



# THE JOURNAL

Stories from the missions and ministry of First Baptist Church Amarillo

## Not the Same as Before

God's Love in Amarillo Shapes  
a Church in South Sudan

## Across the City

Hunger Needs Span the Area

## Formed Through Faithfulness

Why Every Gift Is Needed and  
Every Volunteer Matters

# In This Issue

03

## **Not the Same as Before**

God's Love in Amarillo Shapes a Church in South Sudan

08

## **Serving the City**

Hunger Needs Span the Area

10

## **Formed Through Faithfulness**

Why Every Gift Is Needed and Every Volunteer Matters

16

## **Fostering Hope**

Care Box Ministry Recognized for Meaningful Work

18

## **Love Local**

Finding Where You Can Serve

# Not the Same as Before

## God's Love in Amarillo Shapes a Church in South Sudan

TREVOR BROWN

When Lual and Diana Majok left their homes and family in South Sudan in the midst of a civil war in the late 1990s, it was hard to imagine they could or would ever return. The sadness and distress of leaving behind family and home were substantial. Diana also remembers Lual's persistent conviction.

"Lual sat with me and he was saying 'God is powerful, and he will take care of us,'" Diana recalls.

Leaving their homes, the family became refugees in Tel Aviv, Egypt, in 1999. The following year, Lual and Diana were resettled in Houston, TX. Even as their trust in God's power was tested, they began to see how God could use them. As if the storms of civil war were not enough to uproot a family, it was Hurricane Rita that put them on the move again, resulting in their arrival in Amarillo in 2005.

*Diana Majok (left) shares crafts made with women in South Sudan*





*Diana and Lual Majok*

phone number and told us, ‘If you don’t have a home church, please, you are welcome.’”

“After she left, Lual looked at me and he was saying ‘God brought us someone the first day we moved. We have to call her.’ So, we called her.”

Their call was answered and plans were made to help them bring their family to First Baptist Church the next morning. With the help of Sue Kelly’s van, Lual, Diana, and five children made their first visit to First Baptist Church.

“The first time we got here in the church, we saw how welcoming it was; our children got in a Bible Study, and we started in our own Bible study,” Diana remembers.

“It didn’t take Lual long when we got home to say, ‘My prayer was answered.’”

In the weeks and months that followed, God began to use their new church family to shape and strengthen their faith. “God brought us here, and we became Christians,” Lual recalls. “Even when we were saying before that we were Christians, we were not good Christians because we didn’t read the Bible. But when we came to First Baptist, we grew. Spiritually, that’s where I grew.”

“Without [First Baptist], we would not be here,” Diana adds, “and we would not have this love of God. This is the love we have to share with others, and we just keep thinking: we have to do it.”

As their love for the church and faith in God grew, so did

### **An Answer to Prayer**

A few days later, while moving furniture and clothing into a newly acquired apartment in Amarillo, there was a knock at the door. A member of First Baptist’s international Bible study class had been the previous tenant in that apartment. Mary Lou Serratt thought she was there to visit her friend, the former renter. God had other plans.

“I remember her knocking on the door looking for her friend,” Diana recalled. “But she met us and gave us her



*A local woman proudly shares her Bible with hand-sewn repairs*

their desire to serve and share with others. Even while local ministries were helping them through English classes, Bible studies, and fellowship, Diana and Lual were finding even more ways to serve in their church, assist other refugees, and raise their children.

In the midst of their continued involvement at First Baptist Amarillo, their desire to reconnect with and to serve the people of Aweil East, a small state on the northern border of South Sudan, remained.

“The love that I found,” Lual shared, “I want to give it to other people, too. It cannot die on me. I can give it to other people, too.”

### A Call to Share

By 2011, the idea of returning to South Sudan became more realistic. Lual recalls feeling like God was leading them to go, but with serious health concerns, it was not possible for him. So, together, they made plans for

Diana to go that year. The trip was an answer to prayers more than a decade old. It was also a gift to the village of Warawar in Aweil East, South Sudan.

Lual and Diana continue to recall how the persistent love of First Baptist Amarillo in midst of Lual’s medical challenges has compelled them to love others. Diana has never forgotten the care they received.

“Because of the way they visit,” she says, “to go see you in the hospital, to see if you have a problem. The time Lual was sick... every little thing and every concern they have shown. If my faith was little, it made it bigger. And from there, I want to carry God’s love to others here in the city. I feel like if I have my brother come and love me and wants to come see me, why don’t we go and see somebody.”

Lual’s health improved over the next year, and by 2013, he was able to make the trip to Sudan himself, as well. With children in school and life here in Amarillo, they’ve



never made the trip together. Each year, either Diana or Lual makes the trip for several weeks, alternating years between the two of them since 2013. They spend the weeks in South Sudan ministering, encouraging, and helping make disciples amongst local believers. They meet with families, teach children, and help the church grow in what ways they can.

### Making Disciples

By the end of 2017, with support from First Baptist Amarillo, the small group meeting for worship was able to construct a grass building for gathering. Later, a roof was added. In his most recent trip in 2020, Lual was elated

to be able to officially register the church with the local government, creating Make My Disciples Church.

“Why did God leave me alive from this disaster?” Lual asked, with the answer in mind. “He wants me to do something. My people, who struggle, don’t know anything. There is no forgiveness. There is no love. Because they don’t know what God says. They need somebody to teach them so that they can know that God loves them too... so that they can change to be a people of God.”

“Even now at the church over there – when we go - they tell us, it’s not like before. There is a change. It’s different.



*Lual (left) finishes walls for the church building.*



There is a small forgiveness and a little bit of love. It's not like before because of Jesus Christ. He died for our sins, and he told us to take his message to everybody so that everybody can be free. Our heart is full of evil, and only God can free us."

Now, more than 20 years later, an officially registered church gathers weekly in a small structure for worship each week. The persistent, faithful witness of Lual and Diana to the village is a testimony of God's continued faithfulness to provide.

"People need to hear from us how God is powerful," Diana shared. "Everybody thinks they are just a church here, First Baptist in Amarillo. But they're not. They are First Baptist everywhere."



A map of the Amarillo area, Texas, showing the distribution of hunger needs. The map includes major roads like Highway 335 and Interstate 27. Several blue circular markers are scattered across the map, indicating locations where hunger needs were reported. Labels for 'Cliffside' and 'Bishop Hills' are visible at the top. The title 'Serving The City' is prominently displayed in white text over the map, with 'Hunger Needs Span the Area' below it.

# Serving The City

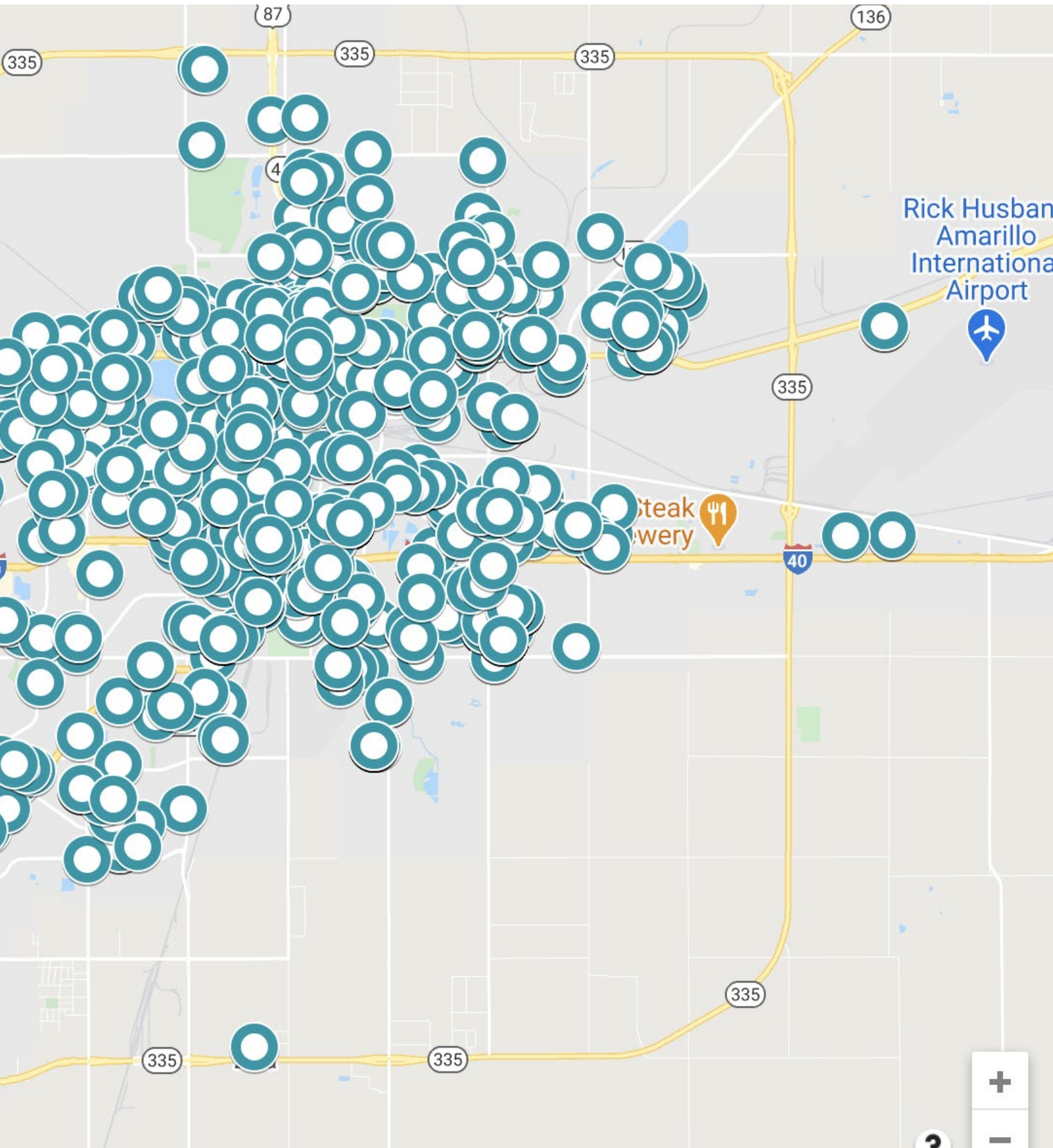
## Hunger Needs Span the Area

At the close of 2020, the Perkins Community Center, the food and clothing ministry of First Baptist Church, had served more food to the Amarillo area than any year prior. Every Tuesday and Thursday, with few exceptions, volunteers were able to respond to hunger needs that spanned the region. When addresses provided at the enter are placed on a map, the picture becomes even more clear: needs abound all over the city.

In last year altogether, the Perkins Center served 1,922 families and 5,600 individuals, an increase from 1,264 families and 3,425 individuals in 2019. In December 2020 alone, the number served totaled 195 families and 591 individuals, providing on-demand food boxes to cars. Faced with an obvious increase in needs, the ministry was able to remove limits on visit frequency and simplify food distribution. These changes enabled a 52% increase in the number of food boxes given away in 2020.

With the tide of food requests receding slightly and the ability to interview and assess clients' needs returning soon, the image created by a map that began a year ago remains. Through the continued generosity of First Baptist Church family, the Perkins Community Center is able to fight food insecurity all across the Amarillo area.





# Formed Through Faithfulness

Why Every Gift Is Needed and Every Volunteer Matters





## TREVOR BROWN

With the class's hour coming to an end, the thirteen 2nd graders gathered in room 2A on Easter Sunday bowed their heads for a closing prayer. Like many others on Easter morning, the room was slightly more full, and the colors were a little brighter, but the moment was not unique. The children in 2A (one of two 2nd grade groups) meet week after week, led in activities, Bible study, and prayers by their faithful teachers, Brent and Shelly Beam, Clint and Brenda Stoddard, and Joann Brown.

For Joann Brown, this year's group marks over 50 years of teaching in First Baptist's children's ministry. Across the building, Joann's son and daughter-in-law, Gary and Melissa Brown, fit a similar pattern. They're nearing 30 years of serving the student ministry, teaching middle and high schoolers.

The impact of 50 years with 2nd graders or 30 years with teenagers is hard to quantify. You could count the number of kids. You could add up the number of Sundays, but these would hardly measure the reach. To really understand the impact, you'd have to know the lives they've helped shape. There are school teachers, attorneys and engineers, clerks and cashiers, doctors and nurses, fathers and mothers all across Amarillo whose lives in Christ have been formed, in part, through the faithfulness of countless volunteers like the Browns.

Many of the same children who once filled the seats on an Easter Sunday are serving somewhere in vocational

”

**It wasn't just one  
person who helped me  
walk this path.**

ministry today. Each one of them helps paint a picture of how the gifts of every worker, leader, and teacher can shape others to serve.

### Equipped for Ministry

“I can’t overstate the role FBC played in shaping me as a Jesus follower and vocational minister,” recalls Tye Barrett. “First Amarillo not only formed my foundational understanding of the gospel, but also modeled to me what it means to follow Jesus with our lives. I remember the care and concern my Sunday school leaders and the church staff showed for me. Their encouragement developed in me the confidence to answer Christ’s calling in my life. I’m so proud to be among the many that will always call FBC Amarillo home.” Tye serves as a worship leader at Oakwood Baptist Church in New Braunfels, TX.

Ryan McCoy, Minister of Youth and Discipleship at FBC Shreveport, shares it similarly: “It wasn’t just one person who helped me walk this path; it was a patchwork of many genuine people, each working and struggling and growing in their own way, that helped me become who I am today. More often than I can count in my life, the community of faith at FBC has been that city on the hill, letting its light shine out and guiding me towards Jesus.”

The story is the same for many others. For Whitney Davis, who now serves through her marriage and family therapy practice in Amarillo, it was Sundays but also everything in between.

“All the youth group events, VBS, mission trips, camp, Bible study, Primetime and many more, gave my young mind and spirit something of great importance to focus on and prioritize,” she recalled.



**David Hanson**

“Students won’t remember much of what you taught them, but they will remember that you showed up, and that you were crazy about Jesus.

It’s my prayer that every student who walks through the doors of FBC experiences adults who are welcoming them into the process of spiritual development. While we are all ‘in process,’ the adults at FBC do a phenomenal job at helping students feel a part of the body; not the church of tomorrow, but the church of today.”

“I came to FBC Amarillo when I was in 6th grade. I can still name every Sunday School teacher I had from 6th grade through college. I don’t remember all the lessons they taught, but I do remember the ways they showed up in my life, the ways they invited me in, made me feel welcome, feel valued, and showed me what it’s like to live a life pursuing Christ.

Those adults laid the groundwork for my understanding of ministry and how God can use a person, flaws and all, to shape young lives. I hope every kid who comes through FBCA has that same army of dedicated adults, willing to give time and effort to show what life in Christ looks like.”



**Ryan McCoy**

“I had a place to be during my teenage years, instead of all of the places I wasn’t supposed to be. My peers at church were my people, and being accepted there, hosted there, took all the things my peers at school were doing completely off my radar.”

### Building a Foundation

Sky Scott and her family live in Johannesburg, South Africa, and serve as missionaries with the International Mission Board. She, too, recalls the rich diversity of ways that her church shaped her faith.

“FBC impacted me in a thousand ways,” Sky shared, “from the godly women who rocked me in the nursery and sang and prayed over me, to preschool where Mrs. Ann Fomby taught me about Jesus, to Children’s Choir where I sang His praises, to Sunday School, to GAs, Acteens, Wednesday night youth,

Sunday night youth choir, Mexico mission trips, and taking the Lord’s Supper in the sanctuary on Sunday evenings. The people of First Baptist poured into my life in countless small and seemingly insignificant ways. Each moment and word invested into my life was like a small stone which the Lord used to build my life on a firm foundation.”

When asked, Sky was not the only one who recalled the “foundation” laid by volunteers. David Hanson also grew up at FBC and now serves as a student pastor at Lakepointe Church in Rockwall. “FBC always surrounded me with consistent and faithful adults who saw the big picture,” Hanson answered. “They served year-in and year-out, knowing that each stone put in place would result in a foundation that I would build upon for the rest of my life.”

“Those adults laid the groundwork for my



### Whitney Davis

“All the youth group events, VBS, mission trips, camp, Bible study, Primetime, and many more, gave my young mind and spirit something of great importance to focus on and prioritize.

There were so many opportunities to be involved in service, and I felt I was good at it, and my heart enjoyed it. Later in my graduate school program at Fuller Theological Seminary in the Marriage and Family Therapy program, we had a specific lesson on how our jobs as therapists will give us an opportunity to be peacekeepers and peacemakers in this world. From that lesson on, I felt confirmation that my marriage and family therapy practice would be my mission field.”

“I feel like my ministry today has all sorts of technical and interpersonal quandaries that can become debilitating. However, I feel equipped to handle these issues because I know what it means to walk into a ministerial challenge without all the answers because of my time at FBC.

I hope that today’s youth at FBC have the same inviting community that I experienced. It was a place that allowed me to be open with who I was and who I was becoming. It was a place of true spiritual formation towards Jesus Christ. The youth group was also a collection of wild personalities, lots of fun and sacrificial adults. I imagine that is still the case.”



### Ryan Hodges

understanding of ministry,” added Ryan McCoy, “and how God can use a person, flaws and all, to shape young lives. I hope every kid who comes through FBC has that same army of dedicated adults, willing to give time and effort to show what life in Christ looks like.”

### Growing in the Gospel

Ryan Hodges, another former student, remembers the way that youth workers challenged him to grow. “It was at FBC that I started to experience a different, genuine Christian community that was as serious about their faith as they were fun to be around. There isn’t one specific moment that stands out, but rather the constant flow of invitation and challenge within the youth group that promoted my spiritual growth.” Today, Ryan works for Texas Baptists, serving with the collegiate ministry.

Through every event and in every relationship, God

has used the varied voices of volunteers to grow and shape the next generation. These gifted, spirit-filled adults have answered the call to know and care for every child and every student who walks through the door. Caroline Hamilton, currently a seminary student at Baylor University, remembers the power of those who took the time to talk to her.

“The most formational experiences at FBC normally took place in conversations,” Caroline recalled. “When the volunteers, Sunday School leaders, and church staff personally took time to pour into my life, even in the midst of chaos, I experienced Christ’s love and care for me on a deep level. The small conversations and moments portrayed to me what it looks like to genuinely follow Christ through loving others.”

### Showing Up To Serve

Joel Richards, a former staff member who is



**Tye Barrett**

“I can’t overstate the role FBC played in shaping me as a Jesus follower and vocational minister. First Amarillo not only formed my foundational understanding of the gospel, but also modeled to me what it means to follow Jesus with our lives. I remember the care and concern my Sunday school leaders and the church staff showed for me. Their encouragement developed in me the confidence to answer Christ’s calling in my life. I’m so proud to be among the many that will always call FBC Amarillo home.

“First Baptist Amarillo provided me with a wonderful example of a healthy, Christ-centered church body. While there are many aspects of FBC that helped me to grow as a follower of Christ, it was most helpful to be poured into from all ministries in the church. The children’s ministry, youth ministry, and youth choir were formative in my spiritual growth.

The most formational experiences at FBCA normally took place in conversations. When the volunteers, Sunday School leaders, and church staff personally took time to pour into my life, even in the midst of chaos, I experienced Christ’s love and care for me on a deep level. The small conversations and moments portrayed to me what it looks like to genuinely follow Christ through loving others.”



**Caroline Hamilton**

currently a seminary student in Pennsylvania, also felt the impact of a church family who will show up when needed. “Any event that takes place, any program that is put on,” Joel Richards recalls, “no matter who the event is designed to minister to, you are guaranteed to see FBC members from all walks of life. If the people at FBC are able, they’ll show up to partner in ministry activities.”

They have been teachers, greeters, readers, watchers, drivers, and some who just say “yes” to the ministry of “showing up.” Some have been able to offer 20 minutes, and others have given 20 years, but the impact of those who answer the call to serve in the preschool, children’s, youth, and missions ministries of First Baptist Church have created an enduring legacy. What a joy to discover that God is able to use one’s gifts to equip another!

When the final “Amen” was spoken over the 2nd

grade Easter crowd, the eyes opened, and the heads raised up. Who is among them? What gifts will they have to share one day with Christ’s body? Are they business leaders or teachers? Are some to be pastors or preachers? Will they come to follow Jesus with heart and soul and strength?

It may be that these answers, and many more, are formed through the faithfulness of countless volunteers. Is there a way that you can be one of them?

“To those who are working with the children and youth,” writes Sky Scott, “to those who stay up late nights writing out lessons, preparing craft materials, planning for camp, organizing mission trips, writing music... do not grow weary in doing good! You are investing in the lives of the next generation and your labor is not in vain.”



**Joel Richards**

I would hope that today’s children and youth see a diverse body of believers united together through the one unbreakable bond Christians have – our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Union with Christ is so important, and I believe children and youth need to see that it isn’t simply good attitudes, good work ethics, friendly faces, and laughter that make a community function together (those are all good!), but that the glue that unites the church together is Jesus Christ – it’s His body, after all!

“In every year of my life, there was a significant, shaping, sharpening moment that took place in the halls of FBC. Indeed, I cannot even walk those halls now as an adult without every room I pass calling out to me, reminding me of the lesson I learned there.

I hope the children and youth at FBC experience Jesus as I did. I hope they learn that Jesus is the Living Word. I hope they have an insatiable hunger to study and know His word. I hope they learn by heart the words of the songs and hymns sung in “big church,” as I did. I hope they hide His word in their hearts. In my dark and despairing times in life, it is the hymns, the songs, the scripture woven into my mind and spirit that have proved to be a strong cord of hope for me. I hope that all they experience at FBC is Jesus, Jesus and more Jesus.”



**Sky Scott**

# Fostering Hope

## College Care Box Ministry Recognized for Meaningful Work

---

The Fostering Hope College Care Box Ministry was granted the **Community Resource of the Year Award** by the Texas Council Child Welfare Board, earlier this year. The award was given because of a recommendation made by a Region 1 Specialist with the Department of Family and Protective Services that worked closely with the ministry.

The Fostering Hope Ministry provides Care Boxes each semester for college students who have aged out of the foster system, have no family support, and are attending college locally. This extension of the Fostering Hope ministry, along with the generosity of FBC contributors, provides boxes of supplies four times a year for foster alumni attending college.





---

This team has been under the consistent leadership of Laura Schelin. Laura's team has been very fluid over the years, utilizing FBC Bible study members, GA's, Acteens, and Disciple Now groups. This area of the ministry is a well-oiled machine because of the amazing organizational skills and dedication she brings to this project and many others. Thanks to all that have assisted with this worthy cause!

*Fostering Hope is a ministry of First Baptist focused on helping children, families, and agencies in the Amarillo area who are involved in foster care and/or adoption. The group, led by David and Sydney Rieff, champions a variety of ways to get involved in this area of great need. For more information, contact the church office or [fosteringhopeamarillo@gmail.com](mailto:fosteringhopeamarillo@gmail.com)*



*Fostering Hope volunteers, Gaylia Polk and Laura Schelin, displaying the award on behalf of the ministry.*

### **Christian Men & Women's Job Corp**

This ministry helps those in our community without a job receive skills training, mentoring, relapse prevention, and connects them with great employment opportunities. Volunteers, teachers, and mentors are always needed.

### **English as a Second Language**

FBC volunteers provide an ESL program on Thursday mornings and Sunday afternoons to internationals, newcomers, and refugees in our community.

### **Margaret Wills School Partnership**

FBC partners with Margaret Wills Elementary to support the many needs of students and teachers. Volunteers help mentor children, serve through Kids Café, and bring gifts to teachers.

### **Prison Visitation and Ministry**

Volunteers regularly visit and support inmates and conduct ministry programs on-campus at our local prison facilities.

### **Perkins Community Center**

This food & clothing ministry serves every Tuesday and Thursday morning from 9:00-10:30am. Additional morning volunteers are needed to help serve, interview clients, sort clothing, or stock supplies.

### **Disaster Relief Ministry**

First Baptist has a mobile shower and laundry unit that provides a key component of disaster relief ministry. Men and women can serve through relief and mission trip support.

### **Fostering Hope**

Fostering Hope is a ministry helping children, families, and agencies in the Amarillo area who are involved in foster care and/or adoption. Volunteers serve in a variety of ways, providing for new foster placements, Care Portal needs, assisting foster parents, and supporting local agencies.

### **Snack Pak 4Kids**

This ministry feeds school children over the weekend. Our volunteers pick up food, sort it, package it, and deliver it to the schools.

### **WMU**

The Women's Missionary Union is an organization that strives to challenge the church to understand and be involved in the mission of God. Mission Friends® for Preschoolers 3 years old through kindergarten, Girls in Action® for Girls Grades 1-6, Acteens® for Girls Ages 12-17 or in Grades 7-12, and Women on Mission® for Women 18 and up are all apart of the WMU.

*To connect with these or other missions opportunities, call our church office or email [trevor@firstamarillo.org](mailto:trevor@firstamarillo.org)*

## **SAVE THE DATE:**

## **4 AMARILLO MISSION WEEK June 28-July 1**

*Join four downtown churches serving in a week of ministry together.*

# Love Local

Want to serve, but not sure where to begin? Want to be a part of local missions, but you don't know how? The best way to begin is to start today! First Baptist has a plethora of ministries that need volunteers.



In addition to the various ways that church members serve in our discipleship and education ministries for all ages, there are a host of ministries that engage in local missions like those listed here.



First Baptist Church Amarillo  
1208 S. Tyler St.  
Amarillo, TX 79101

# 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*



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

*Amarillo*

[www.firstamarillo.org](http://www.firstamarillo.org)