

East Texas church builds relationships with Baptists in New England

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WORCESTER, Mass.—When Josh Brownfield’s son was born, he told plenty of people about it. He showed them pictures and recounted stories.

Children at a church in Providence, R.I., enjoy activities at a Vacation Bible School led by volunteers from First Baptist Church in Longview.
(PHOTOS/Jessica Acklen)

But Brownfield, pastor of Worcester Baptist Church, most eagerly shared the news with one group of people in particular—half a continent away from him in East Texas. After all, he considers those people as family.

They are members of a Sunday school class at [First Baptist Church in Longview](#) who pray for Brownfield and his family, write him encouraging notes and seek to help however they can.

Brownfield is one of several New England pastors who have bonded with First Baptist Church. The congregation has reached out to assist congregations in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, helping with prayer support, mission teams and volunteers who extended their vacations a bit to help in ministry.

They’re connected to service opportunities through Ben and Sherilyn Johnston, who are serving a church strengtheners in New England as [Mission Service Corps](#) volunteers. They spend several months a year in the

Northeast encouraging ministers, providing practical help and connecting volunteers from Texas who want to help grow God's kingdom in the area to missions opportunities.



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Sherilyn Johnston said she was convicted by the “spiritual lostness” she encountered on her first trip to the Northeast. In some places, it was palpable, she said.

“Right here in our own backyard, we have a huge need. In fact the number of evangelical Christians in New England is much less than some of our foreign mission countries,” she said.

During the summer, a team from First Baptist Church helped with a Vacation Bible School at one church in Providence, R.I., during the day while assisting with a discipleship effort at night in another.

The Texans bonded quickly with the children at Vacation Bible School through games, Bible stories and snack times. The event brought in a number of children from the community, some of whom had never heard the gospel before.



Kip Salser, minister to young and median adults at First Baptist Church in Longview, asks children to raise their hands in response to a question during a Vacation Bible School assembly at a church in Providence, R.I.



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“It’s neat to see the different phases of life these kids are in,” said Kip Salser, minister to young/median adults at First Baptist Church in

Longview. “Some who know the Lord we hope will grow closer to him. And some who have never really met Jesus really don’t know who he is. We have the opportunity to share that with them. That’s why we’re here.”

The events and activities empowered Texans to use their gifts to share the gospel, said Julie Forester, who participated on the trip with her mother. The musician and songwriter often led the kids in singing songs that communicated the hope of Christ.

“I believe God gives us gifts for a reason,” she said. “He’s given me the gift of singing to hopefully bring other people to him and to know him and to share his love.”

The trip serves as a reminder of the spiritual needs around every Christian, Salser said. When the team returned to Longview, Salser hoped, they would provide a spark to ignite a blaze of evangelistic outreach.



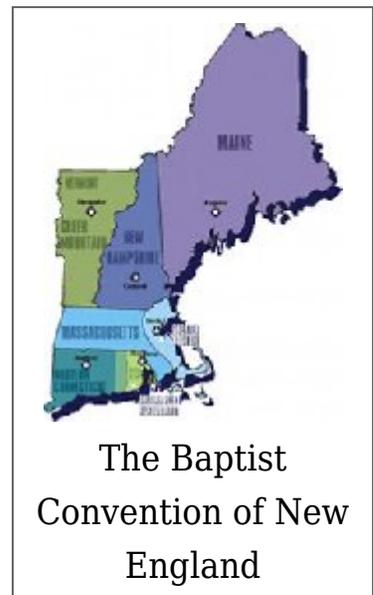
A volunteer from First Baptist Church in Longview serves up some snack during VBS.

“Christ came to serve, not to be served,” Salser said “In a very practical way, we can come back and say we had the honor and privilege of serving the Lord through serving the people of New England. I’d like to see that fire ignite not just in North American missions but see that ignite locally within our church body and say we can serve in Boston, Providence,

Longview, Ethiopia—wherever it is. We can have an impact.”

First Baptist Church was making an impact on the churches where the team serving this summer, just as it had already had in Brownfield’s life and ministry. Texans done construction work on Brownfield’s church and more recently helped do a series of family portrait days where Texans took free family portraits for New Englanders.

Brownfield appreciate the ongoing contact and encouragement he receives.



“Being in New England, we’re naturally a smaller church - there are very few large evangelical churches here,” he said. “We’re always short on people and resources. The people in Texas have both, usually in greater abundance than we do.

“It also helps foster a unity. ... It’s very easy to get divided up in terms of regional focuses and everything else that goes with that. For us in New England, it’s helpful for us to see fellow believers coming up and seeing fellow believers assisting us and working with us. I think it’s good for them to see what it looks like outside the Bible Belt—to see what it looks like in the Northeast.”

The Baptist General Convention of Texas is involved in a partnership with the [Baptist Convention of New England](#). Service opportunities include prayer partnerships between Texas Baptist churches and ministries in New England, missions teams to meet requests by New England Baptists and individual involvement, either short-term or long-term. For more information, contact Steve Seaberry at (888) 244-9400.