

AN EVERLASTING LEGACY

By Ben Hale | Evangelism & Missions Pastor

The Dawson Family of Faith is made up of a large unique and diverse group of people. Every Sunday, people from more than fourteen different countries gather on our church campus to worship in three different languages in four different venues. In a congregation this size, however, we don't always get to know each other's stories. When the word "legacy" is mentioned we often think of a gift of money or property, but the broader meaning of the word describes a valuable gift that is handed down or conveyed from one person to another. This article tells the story of Franny McLemore whose life and legacy continues to impact others today. When Franny's life came to an unexpected end, the gift that she gave to her family, friends, and the Dawson Family of Faith was an eduring legacy for loving God and loving others.

Those who have been a part of the Dawson Family of Faith for a long time understand the impact that Dawson's Chapel Choir Ministry makes on the students who grow up participating in the various ministry activities. Franny was one of those students. While growing up at Dawson, Franny was always fully engaged in all of Dawson's outreach ministries. Disciple Now weekends, summer camps, and KidLife were just a few activities that she and her Dawson friends shared together. One ministry that they always cherished was their time spent on choir mission tours with the Chapel Choir.



For many years, Dawson's 64-year-old Chapel Choir has been one of the greatest single contributors to the spiritual growth of Dawson students. Their annual Chapel Choir Mission Tours provide not only great fellowship for the students, but they also provide a time for them to experience serving people outside the walls of the church.

As an added benefit, every four years the Chapel Choir serves at an international locale. In June of this year, Franny's love for missions, and particularly her love for the people of Ecuador, will intersect when Dawson students travel to Ecuador to serve and sing alongside one of Dawson's long-time mission partners. It is easy to imagine that with every mission tour taken, many lifelong memories are made. James Wallace, one of Franny's fellow Chapel Choir friends, remembers his time with Franny on several mission trips to Ecuador:

"FRANNY CARED DEEPLY FOR HER FRIENDS, FAMILY, HER CHURCH, AND HER LORD AND SAVIOR. THE LIGHT AND JOY THAT COMES ONLY FROM GOD WAS CLEARLY SEEN IN HER BY THOSE SHE CAME IN CONTACT WITH." - HALLIE LAWRENCE WEAVER

I had the privilege of going on several mission trips with Franny to Ecuador. We'd been friends since before I can even remember. I actually remember calling her before I asked the first girl ever to be my "girlfriend" in the 6th grade. Franny was the one I would confide in when I was having problems in high school and college. She was just that way, always there for her friends. So going to Ecuador, I didn't always know everyone but I always had my pal Franny with me. As I think back on our mission trips to Ecuador, I have very fond memories. I remember all of us singing all of the time; me, Franny, Michael, Byron, and Caroline. The song, "Draw Me Nearer" makes me cry even now when I think of it. I remember hiking through grass taller than my head and us being incredibly itchy. I remember being chased by a monkey and Franny laughing at me. I distinctly remember going off one time and hiking up a mountain by myself. When I got back, Franny was waiting to tell me how dumb that was. Not in a condescending way, but in a very loving, warm, and humorous way. I wish I remembered specific details of when she shared the Gospel in Spanish with a little Quechua or Waroni child. As the years have gone by my memory has gotten fuzzy, but I do know she shared the Gospel with the kids in Ecuador and I also know she prayed often for our team. She walked with the Lord in high school and college when the rest of us were caught up in other things, Franny said she always felt like she had an anchor keeping her tethered in Christ's safe harbor. The song I mentioned earlier was (and I hope still is) a Chapel Choir staple. "Draw Me Nearer." The words are a plea to draw people nearer to Christ. Not just to His shining image, not just to the baby in a manger, but to His Precious Bleeding Side. It is a prayer seeking to know God, not just at face value, but in the most intimate way possible, to even be at the foot of the instrument of His death, the cross. I know Franny was always being drawn closer and closer to Christ by the way she walked and talked with Him.

May we all cry out "Draw me nearer."

— JAMES WALLACE



Dawson team on top of the mountain overlooking Camp Chacauco in Ecuador.

Franny made a lasting impact on the lives of the people she came in contact with just like her friend James. James is currently a seminary student in Jackson, Mississippi.

Franny's life was a gift to many. Her love for missions continues through others each year when Dawson students serve on short-term mission trips. The Franny McLemore Memorial Fund, managed by The Dawson Foundation, was established in her honor and enables students to participate in short-term mission projects similar to the one Franny served on in Ecuador.

This year, Dawson's Chapel Choir Mission Tour will serve in Chacauco, Ecuador and will be hosted by veteran missionaries of more than 35 years, Steve and Carol Thompson. The goal of the tour is to share and experience the love of Christ through music and service. The choir will also be supporting churches through a preaching conference, sharing the Gospel in rural villages, and singing in worship and at outreach gatherings across the region.

No matter their age, God uses His people for His glory when they step out in obedient faith. If you or someone you know is interested in participating in a short-term mission project, please visit our Missions Opportunities webpage at dawsonchurch.org/Missions.

Please click here to see more from Franny's mission trip to Ecuador.



BEN HALE serves as Dawson's Evangelism and Missions Pastor and has led Dawson's local, national, and international missions efforts since 2000. He and his wife, Lindy, have been married for 31 years and have three children, Abbie, Sara, and Grace. They also have two grandchildren, Benjamin and Lillian Murphy. Ben is committed to leading the Dawson Family of Faith in reaching its full potential in both missions giving and mobilization.



Dawson mission team standing on the Equator in Quito, Ecuador.



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CHAPEL CHOIR MISSION TOUR

ECUADOR

DAWSONCHURCH.ORG/CHAPELCHOIR