

Baptists and partners meet needs in COVID hotspot

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El Paso Baptist Association—working in partnership with other organizations and with churches across denominational lines—is providing food to people in an area overwhelmed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

El Paso County has reported more than 80,000 COVID-19 cases and set up mobile morgues to help handle the 980 fatalities from the virus. A county judge extended a stay-at-home order until at least Dec. 1, as hospitals have overflowed with patients.

“Of the 700,000 population in El Paso, 85 percent are Hispanic,” said Larry Floyd, executive director of the [El Paso Baptist Association](#) “Many people are considered essential workers and must work to keep their jobs.”

A cultural emphasis on extended family—and a tradition of celebrations in which multiple households gather—likewise has contributed to the spread of the virus, he noted.

Floyd understands the region. He grew up in El Paso in a Catholic family but came to a personal faith in Jesus Christ at age 25 while serving in the U.S. Army. Within a few years, he felt God’s call into full-time ministry. While serving as a pastor in Del Rio, he was invited to become executive director of El Paso Baptist Association.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the association has sought to respond to the needs of affected individuals and families, particularly by providing groceries. The [Texas Baptist Hunger Offering](#) helps provide funds for food.

“With COVID-19, one of El Paso’s greatest needs is hunger,” Floyd said.

“People who own expensive cars are selling their vehicles just to put food on the table. When there is a food distribution day, automobiles line up hours before the appointed time.”

‘People are so grateful for the help’

To meet the increasing need, Floyd contacted Jorge Zapata, associate coordinator for [Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Texas](#). Zapata helped connect him to a U.S. Department of Agriculture liaison to faith-based organizations for the [Farmers to Families](#) program.



El Paso Baptist Association distributed food to families affected by the COVID -19 pandemic. (Photo courtesy of Larry Floyd)

The USDA launched the Farmers to Families food box initiative as part of the agency’s Coronavirus Food Assistance Program. Through this program, USDA purchases produce, dairy and meat. The agency works with farmers and suppliers to package food into family-sized boxes, and then transport

the boxes to food banks, community and faith-based organizations and other nonprofit organizations that distribute them to families.

“People are so grateful for the help,” Floyd said. “We delivered a box to a family of six children who lived in the projects. The father had COVID, was hospitalized on a ventilator, had a stroke, and survived. You should have seen the children’s eyes light up when they saw the box contained dairy products, such as yogurt and cheese.”

Floyd noted his family was new to their neighborhood, having just lived in their home for about a year. After delivering a food box to a neighbor’s home, Floyd received a phone call the next day.

“If you need anything, just let me know,” the neighbor told Floyd. “How would we have survived without this food?”

More community-minded

As the pandemic intensified locally, churches of other denominations have contacted Floyd, asking how they could partner with the Baptist association.

“We are finding we have more in common than we thought,” Floyd said. “Because of COVID, 140 churches from all denominations are participating in food distribution. Pastors are meeting on parking lots and talking while serving food. Some are directing traffic. Others are witnessing to those who come.

“Who would have thought? We are experiencing so many blessings. Even with all the sorrows in this area, we know God is still in control. El Paso has become more community-minded—all because of this pandemic.”



The Elks Club of El Paso presents a check to Larry Floyd, executive director of El Paso Baptist Association. These funds were used to rent fork lifts in unloading food boxes for Farmers to Families Food Boxes.

As Floyd works with the pastors in the food distribution, he also seeks to minister to them. The pastors share their hopes and dreams of serving God and serving people, and Floyd prays for and with them.

The local Elks Club has helped unload the trailers used to transport the boxes by renting forklifts. Volunteers also package and deliver the individual boxes for families.

Spanish-language churches in El Paso are surveying the communities they serve to discover families who need food. Sam's Club and Walmart is providing five gift cards for groceries per church to assist.

Churches also are involved in other ministries related to the pandemic. First Baptist Church in Horizon City provides free COVID-19 testing.

The [Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas](#) has provided a grant to enable churches to purchase disinfectant supplies, gloves and masks.

As El Paso Baptist Association continues to lead in ministry response to the pandemic, Floyd noted he continues to pray for discernment and for God's direction.

"I ask God to help me find people to serve," he said. "What is going on around me? How can I make a difference here in El Paso Baptist Association?"

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