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Home Missions News and Notes
Annie Armstrong: One Woman's Legacy
Chaplains Help to Ease Pain

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Ministering in
Inner City Austin



Baptist Center Shares Christ With Inner-City Austin

AUSTIN—Upbeat, optimistic, tireless, Pat Mustoe directs the Baptist Community Center here with all the verve and commitment she brought to the ministry two decades ago.

As a graceful young athlete, she spent her summer in student missions in the capital city on her way to a college coaching career. It was a fateful 16 weeks; it changed her life forever.

Mustoe first came to Austin from Virginia while a junior at Radford University. Long active in her Southern Baptist church, she had joined Radford's Baptist Student Union, where she began to question seriously what was God's plan for her. She wondered what she could do "except play softball and basketball."

A BSU retreat when she was "really struggling" changed her mind. The passage in Isaiah—"Whom shall I send?"—touched her as if a direct message. She applied for summer missions.

When the Home Mission Board appointed her to inner-city Austin, Mustoe "was scared to death." She had never been out of state except to play basketball in East Tennessee.

Arriving in Austin, she worked in a two-story white wooden converted church Baptist center building on the corner of 2nd and Aransas streets. Many times, her situation seemed impossible. "I had to depend totally on the

Lord," she reminisces.

However, once back in Virginia, she found herself surprisingly homesick for Austin. At graduation she rejected several job offers in recreation and physical therapy. "I knew that wasn't what I wanted," she says.

In 1966, she returned to direct the center in Austin. Two years later she was appointed a home missionary.

Eighty thousand people, mostly Mexican-Americans, crowd the center's aging residential East Side neighborhood. Unemployment plagues the community. Poverty breeds family instability. Crime rates are high, drugs easy to get.

Undocumented persons blend into the community, yet live in fear of deportation. Although large families are common, there are many single parents, many elderly. Most speak English, but the Mexican heritage is strong and important.

"She doesn't just work down there and go home, she's become part of the culture itself," says Frank Deutsch, Christian social ministries director for Austin Baptist Association.

Center programs for community residents include preschool activities for 17 four-year-olds; after-school and summer activities for youngsters age six to 14; various adult-oriented programs; and family services.

Because of their backgrounds, many neighborhood children need preparation for kindergarten, and the preschool "opens doors for witness to the family," Mustoe says. "Through the children, you get to know a family's needs."

The after-school and summer activities run the gamut from arts and crafts to tutoring and Bible study.

Jose, a slender youngster, first came into Pat Mustoe's life when he was 13 years old.

Bored and restless, Jose attended the Baptist center's Bible study, mostly to meet girls and stuff down refreshments. But somehow, over the weeks, the words of the study resonated in his young mind. "He realized God saw everything he did," Mustoe says.

Jose's life changed as he accepted Jesus as his Savior. He gave up the teen gang and began working at the center. He attended Sunday School regularly. And he later married a young woman who had become a Christian through his influence.

Mustoe recalls, "I often wondered, why waste my time inviting him? He'd promise to come and then give me excuses why he had failed to show up. Now I'm so glad I didn't give up on him."

But all her encounters can't be successes. Take, for instance, Reinaldo.

He was an outstanding young man, a good student, a good athlete; a center



Pat Mustoe, right, helps sort clothes for distribution in the Baptist Center clothing ministry in Austin.

regular, he even came to church occasionally. "He was close to becoming a Christian," recalls Mustoe.

Then he went away to college, where he married a woman who was not a Christian. "I continued to write him, encouraging him to be all that God wanted him to be." But he seldom responded, she continues.

Two years ago, Reinaldo's sister flagged down Mustoe as she was driving away from the center. Reinaldo, stabbed in a bar fight, had died.

"If I had witnessed one more time, could it have made a difference?" Mustoe wonders.

Mustoe doesn't spend her life dwelling on the failures . . . or on the suc-

cesses. Through the Baptist Community Center she continues to meet needs.

Adult-oriented programs are another popular ministry of the center. Classes such as sewing, budgeting, child-rearing, cooking, literacy, parenting, and Bible studies are a regular feature of the ministry.

Family needs are also met through the center. Pat's Place—"That's how it's known"—distributes food and clothing throughout the community. For the 12 months beginning October 1986, the center helped more people than in any previous year.

"We interviewed 2,497 families and assisted 2,453. Multiply that number by

the average family size of five, and we helped approximately 12,000 people," Mustoe says.

A portable room tacked on to the center's main building stores food pantry items, including milk, bread, and cheese. Highlights of the year include a giant Thanksgiving meal. This past year, Woman's Missionary Union groups throughout Austin brought turkeys and dressing and pecan and pumpkin pies for more than 300 people. "For a lot of people, without this there wouldn't be any Thanksgiving meal," Mustoe says.

"If we had more money, more food, and more staff, we could do more," quips Mustoe. "This ministry has definitely been a team effort. We've had so many great volunteers down through the years."

"But, you know, it's seeing the spiritual changes in people that keeps you going," Mustoe adds. "That's where it's all at."

Editor's Note: Pat Mustoe is one of 226 missionaries serving in Texas under appointment by the Home Mission Board. Her ministry in Austin is one of 3,693 such ministries nationwide supported through gifts to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering. This year's goal of \$37.5 million will help continue her ministry as she shares Christ in the state capital.