

# OSHKOSH OPC SENDS ITS FIRST SHORT-TERM MISSIONARIES

// ROBERT HOLDA AND WENDY HARNESS



(From left) Wendy Harness, Laura (12), Daniel (11), Aaron (9), and Greg Harness with Christy and Johnny Arendale (far right), wife and son of Cornerstone OPC pastor Robert Arendale

Resurrection Presbyterian Church in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, is just fifteen months old. But it has already had the blessing of sending out a family as short-term missionaries to Houston, Texas.

## A Family Team

The Harness family, who became members of Resurrection OPC in 2017, knew they were open to short-term mission work. In spring 2018, Greg Harness, a former deacon in the OPC, and his wife and three children went to Houston to assist the OPC Disaster Response Team with the work they've undertaken in the wake of Hurricane Harvey. Resurrection OPC joyfully and fervently supported the Harness family throughout the trip with prayers and encouragement, and the Lord honored those prayers.

Before their departure, the Harnesses discussed the possibility that a mom and three children might be more of a burden than a blessing. But shortly after their arrival at the work site in Houston, it became obvious that all members of the family could contribute to the needs of the church there. Taking directions from the Disaster Response Team, the whole Harness family dove right into chiseling, sawing, scooping, dumping, tearing, pulling, and generally de-constructing a flood-damaged church building. Once the deconstruction was complete, the reconstruction could begin. Week

two of work in Houston consisted of constructing a moisture-proof barrier on the outside of the walls, insulating those walls, and hanging drywall.

## One Body with Many Gifts

For two weeks, the Harnesses worked on the newly purchased church building that will be the future home of Cornerstone OPC in Houston. It didn't take long for that place to feel like home to the Harnesses, as well. Why? Because the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit were with them.

It was refreshingly obvious. Their first few hours in Houston were on the Lord's Day, and as the Lord met with his saints during worship, they were greeted with this encouragement from God's Word:

And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. (Acts 2:44-45)

This was a perfect reminder that Christians are privileged to enjoy the warmth and love of the household of God no matter where they enter its doors, whether in Wisconsin or Texas. And this reminder anticipated what the Harnesses would soon discover afresh: not only had God sent them to Houston to serve and to give, but also to *be* served and to *receive* the blessings of fellowship awaiting them among the saints in Houston.



Laura Harness and Dick Boermann stapling insulation

As the trip progressed, God's Word continued to provide the Harnesses with hope and reassurance. The Lord impressed upon the volunteers the following two verses: "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them" (Rom. 12:6) and "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Pet. 4:10).

God had given the Harness family the gift of strong and healthy bodies, a lifestyle of physical labor, and flexibility in their work and school schedules. Although they had viewed these gifts as unremarkable and inconsequential, in Houston they realized that these very gifts were designed for specific service in the kingdom of God. As a family, they grew in appreciation of the scriptural teaching on the importance of the whole church body: "God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be?" (1 Cor. 12:18-19).

The love of the saints in Houston was every bit as heartwarming as the love they had known back in Oshkosh, and



Two OP mission groups in Houston with homeowners they served, with hosts, and with coordinators Fred and Brenda de Rue (back row, second and third from right)

it provided great comfort to the Harnesses. So, too, did the labors of the OPC's dedicated and well-equipped Disaster Response Team. Their direction and humble service is a delightful testimony to the love of Christ.

After two weeks, although it was difficult for the Harnesses to leave their beloved brothers and sisters in Houston who had loved them so well, they returned to Oshkosh, thankful to be part of the local body to which God had assigned them. There, they shared with their brothers and sisters at Resurrection OPC what God had done both through them and in them during

their short-term mission trip. (And it wasn't a bad time to share a fellowship meal together, too!)

### Never Too Young to Serve

Encouraged by the Harnesses' report on their service in Houston, the members of Resurrection are hoping that more short-term mission trips are in their future. They have been challenged by the Word and by example to value and use the unique gifts given to them by Christ, for the benefit of both their local congregation and the broader church.

Resurrection, a mission work of the Presbytery of the Midwest and a daughter church of Apple Valley OPC in Neenah, Wisconsin, may be a young church, but it has energy. The Lord has blessed it with new members, new regular visitors, and several new babies. The saints in Oshkosh certainly have much learning and growing to do, but they are pleased to be where the Lord has placed them and gladly confess, "The lines for [us] have fallen in pleasant places" (Psalm 16:6).

The joys and difficulties of planting a new church and developing new ministries truly are occasions to see the Lord work in new and exciting ways.

If you enjoy the provision of love and fellowship within the church of Jesus Christ, be encouraged to pray for opportunities to spread that same love in service to those beyond your own local congregation—and when those opportunities come, embrace them! You won't be disappointed by the strength and fellowship that God generously provides.

*Robert Holda is pastor of Resurrection OPC in Oshkosh, WI. Wendy Harness is a member of the same.*



Resurrection OPC enjoying a fellowship dinner

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