



# THE JOURNAL

Stories from the missions and ministry of First Baptist Church Amarillo

## Food Ministries Press On

Fighting Hunger Amid  
New Challenges

## More Than English

ESL Ministry Adds to Decades  
of Meeting Needs

## Global Partners Respond

Partnership Missions Prove  
Effective Through Pandemic

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# Food Ministries Press On **Fighting Hunger Amid New Challenges**

**TREVOR BROWN**

When new challenges swept across the globe as a result of a coronavirus pandemic, many ministries found themselves slowing down, taking a necessary break, or put on pause. Others were forced to swiftly adapt to unexpected changes in order to meet quickly increasing needs.

Celia Cole, CEO of Feeding Texas, called it “a perfect storm.” The COVID-19 pandemic created an environment in which volunteers dramatically declined, funds

decreased, and food became more challenging to distribute. “Food, funds, volunteers,” Cole recently described, “those have all declined across the state.”

While this has been true of Texas food banks, it has not stopped the people of First Baptist Church.

## **Perkins Community Center**

Every week, dozens of households receive emergency food relief from FBC’s food pantry ministry. Beginning in March, it was moved





*Marilyn Standefer, Deannie Hill, and Tommy Hill assist the High Plains Food Bank staff in distributing meals at Wills Elementary.*

out to the parking lot of the Perkins Community Center as volunteers packed essentials and delivered them to vehicles. White cardboard boxes, once brought to FBC carrying thousands of worship bulletins for weekly gatherings, were repurposed into grocery boxes. In the coming months, the center continued filling boxes with canned goods, pastas, meat, cereal, hygiene items, and more.

When items ran low at the food bank, volunteers went to the stores to keep food shelves stocked. Before funds were even in crisis, phone calls to the office

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**“They don’t just serve us food; they care about us!”**

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were filling the gap. When a few more workers were needed, more came. In April alone, around 500 people were served through the curbside food boxes, offered every Tuesday and Thursday from 9:00-10:45 AM (1515 S Buchanan St.). This service continues to be available to anyone experiencing food insecurity.

### **Kids Cafe**

At Margaret Wills Elementary, with whom FBC has a year-round partnership, weekday volunteers have been fighting hunger and food insecurity for years. Kids Cafe is a program of Feeding America, offered by the High Plains Food Bank to children in need of daily, healthy meals. For many children in the Texas Panhandle, the meal provided through Kids Cafe is a daily nutritious dinner they may otherwise go without.

In the wake of school closures, FBC volunteers who regularly serve there relocated from the cafeteria to the parking lot. There, pre-packaged meals were given to hundreds of families through car windows.

Throughout March and April, the service was instrumental in alleviating food concerns facing an already at-risk population. Volunteers stood in the parking lot happily waving meals in the air so no one missed out. As one student commented, “They don’t just serve us food; they care about us!”

### **Snack Pak 4 Kids**

The same can be said for FBC’s regular Snack Pak 4Kids volunteers who continue to combat weekend hunger. Every Friday of the school year, Snack Pak 4 Kids provides kids with

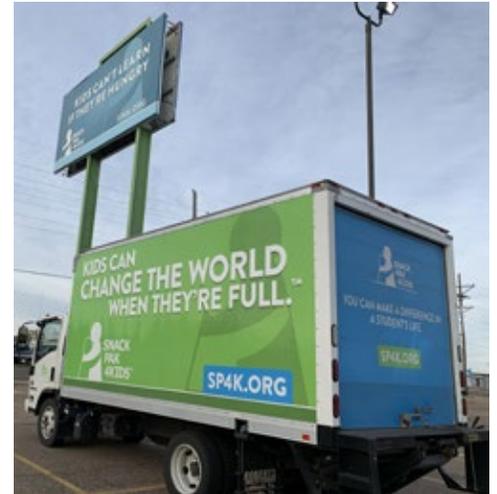
reliable, nutritious food over the weekend so they can succeed.

A team of volunteers from First Baptist is diligent in meeting the need through Glenwood Elementary. Volunteers separately pick up food orders from the SP4K warehouse, pack sacks on FBC's campus, and deliver them to the site.

When Glenwood became a hub for AISD's food distribution during the pandemic changes, the need at that location grew dramatically.

FBC volunteers, who are normally responsible for around 500 weekend packs per month, found themselves stepping in to provide nearly 900 snack packs in April alone. They also accepted the call to continue the service through the summer months, as needed.

When food, funds, and volunteers were at risk, the First Baptist family proved again and again to be diligent and faithful servants, ready to rise to the occasion at every twist and turn.



## What's in a Snack Pak?

“Brand Name. Brand New.” That’s the mantra at SP4K. When kids open their bags full of weekend food (pictured above), they learn that they are important. They receive nutritious foods with dignity and respect. There are 10,000 kids that don’t go without because of the commitment of this program. Snack Pak 4 Kids continues to fight weekend hunger in order to remove barriers to education. As they proudly boast across the region on trucks and billboards: “Kids can change the world when they’re full.”

# More Than English

ESL Ministry Adds to Decades of Meeting Needs For Internationals



*Photography for this article provided by TrenPam Communications.*



### JON MARK BEILUE

It was Unit 2. The subject was Places. It was the identification of government buildings, schools, grocery stores and hospitals.

“OK, class, one thing I need to remind you,” Ann Heard said. “If there’s more than one, don’t forget to put the ‘s’ on there. ‘There are four hospitals.’ If you say four hospital, it’s not correct. It’s hospitals.”

Heads nod. Not the heads of, say, third-grade children, but adults whose previous homes had been Iran, Iraq, Burma, the Congo, and Bosnia.

It’s a Thursday morning in rooms along the first floor of First Baptist Church. Duck into any of them and, for two hours, there are volunteer teachers unlocking language obstacles to immigrants and refugees to Amarillo. The scene repeats itself on Sunday afternoons.

It’s English as a Second Language (ESL), a quiet but essential ministry at FBC that has been teaching English in some form for more than 50 years. On one weekday morning and one weekend afternoon, when most might believe the church is still and empty, it’s bubbling with a combined 26 volunteer teachers, as many as 30 volunteer van drivers, and 140 adult students across the city representing as many as 25 countries.

“There always has been and remains a great need. More than English, they also have contact with a caring person who wants to help them,” said director Sue Kelly. “When you come to another country, you don’t know how to live there.

“When buying medicine, can you read the label and know how much to take? How do you communicate with your

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**More than English, they also have contact with a caring person who wants to help them.**



doctor? You don't know how to negotiate the health care system. Without speaking English, you can't read the notes your child brings home from school or talk to a teacher in a parent-teacher conference. ”

The ESL ministry got its origin in 1964 through the Latin American Mission. Its first students were primarily Korean wives of servicemen from the Korean War, refugees from Castro's Cuba, and Hispanics.

As the world has changed, Amarillo has changed, and the ESL ministry has adapted. In the mid- to late-1970s, after the fall of Vietnam, almost 12,000 Southeast Asians arrived in Amarillo from refugee camps, with about 3,000 remaining in Amarillo.

About 400 refugees from Bosnia began to arrive in the mid-1990s from that war-torn country. The late 1990s was also when Kurds from Iraq came

to Amarillo. By then, nine countries were represented in the ESL ministry.

Over the next decade, refugees from Iraq and Iran and Myanmar would join them, as well as an influx from unstable African countries of Sudan, Burundi, Ethiopia, Somalia, and the Congo.

“It takes a brave person to leave their home country for a foreign one and start over again, which is what they've done,” Kelly said.

### **‘Amazing, absolutely amazing’**

Kelly began teaching in ESL 44 years ago in 1975, the same year as the fall of Saigon and right at the time Vietnamese and Laotian refugees began to arrive. She has never stopped. A rough estimate is 1,500 adult students have made their way into the ESL ministry during Kelly's tenure.

“She is amazing, absolutely amazing,” said teacher Ella Tracy of Kelly. “She is just everything to those students. Her concern, love and dedication... I mean you simply could not ask for any more.”

In the early days, teachers had to devise their own lesson plans and curriculum. But in the latter years, there are ESL curriculums and textbooks to use. In this ESL



*Sue Kelly marks 45 years of faithful teaching and leading in ESL and international ministry this year.*

ministry, there are three class levels: ABC, beginning, and advanced.

The ABC level is just what it says. It's for adults with no English grasp at all. They begin by learning the alphabet, by writing their names, and learning to complete basic forms.

"Students just beam," Kelly said, "when they write their name for the first time."

Students in the beginning class learn vocabulary words and improve on reading and writing. In the advanced class, current events are discussed. Short stories and magazine articles are read.

Linda Richards (pictured to the right) is an experienced teacher of an advanced class. On this November morning, students from Iraq, Iran, Myanmar, and Sudan were learning parts of a newspaper and the role of a free press.



## 'We love them and want them to know we love them'

Sami Askari of Iran was one of the students. In his 60s, Askari arrived in Amarillo in 2015 with two sisters and a nephew.

Askari was an English teacher in Iran for 35 years. But there, he said, the focus was on grammar and not conversation. After the Iranian revolution, teachers could

get in trouble for teaching conversational English.

"Like now, my talking is better, but my understanding is difficult," he said. "Sometimes I want to cry, you know. I work hard to study, but younger ones understand better than me."

Askari, who enjoys writing, is too hard on himself. His communication in English is good. He is earnest in his conversation. Askari has been going to ESL classes at FBC and at Paramount Baptist since arriving in Amarillo four years ago.

"It has helped a lot – a lot," he said. "I want to tell you, because I'm a teacher myself, but Linda has improved me. She is a very good teacher. She could be teaching in college."

There is the spiritual portion of the two-hour class as well. Students have a weekly Bible verse, and all classes gather as Kelly delivers a Bible story followed by snacks. Then it's back to class.

"We have people who have been coming for 10 years,"



Kelly said, “and some also see it as a social outing in a way to get to see friends. A couple of weeks ago, we had to cancel class because of snow. One teacher called one of her students, and she said, ‘No school, no church, nooooo.’ But then for others, it’s a real sacrifice because they may have worked all night.”

As often happens, the benefits and blessings are not just to those being ministered, but to the volunteers. Tracy

has been an ESL teacher since 1998 after 31 years as a third-grade teacher at Lawndale and Sleepy Hollow elementary schools.

She gives witness bracelets to students who have taken some of them to their home country when they visit. The six colored beads are blue for creation, black for sin, red for the blood of Jesus, white for cleansing, green for growing in the Word, and yellow for Heaven.



“It’s just been a part of my life for so long. I love it and as long as the Lord allows me to do it, I’ll do it,” Tracy said. “We just want to make a difference. They’re people like we are – just different. We love them and want them to know we love them.”

*Note: Due to the pandemic, the Spring ESL semester was ended prematurely. Pictures seen here predate the U.S. Covid-19 response.*



# Global Partners Enable Global Response

Despite cancelled travel and barriers to global ministry, established partnerships have allowed for a continued impact around the world.

## TREVOR BROWN

The van bumped down the winding dirt roads, full of large bags packed with rice, beans, lentils, oil, and many other nonperishable food items. Several times a week, Denise Dagher, the country director for KidsAlive Lebanon, and a few helpers made the rounds distributing the food packages that had been prepared by the rest of the staff on site at Kids Alive Lebanon (KAL). The children's home and school just outside of Beirut is one of First Baptist's missions partners. This time last year, an FBC team was working on preparations for summer ministry alongside KAL. While this year's trip was cancelled, the partnership continues.

## Lebanon

Like so many ministries throughout the world, the residential children at the Dar El Awlad children's home were pinned down by coronavirus lock-downs, a situation worsened by Lebanon's complex environment of economic collapse. The families of KAL's Oasis and



**KidsAlive Lebanon**

Director Denise Dagher meets with a family outside of Beirut, Lebanon.

New Horizons Center, education and literacy programs aimed at meeting the needs of families with the greatest needs, had also been disconnected for weeks due to the pandemic.

Knowing the economic challenges of so many of their students and families, KAL staff immediately began making creative plans to meet needs and reaching out to their ministry partners for support. Established partnerships, generous missions giving, and the Partnership Missions Fund had enabled FBC to continue global ministry. Despite the disappointment of cancelled connections, kingdom work was carrying on.

“God is so good,” shared Denise.

“He has allowed us to continue relationships with our children in this unexpected season, showing parents and families that our care and concern go beyond the classroom.

“So many willing hands and hearts have made it possible,” she continued. “Emotionally weary mothers tearfully expressed their hearts saying, ‘Thank you for thinking of us. Thank you for caring for us.’ Tired of life like this, the very humanizing action of passing by to check on them is a bright spot of hope in these seemingly unending days.”

It’s a story that, for anyone paying attention, has become incredibly common. In a global crisis, Christians around the world have found

themselves dealing with strikingly similar issues: closed businesses, banned gatherings, lost wages, food shortages, and more.

“We are humbled,” the KidsAlive Lebanon staff added, “that God would allow us to serve Him to reach the least of these. Please, continue to lift up this ministry in your prayers, asking for His great love to wash over every child and their families who we are connected to in this time.”

## Zambia

Meanwhile, a partner church in Lusaka, Zambia, was poised to respond in like manner. In March 2020 the nation of Zambia recorded its first positive case of COVID-19. By the last week of March, the



**KidsAlive Lebanon**

KAL Staff pray over bags and boxes ready to be delivered to families in need.



*Left: Zambia church members prepare buckets of necessities to distribute. Right: Pastor Mulenga Chella delivering aid.*

government had declared a country-wide lockdown.

“Zambia has a high rate of unemployment,” noted Dr. Mulenga Chella, pastor of Christ Life Church in Lusaka. “Many of its people live on less than \$3.00 per family per day. The lockdown has resulted in many people going without food.” Chella, who visited First Baptist Amarillo last December to share his own testimony and the story of planting Christ Life Church, led his church members to seek out the best way to respond in their community.

“From a recent visit to the Chainda slum,” he described, “we found that most people had no means of protection against COVID-19. Many homes are congested with an average of six people in a two-room structure. One of the houses had a total of twenty-two extended family members, and they had no face masks, disinfectant, or food.”

Christ Life Church has seen healthy growth in its first several years of ministry, adding to its building, creating a school, and funding scholarships for local children. Through the effort of their congregation and the support

of sponsor churches like First Baptist Amarillo, they were able to provide immediate relief in the crisis.

“After seeing the huge need,” Pastor Chella explained, “we, as a local church, with the help of some sponsors, were able to bless 40 families with a bucket filled with cornmeal, a bottle of cooking oil, beans, disinfectants, face masks, and washing soap. We were able to provide meals for 234 people for four days.”

Churches around the world, particularly those in regions where the majority of people rely on meager, daily wages to provide food for families, have all witnessed these same needs.

## Kenya

Good News Preaching Church, for example, was once a strong, vibrant presence in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo. When war and unrest forced thousands to flee, the congregation fled in many directions. One of those was Amarillo, TX.

Today, you will find many of its members in a weekly



worship service that takes place in First Baptist’s Chapel, spoken in the central African dialect, Kinyamulenge. Many more of the congregation’s people, however, have settled in Nairobi, Kenya, where a sister church by the same name continues to bring together the large displaced community.

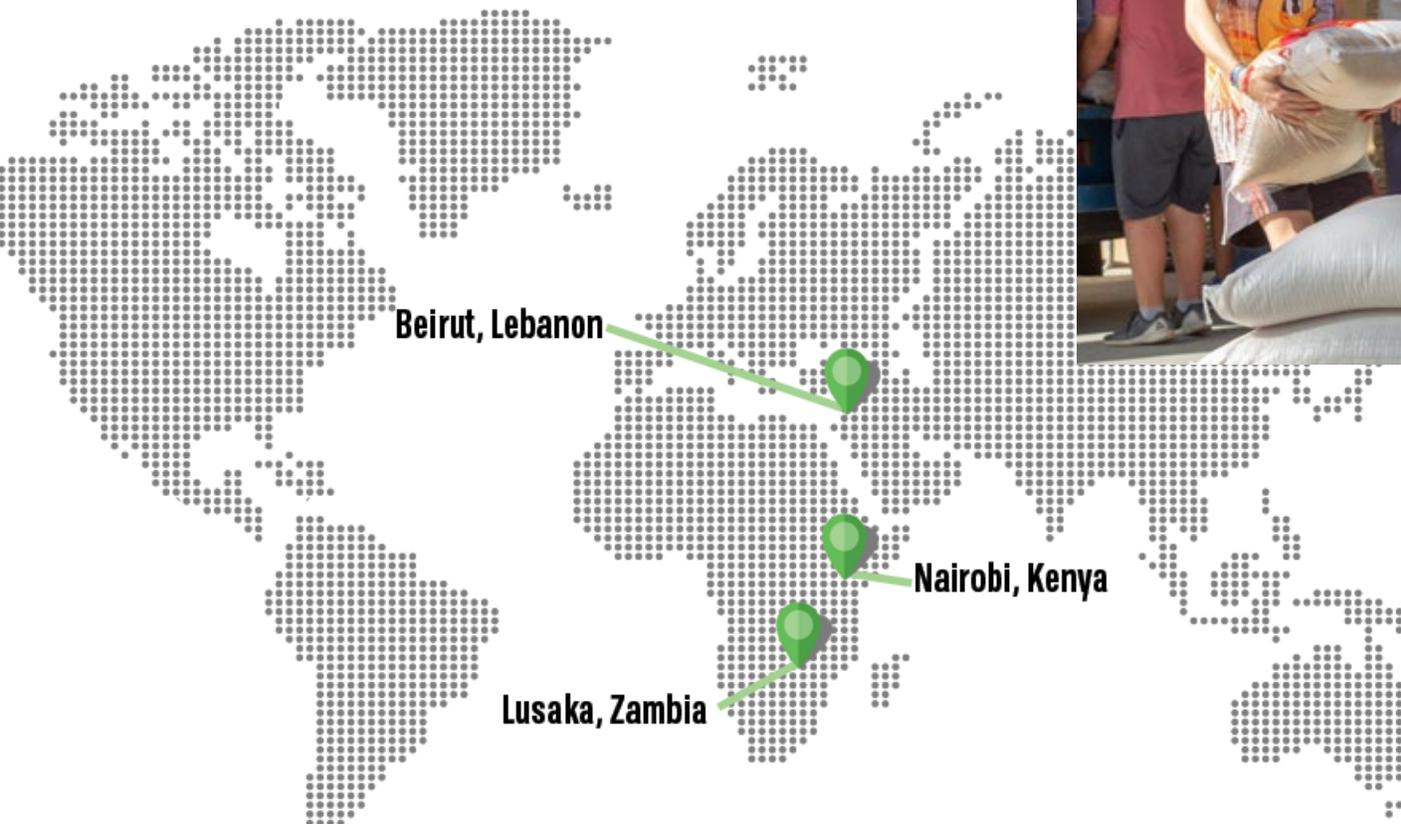
When the pandemic created widespread food insecurity due to work stoppages, the Nairobi church looked to its sister congregation in Amarillo for help. Together, the churches were able to purchase food and begin slow distribution to families, following government orders against gatherings. In all, around 170 families were gifted large portions of rice, beans, oil, and other cooking necessities to help span the gap in wages.

From Lebanon to Lusaka to Nairobi, faithful missions partnerships have empowered local churches to respond with local solutions to local problems. “We are so grateful to God,” added Pastor Chella, “for His love to us and in using us to transform lives.”



*Above: Bags of food purchased in Nairobi, Kenya, are gathered in the church building for distribution.*

*Below: Staff and students at Kids Alive Lebanon work to prepare food distribution.*



# The Whole Jar

## Stories of Generosity Continue to Inspire

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**“It helps everyone realize that every little bit is important.”**

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### TREVOR BROWN

The large, glass jar on a small table in the International Sunday School department had been clanging for several weeks, as it does every year. The label on the outside reads “Change for Change.”

Leaders of the International Class recall the simple concept being around for more than fifteen years in their room. It starts, several times a year, with an empty jar and the willingness of the class to give what money they can to support mission work around the world.

Annual missions offerings have a much longer history than the jar. A Christmas offering for international missions in broader Baptist life dates back to 1888, a time when the city of Amarillo was still brand new and its 150 citizens were yet to complete their first Chapel. The occasion for this specific collection, as is the case each Easter season, was the support of North American mission work.

The International Department brings together a broad spectrum of backgrounds: long-time citizens with Southeast Asian heritage, Sudanese immigrants, a large group from FBC’s Karen (Burmese) congregation, and many others. The simple goal of the class was to begin filling the jar together. It encourages generosity, promotes awareness of the need around the world, and enables the group to contribute what they can to the cause.



“I think it helps everyone in the class to realize that every little bit they give to missions is important,” said Mary Lou Serratt, a longtime leader in the class.

“We’ll announce that it’s time to be taking up another missions offering,” explained Ruthie Baggett, who found a home serving in this class after years of missionary service in Mexico. “It’s amazing how many pennies and nickels and dimes and dollar bills will show up in it.”

On one particular Sunday morning, it was the money that was placed beside the jar, not in it, that was most remarkable. The “Change for Change” had

made some modest headway when a Karen (kah-REN) class member walked in one Sunday in March with a glass jar of her own. With eagerness and generosity, she had filled a large Starbucks Frappuccino container with coins. It was to be her missions offering.

“She walked up and rather than open it up,” Baggett explained, “she put her whole jar on the table next to our class offering.”

“The secretary and I actually counted it and decided to put it back into her jar to turn in so that



*International Sunday School classes meet weekly in Rm 102*



*Pastor Rainbow Gold of the Karen Congregation*

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**“We were so impressed with what she did.”**

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somebody would see what she’d done. We were so impressed with what she did.”

Stories of great generosity are familiar at First Baptist Amarillo. They are a part of the church’s identity. Woven into a long story of ministry and missions throughout the local and global community are stories like this one, generous hearts and faithful people committed to supporting kingdom work.

Times filled with uncertainty and anxiousness about the future are prone to push generosity to the background. There are few people who understand crisis and calamity more than refugees.

The Karen people, who fled tragic religious and ethnic persecution and Burma, are no strangers to uncertain times.

What better example of the power of generosity than a beloved Karen refugee saving up to support gospel ministry throughout North America. They asked for spare change, and she brought her whole jar.

*Photography for this article provided by TrenPam Communications.*



## Breakaway 2020 | July 13-16

First Baptist Church Amarillo

Camp Pastor- Kyle Wilson  
Worship Band- The Gladsome Light

Completed 7th-12th Grade  
Invite your friends!  
Cost: FREE

[firstamarillo.org/youth-registrations](http://firstamarillo.org/youth-registrations)

Includes lunch and dinner each day  
plus 2 t-shirts!

Parent Meeting:  
July 8 or July 9 / 6pm / Room 407

Deadline to register:  
Sunday, July 5

## VIRTUAL VBS JULY 27-30

Mark your calendars and make plans to join us for a fun week as we learn how to make Jesus the foundation of our lives.

Babies - Completed 6th Grade  
Register now at [firstamarillo.org](http://firstamarillo.org)



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# THE JOURNAL

Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name;  
Make known among the nations what he has done.  
Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts.

*Psalm 105:1-2*



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