

# Serving Globally: A Detroit Lions Player Joins Friends on a Service Trip to Honduras

*A team from Detroit's Grace Community Church serves with International Samaritan*

DETROIT, MI, UNITED STATES, May 1, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- When Detroit native Xavier Cornelius first went to Honduras in 2022 on a service-learning trip with [Grace Community Church](#), he wasn't sure how he would overcome the language barrier. He was going to Tegucigalpa to visit and serve children and their families who are part of the [International Samaritan](#) scholarship program. These students live next to the city's garbage dump and are seeking education as a way out of poverty.

Connecting with the kids and families turned out to be easier than he expected. "I started playing soccer with the kids," he said. "Competing in sports and laughing about it is universal."

Not only did they play soccer, but the team from Grace Community Church dug trenches for water pipes that now bring fresh water to 2,000 people who live next to the dumpsite. The experience "captured my heart," Cornelius said. So he kept going back, year after year, leading a group from Grace Community Church. One year, his girlfriend joined him. This year, she joined the trip as his wife.

A special guest also joined Cornelius and Grace Community Church on their trip this year: Detroit Lions veteran defensive back [Avonte Maddox](#).



A team from Detroit's Grace Community Church, including Detroit Lions player Avonte Maddox, recently served with International Samaritan in Honduras.

Maddox and Cornelius grew up together in Detroit. They attended the same school since fifth grade and played basketball and baseball together. "We went to the high school championship for baseball every year," Cornelius said.

Maddox had been hearing from Cornelius about the annual trips to Honduras. "By going every year for the past five years, I've gotten to see people grow, graduate, get married, and have babies," Cornelius said. "They were excited to see that I had gotten married."

Maddox volunteered to go with his friend this year. "I got to introduce my childhood friend, Avonte, to my friends in Honduras," Cornelius said.

The scholarship students and their families "were excited to meet Avonte," Cornelius said. "We got to play soccer with them. We taught them American football."

The group from Grace Community Church also helped build a concrete floor for a family, and they cooked and delivered meals to people digging through trash at the city dumpsite. The people who work to earn a living as "recyclers" or "waste-pickers" at the dumpsite are often overlooked by their society, Cornelius explained. Job opportunities in Honduras are scarce, and even more so for people who live next to the dumpsite.

“

We're sending a message to people living next to the garbage dump that we see them as equally created by God and that they are worth taking our time to serve, pray with, and get to know."

*Xavier Cornelius*

Growing up in Detroit, Cornelius isn't a stranger to poverty. "I grew up seeing the disparity between those who have and those who have not," he said. "It never sat right with me."

So he's been determined to do what he can, working as a nonprofit volunteer in Detroit and through his employment as a construction project manager. Through his job, he's currently working to manage the transformation of a former Fisher Body plant, a long-time Detroit



Avonte Maddox, a defensive back for the Detroit Lions, joined his friend Xavier Cornelius on a service-learning trip with Grace Community Church and International Samaritan.

eyesore, into more than 400 loft apartments, which he considers a Super Bowl-sized project.

“Avonte has actually won an NFL Super Bowl with the Eagles, and now he’s chasing one with the Detroit Lions,” Cornelius explained. “Since I don’t play professional sports, Avonte encouraged me to think about what a Super Bowl would look like for me in my industry. And for me, this is a Super Bowl.”

But working to alleviate poverty, whether it’s in Detroit or Honduras, is more than a big game or career highlight for Cornelius; it’s a way of life. “I want to represent the love of Christ,” he explained.

“And he does,” said Pastor Doug Kempton of Grace Community Church.

“These trips with International Samaritan give those who go a chance to step out and actually live it—to be the hands and feet of Jesus.”

In the Bible, Jesus spent time with people who were overlooked by society. That’s what Grace Community Church is doing through these trips. “We’re sending a message to the people living next to the garbage dump that we see them,” Cornelius said. “We see them as equally created by God and that they are worth taking our time to serve, pray with, and get to know.”

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International Samaritan scholarship students were able to visit with Avonte Maddox, a defensive back for the Detroit Lions, when he joined a service trip with Grace Community Church.

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