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20 years of service to the needy - What started as a Bible study group has 260 congregations  
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ARLINGTON - Between summer camps, worship services and the free dental and medical clinics, keeping up with all that Mission Arlington/Mission Metroplex has accomplished in the 20 years since the ministry began can get complicated.

Pinpointing the power behind it all is easier, those involved say.

"We get mostly families and we pray with all of them, each person, each family," said Mary Lois King, who works in the reception area. "We just supply their needs as best we can, as best as God allows us to."

With the help of 100 to 500 volunteers each day, Mission Arlington/Mission Metroplex gave emergency assistance to more than 52,000 families in 2005, the latest year for which figures are available. That translates into food, clothing, rental or utility assistance for at least 200,000 people, according to the nonprofit. Last month alone, 14,000 people got help with their Thanksgiving meals.

The mission also has 260 congregations that meet each Sunday at apartment complexes and other Metroplex locations. The organization has church buildings throughout the city, with more than \$7.2 million worth of property listed on county tax rolls.

Executive Director Tillie Burgin said it all started in August 1986 with a Bible study held in the apartment of a woman who came to Burgin for help with her utility bill. The intent today is the same as it always was - to take the church's message to people, wherever they are, said Burgin, 70.

"God just moved it in a way that was his plan," said Burgin, who has emerged over the years as the public face of Mission Arlington.

A recent weekday morning gave a good example of the buzz of activity that's typical at the headquarters at 210 W. South St. As some volunteers sorted donated clothing and home items, others worked in the Christmas store. They were setting up a gift wonderland filled with Barbie dolls and red Radio Flyer wagons.

The mission's free Christmas store, which along with its adopt-a-family program helped 22,000 people last year, will open to the public Saturday. Like much that Mission Arlington has done, the Christmastime collection of toys and other items started as a common-sense solution to the problems of low-income families, Burgin said.

In January and February 1987, members of the Mission Arlington ministry, which started out in an office at First Baptist Church of Arlington, noticed that lots of families were looking for help paying rent and utility bills. It turns out, Burgin said, that they'd used up any extra funds making sure their children didn't go completely without on the holiday. The first store opened that December, with toys stacked on the floor in Burgin's office and clothing draped over chairs.

It has grown because of donations from corporations, school groups and individuals, she said.

Jim Burgin, one of Burgin's two sons, said the giveaway comes during a season that can be

especially difficult financially for some in his congregation. Burgin is the pastor of Grace Street Church, a Mission Arlington congregation in the east part of town.

"They all have jobs," Jim Burgin said. "It just takes a little bit extra sometimes to get Christmas done."

The Burgins said it's not uncommon for those on the receiving end of the mission's generosity to come back later with a donation. They have countless stories about those who've been able to turn their lives around with a little help from the mission.

Kelly Haas, a young mother who works there, seems well on her way to becoming one of those examples. Haas, 24, attended church as a teenager but by early this year, she'd been using methamphetamine for months and was homeless. Getting pregnant convinced her to get off drugs, and she met Tillie Burgin a couple of months after moving into the Arlington Life Shelter. She still needed a job and getting one at seven months pregnant seemed impossible.

Burgin hired her the day they met. Now Haas takes her 3-week-old son, Mathew, to work with her, and he sleeps in a bassinet or gets attention from other staff members while she works in the food pantry.

"I owe her a lot," Haas said of Burgin. "I'm so blessed to have had her become part of my life and to become part of the Mission Arlington family."

#### The mission's mission

Mission Arlington/Mission Metroplex began with an August 1986 Bible study meeting at an Arlington apartment complex. The agency was at first a ministry of First Baptist Church of Arlington, where one-time missionaries Bob and Tillie Burgin attended.

"There was something I just couldn't get away from," Tillie Burgin said. "If I could do missions in Korea, why can't I do missions in Arlington?"

Mission Arlington/Mission Metroplex owns church buildings all over Arlington and some apartments where missionaries live. The nonprofit's main location, at 210 W. South St., has a food pantry, dental and medical clinics, and a free clothing store. Most days, the reception area is full of families.

#### Recent accomplishments:

More than 9,000 children received school supplies from Mission Arlington this year.

From March to August, 11,310 children and teenagers attended Rainbow Express, the mission's backyard Bible club, which features snacks, Scripture stories and singing.

Almost 4,000 patients received medical or dental care at the mission's clinics in 2005.

About 3,900 people attended Mission Arlington Bible studies and Sunday services each week.

1,064 groups, including those from 25 states and 127 Texas cities, visited Mission Arlington to volunteer in 2005.

SOURCE: Mission Arlington/Mission Metroplex

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Kelly Haas works Thursday morning at Mission Arlington. She was homeless and pregnant, and Tillie Burgin gave her a job.

SPECIAL TO THE STAR-TELEGRAM/BRIAN LAWDERMILK

Behind Mission Arlington founder Tillie Burgin is a merry Christmas for many children of needy families, thanks to donors.

SPECIAL TO THE STAR-TELEGRAM/BRIAN LAWDERMILK

A free Christmas store is one of the ways Mission Arlington helps families put smiles on children's faces.

SPECIAL TO THE STAR-TELEGRAM/BRIAN LAWDERMILK

Racks of donated clothing are available to customers who need it. More than 1,000 groups from 25 states volunteered last year.

SPECIAL TO THE STAR-TELEGRAM/BRIAN LAWDERMILK

Kelly Haas and mission founder Tillie Burgin admire Haas' 3-week-old son, Mathew Haas, on Thursday morning at Mission Arlington. The mission is celebrating its 20th anniversary.

SPECIAL TO THE STAR-TELEGRAM/BRIAN LAWDERMILK

The mission offers free clothing to those who need it.

SPECIAL TO THE STAR-TELEGRAM/BRIAN LAWDERMILK

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