

Volunteers serve at Christmas in the Rio Grande Valley

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BROWNSVILLE—Texans on Mission assembled a “dream team” of volunteers to bring Christmas—and its Christ-focused message—to the Rio Grande Valley Dec. 13-19.

“This year’s annual Christmas in the Rio Grande Valley really featured a dream team of volunteers,” said Sabrina Pinales, director of missions and discipleship with Texans on Mission.



Billye Rhudy of Coryell Community Church in Gatesville served with Christmas in the Rio Grande Valley. (Texans on Mission Photo / Russ Dilday)

“We had a group of 11 students from Go Now Missions, a six-person team from Watermark Health, eight members of Grapevine’s First Baptist

Church, and a group of new and repeat volunteers.”

The volunteers concentrated their efforts in the Brownsville, Mission and Donna areas. They also partnered with local churches Iglesia Bautista Horeb and Casa de Oracion Church to reach into several communities, many of them with underserved families.

Billye Rhudy of Coryell Community Church in Gatesville noted it was her second time volunteering with the Christmas in the Valley event, along with her husband, Sam.

“Part of our purpose is to serve the community,” she explained. “And we want the community to know that Jesus loves them.”

The group held several events designed to benefit the communities they served.

Volunteers:

- Painted the interior of Casa de Oracion and built a new fence on its property.
- Served lunches to teachers and staff of local schools.
- Distributed Christmas gifts such as toys, warm blankets and food donated statewide through Texans on Mission.
- Built and assembled beds for families.
- Held medical clinics.

All of these ministries, Pinales said, “worked together to bring the Christmas message and our Texans on Mission brand of help, hope and healing to the Valley.”

Olber Roblero, pastor of Iglesia Bautista Horeb, said the team also magnified the efforts of his congregation to reach into their surrounding community.

“Texans on Mission is helping our church and the community in different ways. First of all, they are helping us build relationships with the schools and the community and the church itself. So, by doing that, we are showing Christ’s love to the people who don’t know Christ yet.

“The other way they’re helping us is to strengthen the relationships that we already have with the resources they’re bringing all the way from the north, from all over the place and from different churches, and putting together a team to be able to come here.”

Providing for those in need

During one of the community distributions, the team gave toys, blankets and food to children determined to be unaccompanied immigrant minors from two area shelters.

For Billye Rhudy, it was an opportunity to speak her faith to this special group.

“Our heart is always with those who are disenfranchised and those who come across and don’t have a home,” Rhudy said.

The Watermark Health team provided health clinics two days at Iglesia Horeb. Team member and physician assistant Megan Landon, who provided consultations to families, said the team sought to “provide the community with resources to navigate the U.S. healthcare system.”

The team dealt with “complaints that patients might have, such as pain or chronic conditions that patients need to be followed up with, such as diabetes or high blood pressure. We’re also seeing things like viral illnesses, coughs, colds, flus.”

The team saw more patients than the clinic’s daily capacity, she said, leading her to believe “that the people here need access to healthcare that

is affordable or free, and it's difficult to get that in the U.S. sometimes.”

The Christmas in the Rio Grande Valley effort fit the mission of Watermark Health, a ministry of Watermark Church in Dallas, Landon said.

“We exist to glorify God and make disciples. So, we want to make disciples of all nations,” she said. “By serving here, we want to share the hope we have in Jesus Christ, and so we’re hoping to tell people about the salvation and joy they can receive from knowing Jesus.”

Serving the community

Go Now Missionary Angelica Martinez, a student at the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley, paused from her duties serving brisket lunches to teachers at Senator Eddie A. Lucio Jr. Middle School to share her perspective on the Go Now Missions team experience.

“We’re serving our community and the teachers, showing our faith and expressing to them how much Christ loves them,” she said.



Cal Vande Zande (left) of Grapevine’s First Baptist Church served with Christmas in the Rio Grande Valley. (Texans on Mission Photo / Russ Dilday)

Cal Vande Zande of Grapevine's First Baptist Church was part of a team that built and distributed beds and mattresses to families in need "on the very first day. And that was by cutting lumber to dimension, cutting it all to size, and then building a bed to make sure that it worked, and then practicing putting it together."

The team distributed and assembled the beds the next day, Vande Zande said, explaining conditions in the homes "varied quite a bit."

"Some of the homes were nice, other ones not so much. There was one room that we got into where there was just barely enough space for the bed, and it was very difficult for the people to put the bed together, but they got the job done," he said.



Claire Golema from Grapevine's First Baptist Church served with Christmas in the Rio Grande Valley. (Texans on Mission Photo / Russ Dilday)

Claire Golema, another Grapevine's First Baptist member, helped assemble and distribute the beds as well.

“I got to go out and give out two of the beds to the children, and they were just so excited to have a bed,” she said. “I can’t imagine not having my own bed or even my own room, and these beds were going into basically the first room you walked into in the house, but they were so excited that they had a bed, that it was theirs.”

Golema also helped serve lunches to school teachers, an act she said “really opened the conversation between them and the church that is across the street, that perhaps they pass every day and didn’t realize was there. And so, that’s been a really good way to reach out to them and to help them to know that God isn’t just in a building. God is outside of the building.

“I hope that they would see that God can change things—that he’s relevant for their life. I think that’s my prayer—that people would see God differently because of what we’ve done this week.”

EDITOR’S NOTE: The 3rd and 4th paragraphs were updated, along with the 4th paragraph in the “Providing for those in need” section, when additional information was made available.