

# MAKING A DIFFERENCE

BUFFALO DREAM CENTER | BOL 2018



PASTORS ERIC & MICHELLE JOHNS

## BOXES OF LOVE CELEBRATES 20TH ANNIVERSARY

PASTOR ERIC T. JOHNS

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As I look back, it is hard to believe that it was twenty years ago when I packed my bags and went to live with the homeless on the streets of Buffalo, New York. I wasn't even thirty-years-old. I had no idea what I was doing. I just had a clear word from God to do it.

The story attracted the attention of the media. Every evening the television news stations aired the story of the young pastor and his friend, Keith "Shoes" Cauley. The pastor and the ex-convict were living on the streets to shine a light on the needs of the city and raise money for Christmas gifts for children. The community supported us and Boxes of Love began.

Some ideas sound crazy at first. Sometimes it is simply because nobody has ever done it. Other times, people may look at the person with the idea and think, "He shouldn't be doing something like that." In my case, I think it was a little bit of both. However, I have learned that every idea that comes from God takes faith. If it does not take faith to accomplish the task, it probably is not a God given idea.

This year I will pack the same blue backpack and roll up the same sleeping bag that I used twenty years ago. That "idea" has become an annual part of my life. In some kind of strange way, the annual trek on the streets has defined me in the minds of people.

The homeless week and all of the work that goes into Boxes of Love has also defined the Buffalo Dream Center as a church that loves people and helps families in need. I have always felt that, as a pastor, I am responsible for the people who attend my church and the people who do not attend my church. In other words, I have two congregations – those who attend church on Sunday and those who do not. The people of my city are my second congregation. Churches that are only focused on the people who are "members" are not only neglecting the people who need Jesus, they are not doing what the church was called to do.

This is why we help three thousand families every Christmas. At the

Buffalo Dream Center, we are committed to the place God has given to us as an assignment. It is a territorial commitment. Throughout the Bible, God blessed places before He blessed people. For example, He blessed the land of Canaan and then the people came to the land. He told the early church that He was going to pour out His Spirit in Jerusalem. The people went to the place where God was pouring out His Spirit.

Proverbs 12:11 says, "Whoever works HIS land will have plenty to eat." Notice you need to be working on YOUR land. God has place for you to work. When you are committed to the place, God's blessing comes upon the work you are doing. This is one of the reasons so many Christians are confused, wondering about God's plan for their lives. It comes from a lack of commitment to the place God in which God put them to serve Him.

I believe we must love the place God has put us. We cannot live every day wondering what it would be like in another place. I think Buffalo, New York is the greatest place on earth! That is because it is my territory. It is the place God put me. The Buffalo Dream Center loves our city and we are committed to seeing it become a better place.

What does that mean? We love our city. We pray for our city. We teach God's Word in our city. We also help the people. We show them the love of Jesus. What better way than giving away food and toys during the Christmas Season?

More than one thousand volunteers will come through the Buffalo Dream Center during the month of December. They will wrap gifts, assemble bags of food, and give it all away at distribution sites across Buffalo and Niagara Falls. Dozens of churches from various denominations will come together to show God's love to people in need. I actually believe it changes the spiritual atmosphere of our city when the church comes together to help people and introduce them to the love of Jesus.

Someone asked me recently why ...continued on page 2



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we continue to help families every December. Why do we keep doing it year after year? There are many reasons. We are helping people in need. If people are hungry, we are called to feed them. If families are living every day without hope, the food and toys they receive are opportunities to introduce

them to the Jesus, the Hope of Glory. But Boxes of Love does something else. Proverbs 11:11 tells us, "By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted." It lifts up our city. Our commitment to the place God has for us pushes back the darkness and allows God's light to shine.

Please consider sponsoring me as I live on the streets with the homeless. Your gift will help a family in need of food and toys. Thank you for joining us as we lift up the families of our city this Christmas Season.

## TEAM OF FOUR PEOPLE REACH THOUSANDS WITH THE GOSPEL IN INDIA BY: MICHELLE JOHNS

Throughout the years the church in India has been persecuted and Christians have always been a minority. In the past I have travelled to North India where there are anti-conversion laws. However, I have never seen a government so active in trying to abolish Christianity in India as the one in power now. The Indian people are afraid of their government. During our trip we had to move most of our meetings inside. We had to be very careful while we were in public places, such as a restaurant or a hotel lobby, not to discuss what we were doing.

After flying into Chennai, we met our driver and friend, Veera. He was a Hindu, but he gave his life to Jesus the first time he drove for our family eight years ago. He was not just our driver. During our time traveling across India, he was a part of our team. After one night of rest, we began our journey the next day and traveled to Vijayawada.

We spent the first two days of ministry with Pastor Joshua. His church is located in a remote area about two hours from where we were staying. In our two days of ministry with him, we

conducted eight meetings. We taught church leaders, held children's outreaches, and did evangelistic meetings at Pastor Joshua's church. The meetings were supposed to be outside, but they were moved inside of the church due to security reasons. However, many people attended and were saved and healed. A little boy who had been deaf in one ear since birth was healed along with many others.

After two days with Pastor Joshua we began working with Pastor Sagar. He oversees the Center of Hope in Guntur. He has about twenty five children living at the Center of Hope and works with more than sixty pastors who have planted about one hundred fifty churches in the area. I did a women's seminar in one of his churches. More than two hundred women attended and were impacted by God's power. Many testified of being healed and set free from depression.

Every evening, Pastor Eric and I split up and did two meetings in remote village areas where God healed and saved many people. Because we were able to preach in separate places we reached ten villages in five nights. Most of the villages in the area are full of agriculture workers,

fishermen, and prawn farmers. I wish all my friends could visit a village. It is like stepping into another world trapped in a different era of time. Village outreaches are my favorite. I love seeing the smiles that come upon people's faces as they hear the simple Gospel message for the first time or as they experience the power of God touching them. Some of the village meetings were inside primitive churches and other meetings were outside – open air style.

During our time with Pastor Sagar we conducted two children's festivals reaching eight hundred children with the Gospel. We also held two leadership seminars in which we trained approximately six hundred church leaders, all of whom are pastoring in more than one village. Many leaders received the baptism in the Holy Spirit at the seminars.

The next stop on our journey was Tirupati. also known as the Temple Town. This city is home to the world's largest Hindu temple. When Pastor Eric first traveled to India more than twenty years ago there were only three churches in Tirupati. Now there are more than one hundred. When we arrived the churches had been praying for forty-two weeks for the city. Each week all the pastors meet and pray for their nation, city, and ministries. A different church





hosts it each time. We had the privilege of going to the weekly prayer meeting which was attended by more than one hundred fifty pastors, leaders, and other believers.

While in Tirupati we also preached in churches, did outreaches in villages, and conducted leadership seminars. We visited both Center of Hope locations – one for boys and one for girls. Pastor Arul and Mary oversee both homes and have begun to reach out to girls in the community. There are twelve orphans at the Center of Hope for girls. But there are also about twenty girls from the community who are sponsored by the Center of Hope. Every day they come after school for dinner and assistance with their homework. They receive school supplies and a uniform as well.

We were also given the opportunity to do a program at a medical college where students study to be nurses, x-ray technicians, phlebotomists, and other medical professions. About one hundred students filled the room. We had a powerful service where we shared the love of Jesus and many of the students gave their lives to Him.

While in Tirupati, the highlight for our family was a village outreach. Approximately three hundred people sat under a tent for the evening service. Most of the village responded to the Gospel message and surrendered their lives to Jesus. The pastor

was so happy. After praying for everyone several people testified that God had touched and healed them. Following the meeting everyone ate a meal together, including our family. As we were eating, people continued to come to us for prayer. Pastor Eric prayed for an old man who got healed from deafness and I prayed for a little girl oppressed by demons. I could definitely see a change in her countenance when Jesus set her free!

Our sons, Alex and Nate, had the opportunity to lead and plan many of the outreaches. They also ran an entire program for youth. They both preached and prayed for all of the youth. More than one hundred and fifty teenagers attended the program and responded to the challenge to lay down their lives for the Gospel.

After Tirupati, we drove back to Chennai, our final destination. By end of the trip we traveled more than three thousand miles across two states.

That Sunday, between all of us, we did eight meetings which included church services and a leadership seminar about the Holy Spirit.

The next day we did programs in three schools and reached more than four thousand children with the Gospel. The founder of the schools found out about our seminar on the Holy Spirit. She requested that we stay after school and teach some of the teachers. That day we taught twenty teachers about the Holy Spirit. We ended up going back again two days later and holding two more sessions for the remaining teachers and staff. Nearly one hundred staff members received the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

In total, we had eighteen days of ministry. During that time more than ten thousand people heard the Gospel. Many were saved, filled with the Holy Spirit, and testified of being healed. Thank you to everyone who supported this trip. You have helped us make an eternal difference in the lives of many people.





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## TEEN IMPACT AND DREAM TEAM: MINISTRIES TO YOUTH AT THE BUFFALO DREAM CENTER

*Dezmond and Emilie McClinton lead Teen Impact, the youth ministry at the Buffalo Dream Center. Teen Impact reaches young people every week on Thursday evenings and also has a special monthly meeting for the teenagers who desire discipleship and a deeper walk with Jesus. Emilie describes what has been happening at Teen Impact:*

Teen Impact has been going for almost two years now and it is incredible to see the growth in some of our youth. At first we only met once a month after our Sunday service, averaging about ten youth. Now we also meet once a week on Thursdays and average about thirty teenagers.

Teen Impact has been a good stepping stone for the children who are moving out of Kidz Club and becoming junior leaders in the church. What I love most about Teen Impact is seeing the hunger growing in the hearts of the young people. We are able to spend a lot of one-on-one time with them and help them fall more in love with God. They are the next generation and we have really seen the importance of reaching out to them. We have a responsibility to disciple them and get

them ready to fulfill the plan that God has for them. He has amazing things in store for each and every one of our youth!

*Victoria Shurr spent her teenage years as a member of the Dream Team. Now, she has been given a new group of young people and the Dream Team has been reborn. Victoria tells about her plans for this exciting ministry:*

When I was younger, Dream Team was a big part of my life. We met once a week, practiced dances, dramas, and then would go all over Buffalo,

Western New York, and even Canada to perform and conduct outreaches. However, Dream Team was more than just that. We were a group of friends that loved serving Jesus. We wanted to tell everyone about the amazing things He had done in our lives. Our leaders disciplined, trained, and sent us out. Now I am married, serving in the church, and have the honor of starting this incredible ministry again. My goal is to see Dream Team grow and begin traveling throughout the area again. Young people desire to be used by God to impact their generation.

It has brought me so much joy to see the young people learning how to tell others about Jesus through dance and drama. Here is what some of them had to say about being a part of Dream Team.

"I love seeing how people are impacted through our dances and dramas." -

Tommy

"I enjoy having a group of people that I can dance and have fun with." - Alex

"I like that we are all accepted no matter what." - Avereë

