

# Hispanic Baptist church collaborates with multiple agencies to meet children's needs

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DALLAS—Primera Iglesia Bautista Mexicana is working with multiple community agencies to provide free summer programming for children in northwest Dallas in collaboration with Buckner International.

"It's about putting all our resources together and finding where and how can we meet the (community's) needs ... and getting to know the kids," said Sandra Martinez, coordinator of global ministries for [Buckner Children & Family Services](#) and director of the summer programming at the church.

All the participants hope to engage neighborhood children and youth—ages 3 to 19—in classes encouraging fun, physical wellness and spiritual growth.

Caridad Gregorich (center), David Vivero (right) and Norma Lopez (seated) greet parents and children who are drawn to Primera Iglesia Bautista Mexicana in Dallas by the free summer children's programs made possible by Buckner International.  
(PHOTO/Crystal Donahue)

"We want to reach out to the community and show Christ's love to the kids and the families that we come in touch with," Martinez said. "We want to get outside the walls of the church and let them know we want to serve."

Before the program started, 125 children signed up, but Martinez expects more to join throughout the summer.

Activities include crafts, games, Bible lessons and a week of Vacation Bible School.

The [North Texas Food Bank](#) is providing boxed lunches for students Monday through Friday free of charge.

The church has a small collection of children's books, donated by Buckner, and participants earn prizes by participating in the summer reading program.

"Buckner focuses on networking and how we can work together to reach more people," Martinez said. "Serving the community is a group project."

Girls in Motion enlisted female students from Southern Methodist University, the University of North Texas and Brookhaven Community College to mentor adolescent girls on the importance of self-worth.

"It is a program for girls 10 to 12 years old, and it is hosted by specially trained students. The cost is normally \$120 per child, but Girls in Motion is doing it free for us," Martinez said.

Program Associate Stacey Reinig said the organization's mission is to "empower young women to appreciate their bodies ... with the goal of promoting positive body image and preventing obesity and eating disorders."

Girls in Motion partnered with the church and Buckner because they, too, want to serve low-income and minority populations.

"We wanted to reach a group of participants that may have otherwise not had another summer camp opportunity. This was a perfect match," Reinig said.

In the fall, the church's ministry will cater to adult needs by offering bilingual programs, concentrating on technology, financial management, health and English as a Second Language.

The adult programming came as a result of a community assessment done by Buckner in partnership with the church and other community agencies, Martinez said.

"The No. 1 problem in the area is poverty and a lack of resources," she said.

She points out that many families cannot afford rent, utilities, school supplies or even clothing. Additionally, 80 percent of the target population is Hispanic, creating a language barrier.

"We hope to find the gaps in services and fill those," Martinez said.

A health clinic with free immunizations, a bloodmobile and \$10 physicals will be offered in August.

Martinez noted the church, Buckner and the supporting agencies are looking forward to seeing how the children's summer programming—and later the adult educational classes—will benefit the neighborhood.

"We know there are needs, and it's our desire to be God's hands and feet in the community," Martinez said. "Hopefully through us, people will see Christ ... and be encouraged and empowered."