

## Embracing Authentic Evangelism: Hyaets Ministry

An online interview with Greg and Helms Jarrell and Jason and Joanie Williams of Hyaets Ministry

In the previous newsletter, we featured Hyaets ministry in the West Charlotte neighborhood of Enderly Park as one who personifies the CBFNC General Assembly theme “Embracing Authentic Evangelism.” The mission of Hyaets is to inspire, enrich, and embody Christian community, and they do so by offering their own homes to their neighbors as a place of rest, food, shelter, and friendship.

*Hear from Hyaets partners, Jason & Joanie Williams and Greg & Jennifer “Helms” Jarrell from an online interview.*

### In “layman’s” terms, what exactly is Hyaets?

Helms: We are two couples (plus outside neighborhood supporters) who have moved into an at-risk neighborhood who practice Christian hospitality with neighbors by offering our homes and our lives as a gift to one another. We offer hospitality by offering meals, companionship, shelter, prayers, and a listening ear.

### How did you come up with the name Hyaets?

Jason: Hyaets (חַי עֵץ) is a Hebrew phrase that means “tree of life.” Actually it is very poor Hebrew grammar. The words should be in reverse order “aets-hy,” but that didn’t flow off the lips as easily as *hyaets*, so we flipped the word order! חַי (hy) = life and עֵץ (aets) = tree. Although we fudged the Hebrew a little to make it more accessible, the image we are striving for is the image of the tree of life that bookends the bible in Genesis and Revelation and is referenced in several Psalms.

The word חַי (hy) can also mean “community” depending on the exact spelling and pronunciation. Through the phrase *hyaets*, we actually intend the pun – so that the phrase could mean “community tree.” The fact the Hebrew word for “life” is so similar to the word for “community” (coming from the same root word) is instructive for us. Though we need to do more research, we believe that this is no coincidence, that life and community are related, that life is about

community, that community is about life. We live rightly in community. That is, in large part, the core of Hyaets.

### Why Enderly Park in Charlotte?

Greg: When we were looking for the neighborhood we would be settling in, we asked folks we knew in Charlotte, “If you were going to move your family to a neighborhood to raise your children, what area would you *not* go to?” A couple of places, including Enderly Park, came up several times. Enderly Park is one of the most fragile neighborhoods in the city - we have had very high crime rates over the past several years. There are relatively few homeowners, many neighbors are on some kind of public assistance, there are obvious signs of blight here - boarded up houses, lots of litter, etc. Our conviction was not to live in a dangerous, economically depressed place just for the adventure of it, but that we wanted to be next door to the poor. We think that we should take Jesus seriously when he says that the kingdom of heaven belongs to them, and we want to place ourselves in a position to be able to learn from the poor about what Jesus meant.

### What about your own journeys led you start this ministry?

Helms: Gosh, each of us could probably spend an hour answering this question. Things that brought me to this place: My experience growing up at FBC Raleigh helped to disciple me and made me want to work hard to build the kingdom. The Baptist Student Union at ASU taught me a lot about community and about listening for God. My experience as a Student Summer Missionary every summer made me want to serve and do so in radical ways. Seminary at BTR challenged me to question and practice what I believe.

### CBFNC is diving deeper into conversations about evangelism, wealthy and poverty, and racial reconciliation. Can you speak to this conversation in relation to Hyaets?

Greg: Our strong conviction about these areas is that our lives and behaviors more

than our words will bear out how serious we are about them. Folks who care about the poor ought to be friends with people who are poor. Folks who care about racial reconciliation should know people of other races, and love them. In doing so, we can learn to see with a different set of eyes, so that our preaching might actually sound like - and our lives look like - good news. How to become completely converted to that new way of life, or to seeing the world in a new way, is a constant struggle for us. So, this is an ongoing conversation with us as well, and we are glad to be a part of that conversation with CBFNC.

### How does being a CBFNC Baptist relate to a ministry like Hyaets?

Joanie: Many of the people who informed, influenced, and helped me hear my call to ministry and particularly to Hyaets are part of CBF and that is very important to me.

Jason: We believe by being Baptist within the ministry of Hyaets, we are a unique voice amidst the many Baptist voices of the world. We feel that we have an important perspective to offer to our fellow brothers and sisters. Hyaets has come out of the lives of three North Carolina Baptists who all associate with CBF. Our Sunday School teachers, pastors, parents, youth leaders, and mentors were CBF folk. In other words, it was really CBF, and CBFNC in particular, that birthed Hyaets by forming us throughout our youth. We only hope that Hyaets and CBFNC can deepen our relationship over the coming years such that CBF might claim us as their own. We fervently desire to be deeply connected to CBFNC, to be a strong resource for the churches and congregation of CBFNC, to be a place of mission and retreat for members of CBFNC, and to be an avid voice for the poor, marginalized, and oppressed at the CBFNC table.

Contact us or arrange to come and visit. We would love to introduce you to some really beautiful people!

Visit [www.hyaets.org](http://www.hyaets.org) to learn more. Read the interview in full at [www.cbfnc.org](http://www.cbfnc.org).