

Mission Able seeks to transform San Marcos

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What started as a one-week service emphasis at First Baptist Church in San Marcos evolved into a multi-church ministry with its own nonprofit status and big goals for the future.

For Monica Followell, who oversees missions and outreach at the church, that is exactly as it should be.

Followell began her time of service at First Baptist San Marcos in 2013. Almost immediately, she jumped into planning the service week on the church's calendar for July of that year. Early on, the effort had an inspired name that uniquely captured the heart of the matter.

"We were praying over what to call it, and the Lord laid on my heart Ephesians 3:20-21, where he is able to do far greater things, so we started to call it Mission Able," Followell said.

"We're using our own abilities to glorify the Lord for people who aren't able to do those things. It was about restoring people's dignity, working alongside people however we were able and loving on people to the glory of God."

The first Mission Able project was confirmation of sorts. A group of 30 showed up to clean out trash from a woman's mobile home that had been cited by the city. During the day, they learned a man was living behind the mobile home in a makeshift shelter in exchange for mowing the grass for the woman, who lived with her mother and had several children.

"We found out he was a hard worker, and he worked hard all day helping

her. The guys asked him to help the rest of the week, and he agreed. They picked him up and took him to the next job site, and we asked how we could pay him. He really just wanted an outdoor shower, so we bought one and dropped it off for him,” she recalled. “His name was Abel, so that whole experience just confirmed what it was supposed to be called.”

Growing needs, expanding mission

The weeklong summer service emphasis continued for a few years, with 17 to 20 projects completed and about 100 volunteers participating. When word began getting out, more projects landed on Followell’s desk.



Volunteers with Mission Able complete 30 to 50 community service projects a year. (Courtesy Photo)

But the church soon realized urgent needs would not allow them to wait several months, and they began scheduling quarterly efforts. Eventually, they moved into their current model, which is to handle projects as they come up, with 30-50 projects completed each year. They picked up a key partner as well.

“The director of neighborhood enhancement called me four years ago and had heard about Mission Able through the Lions Club. He wanted to see how to partner with their compliance department that tickets people who often have no way to pay, which just compounds the problem,” Followell said.

“We designed an online form that people could use to notify us of a neighbor with a need. And now that city department is one of our biggest

sources for project requests.”

Projects also come in from all across the church as Bible study members share about neighbors or ministries that serve low-income communities and may refer those with needs. Projects can range from simple lawn maintenance for a cancer patient to major roof repairs.

Monica said when projects involve more than just sweat and heavy lifting, Mission Able relies on church members with those skill sets, retired or active, or they contract out a skilled laborer and get a team of volunteers to assist.

Now an independent nonprofit organization

With projects increasing, the modest amount allocated from the church budget became a challenge. While Followell appreciated the ways God multiplied what the church provided financially, she also sensed she needed to pursue additional donors. So, the ministry pursued a separate 501c3 status and became an independent nonprofit organization in September of 2023.

Mission Able now has a board, bylaws and a future plan to hire an assistant to route projects. A city contract brings \$400,000 in funding for projects, and additional partnerships with Texas Baptists ministries such as Bounce student disaster recovery and Texas Baptist Men add additional resources.

Ministry leaders are hopeful the new nonprofit status will open opportunities to work with state organizations to address some housing challenges in San Marcos and bring low-income homes up to livable standards.

The nonprofit has also added a microcredit program to help homeowners

with higher price tag fixes. Mission Able pays the costs upfront and negotiates with the homeowner to repay a portion at no interest. That money can then be used to help the next project.

“They’re ensuring future good faith for other projects or the funds can be put to use for a neighbor, and they can even put a suggestion as to which neighbor that is. That strengthens neighborhoods because they’re not doing something just for them, but for others as well,” Followell explained.

She noted one client who received a microloan to replace part of a leaky roof who made small payments each month.

“It’s more of a relationship than him hiding, because he’s ashamed to not be a solution to a problem,” she said.

‘Jesus people’ from varied churches involved

The effort has also moved beyond First Baptist Church as it has grown.

“We have other churches on board who are building Mission Able teams—First Presbyterian Church of San Marcos, Sozo Church and Landmark Church—and are discussing with another. Our entire mission is to mobilize Jesus people to meet neighbors’ needs,” Followell said.

“The church is a response to a neighborhood need, not the city or government. If the church is doing its job, our neighborhoods would be stronger places.

“We don’t have any qualms with what church helps as long as it’s Jesus people. These churches have heard and want to be more present and use their abilities too, and we’re happy to help mobilize those.”

While Mission Able is only a portion of Followell's work at the church, she admits it is a highlight, primarily due to the people and connections made.

"I've met so many people I otherwise wouldn't have and at their time of need," she said. "Where Mission Able meets people is the truth: a need that can't be met on its own and requires the community to come together, meet a need and love on people, be honest and share about what Jesus has done for us in some cases.

"And in some cases, it's seeing people come back and want to help. It's a cool, deeper way to connect."

Mission Able will host a home-improvement-themed fundraising banquet called "Dine and Dime" on April 4 at First Baptist Church in San Marcos. Learn more by contacting the church at (512) 738-8454.

EDITOR'S NOTE: On Jan. 31, the City of San Marcos approved a three-year \$400,000 federal grant to Mission Able to facilitate its work in mobilizing volunteers to meet community needs.