

DeSoto church serves community in season of need

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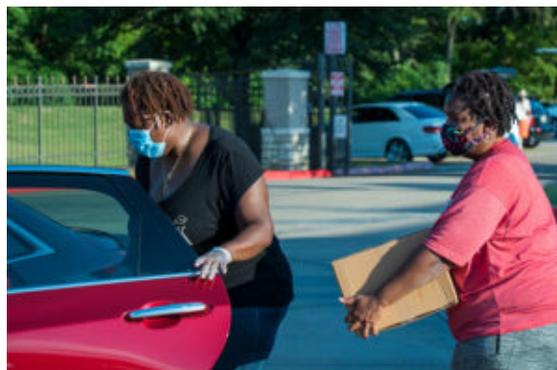
Pastor Oscar Epps of Community Missionary Baptist Church in Desoto always has been passionate about meeting the needs of his community.

So, when the COVID-19 pandemic left many families hurting for food and other basic needs, Epps asked the church to give generously to provide supplies for these families.

Community Missionary Baptist Church responded, launching a food drive at its two campuses in Cedar Hill and DeSoto.

“It’s our pastor’s vision that our church should work outside of the four walls,” said Deacon Stephen Jackson, director of ministries at the church. “And during the pandemic, we saw people facing real needs. There were folks that were struggling, and our church’s mission is to take care of those that are less fortunate than us.”

Sherwyn Ramey, director of Christian education at the church, is leading the food distribution. Ramey coordinated a team of volunteers to give out food boxes and present the gospel to those in need.



Members of Community Missionary Baptist Church in DeSoto load boxes of food into a car. (Dominique Crawford Photography)

The food drive, which takes place at the church's two campuses every Saturday, distributes up to 1,200 boxes of food weekly. Each grocery box contains a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, dry goods, dairy products and other basic necessities. Each box is designed to carry the family through the week until they can receive their next one.

In June, the church partnered with the Mint Foundation and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to provide even more food to those in need. Since this partnership began, the church estimates more than 26,000 boxes of food have been distributed.

In addition to the boxes, the church also periodically distributes heaping plates of barbecue to the families that come to receive groceries. The barbecue dinner allows church members extra time to bond with the families and share Christ's love with them.

To Ramey, this embodies the mission of Christ as recorded in Matthew 25: "I was hungry and you fed me. ... Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

Ministry continues to expand

Seeing the success of the food drive, local law enforcement asked Community Missionary Baptist Church to deliver grocery boxes to apartment complexes where the crime rate is highest.

The church leaders agreed. In July, they began distributing between 300 and 500 boxes each Wednesday.

As they saw the needs in the apartment complexes, Epps expanded the program to also distribute laundry vouchers that could be redeemed at local laundromats. He and his congregation hope that this ministry will bring light and hope into an area that is often filled with darkness.

Jackson noted that the success of the church's food drive is due largely to the congregation's willingness to step up and serve. From assembling the boxes, to obtaining laundry vouchers, to serving food, church members have mobilized to help their hurting community.

"They are living out the Great Commandment and Great Commission," said Roy Cotton, who recently announced his retirement as director of Texas Baptists' African American Ministries.

"People cannot hear the gospel message when they are hungry. The ministry of the community missionary takes on an even greater significance when so many people are adversely affected by the pandemic.

"This ministry is serving 'the least of these' in their communities. They are making a difference, and people are coming to Christ because of it."