

McAllen church seeks to build bridges to its neighbors

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McALLEN—Calvary Baptist Church in McAllen understands that to minister to people, Christians need to build bridges to them.

In 2012, the church's Spanish-speaking congregation, Calvary en Español, created Bridges—a series of strategies to embrace neighbors and develop their community educationally, emotionally, spiritually and socially.

'Here to care for people'



Elizabeth Zamora

Elizabeth Zamora, community ministries associate at Calvary, estimates 85 to 90 percent of the community surround the church is Hispanic, and many are low-income families who face chronic hunger.

"We have programs to address health, and nutrition education," Zamora said. "We want to be here to care for people."

The church offers programs like Bread of Life, a food pantry that distributes groceries to families the second Saturday of every month, and Zumba Fitness, an exercise class for adults and children.

Like many organizations dealing with hunger and poverty, Calvary has limited resources, which restricts the help the congregation can provide. But Zamora discovered collaborative partnerships with other organizations improve effectiveness. Calvary has five partnerships with other organizations.

Through these types of programs, Zamora sees Calvary building relationships with the community, but that can take a lot of time, resources and passion.

“For people to be part of this, the most important requirement is to have a passion to help others,” Zamora emphasized.

Nutrition classes



Emilia Padron teaches a nutrition class at Calvary Baptist Church in McAllen.

About six weeks ago, Calvary began offering nutrition classes through the [Texas A&M AgriLife Extension](#) program. Emilia Padron, a nutritional education assistant, teaches the eight-week course, instructing her students about portions, recipes and the groundwork necessary to have a healthy diet at home.

Students learn to implement better nutrition at home and also improve

their employment opportunities, since the certificate they receive at the end of the course is necessary for a food handler's permit.

The course—offered in both English and Spanish—underlines the importance of parents passing information on to their children.

One of the students, Alicia Teran, already has seen the benefits of the class.



Alicia Teran

"I had been told I was on my way to being a diabetic, and the only solution was to do something about my diet," Teran said. "This class has helped me to change my lifestyle."

At the end of every class, Padron teaches the class to prepare a healthy dish.

"We learn to know what is nutritious, and what foods we should avoid," said Teran, who no longer is at risk of diabetes.

The relationship of the church with the community is holistic, Zamora said. Even in small ways, like offering a nutrition class, Calvary knows the church can build bridges of hope when its members care for the whole need of a person.

"We care about their spiritual needs, which go along all of their other needs, which can be emotional, mental or physical," she observed.

This is part of an ongoing series about how Christians respond to hunger and poverty. Substantive coverage of significant issues facing Texas Baptists is made possible in part by a grant from the Prichard Family Foundation.