

International church reaches refugees in “the most diverse square mile in America”

*By Lindsey Williams
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A Vision Journey team of 12 MS Baptists built connections in Clarkston, GA, a suburb of Atlanta, which became a refugee settlement in the 1990s. Where it was once a largely Caucasian community, now the 100 languages of 60 different countries speak to its multicultural transformation.

As the community began to change, the former Baptist Church in Clarkston dwindled down to almost nothing, and only a remnant of that congregation remained. The remnant decided that unless they set out to reach the changing community, the church would certainly die out. Corresponding to their mission, the church was renamed Clarkston International Bible Church (CIBC) and is now multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-generational – a reflection of the Kingdom!

Many misconceptions have been made about refugees like the settlement in Clarkston. They are not illegal immigrants, nor do they claim refugee status for self-seeking gain. Refugees are displaced people who fled from war or religious persecution in their homeland and are sent to live in refugee camps outside or on the border of a safe country. Less than 1% of these refugees actually make it to America, and those that do may be separated from family, earning money to send back to their loved ones.

“They’re not looking for a life in America. They’re looking for a life to live,” said Chad McCord, Director of Missions Mobilization at the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board and organizer of the Vision Journey. “So, CIBC has been trying to

reach these communities. They have Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and even Christians who land there, as well.”

From Dec. 12 – 14, McCord and 12 MS Baptists drove to Clarkston and back. The team represented eight churches and one association, including Jeremy Vaughan from Meadow Grove Church in Brandon, Nate Carroll and Jinshu Shi from the Chinese Christian Church of Greater Jackson, Richard Green from Fifteenth Avenue Church in Meridian, Brandon Conerly and intern, Davis, from Parkway Church in Clinton, Bill Wright from Trinity Church in Southaven, Jay Nelson and Beau Bredow from Northcrest Church in Meridian, Chuck Myers and daughter, Ashley, from First Church Richland, and Randy Sims from the Pine Belt Association.

“It was good to see that our group came from larger churches and smaller churches,” said McCord. “This Vision Journey wasn’t just for one kind of church; any church can be involved in these.”

Lead Pastor Trent Deloach and Mission Pastor Jason Lee of CIBC guided the group to tour a massive Hindu temple in the Atlanta metro area, not far from Clarkston. The temple had been constructed in India, intricately carved by hand, labeled, disassembled, sent to Atlanta, and reconstructed.

“We saw the people worshiping in the temple, and it opened our eyes up to lostness,” said McCord. “We always have lostness around us, but to see men and women falling prostrate before false gods opens our eyes to the fact that we have to be on mission. We have to be taking the Gospel. I hope our guys and ladies that went on this trip see that God has brought the nations to us. Yes, we want to go to the nations, but we have the nations here and we have an opportunity right here to reach them for the Gospel and make sure they have a chance to accept Jesus as their Savior.



Participants in a Vision Journey to the Clarkston International Bible Church in Clarkston, Georgia, visit an Atlanta-area Hindu temple. (Photo credit: Chad McCord)

“My goal for Missions Mobilization is to see churches active in going, but also in br

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On the last night of the Vision Journey, the team divided to visit two homes of multicultural Christian families. One group visited a Pakistani family while the other visited a couple who had met and married in the States, a Guatemalan man and

his Nepali wife. Over homecooked Pakistani and Nepali meals, the team heard these families' testimonies.

"They came to America as unbelievers," McCord shared, "and they became believers through CIBC's witness, and God has changed their lives. Now they have a vision to reach their people being resettled there, as well. It was a neat opportunity to get to talk to them. It really changes your mindset and gives you more of a desire to reach others for Christ."

With so many gospel needs in Clarkston, the North American Mission Board (NAMB) has come alongside CIBC to help enhance their outreach. NAMB is currently building a brand-new facility for the once rundown church, and final approval to open the doors to a new ministry center awaits CIBC.

Vision Journeys are excellent opportunities for MS churches to get on mission for the nations in our neighborhoods. Registration requires a small fee, and most of the funding is provided through the Margaret Lackey State Offering.

To learn more about Vision Journeys, contact Missions Mobilization at 601-292-3398 or cmunn@mbcb.org, and request to join the Vision Journey distribution list to receive updates on upcoming opportunities. On average, Vision Journeys occur once a month.

To learn more about CIBC or to support their ministry, visit CIBC (cibcfamily.com).

To learn more about NAMB's cooperative work in Clarkston and Atlanta, visit Atlanta Ministry Center – Send Relief.