

El Paso churches respond to surge of migrants

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EL PASO, Texas (BP)—Baptists in El Paso are joining other groups to respond to large numbers of migrants that can quickly and easily spiral into a humanitarian crisis.

“We’re averaging 2,500 crossings a day,” said Larry Floyd, executive director of the El Paso Baptist Association. “Shelters are full. I’ve never seen it like this.”

The recent crowds at the border can be linked to the scheduled Dec. 21 deadline of Title 42. Originally enacted as part of the Public Health Service Act of 1944, Title 42 regards the “suspension of entries and imports ... to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.”

President Donald Trump cited the COVID-19 pandemic when he enacted Title 42 in March 2020, thus leading to the rapid expulsion of migrants at the border.

Floyd and others braced for a flood of immigrants last year as Title 42’s anticipated deadline neared, but the Biden administration ultimately decided to continue the policy.

At that time, El Paso Baptist Association had just opened its [migrant ministry center](#). Since then, the center has worked with the local government as well as the U.S. Border Patrol and the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in helping 60 to 100 migrants each week.

The current crisis happens, though, as the association’s migrant center is closed for the rest of the month. Primarily, the closure is due to a lack of

the center's regular volunteers, who will be serving at their respective churches during Christmas.

"There are churches going out on their own and handing out items like blankets," Floyd said. "Pastor Ariel Martinez and Del Sol Church have been active in this."

The migrant center will reopen in January.

"I'm hoping this surge creates a bigger sense of the need for volunteers year-round," said Floyd, who added that the center remains "spiritually based" and meets those needs alongside humanitarian ones. Families and individuals typically spend 24 to 36 hours there before being processed out.

Brent Moore, pastor of Life Church in El Paso, is one of those churches active at the migrant center.

"About a third of my church works with the government, so we're ministering to them during this as well as those crossing the border," he said.

Moore said government officials need to act.

"There's a way to be compassionate while calling your local officials to uphold the law." Moore said. "We're ministering to our people who are putting in the overtime, as well as migrants."

Coverage of the border situation and talk among lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have picked up considerable steam. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-NY, called President Biden's chief of staff over the matter, according to reports.

On Dec. 13, Sen. John Cornyn joined others in calling on Biden to extend Title 42 beyond its Dec. 21 deadline.

In addition to full homeless shelters, Moore has observed “shantytowns” of migrants springing up around gas stations. He has spoken to air marshals who have been pulled into border patrol duty. There are valid concerns of migrants being trapped into human trafficking.

The situation is an unprecedented one for Floyd, an El Paso native.

“Normal migration in El Paso is pretty substantial, but well-maintained,” he said. “When the border patrol is dropping off migrants in the streets, like now, something is seriously wrong.”