

Valley church is hands and feet of Jesus

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PROGRESO- In the midst of the picturesque fields and flocks of sheep that surround this valley town struggling for survival, Iglesia Bautista Sublime Gracia, is offering hope and help to more than 1,600 people a month through the church's food pantry.

Rather than being discouraged by unemployment and poverty, the church is imitating the actions of the early church in Acts, according to the Pastor, Ismael Gaspar. The congregation lives by an active faith that gives sacrificially and trusts God will provide all of its needs.

Pastor Ismael Gaspar, who started 15 other churches, had a dream four years ago to start a second Baptist church in Progreso. Watch his video testimony here. [Watch a video clip of Gaspar's testimony.](#)

"My vision and my purpose are to be more direct in presenting the Lord Jesus as their Savior," Gaspar said. "If I can help them in that way, that is the best way. And then I can help them with some kind of food each week or when it is necessary."

Each month, the 150-member church supplies food and basic necessities to 1,600 people in the community. The Baptist General Convention of Texas is partnering in this ministry with a monthly grant through the Texas Baptist Offering for World Hunger, and BGCT Local Transformational Missions provided a refrigerator and freezer.

The majority of food comes through offerings and donations that church members sacrificially give. Ladies in the church sort the food and distribute it Wednesday and Friday nights.

"If anyone has a need, he should put it in the hands of God," said Laura Mireles, a member of the church and leader of the women 's ministry. "If you feel like He will never answer, He knows when to answer. Just have faith in the end He will keep you."

For the past two years since she, her husband and 10 children joined the church, Mireles said the congregation has encouraged her and helped her family after their house burned down.

"We had only the clothing we had on, but the church here at Progreso gave us clothing, " Mireles said. "They gave us love and food. They have never left us alone, and they have always cared for us. This is proof that God lives, that Christ lives."

After the Mireles' house burned, a mission team from Austin helped repair a small house so the family would have a place to live. When they lived in their original home, many people in the community would come to visit. Now that they have a smaller house, only the pastor comes to visit, Mireles said.

"We cried over that house for one night," Mireles said. "Then we held hands and said we are not going to cry anymore because God is in our hearts. And those are just two-by-fours. It 's just lumber. And since that very day, I serve my God day and night."



Iglesia Bautista Sublime Gracia in Progreso helps more than 1,600 people a month through the church's food pantry.

The BGCT is in the early stages of Texas Hope 2010, an evangelistic effort to provide every non-believer in Texas the opportunity to respond to the gospel in his or her own language and cultural context.

Iglesia Bautista Sublime Gracia is an example of what the BGCT hopes to see happen across the state. Since the beginning of the church, Gaspar and the members have been active in meeting the physical needs and sharing the gospel with those around them.

Although the church is currently growing, it has not always been this way. Growth and fruit in the congregation took much time and effort.

Gaspar, who started 15 other churches, had a dream four years ago to start a second Baptist church in Progreso, one that would be the hands and feet of Jesus to the people there. Going door-to-door on his horse, Gaspar invited his neighbors to come to the church and offered children a ride to church. Later, Gaspar sold the horse to purchase property for the church building.

"At the very first service, I only had one person in the congregation," Gaspar said. "Little by little, people started attending the services and people were getting saved. Then we began to baptize people."

Building a sanctuary has been a long journey of a couple of years. Church members began holding services and opened a food pantry in a small building on the property while plans were made for a new sanctuary. They prepared the foundation for the new sanctuary and prayed that God would send a way to finish the rest of the building.

"Vashti Baptist Church in Bellevue sent the money for the rebar, bricks and cement needed to build the 10-foot walls," said Domingo Quintanilla, ministry associate for the Rio Grande Valley Baptist Association. "Cheyenne Solis with Buckner was able to get another church to come down and build the roof on the church."

Now, the sanctuary is finished and filled with pews donated by Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio. Outside the sanctuary, children play on a playground given by the Buckner International Colonia Program.

Growing the church came at a sacrifice, with the pastor working nights at the school district to provide for his needs and the needs of the church.

"We are working bivocationally, but God has met our needs," Gaspar said. "I work with the school district here in Progreso and I also work as a nurse. My employment with the school district has really been a blessing. All the students see me there, and they know I am a pastor here."

The members also continue to expand the ministry, praying for direction on how to better reach the spiritual and physical needs of the people in their community. Gaspar is also praying for a way to obtain a warehouse for the food pantry so that they will have space to meet more of the needs in the community.