

Texas Baptists seek to transform Rio Grande into River of Hope

October 3, 2008

DEL RIO—Standing in a rocky lot with a rusted blue mobile home haphazardly lying across it, Ruben Chairez spoke quickly and excitedly with expansive hand gestures and a broad smile. The surrounding land is more than a lot in need of repair and upkeep; it's the future of this community.

But Chairez, pastor of Primera Iglesia Bautista, did not want to discuss the neighborhood's economic difficulties. He preferred to talk about the connections his church members have made while prayerwalking the community. He spoke about the transformation that could take place with a church in the area.

A man in El Paso's Armijo Park prays to accept Christ as his Savior during the weeklong kick-off of Texas Hope 2010, an initiative to share the gospel with every Texan by Easter Sunday 2010.

(Photo/Ashli Young/BGCT)

[Watch a slideshow from the Rio](#)

[Esperanza effort.](#)

[See a video of the kick-off in El Paso.](#)

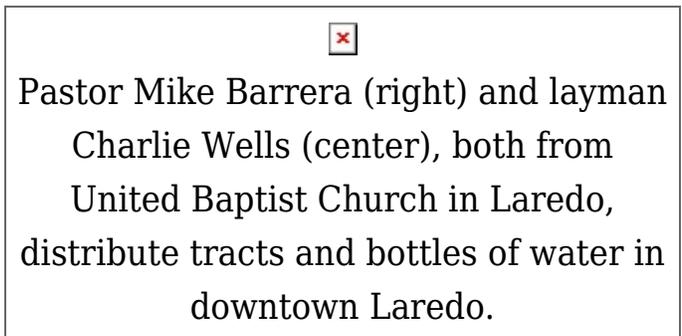
"These people—people forget about them," Chairez said, standing on land he hopes will one day host a church. "They need help."

Chairez was among the Texas Baptists who participated in the weeklong Rio de Esperanza—River of Hope—event along the Texas-Mexico border.

The emphasis served as the kick-off for [Texas Hope 2010](#) , a Baptist General Convention of Texas initiative to communicate the hope of Christ to every Texan by Easter 2010.

During the week, Texas Baptists from El Paso to Brownsville reached out to their communities with assorted efforts based on the three pillars of the Texas Hope 2010 initiative—prayer, caring and sharing one’s faith. Ministries included prayerwalks, block parties, Bible distribution and emergency food-service efforts.

Fueled by a desire to share the hope of Christ, Texas Baptists prayed for schools and neighborhoods, distributed thousands of Bibles and fed thousands of people by cooking hot meals and distributing free boxes of food.



“Hope means that there’s something that is coming that is going to be a blessing,” said Leo Samaniego, a minister at Lakeside Baptist Church in El Paso. His congregation gave boxes of food to more than 60 families in mobile home parks as part of Rio de Esperanza. “We’re bringing hope to the people.”

Throughout the week, Baptists along the Border saw God work. Twenty-five people made professions of faith at one event in El Paso. Another El Paso event reaped at least 10 more professions of faith. Curious onlookers were drawn to churches and parks for block parties and worship services.

Members of Iglesia Bautista El Buen Pastor in Brownsville didn’t even have

to knock on a door to give away their first Bible. As soon as they arrived in one neighborhood, a man in a truck pulled up and asked if they had any Bibles. The church members gave him one and shared the gospel with him.



A couple reads gospel tracts during an evangelistic outreach event associated with the launch of Texas Hope 2010. The outreach took place where El Paso Baptists one day hope to start a ministry outreach center.

In Laredo, Mike Barrera, pastor of United Baptist Church, handed out more than 200 bottles of water, tracts and pamphlets about simple health issues to people walking the streets of downtown. Many of the people Barrera sees come from Mexico to buy groceries with little money.

The cold water provides people a refreshing drink on hot days without the having to spend their limited funds on it. Through such efforts, the congregation sees about 25 people come to Christ each summer.

“When you get into the hurt of people, you get to know a little bit about the heart of God,” Barrera said. “I need to know that. I’m an American Christian. I’m a Texas Baptist. I haven’t starved. I haven’t gone a week without food, so I have to get down here to understand the hurt and the agony and the pilgrimage of these people. And if I don’t do it, I don’t have the concept of what Jesus is talking about the poor.”

BGCT Executive Director Randel Everett praised the hard work of Baptists

along the border and how God moved as a result of their efforts. He hopes Texas Baptists will continue responding to God's call to share their faith.

"The greatest opportunities and challenges are along the Texas-Mexico border," he said. "Texas Baptists have wonderful ministries here that are reaching tremendous numbers of people. If Baptists across the state can partner with believers here, we can bring the hope of Christ to those who still need it here."