

Brownsville pastor ministers to Central American immigrants

February 15, 2019

BROWNSVILLE—A Baptist pastor in the Rio Grande Valley resonates with the story of Joseph in the book of Genesis.

Like the Old Testament patriarch who was able to meet the needs of his brothers after he rose to a position of responsibility in a foreign land, Pastor Carlos Navarro of Iglesia Bautista West Brownsville helps minister to the needs of fellow immigrants from Central America.

Immigrating from Guatemala

Navarro journeyed from Guatemala to California in 1982. Like many others, he was coming to escape the struggles at home and find new opportunities in the United States.

Navarro first arrived in the country without a visa, but churches in California took him in, and with their support, Navarro began to serve as pastor of a church in Stockton.

In 1987, Navarro completed a degree at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, and four years later, he left to serve as a missionary in El Salvador.

Two years later, Navarro was able to receive the necessary documentation to return to the United States and begin serving as pastor of Iglesia Bautista West Brownsville.

Unexpected opportunity to minister

Not long after arriving in Texas, Navarro recalls how God placed him in a situation he did not foresee.

Immigrants from Central America already were making the journey to the United States to look for a better life in the 1990s, Navarro said.

The process then was similar to what it is now, he noted. Immigrants would come to seek refuge. Among them were minors who made the trip without their parents.

Once they were processed, many were taken to a detention center where Navarro was invited to minister.

“I could connect with them because not only did I speak their language, but I also spoke their culture,” Navarro said.

Ten years ago, Navarro transitioned to ministry with immigrants at the [Southwest Key](#) Immigration Shelters in Brownsville, he said.

The founder and chief executive officer of Southwest Key Programs, Juan Sánchez, grew up in Brownsville, where there are four shelters for immigrant children—including Casa Padre, one of the largest in the country.

Navarro recognizes he has an opportunity many others cannot have. Even as U.S. [senators](#) initially have been denied access to immigration shelters, Navarro said he has been allowed into those shelters to minister to immigrant minors.

“I am the only person they get to interact with who is not in uniform,” Navarro said. “So, I get to welcome them and talk to them about God.”

Ministry meets needs

Like Joseph, who welcomed his brothers in times of need, Navarro said, he has the opportunity to welcome his brothers and sisters who have come to the United States in times of need.

“They have needs,” he said. “Those needs are physical, emotional, legal and spiritual.”



Through Golán, a ministry to immigrants sponsored by Iglesia Bautista West Brownsville, Pastor Carlos Navarro said he can relate to the story of Joseph, who welcomed his brothers to Egypt in times of need. (Photo / Isa Torres)

Iglesia Bautista West Brownsville sponsors a ministry called Golán, which collects toiletries, clothes, backpacks, food, water and other items to help support immigrants.

“We do this because we know these people have been created in the image of God,” Navarro said.

While the ministry is hard and costs a lot of money, Navarro said, the

church understands God will remain faithful, even when funds are short.

Navarro and his church have been recognized by the city of Brownsville and Cameron County for their ministry to immigrants.

Navarro also was invited to participate on a press call convened by the [National Immigration Forum](#) recently.

In the conversation, he heard others address solutions that will ensure security and maintain cross-border trade and economic vitality. But at the end of the phone call, he said what matters in the conversation is the physical and spiritual needs of immigrants.

“We have been called to preach the gospel to all creatures, whether they are legally here or not,” Navarro said. “My message to others is to call them to do this in obedience to God.”