

## South Asia

# Calling all believers

An Illinois mission team's experiences in South Asia has ignited a fire for the gospel—and sharing it around the world—in their churches here at home.

**Bethalto** | It took a trip to South Asia to remind **Gail Faulkner** of what she'd lost by living for 10 years in the comfort of the United States.

"Without realizing it, I had become comfortable and apathetic," said the former International Mission Board missionary, who served with her husband, Chip, in South America and the Caribbean before moving to Bethalto, where he pastors First Baptist Church.

"I did church," Faulkner said, "but I didn't realize until God took me away that I had lost the passion and the urgency of the gospel."

In Bangladesh, on a mission trip with several other women from Illinois, Faulkner found what she'd been missing—the understanding that the light of the gospel shines the brightest in the darkest places. Now, back in Illinois, Faulkner and her mission teammates are telling their churches what they experienced in South Asia, so that others might hear and respond to the call to go.

"We experienced things on that particular mission trip that I am convinced God wanted us to experience so that we could come back and mobilize, and get people active in missions and sharing the gospel."

Every year, more than 24,000 Illinois Baptists are involved in sharing the gospel, both in their own communities and through short-term mission trips to places around the world. The Mission Illinois Offering helps support training for churches in missions awareness and involvement, and also facilitates student mission groups, called GO Teams.



When those teams come back from their mission field, whether they've traveled to Chicago or Bangladesh or somewhere in between, their churches benefit from their experiences, said **Mark Emerson**.

"First of all, it personalizes the mission work," said Emerson, who serves as associate executive director for IBSA's Church Resources Team. People in the pews can feel disconnected from mission work because the people and places and foreign to us.

"But having people in our own church participate in a mission trip allows us to put a face to the missionary. And it also shows us that it can be done. You know, we know the person who did that.

"And if they can do it, we can do it too."

### Waiting for a catalyst

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In Bangladesh, Gail Faulkner and her mission team of women from Illinois worked alongside Christian women—known as “national believers” to the team—who were desperate for people in their villages to know Christ.

“I watched them with the urgency of the gospel take us into villages and tell us, “Share. These women are thirsty. Share.”

As Faulkner and others on the team shared the gospel through a Bible storytelling technique they’d practiced before leaving the States, the women in the villages responded.

“We watched women raise their hand, saying, ‘I want to be a follower of Jesus,’ knowing that persecution may come. And that will forever change my life.”

The trip wasn’t an easy one to make—halfway around the world, in a country where Christians are a very small minority and some face severe persecution. The country also has been the target of a recent series of terrorist attacks, including a mass shooting in early July at a café in Dhaka, the capital city.

As the Illinois team prepared to leave for their spring trip, there was some concern, said Pastor **Jon McDonald**, whose wife, Lindsay, was on the mission team. “It’s not the most dangerous part of the earth,” he said, “but it’s also not the safest for the gospel. And so there was some hesitancy for them to go. A little bit of worry.”

But their church, First Baptist in Casey, was excited too.

“People wanted to be involved. They wanted to give toward their trip. And they wanted to be in prayer about what was going to happen.”

In their small town—known for the world’s largest rocking chair and bird cage, among other landmarks—the McDonalds are leading their church to think through an Acts 1:8 strategy for

missions. FBC Casey has formed a committee to head up missions efforts in each of the mission fields described in that verse of the Bible: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, often interpreted by churches as local, state, national and international.

It was almost as if his church was waiting for a catalyst to get them from giving to support missions, to actually going, the pastor said.

“I think the ladies going on the trip lit a fire in our church that’s burning brightly. I think people are beginning to see that, ‘I am responsible to make sure that the gospel goes to Jerusalem, and Judea, and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.’”

### The call is local

The women who went to South Asia talk a lot about the need for obedience when they describe their trip—obedience to go, obedience to encourage others, obedience to take responsibility for their communities here at home.

“Whether we go halfway around the world, or we go across the street to our neighbor, we need to remember—I need to remember—that there is somebody waiting on the other side of my obedience,” said **Lindsay McDonald** (pictured on page 1). “And if I choose to not go and share the gospel, then their eternity is at stake.”

**Carmen Halsey**, IBSA’s director of women’s ministry and missions, was also on the trip to South Asia. She saw the hopelessness of many of the people there, the extreme poverty, the spiritual darkness. The trip was initially a way to continue a focus on human trafficking prevention that Illinois Baptist women started a few years ago. What they found instead, Halsey said, was that women in Bangladesh need to be witnessed to, listened to, and discipled.

That can happen here, too.

“What we’re really hoping is that we can increase this vision to say, ‘That people group is here too. They’re living here in Illinois. So, how



can we locate them? How can we build relationships with them? How can we share the gospel... in hopes that some of them will also help take it home?

“It’s not always going to be about us getting on a plane and going,” Halsey said. “I believe God’s just opened up the playing field, if we would just get creative and not limit our thinking on how we can get the gospel into South Asia.”

A missions zeal for a place halfway around the world—that people there might hear and respond

to the gospel in way only God can orchestrate—started here in Illinois, because a group of women were obedient to his call.

At a time when full-time missionaries are coming home because resources are limited, the task at hand is going to require that kind of obedience, Emerson said. Local churches, engaging in missions through effective short-term missions strategies that get the gospel into places that are difficult to reach.

The world is waiting.