

Join ‘Jesus Agenda’ by ministering to children, families, speakers urge

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WACO—During his earthly ministry, Jesus healed the sick, brought hope to the hopeless, touched the untouchables, dined with outcasts and forgave prostitutes. The marginalized and oppressed members of society were always on his agenda.



Eron Green, president of South Texas Children's Home Ministries, said Christians need to welcome the vulnerable into their churches. Today, the "Jesus Agenda" is an international effort to raise awareness of God's heart for the poor and vulnerable, and how God wants his followers to seek justice for the oppressed.

Three leaders from Texas nonprofits serving vulnerable children and

families spoke in a panel discussion during a workshop at the Baptist General Convention of Texas annual meeting about their missions to carry out the Jesus Agenda among the most vulnerable in society.

When Tony Celelli, president of the [South Texas School of Christian Studies](#) and moderator of the discussion, asked the panel for specific ways Christians can “give voice and status to the marginalized,” all three panelists’ responses had a common thread: It’s about relationships.

“As pastors, as people with resources, we have people in need that come to us, and it’s easy to write a check,” said Eron Green, president of [South Texas Children’s Home Ministries](#). “It’s easy to say: ‘Yes we have a family aid program. We’ll pay your rent this month. Here’s the money, or tell us who to send the check to, and we’ll go take care of that for you.’ But too many times, that doesn’t really solve the problem of what’s going on.

“I say as a church, as Christians we welcome those people into our church. We love them. We get to know them, talk to them about the struggles they’re having.”

Marginalized people need education

JoAnn Cole, vice president of [Buckner Adoption and Maternity Services](#), encouraged Texas Baptists to give marginalized people status through education. She talked about the impact made by a group of Christian women who volunteer regularly with single mothers living at Buckner Family Pathways, teaching Bible studies and job-readiness skills such as how to dress appropriately for work and how to do an interview.

“I think each church has the ability to give status through their relationships, through their voice, through the things that God has gifted you to do, the talents and abilities,” Cole said. “Then you are able to give that to someone else, and that lifts their status.

“We had one of our single mothers come and speak to (the Buckner International) board, and she had the whole floor just torn up, from businessmen to doctors, because she was empowered because of the women that had worked with her to teach her.

“Relationships and empowerment through skills will bring status and voice to the people, because they can speak for themselves. When they feel confident, they will speak for themselves. They will give voice to the issues they have faced.”

The poor need relationships

Todd Roberson, president of [Children at Heart Ministries](#), echoed the importance of relationships by talking about Sunday school classes in the Houston area that bring meals to single mothers at Gracewood, a Children at Heart Ministries residential program for single parents.



A participant looks over brochures from one of the organizations represented at the workshop. (BGCT Photo) “They don’t just drop off a meal to a family and say, ‘Here’s food for tonight,’” he said. “They come and bring a meal, and they stay.

They sit down with them and have dinner. They hear about how school is going. They hear about what mom's doing to better herself and launch out with the family. They're there lifting them up and giving them status by giving them their time. I think that's something all of us can do, is give of our time."

The panelists discussed issues in the foster care system and the pressing need for more Christians to step up and become foster families.

"I can tell you I've served in numerous states, and foster parents are overwhelmed; they're overloaded," Green said. "They may become licensed for two children, but then the worker will come back and say: 'There's these other siblings in this situation. Would you mind taking these three other siblings?' So the foster parents' heart is to take care of children, but when you get eight children in a foster home, and the home is only big enough for three, it causes a lot of problems. So, the need for foster parents is great."

Recruit understanding foster families

Cole emphasized the importance of recruiting foster families who understand the work of foster care as a ministry and are committed to the well-being of children rather than a reimbursement check. She also said ongoing training for foster parents is essential to help them parent effectively, and one way churches can help is by supporting those training efforts.

Churches "can help us by providing childcare so that these families can be trained. ... You can offer your church facilities so that we can do training and make it accessible to our foster parents so they don't have to drive all the way to the other side of town to get training," she said.

"I see over and over. Our foster parents really try to equip themselves so they can manage, but it is difficult at times, and the more training and the

more prayers and support they get, the better they're going to be able to manage."