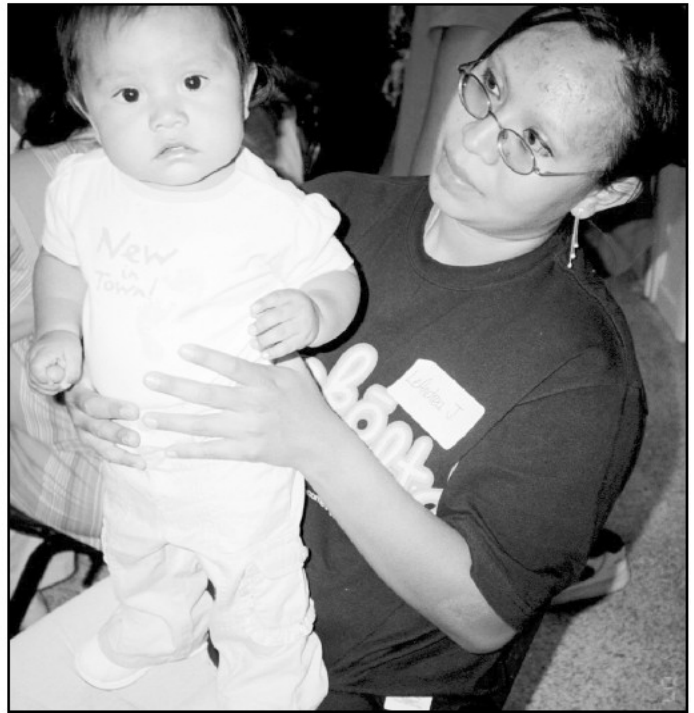


# Crownpoint Church Opens Doors to Teen Parents

Just the free pizza and pop would be enough to draw a crowd. But then add rows and rows of free diapers, baby blankets, and other assorted baby-related paraphernalia, and you'll really catch their attention. And this is the sandwich around playing games, hearing a short message about Christ, child rearing information, all while free childcare is provided. Teen moms and dads who live in the Crownpoint area are getting all this at the monthly meetings of "YoungLives," a program which is part of the national Young Life program, but one that targets teen moms and their children. The local program was started this past May at Crownpoint Christian Reformed Church by Barbara Johnson, who moved to Crownpoint a year ago when her husband began his job as a physician at the hospital there. After raising four children of her own, running several crisis pregnancy centers, finishing an MA in counseling, and starting a previous YoungLives group in Philadelphia, Johnson seems providentially placed in Crownpoint to start such a program for teen families there. About 35-40 people, including moms and their babies, a few fathers, and even grandmothers, aunts, and cousins, all attended the group meeting on September 11, 2007 the largest gathering so far. Newcomers to the group are drawn for different reasons.

Lyle and his family recently moved to Crownpoint from Ganado, and came because "we wanted to see what it was, and get to know more people around here."

Kristin, who also recently moved to Crownpoint, was a little more frank. "It's pretty boring here," she stated—so she and her family simply came looking for something to do. "I know they have fun games and I



want to learn more about God," Bonita Lee said while holding Skyler, her 2-month old nephew wrapped snugly in his cradleboard. "I know he (God) did a great thing for us, and I believe that he is alive. He hears our prayers."

Suzanne Charley and her family, including her husband Steven, and their three children ranging from 2 months to four years also came because they wanted to learn more about the Bible. Barbara Johnson added that "One high school girl called and said, "We want to come, but we don't have babies and we're not pregnant." But since YoungLives is really just for teen moms and their children, Johnson had to tell them that unfortunately they couldn't come. "So we need regular Young Life here too," she said.

Mentors play a large role in the structure of YoungLives, more than in its better-known counterpart, Young Life. Although the larger group of YoungLives will meet only once a month, each young mom is matched up with an older female mentor that they meet with at least once a week. Theresa Tsosie, a Crownpoint CRC member, joined YoungLives as a mentor in order to "share the love of Christ," she said. "When I was young and in a situation like that, I didn't have any one—these kids are lucky to have Barbara." Johnson is still trying to get enough mentors for all the young moms, since each mentor is assigned to only one young mom, making it difficult to find enough women able to help out. Also, fathers are not a part of typical YoungLives groups, but several young fathers have been attending the Crownpoint group, and Johnson would like to get them set



up with male mentors as well.

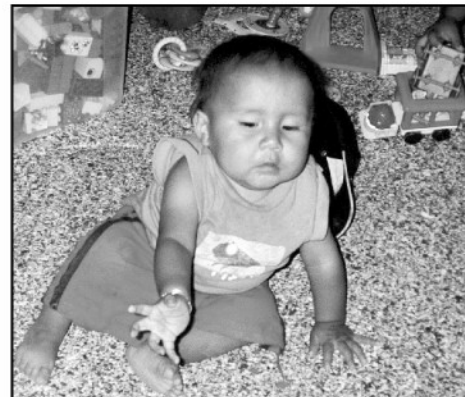
Each summer, YoungLives offers several camps for the young mothers and their children throughout the country; this past summer one was held in Williams, AZ, where 150 teen moms with their 150 children and 100 care workers all met for a week of traditional camp experiences of hiking, canoeing, roasting marshmallows, etc. “It’s such a lot of effort that week, but it’s worth it,” Johnson said. “50 girls committed their lives to the Lord that week.” Although she brought only one 21-year-old Navajo childcare provider with her to the camp this summer, Johnson hopes to bring a much larger group next summer.



The Crownpoint Young Lives program is funded primarily through grants and private donations, especially through some of

Johnson’s Christian friends from the eastern United States. It was important to Johnson that the program be funded and not just be a volunteer program, so that if she were to ever move elsewhere, it could still continue, just with a new leader in place of her.

In a typical youth group fashion, after most of the pizza and pop are consumed, the tables are shoved to the side,



chairs are spread into a circle, and several raucous games are played.

But then everyone settles down while Johnson talks about Christ, how he purifies us from our sins, covering us with His own white purity. As she dons a white oxford symbolizing Christ’s covering over our own sins, though, a kid screeches in the room next door, a couple of moms slip out to tend to the child, and a 2-year old wanders in looking for Dad. When Johnson is finished, a local nurse talks briefly about preventing medical emergencies in homes with young children. Then everyone troops into the sanctuary, where stacked up along the 3 back church pews are packages of diapers and wipes, hand made quilts, jars of baby food, even bottles of dish soap and shampoo, donated mainly from Target stores in Albuquerque. Eventually everyone heads home in the dark with full stomachs, full arms, tired children, and happy faces.

“I just hope these moms realize that there’s someone who loves them,” Theresa said. “There’s always hard times, but Jesus is always there. It’s cool. Jesus is cool,” she smiled.

The Crownpoint YoungLives group meets on the second Tuesday of each month, from 7-9 PM at the Crownpoint CRC Church located across from the post office. Rides can also be provided if necessary; call 505-786-4043 for more information.

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