

Brownsville church feeds families during pandemic

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BROWNSVILLE—Working with multiple partners, a small-membership Hispanic church in Brownsville is providing food to hundreds of vulnerable families and individuals each week during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Drive-through food distribution events at Iglesia Bautista Horeb not only serve Brownsville residents, but also families from other Cameron County communities. (Photo courtesy of Iglesia Bautista Horeb)

Like most churches, [Iglesia Bautista Horeb in Brownsville](#) suspended in-person Sunday worship services for a few weeks, shifting temporarily to online-only worship. But the church never stopped meeting needs.

“We started the food distribution within our own church, to care for our senior adults,” Pastor Olber Roblero said. “When we saw the need here, we opened it up to the community.”

When Iglesia Bautista Horeb resumed in-person worship on Sundays, it began offering two services—one specifically for senior adults and others in high-risk categories for COVID-19 and one geared toward younger worshippers.

“We continue with online worship on Wednesday and face-to-face worship

on Sunday. And throughout the week, we're feeding the community," Roblero said.

Drive-through distribution kept growing

Iglesia Bautista Horeb launched a weekly drive-through food distribution on the church property. Donations from a local business enabled the church to give away 50 bags of food the first week in May.



Volunteers deliver 100 food boxes each week to the doorsteps of homebound senior adults and low-income mobile home community residents, including some who have tested positive for COVID-19. (Photo courtesy of Iglesia Bautista Horeb)

By mid-May, that number had grown to 300 food boxes. In recent weeks, the church—which averages 60 in attendance—has distributed 500 food boxes at the drive-in event.

Volunteers also deliver another 100 food boxes each week to the doorsteps of homebound senior adults and low-income mobile home community residents, including some who have tested positive for COVID-19.

Iglesia Bautista Horeb received a \$1,000 [Community Transformation](#)

[Initiative](#) grant from the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission and Woman's Missionary Union of Texas.

The church also developed ongoing partnerships with the [Brownsville Wellness Coalition](#), Urban Strategies, World Vision and the [U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farmer to Families food box program](#) that make the weekly food distribution possible.

"We are so blessed," Roblero said.

Ministering to body and spirit

The church's ministry extends beyond its immediate community. The drive-in food distribution not only serves Brownsville residents, but also people throughout Cameron County, including Harlingen and San Benito.



Volunteers not only provide food, but also offer to pray with area residents during food distribution events at Iglesia Bautista Horeb in Brownsville. (Photo courtesy of Iglesia Bautista Horeb)

The church posts announcements about the food distribution on its Facebook page and encourages others to spread the news by word of mouth.

"When we say we will be open at 9 in the morning, by 6 o'clock people already are in line," Roblero said.

Recipients are encouraged to stay in their vehicles and allow mask-wearing volunteers to load the groceries for them in their trunks or back seats.

Volunteers also are available to pray with anyone who requests prayer.

“Some ask for prayer because people are losing their jobs,” Roblero said, noting others mention health concerns and other issues.

“If they don’t want to roll down their windows to talk, that’s OK. We show them the love of Christ through our actions.”

‘This is essential work’

Volunteers follow appropriate health and safety protocols—maintaining social distance, wearing masks and using hand sanitizer frequently.



Volunteers work during food distribution day at Iglesia Bautista Horeb in Brownsville. (Photo courtesy of Iglesia Bautista Horeb)

Even so, Roblero recognizes any contact can be risky, particularly in a hot spot like the Rio Grande Valley. The four counties in the Rio Grande Valley have reported 43,000 cases of COVID-19, and the number of confirmed deaths due to the virus topped 1,300 in mid-August.

Still, Roblero points to the example of Jesus, who offered a healing touch to lepers in spite of the risks.

“Pray for the safety of our volunteers,” he said. “This is essential work, and they are on the front lines.”

Although the church hasn’t actively recruited volunteers outside its membership, several individuals from the community have shown up to volunteer on distribution days, Roblero noted.

One community volunteer thanked the pastor at the end of a drive-in food distribution for the opportunity to serve, indicating he would be back to help again.

“I was surprised when he didn’t show up for a couple of weeks after that,” Roblero recalled.

Then during a weekly drive-in distribution, a woman rolled down her car window and called out to the pastor, asking him to come speak to her. She told him her husband had volunteered earlier, and it meant a lot to him. He had died the week before of COVID-19.

“This is life and death we’re dealing with,” Roblero said. “The church needs to be a light in the community at a time like this.”