

**WEEK OF  
PRAYER**

**Day 1**

# Churches connect with missionary task

Tim and Tina Louderback and Sean and Shelley Blacksten are passionate about equipping and connecting churches with opportunities to serve in Central America and the Caribbean. The Louderbacks and the Blackstens serve with the International Mission Board in Panama, and the Louderbacks lead the Americas Connect program.

Americas Connect was established to provide entry-level ministry opportunities for Southern Baptist churches interested in strategically coming alongside the IMB.

Panama was the pioneer country for Americas Connect and trips were later extended to Guatemala, Costa Rica and Brazil.

Church members participate in five to six weeks of training online before their trip.

Tina says the training for teams coming to Panama is modular and covers basic missiology and country-specific training. Once teams arrive, they receive training related to the missionary task and their specific ministry assignment.

Sean says they have been personally encouraged by the teams, “especially by individuals that are a part of their church’s first foreign trip.”

***“It takes courage and obedience to be the leading edge for a church that hasn’t been involved in person on the mission field to this point,” Sean continues.***



**MAIN IMAGE:** Omar Peñaloza (center), president of the Baptist Convention of Panama, prays with IMB missionaries Sean Blacksten (right) and Kenny Morris. **Peñaloza shared what church life was like before and during the pandemic. His church used to host camps but has not been able to recently. As restrictions lift, Peñaloza and church members can meet in a covered, open-air building.**

**SECONDARY IMAGE:** IMB missionary Tim Louderback, (center) and his national partner, Daniel Tejada, (left, orange shirt) stand with students from the University of Panama.





**MAIN IMAGE:** Shelley Blacksten, an IMB missionary to Panama, laughs as she talks with Icilda de Henry, president of La Unión Femenil Bautista Misionera Helen Stuart. The Baptist Convention of Panama's Woman's Missionary Union has actively ministered in Panama for decades.

Our prayer is that they will be the first among many who come to work alongside us and that some would choose to build on their experience in Central America and pray about an even more remote or less reached place the next time around," Sean says.

One volunteer group came alongside an Indigenous team that ministers among an unreached people group. The church served by prayer walking, sharing the gospel and providing English practice for the Indigenous Christians who support themselves with an eco-jungle tourism business.

The Louderbacks encourage churches to put what they learn on the mission field into practice when they return to the U.S.

***"They're being trained up in advance. They're putting the missionary task in place while they're on the ground. They're debriefing, and they're leaving with a vision to go and serve back home or wherever God leads them in the rest of the world," Tim says.***

Some churches, after returning from their trip, have started participating in or hosting an English as a Second Language course to reach out to their communities.

The Louderbacks encourage churches that have participated in Americas Connect to adopt an unengaged, unreached people group.

Emmanuel Baptist Church in Weatherford, Texas, is one of the churches that has committed to a people group adoption. The church came on an Americas Connect trip to Panama in 2019.

Michael Bizzell, pastor of admissions and missions at Emmanuel, said the desire to get involved on a greater level led to the formalization of a partnership with the Bolivian Baptist Convention to minister among an unreached people group.

After the Americas Connect trip, the Lord called a couple from the church to serve with the IMB as career missionaries.

**Pray** for inroads for Indigenous believers who are reaching the lost.

**Pray** churches who participated in Americas Connect will continue to pursue opportunities to serve.

**Pray** the Lord will facilitate more church connections.

*pray*