

# **TBM volunteers bring Christmas cheer to the Valley**

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About 30 Texas Baptist Men volunteers brought gifts and helping hands to the lower Rio Grande Valley for Christmas.

The gifts and resources came from countless TBM supporters who gave toward the second annual Christmas in the Rio Grande Valley Mission Trip. And TBM Rebuild volunteers worked on a community center for Iglesia Bautista Horeb in Brownsville.



Student volunteers with the Longhorn Baptist Student Ministry at the University of Texas in Austin worked on a community center for Iglesia Bautista Horeb in Brownsville. (TBM Photo / Russ Dilday)

Volunteers from the Longhorn Baptist Student Ministry from the University of Texas in Austin provided much of the labor for the building project. It marked the second year a Longhorn BSM group worked with TBM Rebuild.

TBM collected and distributed gifts for children and adults—toys, blankets and food—living in colonias, unincorporated communities of about 100 families living in extreme poverty, said Jorge Zapata, founder of Hearts4Kids, TBM's partner in the effort.

The mission trip volunteers included five student missionaries with Texas Baptists' Go Now Missions program.

"What we're doing here with Texas Baptist Men, we're meeting people's needs, especially with the children," Zapata said. "So, all of these toys are going to be a blessing."

## **Easing the burden for families**

The volunteers went to colonias near Donna. The toys naturally thrilled the children, but they gave the parents joy, too.



TBM volunteers distributed gifts to children and adults living in colonies in the Rio Grande Valley.

(TBM Photo / Ferrell Foster)

"A lot of these parents have four or five children in a home. So, they can't afford to buy toys for each child. So, this will bless mom and dad," Zapata said.

Sabrina Pinales, TBM director of missions and discipleship, coordinated the statewide collection. In addition to the toys, volunteers distributed blankets for the coming winter months and hygiene kits, Pinales said.

"This is a fun time to ease the burden for the families that maybe can't provide the gifts they would like to for their families," she said.

The volunteers also delivered and set up 15 twin beds in colonia homes.

"We have hundreds of children sleeping on the floor, because they don't have a bed," Zapata said.

## Meeting needs, building relationships

At Iglesia Bautista Horeb, Pastor Olber Roblero addressed the volunteers.



As part of the TBM Christmas in the Ring Grande Valley Mission Trip, TBM volunteers distributed toys and other gifts to children in colonies. (TBM Photo / Ferrell Foster)

"I didn't expect to have all of these amazing people," he said, noting "all this effort, leaving their families and to be here. ... I'm grateful."

Roblero has been pastor of the church three years, and the congregation established relationships by meeting needs, especially of the children who attend a nearby school.

"There's about 2,500 kids around this area," Roblero said, so the church began providing backpacks, shoes and clothing for those in need.

The goal of the community center at Iglesia Horeb is to aid that ministry to children and their families, as well as providing space for English as a Second Language and GED classes.

"This is a blessing for us," Roblero said. "So, what I see is amazing. We couldn't do this by ourselves, and I offer this building to the glory of God."

Rafael Muñoz, TBM Rebuild coordinator, organized the volunteers at Iglesia Horeb.

"When we were looking at how we could come out and support [Roblero's] ministry, we realized that he was already on the go. He was doing a lot," Muñoz said. "He's doing work in the community to reach the four schools that are surrounding this facility. So, there's a big vision."

## **Addressing spiritual and physical needs**



Royal Ambassadors from Uvalde served in the Rio Grande Valley as part of a TBM Christmas mission trip. (TBM Photo / Russ Dilday)

Both TBM efforts in the Valley centered on local ministries—Iglesia Horeb and Hearts4Kids—that are committed to long-term efforts to address spiritual and physical needs.

Hearts4Kids is working with churches in the colonias and starting new Bible study and house church groups where there are no existing churches.

Before distributing toys, the volunteers set up tables on a cul-de-sac without houses. They organized the toys by age and gender groups. They grilled hot dogs for the community. They parked a pickup truck filled with blankets just past the food tables.

Zapata instructed the volunteers to “be friendly, have big smiles and a lot of love” as they distributed the gifts.

Then he prayed: “Father, we ask you to take every gift, put your hand on each gift. ... We ask that your Holy Spirit start moving right now in this area, in every home, that when people arrive they will feel your presence, the power and the love and the joy. ... Bless this place. ... This is your

house... Let your presence be felt right now."

Joy reigned as the kids and their parents steadily worked their way along the tables, selecting appropriate gifts.

And the volunteers did as Zapata instructed—being friendly, smiling and loving, all toward the hope that Christ would be honored in the community.