

Baptists in Texas show love in midst of migrant surge

April 7, 2021

As U.S. immigration officials continue to deal with a massive surge of migrants on the nation's southern border—including significant numbers of unaccompanied minors—Baptists in Texas redouble efforts to show Christ's love.

[U.S. Customs and Border Patrol reported](#) agents along the U.S.-Mexico border apprehended about 15,000 unaccompanied minors in January and February—a 160 percent increase from the previous fiscal year.

“The number of children and teenagers arriving at our country's border without a parent or legal guardian has dramatically surpassed the capacity of our government's infrastructure to provide appropriate care in compliance with U.S. laws, and thousands of kids are presently stuck in unacceptable conditions,” Matthew Soerens, national coordinator of the [Evangelical Immigration Table](#) and U.S. director of church mobilization for World Relief, wrote in an April 6 email.

On March 17, the Evangelical Immigration Table wrote President Biden, urging the federal government to work with nonprofit organizations to increase capacity to provide prompt and appropriate care for children.

Buckner manages donations for migrant youth

[Buckner International](#) is helping manage donations for about 2,300 migrant children—primarily teenagers—housed in the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center in downtown Dallas.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement selected Catholic Charities of Dallas to enlist Spanish-speaking volunteers and gave Buckner—working alongside Trusted World, a Garland-based nonprofit organization—permission to receive and manage all in-kind and financial donations for the migrant teens.



Buckner International received recreation equipment that FC Dallas, Univision and the University of Texas at Arlington donated for unaccompanied minors housed at the convention center in Dallas. The Dallas Mavericks also donated several boxes of items. (Buckner Photo / Scott Collins)

Only new clothing and hygiene items in their original containers are accepted, along with small Spanish-language Bibles, educational supplies, games and selected items for recreation. Items are needed for both males and females ages 13 to 17.

For the complete list of requested items, [click here](#). To make a financial contribution, [click here](#).

No items are accepted at the convention center. Donated items should be

delivered to the Buckner Center for Humanitarian Aid at 5405 Shoe Drive in Dallas between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Donated items will be held for distribution as needed. If all the donations are not needed for the migrant youth, the Office of Refugee Resettlement has approved their use to help other vulnerable children and families.

“Texans have shown so much generosity toward the migrant children relocated to Dallas from the border,” said Albert Reyes, president and CEO of Buckner International. “We will do our best to honor the original intent of donors, but in the event no additional supplies are needed by [the Office of Refugee Resettlement], I can promise the donations will make an impact on local children and families who are also in great need.”

‘Fluid and dynamic’ situation along the border

The situation along the U.S.-Mexico border is “fluid and dynamic,” and it varies from one border crossing point to another, said Marv Knox, founding coordinator of [Fellowship Southwest](#), an ecumenical network rooted in the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Across the border from Eagle Pass, Pastor Israel Rodriguez regularly shelters about 75 immigrants at Primera Iglesia Bautista in Piedras Negras.

About 100 miles to the southeast, Pastor Lorenzo Ortiz, leads El Buen Samaritano Migrante. Ortiz has operated two shelters in Nuevo Laredo and another in Saltillo, and he recently opened another shelter in Nuevo Laredo to accommodate increasing numbers of migrants.

“Keeping people off the streets so they are not as vulnerable” to the cartels that operate in the Nuevo Laredo area is crucial, Knox noted.

About 200 miles away on the U.S. side of the border in the lower Rio Grande Valley, Pastor Carlos Navarro of Iglesia Bautista West Brownville provides migrants backpacks filled with socks, underwear, toiletry and hygiene items, snacks, bottled water and Bibles.

Migrants who are released by border agents typically board buses to connect with their sponsors in distant locations, and volunteers from Iglesia Bautista West Brownsville offer meals and travel bags to them at the bus station. Navarro also distributes the filled backpacks to migrants without sponsors who are living temporarily on the streets of Brownsville.



Mario Alberto Gonzales, director of River Ministry, joins Pastor Carlos Navarro of Iglesia Bautista West Brownsville and representatives of No Mas Violencia in visiting migrants at the Brownsville bus station. (Photo courtesy of Texas Baptists)

Mario Alberto Gonzalez, director of [Texas Baptists' River Ministry and Mexico Missions](#), recently traveled to the Valley, where he visited migrants in the bus station with Navarro, along with Norberto Palmitano and Richard Gómez from [No Más Violencia](#), a nonprofit ministry committed to biblical peacemaking.

“We were able to greet and talk with people from Central America, Venezuela, Cuba, Haiti and Ecuador, and we met a man from China and were able to talk with him and many others. There is no doubt that God is sending people from many nations to testify to them of his love and the gospel,” Gonzalez said.

The No Más Violencia representatives are looking for churches in the Valley that want to help migrants stop the cycle of violence they experienced in their countries of origin.

“Almost all immigrants have been affected by violence in their own nation and continue life with hardened hearts. This program, with support from River Ministry, is designed to help those who wish to leave the vicious cycle of violence,” Gonzalez said. “Of course, church volunteers are required in training those who want to stop the violence and follow Jesus.”

Gonzalez also learned more about the ministries Pastor Olber Robledo and members of Horeb Baptist Church in Brownsville provide to migrants.

‘Thank God for churches ... serving migrants’

“Thank God for churches like Horeb and other congregations that are serving migrants, especially West Brownsville Baptist Church. Thank the Lord for every pastor who is organizing and directing his church members to serve among immigrants,” Gonzalez said.



Members of Rock Pointe Church in Del Rio record each migrant's name, destination and family contact, while seeking to discover immediate needs. The church works in partnership with Shon Young, a River Ministry missionary, as part of the Val Verde Border Humanitarian Coalition. (Photo courtesy of Texas Baptists)

In Del Rio, Border Patrol officials rely on the [Val Verde Border Humanitarian Coalition](#)—a nonprofit group that includes several area churches—to provide food and meet other basic needs of newly arrived immigrants.

Shon Young, a River Ministry missionary and missions pastor of City Church in Del Rio, leads the coalition, which served about 2,100 people in March—an increase of more than 600 over February.

“Since mid-January there has been an obvious increase in the immigrants being released from Border Patrol to the local body of believers. Thankfully, the number of churches serving them is starting to increase,” Young said.

In addition to providing food, Young distributes travel kits to immigrants. Each kit includes hand sanitizer, a facemask, lip balm, a pen and notebook, tissues and a Spanish New Testament.

To support River Ministry, click [here](#). To support Buckner, click [here](#). To support Fellowship Southwest's Border Relief Fund, click [here](#).