

# San Angelo bus ministry takes gospel to travelers

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SAN ANGELO—At First Baptist Church in San Angelo, bus ministry doesn't mean transporting people to church. It means taking a message of God's love to people who may never pass their way again.

Volunteers from the church minister at the San Angelo Bus Center, board buses to deliver brown paper sacks filled with bottled water, snack crackers, a can of Vienna sausages, a small plastic container of chocolate pudding and tracts in English and Spanish.

Paul Mansfield boards a bus in San Angelo to offer a gift on behalf of Jesus Christ to each passenger.  
(Photo/Jennifer Wright)

A "love note" is stapled to each bag. One side says: "This is our simple way

of saying that God loves you. Let us know if we can be of more assistance.” The other side of the card contains contact information for First Baptist Church.

The bus center ministry began one year ago. Ten buses pass through San Angelo’s bus station every 24 hours—some in the middle of the night.

Due to a limited number of volunteers, the church focuses its ministry on Sunday afternoon and holidays—times when the traffic is heaviest and their impact greatest.

On a recent Sunday, volunteer Bob Hays boarded a bus to distribute gift bags. He greeted each passenger with the words, “We bring this in the name of Jesus Christ.”

If a traveler didn’t accept the gift, he repeated in Spanish, “En el nombre de Jesucristo.”

When some appeared hesitant, he added another welcome word—“Gratis” (free)—that typically elicited a grin and warm reception.

Hays and his wife, Lee, went through the same routine again about 20 minutes later, when a southbound bus arrived in San Angelo on its way to Del Rio and Eagle Pass. In less than an hour, the couple touched the lives of 50 travelers and two drivers—as well as clerks inside the station.

Ronnie Laughlin, associate pastor at First Baptist Church, works closely with the ministry. In addition to the Hays family, Ken Phipps and Frances Neal, Mike and Debbie Bitner and Paul and Sue Mansfield volunteer with the bus center ministry on a four-week rotation.

Fellow church members Cecil and Gwynn Tucker purchase supplies. Volunteer Noemi Jimenez regularly helps fill the paper sacks, and members of the church’s college and career Sunday school class also helped fill 200

bags one week.

Last year, the church's Vacation Bible School designated part of its offering to the bus center ministry. In its first 10 months, the ministry distributed gift bags to more than 1,100 travelers.

"We tell our people that their prayers and gifts have made a difference to many of God's children and will continue with their help," Mansfield said.

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