

# To Ortiz, pizza means peace in refugees' neighborhoods

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Can pizza prevent a kidnapping? Or spread harmony through a community? Or entice people to consider their relationship with Christ?

Pastor Lorenzo Ortiz thinks so. That's why he's launching Pizzas el Buen Samaritano in Nuevo Laredo, just across the Rio Grande from Laredo.

Ortiz directs El Buen Samaritano Migrante, a ministry that serves more than 100 refugees in three shelters in the Mexican states of Coahuila and Tamaulipas. [Fellowship Southwest](#), an ecumenical Cooperative Baptist Fellowship network, partners with Ortiz, providing [ongoing support](#)—from food and supplies, to rent and appliances, and even a passenger van—for his shelters.

Ortiz sees selling pizza as an opportunity to build bridges with the community, while also providing income for refugees who live in the shelters. So, he built an oven in the front of the El Shaddai Shelter in the Buena Vista neighborhood of Nuevo Laredo.

"Since I am a bricklayer, I can do an oven in one day and sell pizzas on that same day," he said.

El Shaddai is one of two shelters Ortiz operates in Nuevo Laredo, along with a third shelter in Saltillo, about 180 miles south.

## First fruits for God and community

Seeking to involve the community in his project, Ortiz distributed free pizzas to the community. "Those were our first fruits for God and the

community,” he noted. “People are already asking us when we are going to start selling the pizzas.” That will happen soon, he said.

Ortiz decided to bake and sell pizzas to counter the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, increased unemployment, erosion of social problems and growing dominance of drug cartels in the region.

“Buena Vista is in the middle of where the cartel and the hawks (cartel informants) dominate,” Ortiz explained. “They’ve stopped by, and we share with them. We give and we sow (the gospel), and they feel good.”

Ortiz expects the pizza initiative to reduce “crime within the colony.” He believes cartel members will begin to see the refugees in his shelters as “their neighbors who serve and feed them.” Then, he hopes, they will stop hurting and stealing from the immigrants.

Acts 2:44-47—which describes how the early Christians “were together and had everything in common”—provided the inspiration for Pizzas el Buen Samaritano. Citing that story, Ortiz pointed to three steps for achieving unity—be together, walk together and do something together.

## **New Testament-style growth**

When Christians live like that, they serve their community, and their Christian witness gains attention and respect, he insisted.

“This is a type of growth based on the (New Testament) book of Acts,” he said. “No one was envious. They grew in unity, therefore finding favor among men. People, then, sympathized with the church.”

The Buena Vista neighborhood has reacted with enthusiasm to Pizzas el Buen Samaritano. Many local young people have said they want to deliver pizzas, Ortiz reported. He plans to build another oven at the other shelter in Nuevo Laredo, following the same strategy he established in Buena

Vista.

“The plan is to get to know (people in the community, including the cartel members) and live with them and evangelize them,” he said. “We will be having Bible studies, first with those who live in the shelter, and later with those in the community as they integrate and we establish dialogues.”

Ortiz asked for prayer so that the unity that has begun will bear fruit in the communities surrounding the refugees.

“All of this allows for the light of the church to shine brighter in the midst of so much darkness,” he said.

*Elket Rodríguez is an immigrant and refugee advocacy and missions specialist for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Fellowship Southwest.*