

# SBC leaders note ‘urgent need’ along the border

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TIJUANA, Mexico (BP)—Two adult sisters risked their lives in a months-long journey from Cameroon in Central Africa to Tijuana, Mexico. Southern Baptist pastor Marshal Ausberry was surprised to see them at the southern U.S. border seeking asylum.



Marshal Ausberry, first vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention, traveled to the Mexican border to learn how Baptist pastors there are ministering to immigrants and migrants seeking safety in the United States. (BP screen capture)

“It’s just not people from Central America and South America that are coming,” said Ausberry, first vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention, following his recent trip to the border. “There are people from Africa and Haiti that have migrated to Mexico in attempts to come through the border to the United States.”

## **‘Modern-day diaspora’**

Ausberry met the immigrants at a Baptist church in Mexico as he was on a fact-finding mission on border ministry with Todd Unzicker, an associate pastor at The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, N.C. The Christian sisters fled persecution in Cameroon, he noted.

“That was just one story, and there are thousands of those kinds of stories,” said Ausberry, senior pastor of Antioch Baptist Church in Fairfax Station, Va. “I kind of see it as a modern-day diaspora, that God is shifting the population around for his purposes. When people are willing to endure such great hardships to come to the United States from Mexico for their personal safety, it just moves your heart.

“We don’t get into the politics of it, but as believers in Christ Jesus, we’re burdened to do that basic level of care,” Ausberry said. “We still need to show them that human dignity of food, clothing and shelter, that care ... as they go through the political process of getting asylum and access to the United States and Mexico.”

SBC President J.D. Greear, pastor of The Summit Church, asked Ausberry, Unzicker and SBC Second Vice President Noe Garcia, pastor of North Phoenix Baptist Church, to make the trip. Garcia was unable to participate.

## **Love for neighbor, not politics**

Ausberry and Unzicker met July 16-18 in Tijuana with leaders of the National Baptist Convention of Mexico, Baptist pastors, Southern Baptist pastors from California and Southern Baptist workers in Mexico to learn about ministry to those caught in the crisis on the border.

“As Pastor J.D. says, most of us are not called or competent to make policy decisions on the border, but we are commanded by Jesus to love our

neighbors and those who are hurting,” Unzicker said. “And this, what is a crisis, I think could actually be an absolute win for the kingdom (of God).

“Nobody could doubt that God is moving the nations all around the globe right now, in ways that history has not seen before. We were able to go and share the gospel with people who literally had nothing.”



Todd Unzicker, associate pastor at The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, N.C., encountered two Christian sisters at the Mexican border who had fled persecution in Cameroon and are seeking asylum in the United States. (BP Photo from Twitter)

The sisters from Cameroon were staying and serving at a church while awaiting an immigration hearing in the United States, Ausberry said.

“They really have the joy of Christ in them,” he said, and prefer their current situation to Cameroon. “Their love for Christ, their hopefulness, is just tremendous. It touched our hearts, and we’re thankful for the church opening their doors to give them a place to stay, a place to serve while they’re waiting to go to the hearing to continue their path to seeking asylum.”

# Ministering with meager resources

Ausberry and Unzicker visited five sites where aid is being administered. Baptist churches there do much with few resources, the two said. At one church, about 30 immigrants were housed on cots stacked to the ceiling. Churches were feeding, clothing and ministering to those who had fled home with nothing.

“One pastor had such a burden,” Unzicker said, that he asked his leadership for permission to house immigrants in the church’s Sunday School classrooms.

“His leadership team said, ‘OK, you can make room for five people.’ So, he went out and brought back 30. And so they made bunks that just went all the way up to the ceiling,” Unzicker said.

“It’s happening all along (the border) from Brownsville to Tijuana,” he added. “We want to catalyze that, and see all Southern Baptist entities and churches working together for one cause.”

Greear will use information gathered on the trip to Mexico to formulate ideas for ministry through Southern Baptists and partners, Unzicker and Ausberry said.

Greear could not make the trip to Tijuana because he was in Asia in July, meeting with 51 missionaries from The Summit Church serving in Thailand and Malaysia.

Ausberry noted there is “an urgent need here to show the love of Christ, and it’s in real terms of food, shelter, clothing, a bath, a bed, just basic needs you and I take for granted.”

Ausberry and Unzicker described the situation as an optimum opportunity tangibly to show the love of Christ.

“The nations are coming to our front doorstep,” Unzicker said. “We want to certainly welcome them with arms that are full of blankets and food, and most importantly the love of Jesus.”