

Texas Baptists offer well water, living water in Peru

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CHICLAYO, Peru—Fourteen-year-old Thalia bounces around her school's campus with a smile as bright as the Peruvian sky. Among her peers, she's clearly a leader, pulling them in with her optimistic brown eyes and light laughter.

Texas Baptists Advocacy/Care Center
Director Suzii Paynter visits with two
young boys in a Cajamarca, Peru
orphanage. (PHOTOS/Texas Baptist
Communications/John Hall)

For her, the campus near Chiclayo, Peru, is a steppingstone to what she hopes will be something bigger and better. She dreams of trading in her white school uniform for the similarly colored overcoat of a doctor.

Those dreams are being made possible in part by the generosity and ministry of Texas Baptists.

Gifts through the Texas Baptist Offering for World Hunger supplied the necessary funds for Villa Milagro—a ministry in Peru led by Larry and Joy Johnson of First Baptist Church in San Angelo—to drill a well for the school and its surrounding community.

The well has transformed the campus, providing clean water for the students to drink and drastically improving the health of children who regularly suffered from dysentery. The water also serves as the life stream for crops grown on the school's campus, giving young people enough food to eat and a place to learn agricultural skills.



Water pours from a pipe connected to a Villa Milagro-dug well. The water nourishes crops that feed students at a Peruvian school and provides clean drinking water for the young people as well.

Thalia's school was one picture of success 16 Texas Baptists witnessed during a recent mission trip to a variety of Villa Milagro ministry points. The organization, which seeks to share the gospel while meeting physical needs, has seen multitudes come to faith since 1994 and has dug more than 200 wells, helped start more than 85 churches and built numerous roads.

"For the last few days we've seen how the Texas Baptist offering has helped drill wells for schools and communities, and it literally transforms lives," said Bobby Broyles, pastor of First Baptist Church in Ballinger and second vice president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

"It saves lives because children who once were dying of dysentery and dehydration are now living healthy lives. Obviously, it has changed their lives physically. Hopefully, we'll also have the opportunity to change their

lives spiritually.”

The act of providing clean water to schools and regions has created avenues through which the gospel has been shared repeatedly, said Carolyn Strickland, member of Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas and BGCT first vice president. Lives and communities are being altered in the present and in eternity.

In Matara and the surrounding villages, a series of new wells is providing clean drinking water for several thousand people and has sparked economic growth and development in the area. The success of the efforts led to Villa Milagro sending medical mission teams into the area to meet additional needs. As they continue to serve, additional opportunities arise, as do chances for volunteers to share their faith.



Marilyn Davis from South Garland Baptist Church offers high fives to students at a school near Chiclayo, Peru.

“It’s vital,” Strickland said of ministry that connects people with clean drinking water. “It’s the most important thing you can give a child, you can give a community. It’s water that’s nourishing. It’s living water. It’s what we believe in in our faith. It’s what Christ would do.”

During their trip spent primarily near Chiclayo along the Peruvian coast and near Cajamarca in the Andes Mountains, Texas Baptists saw

transformed lives, but they also were confronted by vast needs and large projects trying to meet those needs.

They saw a government-run orphanage where—thanks to Villa Milagro—children have enough to eat. But their homes need significant renovation. Texans saw wells that had been dug to provide clean water, but still needed pumps to push the water throughout communities. They witnessed churches reaching into their neighborhoods, some through constructing a medical clinic and holding a youth Baptist meeting.



Grant Lengefeld from First Baptist Church in Hamilton and Van Christian, pastor of First Baptist Church in Comanche, visit with students at the Monte Scion Christian School in Cajamarca, Peru.

“I saw a lot of needs,” said Grant Lengefeld, member of First Baptist Church in Hamilton. “My eyes were opened. I have to tell you the most difficult thing for me on this trip was to see the Pharisee inside myself. These folks here have a very sacrificial faith. I look at the things they are

facing with poverty, with hunger, with family abuse issues. I was amazed at the sincerity of the prayer and the sincerity of their faith.”

Throughout the trip, Texans talked about facing crises of belief. When confronted with a trying situation—an orphan in need, a church searching for the resources to do what God has called it to or a student without clean water to drink—participants were challenged to decide how they would respond to the needs before them.

Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission Director Suzii Paynter said that was precisely the point of the trip. Seeing the faces of hungry children helps people understand the gravity of the situation. It challenges them to put the principles of their faith into action.

Giving through the Texas Baptist Offering for World Hunger empowers believers to support effective ministries like Villa Milagro around the globe. Christians also can get involved further through direct missions work, some of which will happen as a result of the trip, Paynter said.

“I want people to see the world hunger offering as a stepping stone to missions,” Paynter said. “It’s not simply an offering that we take up and give away. It’s a partnership with ministries who would welcome congregations to come along and serve alongside them.”



A young boy rides on the shoulders of Bobby Broyles, pastor of First Baptist Church in Ballinger, in a Cajamarca, Peru orphanage.

The responses of trip participants will vary, Paynter said. Some people will give more through the Texas Baptist Offering for World Hunger. Others gave during the trip and will give more directly to Villa Milagro for specific efforts. Baptists will take the needs back to the congregations and try to organize a wider response, possibly even recruit volunteers to serve through Villa Milagro. Trip participants will be more mindful of the hungry around them and advocate for assisting those in need.

No matter the response, it begins with an individual's response to how God is moving in one's heart, Lengefeld said.

"I think my responsibility is first off to go home to my church and get my church involved in the story," Lengefeld said. "I think my job is to serve as an advocate. And I'm going to start in my Sunday school class. I think that's important. Hopefully it will start in our Sunday school class and have it move throughout the church, then to the community and other churches. I think that's how great things start."

For more information about the Texas Baptist Offering for World Hunger, visit www.bgct.org/worldhunger . For more information about Villa Milagro, visit www.villamilagro.net .