impoverished, drug addicted or entangled in gangs and prostitution was made easier for Baugh in the days after Katrina struck.

Knowing that aid would be a long time in coming to Port Arthur, Baugh telephoned Convoy of Hope and asked for assistance.

“A truck full of cleaning supplies, water and food was immediately dispatched to Port Arthur,” Michael Redmon, Convoy’s U.S. outreach director, says. “It was the beginning of a great relationship.”

Within 48 hours the truck arrived at The Rock. With most of his members reeling from hurricane damage, Baugh, his wife, Tiffany, their teenaged daughter and two family members began distributing the food, water and supplies to hundreds of people. The work was taxing and lasted from sunup to sundown.

“At one point we got so tired I just called out to anyone in the line to volunteer to help us pass things out,” Baugh recalls. “Five ladies whom we had never met did. They stayed with us for al-

most an entire week.”

A few weeks later a team of volunteers consisting of members from Convoy of Hope and a large religious organization descended on Baugh’s church and parsonage to do repairs.

It was then that Baugh met Fory Vandeneinde, a Convoy of Hope representative working Katrina relief efforts. Vandeneinde offered to send truckloads of furniture that Baugh and his congregation could distribute to the families of Port Arthur. Baugh readily accepted the offer. Since then, Convoy of Hope has sent more than 18 truckloads of furniture donated by corporations to the city for distribution.

Helping those in need fits perfectly with the church’s mission statement, which reads in part, “Dedicated to the restoration of broken lives.”

“I appreciate Convoy of Hope so much for giving us tools,” Baugh says. “They have supplied us with the tools to reach this community with love. We couldn’t do what we do without them.”

Though finances run thin almost every month and life in the inner city can be challenging, the Baughs say they are in the center of God’s will helping those in need.

“Ministering here to these people is like going back after myself before I met Christ,” says Baugh. “Like many of the people here, I just needed someone to come after me and tell me about Jesus.” **tpe**

KIRK NOONAN is managing editor of *Today’s Pentecostal Evangel* and blogs at Simple Plan (knoonan.agblogger.org).

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.