

Spirit of collaboration marks Serve Tour Brownsville

November 1, 2024

More than 300 volunteers from around the United States completed 33 service projects across the Rio Grande Valley as a part of the Serve Tour Brownsville in mid-October.

Hailing from 28 churches representing 11 states, volunteers served 2,303 individuals, participated in 1,011 gospel conversations and celebrated 128 professions of faith in Christ throughout the two-day missional experience in and around Brownsville.

One stop on the Send Relief Serve Tour, the service event saw the North American Mission Board's Send Relief partner with Texas Baptists, Texans on Mission and Buckner International.

Mario Alberto Gonzalez, director of River Ministry/Mexico Missions for Texas Baptists, provided coordination leading up to and during the event.

He led a devotional at one of two "hub" churches on Saturday morning, introduced area River Ministry missionaries during a Saturday evening rally, corresponded between area leaders and event organizers, and participated in numerous service projects.

At one project in Los Fresnos, about 15 miles north of Brownsville, Gonzalez and others fed hot meals and shared the gospel with school bus drivers, janitors and other support personnel. After talking with a bus driver in his late 70s, Gonzalez said the man made a commitment to follow Jesus.

"He accepted Christ when we presented him with the gospel. He spent

more than one hour talking with me,” he said.

Spirit of unity and kingdom focus

Gonzalez appreciated the spirit of unity and kingdom focus amongst the churches and organizations aiming to serve along the border.

“They were showing to us a spirit of collaboration not just with words but with actions. They were very sincere and honest,” he said.

Gonzales was also glad these churches from across the country visited and saw for themselves that the Valley is a safe place to do missions.

“I was so grateful to the churches for coming after they hear things about the border,” he said. “Brownsville is not what you are hearing in the news. Some people don’t like to come to the border, but all these people come back to their churches and say they can come to the Valley for missions.”

Several churches expressed a desire to return to partner with River Ministry/Mexico Missions in the future, Gonzalez said.

Volunteers partnered with the Baptist Student Ministries from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley campuses in Edinburg and Brownsville to cook hotdogs, offer prayers and interact with college students on that school’s campus. That effort saw 35 people accept Christ.

Support for law enforcement, love for immigrants

The Send Relief Laredo Ministry Center, a partnership between Texas Baptists River Ministry/Mexico Missions and NAMB’s Send Relief, hosted a block party for Border Patrol and other law enforcement officers and their

families. Eight individuals accepted Christ at that gathering.

Gonzalez noted that law enforcement officers along the border are sometimes overlooked.

“Many of them are Christians and are suffering also. They are just doing their work,” he said. “We need to provide support for law enforcement and, at the same time, be willing to show the love of Christ to immigrants.”

Buckner International, in partnership with Iglesia Bautista Southmost and local health agencies, provided a community health fair that provided shoes and socks for children. Organizers reported eight salvations from that event.

Three churches partnered with volunteers to host neighborhood “grill walks,” where participants distributed free food and shared their faith. Seventeen salvations were recorded across three separate events, including one entire family: a husband, wife and teenage son.

In addition to outreach events, volunteers completed projects at 15 Texas Baptists churches in and around Brownsville.

Volunteers painted classrooms at Iglesia Bautista El Buen Pastor, replaced a roof at Primera Iglesia Bautista Mexicana, installed a basketball goal and painted facilities at Olmito Community Church, replaced flooring for Iglesia Bautista Eliacim and built a community ministry patio at Iglesia Bautista Horeb.

Volunteers completed 15 projects for local schools and communities and aided three bivocational pastors.

One pastor’s wife, who was recently widowed, received a new roof as a part of the more than 1,175 construction hours worked. Gonzalez said she was grateful for the outpouring of support. At a time when she was struggling

with the pain of losing her husband, Gonzalez said, she expressed her gratitude for the love and support of volunteers.

Gonzalez hopes more churches will continue to revisit mission opportunities along the border.

“We need more churches to come and help us in the border—not just in Brownsville, but in all border cities,” he said. “The churches that come are discovering people with great needs.”