

Love for community the heartbeat of inner-city El Paso church

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For nearly 26 years, community service has been the heartbeat of Pastor Alfonso Lopez and Iglesia Bautista Peregrino in El Paso.



Alfonso Lopez For two and a half decades, Lopez has instilled in his congregation the importance of “Hispanic people reaching back to Hispanic people.” And “love for the Hispanic people in the culturally growing Hispanic community” has been the driving force of Lopez’s heart even longer—since 1969, when he immigrated from Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

The congregation, which averages around 30 people during the Sunday morning worship, contributes to its community in various ways. Through the [Texas Baptist Hunger Offering](#), the church uses its inner-city building to distribute dry food, canned goods, pastas and occasionally potatoes to families. In one quarter this year, the food pantry fed 60 families.

The pantry is designed specifically for single mothers who can’t afford to feed their children three meals per day. Lopez estimates single mothers head half of the families in the community.

School supplies

Iglesia Bautista Peregrino doesn’t just provide families with food. It also helps provide for children’s basic needs, such as clothes and school

supplies. Last month, the church set up tables with a variety of donated clothing, including new tennis shoes, and assorted school supplies. The church invited families to take whatever they needed, free of charge.

Maribel Cuellar, a student at El Paso Community College, volunteers at the church. She consistently teaches eight to 10 middle-school students in the church how to pray and answers questions they may have. She has found the experience satisfying because of the fruit her investment yields.

“The most rewarding thing for me is when they actually accept Jesus as their Savior and they ask me questions, because then I know they want to learn more,” she said.

Kids in the park

Lopez and Cuellar go to the students if the students don't come to them. During the summer, the two launched “Kids in the Park,” an outreach activity in which they played gospel music and performed children's Bible stories in local parks.

However, Lopez is not interested in serving just single mothers or just children. He seeks to be the hands and feet of Jesus to entire families. Few people know that better than Cuellar.

When her parents experienced financial struggles, Lopez assisted them by offering a paid custodial position to Cuellar's mother. He also biblically counseled the family through economic hardships and most recently after the birth of the Cuellar's third daughter.

Rough times

“There have been rough times in our family. He has helped us and guided us to meet new people to help us out and learn about our situation,” Cuellar said.

Her father is a new believer in Jesus, and she appreciates how Lopez encourages her father in his walk with God, even consistently pulling him aside to have “man-to-man” conversations with him.

A few years ago, Lopez declined an invitation to pastor a bigger church in DeSoto, Kan. He knew he had a divine calling to stay in El Paso, though, because of his great love for the Hispanic community.

“I’m driven with the mercy gift to help,” he said. “But above all, I feel like that’s God will for my life. I’m in the center of God’s will for my life.”