

Wichita Falls volunteers plant seedlings, gospel seeds in South Africa_72505

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By George Henson

Staff Writer

WICHITA FALLS—Members of First Baptist Church in Wichita Falls not only planted seedlings to nourish bodies, but also left seeds of evangelism to transform souls in South Africa.

More than 100 church members journeyed from North Texas to Johannesburg, where they boarded a bus for another four and a half hours to reach White River, South Africa.

With White River as the base of operations, the Texans joined with a California church group to plant 16,458 gardens within a 100-mile radius.

Both groups took the trip to Africa as part of Dream for Africa movement founded by Bruce Wilkinson, author of *The Prayer of Jabez*. The churches participated in the Never Ending Gardens portion of the program.



Jennifer Garner of Wichita Falls carries a group of seedlings to the planting beds. First Baptist Church in Wichita Falls sent 108 volunteers to South Africa to plant gardens to help fight the hunger there. (Photos by Eric Garner)

After a day of training, the participants broke into teams of seven to 10 people, who worked with Africans to plant gardens. Some were community gardens, and some were small plots to serve individual families, Minister of Education Walter Guillaume reported.

Teams planted gardens with beets, cabbage, lettuce and spinach. Seedlings, not seeds, were planted to expedite the process of getting food to the people. Planting was not done with tilling machines but with hand tools such as picks, hoes and rakes.

"We tried to meet real physical needs while sharing the gospel to meet spiritual needs as well," Guillaume said. Another facet of the 10-day mission trip was to encourage Christians in the area.

Team members felt an "overwhelming sense of the demonic" in the area, Guillaume said. While he was planting one garden, he could hear the reverberation of drums that villagers told him were part of a witchcraft ritual being held 50 yards away.

Another lasting impression that stayed with Guillaume was the state of the family in Africa.

"There has been a total degeneration of the family unit. The father for the most part is completely absent—he just doesn't exist. He may have died from AIDS, or he may be at the beer hall, but regardless, he wasn't around,"

Guillaume said.

AIDS has so ravaged the nation that only children inhabited many of the houses where the teams planted gardens, with no adults living in the huts. Many others contained only children and an elderly woman or man, looked upon as grandparents, whether or not there was any blood relation.

While many studies say that 1 in 4 people are HIV-infected or have AIDS, church leaders in the area believe that 1 in 3 may be a closer approximation, Guillaume said.

“We're talking about homes with door frames without doors and window frames without glass –places we wouldn't store our lawn mowers–but are the homes for people,” Guillaume said.

Participants will not soon forget the mission trip, he added.

“It's impacted them in a huge way,” he said. “Many will go back, and others who did not go this time will go when we return. Others will now be supporting financially the missionaries we met there.”

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.