

Oilfield outreach an answered prayer for pastor

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When Juan Florez walked into a motel in Poteet and spoke to the receptionist, he knew God already had been at work to answer his prayers.



Oilfield workers have been moving into Poteet since 2008 when oil and gas companies drilled their first successful wells in the Eagle Ford Shale. Since 2008 when oil and gas companies drilled their first successful wells in the Eagle Ford Shale, life drastically changed in many South Texas small towns. Populations skyrocketed.

Florez, pastor of Hosanna Baptist Church in Poteet, had been praying for God to open doors and create new opportunities to reach people. When oilfield workers reached Poteet, Florez and his congregation stood ready to answer the call.

“We started praying for gospel opportunities,” he said. “We were ready and willing. We need to be proactive, not reactive.”

Last year, the church hired evangelist Tommy Garza to coordinate new mission opportunities.

“It’s been phenomenal, because a lot of people go by here,” he said.

Florez believed outfield workers would feel more comfortable gathering for Bible studies somewhere other than the church building. When he met the motel receptionist, she told him she had been thinking about how she needed to return to church. Now she allows the church to meet with oilfield workers in the hotel free of charge.

Reaching this group offers a unique and rewarding experience, Garza said.



“We have to be real wise in how we approach it,” he said.

Garza and church volunteers create a comfortable environment and try to avoid religious buzzwords. Volunteers dress similarly to the oilfield workers and eat at the same restaurants.

“You have to look like people who work the oilfields,” Garza said.

Evangelists discovered an effective method to reach the workers—ask if they need prayer.

“We hit a nerve when we ask, ‘Can I pray for you?’ They let us pray for

them. We are able to be there when they need prayer,” he said.

Through those conversations, evangelists build relationships with workers, Garza added.

“We have to put ourselves in their shoes,” he said. “These guys are rugged men, and many of them are running from God.”

Despite the obstacles, Garza said, he has watched God at work.

“It’s unbelievable to see what God is doing,” he said. “God is opening doors.”



More than 100 miles to the southwest, First Baptist Church in Cotulla also is reaching out to oilrig workers in its area by distributing Bibles and evangelistic tracts.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas produced a tract, “The Greatest Discovery,” geared toward oilfield laborers, made possible by gifts to the [Mary Hill Davis Offering for Texas Missions](#).

The church also sponsored luncheons to accommodate workers’ irregular schedules, Pastor Loren Fast said, adding, “The response was very positive.”

He prays God will send Christian workers to meet the growing need.

“We’ve had such an influx of people. It’s been pretty overwhelming,” Fast said. “We really need people who can volunteer and dedicate themselves.”