



FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD

FAITH IN ACTION OUTREACH SERVES A HURTING WORLD

Story and photos by Toni Garrard Clay

IT'S AMAZING what can happen when a group of like-minded people come together and discuss how to help those in need. The next thing you know, that group is taking over the operation of a local food bank, adding additional services and feeding as many as 2,000 people a month. Faith In Action Outreach in Malakoff is manned by about 75 volunteers who work to provide a helping hand to people throughout Henderson County and the Cedar Creek Lake area.

“We live in one of the poorest counties in Texas, and this is a tangible way to help people who are in desperate situations,” said Teri Caswell, director of office operations for Faith In Action. “We can’t always get them out of their situations, but we can certainly support them through prayer, through food, with a hug. Sometimes these folks just need somebody to listen.”

The operation began in the summer of 2011 when a group from First Baptist Church Malakoff agreed to take over the running of the food pantry in their city. The volunteer staff soon involved others outside of FBC Malakoff, though they have kept the effort, as Caswell put it, “Christ-centered.” The name Faith In Action is inspired by a Bible verse from the book of James: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

Volunteers open the doors to Faith In Action every Thursday. If a visitor has been before, his file will be checked to see if anything needs updating. With

limited resources, those who receive help are limited to no more than one visit a month.

“After we go over someone’s file, we offer to pray with them about anything they want to pray about,” said Caswell. “We’ve only had a handful of people tell us they don’t want to pray with us. Many of them look forward to an opportunity to share what they’re going through.”

Volunteers take a donated trailer once a week to the East Texas Food Bank in Tyler to purchase about 4,000 pounds of food. Between 1,500 and 2,000 people — about 300 to 350 families — are fed each month.

“We’ve been here once before,” said a young woman during a recent visit to Faith In Action. “It’s a great help. I have two small children, and things can get really tight. They seem to be happy about what they’re doing here, and they’re welcoming.”

Those who come to Faith In Action are welcome not only to food, but to clothing. The organization clothes about 100 people of all ages each week. “Anyone can come if they feel they need clothes,” said Matsy Walker, clothes closet coordinator. “A person can have up to four outfits, head-to-toe. We try to make the experience a good one.” The clothes closet is always in need of donations, particularly children’s clothing, bluejeans and shoes.

Not all the services provided by Faith In Action take place inside the building. Every Thursday, volunteers deliver bags containing kid-friendly food to elementary schools in Malakoff, Cross Roads and Eustace.

“We started doing this because a teacher in the area noticed some children were reluctant to go home on Friday, and those same children were gorging themselves on Monday at breakfast time, so much so that they sometimes made themselves sick,” said Caswell. “They learned these children were not eating over the weekend.”


Caswell said the volunteers at Faith In Action, upon hearing this story, felt they had to do something to help. So they deliver the bags of food to the schools on Thursday, and on Friday teachers or counselors put a bag into the backpack of each child identified as needing the assistance. They hope next fall to add Trinidad elementary school to the Food for the Weekend program.

“Those kids can’t change the situation they’re in,” said Caswell. “They don’t have a say in what’s happening to them, and we want to minister to them somehow.”

In addition to food and clothing services, a handful of people each month receive assistance with their prescription medications through a partnership between Faith In Action and Malakoff Pharmacy. AA meetings just started being held twice a week in the Faith In Action building — during the day on Saturday and on Monday evenings — and a church service is open to anyone every Sunday at 11 a.m.

“For me, personally, it’s a calling that God has put on my heart and, I believe, on the hearts of others who

serve here,” said Caswell. “We have a passion to help those who are hurting and downtrodden.”

Faith In Action, located in Malakoff at 103 South Terry Street, is open to those in need every Thursday from 9 a.m.-11 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.-6 p.m. Donations of food and clothing are always welcome, as are monetary gifts in any amount. A donation may be made online at faithinactionoutreach.com or mailed to PO Box 862, Malakoff, TX 75148. Volunteers are always needed. For more information contact Caswell at 903-880-2906 or board president Larry Albertson at 972-679-6755. 



Opposite page: Pictured are volunteers (back row, from left) Frances Davis, Linda Upchurch, Frank Upchurch, LaNell Richardson, Wylie McClintock, Jim Richardson and (front row, from left) Linda Brown, Monica Bell, Matsy Walker, Zo Bailey and Teri Caswell. Above: Monica Bell and Matsy Walker work in the clothes closet, which provides for about 100 people a week.

