

# Dodgers Pitcher Clayton Kershaw Teams Up With Pastor Tommy Barnett's LA Dream Center

Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Clayton Kershaw is recovering from a back injury and cannot pitch in Major League Baseball games right now, but that hasn't stopped him from pursuing another of his passions—helping people in need.

On Tuesday, Kershaw—who is the reigning Cy Young Award winner as the best pitcher in the National League last year—visited Los Angeles' Dream Center, where he joined season-ticket holders and Dodgers players' wives in distributing groceries to 75 families.

For Kershaw, support of the Dream Center's mission to help homeless families get off the streets of Los Angeles and into transitional housing isn't a one-day event. It's part of his greater purpose in life.

The Dodger pitcher and his wife, Ellen, run a nonprofit endeavor called Kershaw's Challenge, which annually partners with organizations that help children at risk and people who struggle with poverty.

The 2014 Kershaw's Challenge projects include the Dream Center, located just a few miles from Dodger Stadium and founded by Tommy Barnett and Matthew Barnett; Mercy Street, an urban ministry in Kershaw's hometown of Dallas; Arise Africa, an outreach to orphans in Zambia; and Cure International, also in Zambia.

"It's important to Ellen and I to use the platform that God has blessed us with and be able to impact as many lives as we

possibly can,” Kershaw told Charisma News. “That means not only serving in Africa, but in the cities we call home. There is so much need right here in Los Angeles, and since we spend the majority of our year here, we wanted to add a local project to Kershaw’s Challenge. This gives us the opportunity to serve hands-on year round.”

Partnering with the Dream Center, Kershaw’s Challenge has zeroed in on helping to provide transitional housing for homeless families. In addition, Dodger wives, including Ellen, will participate in a season-long series of other outreach projects.

The centerpiece of Kershaw’s effort is called Strike Out to Serve. While Kershaw’s Challenge does accept donations, Kershaw leads by example. He is one of the best strike-out pitchers in baseball and a two-time Cy Young Award winner. For each batter he strikes out in a game, he makes a donation to the Kershaw’s Challenge projects. So the better he performs, the more he gives.

“I want every pitch and every batter faced to be about something more than a game,” he says.

The challenge started in 2011. During the off-season, Kershaw and his wife visited Arise Africa’s children’s project in Zambia. Ellen had been there before, but it was Kershaw’s first trip. An HIV-positive orphan named Hope won over their hearts. At the start of the 2011 season, Kershaw pledged \$100 per strike out to help build a home for Hope and other orphans in Zambia.

In 2011, Kershaw had his best season ever, leading the league in wins, earned-run average and strike outs—248 of them. Other athletes, including high schoolers, joined in the effort and pledged various amounts to help the orphans of Zambia too.

Kershaw has continued the Strike Out to Serve challenge each year, adding projects in Texas and California. And each off-

season, he and his wife return to visit Hope and the orphans of Zambia. The first home is built and a second is in the planning stages. The Kershaws tell their story in their book, *Arise: Live Out Your Faith and Dreams On Whatever Field You Find Yourself*.

Kershaw opened the 2014 MLB season for the Dodgers beating the Arizona Diamondbacks 3-1 in a game played March 22 in Australia. In that game, he struck out seven batters, getting Kershaw's Challenge off to a brisk start. However, his back injury has prevented him from playing since.

Last week, Kershaw announced that since he isn't able to strike out batters and thus make donations to the projects, he is tweaking the challenge.

"Kershaw's Challenge has always been about giving to something bigger than ourselves," Kershaw wrote in an announcement posted on his website. "We challenge others to use their talents to give back to those in need. One of our main campaigns is *Strikeout to Serve*. Since I can't strike anyone out right now, I've decided to look to the guys on my team who are making it happen. Every time one of my teammates gets a strikeout, I'll make a donation to Kershaw's Challenge. Going back to opening day, I'll give for every strikeout, for every Dodger pitcher."

To date, Dodger pitchers have struck out 194 opposing batters. What's more, Kershaw is recovering from his injury and will make his first minor league rehab start on Friday pitching for the Dodgers minor league team in Rancho Cucamonga, Calif. He is on course to be back on the mound for the Dodgers at the major league level in early May—at which time Strike Out to Serve will recommence at full force.