

TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

WALK NAMES

Unleashing Disciples

By Kami L. Rice

A Keller, Texas, church redefines its vision through ministry in Vietnam.

Before joining NorthWood Church in Keller, Texas, in 2007 and 2009, respectively, both Jessica Jernigan and Vicky Scott had participated in mission trips with their previous churches. And both had a love for international travel. So it was no surprise when the two women were quick to attend informational sessions about NorthWood's ongoing work in Vietnam and upcoming trips to the developing Southeast Asian nation.

Jernigan, a life skills teacher for students with special needs, first traveled with NorthWood in 2009 as part of a team leading a special education conference at the University of Hanoi. Last summer, she returned to Vietnam to help with the sixth annual conference, co-leading a session.

Scott's expertise lies in a different domain; she earned her master's degree in business administration and currently works as a senior information technology leader for a major American firm. When she learned that NorthWood was launching micro-finance work among rural communities in Vietnam, she sensed she was uniquely equipped to assist. Since her initial trip in fall 2008, Scott has traveled to Vietnam twice a year, working in Hanoi with Hanoi Young Business Association and Hanoi Network of Entrepreneurial Women and initiating poverty alleviation work among Vietnam's rural ethnic poor. She and others at NorthWood also hosted 10 businesspeople from the two organizations for a U.S. business study tour last spring.

But though Jernigan and Scott are building relationships in Hanoi and using their skills to engage in the domains of society, they are cognizant that open evangelism is not permitted in Vietnam. While NorthWood teams are honest about their Christian identity and why they are working in Vietnam, they also comply with government prohibitions on proselytizing.

"That's what took me a while to get used to: 'Oh wait, we can't even talk about Jesus unless someone asks us?'" Jernigan admits. "It's been a struggle for me, but that's their law, and we need to respect that. I've had to learn it's not only about sharing the Gospel, it's about meeting their need in the moment."

While these are not your typical mission trips, Scott says she feels called—instead of obligated—to participate. "I love playing a small part in bringing God's kingdom to Vietnam. I had never felt uniquely called to paint churches or lead backyard Bible schools, so my tendency

was to contribute financially and let someone else go," she says.

Scott's response to her calling is exactly what NorthWood Founding and Senior Pastor Bob Roberts aims to stir up in his central Texas congregation. "Our church is a platform to mobilize our members to fulfill their missional call," he explains. Often churches don't strategically

mobilize volunteers, neglecting to consider their specific gifts and skill sets. Instead, Roberts asks, "How do we help the person in the pew be the missionary that participates in the work of God's kingdom?"

"Doing global engagement is the No. 1 tool of discipleship," he says. "I've rarely seen a person go into the mountains outside Hanoi and not be changed. It redefines the level of discipleship in your church."

And because people are sent out, discipleship bends outward. This external focus, both local and global, drew Scott and her family to NorthWood, she says. Jernigan stayed at NorthWood partly because

of the church's local outreach to children with special needs.



The Strategy in the Pews

NorthWood's relationship with Vietnam began in 1995 when Roberts led a local surgeon, Bob Perot, to Christ. Soon after, Perot told Roberts he felt God calling him to return to Vietnam—he was shot down there three times as a pilot during the Vietnam War—to serve the local people.

Initially, Roberts wasn't supportive. "My dad had buried a lot of soldiers as a pastor, so I didn't have a high regard for Vietnam," he explains, describing growing up near Sheppard Air Force Base in Wichita Falls, Texas, as a fourth-grader looking up to the soldiers who visited their home every Sunday, many of whom didn't make it home from the war. However, about a week after he learned of his friend's interest in Vietnam, Roberts received a call from people offering to pay his way for him to join them on a trip to Southeast Asia with a stop in Vietnam.

"I felt that was an unusual God thing," he says, "so I went, and my heart was captured." Next, Roberts, Perot and another doctor traveled to Hanoi, went to the city's largest medical hospital, met with the director and volunteered to help. They were put to work. For about three years, Roberts says, the church "slugged it out in the mud" in Vietnam, traveling there with teams but not really knowing what to do.

Then two NorthWood families unable to travel to Vietnam, yet search-

