

## Meet Miss Tillie Burgin, the Ageless Angel of Arlington

How about something positive for a change?

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Image: [City of Arlington](#)

I've done a fair amount of ranting over the past week, both at the world and at myself. A fair amount of that frustration/outrage has been vented at the elected officials here in the Great State of Texas, and looking back over it something occurred to me: going solely by my writing (and most news reporting), it appears there's not one sane person in the entire Lone Star State.

I feel bad about giving that impression, because it's just not true. We have our fair share of lunatics, but what state doesn't? Wyoming has one-tenth the population of the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex and still managed to give us Dick Cheney. So, for this Monday, I want to do something totally out of character and focus on something positive about my home state.

I considered just posting a bunch of ZZ Top videos; there's never a bad time for that little ol' band from Texas. Or maybe some George Strait (did you know that tickets for his Fort Worth concerts in November have reached Springsteen-level prices?). Or maybe just a picture of some cows; cows are cool.

In the end, I decided on a direction that also brings in something else I've written about before: the sad co-opting of Evangelical Christianity for nefarious purposes by those who apparently

don't think either America or Jesus are all that great right now. This time, however, the news is good.

It's no shock that the folks out there actually following Jesus don't get much publicity. Loving God and neighbor and caring for the "least of these" isn't as flashy as flying to your next preaching engagement in a private jet or as "newsworthy" as denouncing the current president from the pulpit. Except for the occasional human-interest story on a slow Sunday morning local newscast, you'll never hear about a woman who has dedicated her life to exhibiting the love of Christ with both words and actions, even when she's 87 years old and throwing boxes in the Texas heat right alongside kids who could be her great-grandchildren. Let's change that.

Meet Tillie Burgin, better known as Miss Tillie, the founder and Executive Director of Mission Arlington/Mission Metroplex in Arlington, TX.



87 years old and still hauling boxes  
(Image: [Mission Arlington Facebook page](#))

In 1978, after Tillie and her husband Bob returned to her hometown of Arlington after serving for ten years as missionaries in South Korea, she kept asking herself a simple but crucial question: If we can do missions in Korea, why can't we do missions in Arlington? In 1986, after years of prayer and preparation, the answer came when Mission Arlington began operation.

Initially launched through her home church, First Baptist — Arlington, today the ministry is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization separate from the church. In 1990, Mission Metroplex was formed to reflect the broadened scope of their work. The mission of the organization is one that is so simple and straightforward you have to wonder why it's not being done everywhere: taking the church to people who, for whatever reason, cannot or will not come to the church.

Across 360 locations in the D/FW Metroplex and in multiple languages, small Bible study groups gather in apartment clubhouses, mobile home parks, city parks, and anywhere else they can find that can accommodate them, all in order to help people come to know Jesus. Though founded through a Baptist church, they work across denominations; both volunteers and Bible study leaders come not just from Baptist churches, but from Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Catholic, and non-denominational churches as well.

“They just love, love, love people,” Lt. Patrick Jones, head of the Arlington Salvation Army, [told the outlet Faith and Leadership](#). “If I disagree with you about the necessity of baptism, we can still work together to build the kingdom of God.”

There are similar outreach efforts by churches across the country (though you rarely find Baptists and Catholics teaching side by side); where Miss Tillie and Mission Arlington/Mission Metroplex differ is that they don’t stop there. They take seriously this passage from the Bible’s Letter of James:

*“Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”* ([James 2:15–17 NIV](#))

Besides the Bible studies, Mission Arlington/Mission Metroplex provides emergency assistance including food, clothing, furniture, and rent and utility assistance. They offer a medical and dental clinic free of charge, and though they send out no fundraising appeals and have no marketing budget, there were enough donations of cash and goods in 2022 for the following to be accomplished (per their 2022 Annual Report [here](#) and [here](#)):

- The 360 Bible study groups/house churches averaged a total of 3,800 people per week.
- 48,385 families (totaling 180,696 people) received food designed to last for 3 to 5 days. An additional 3,819 families received non-food emergency assistance.
- The medical clinic had over 11,000 visits, treating 3,636 patients; the dental clinic treated over 1,300 patients.
- 5,100 families received furniture.
- 7,964 volunteers provided more than 185,000 hours of community service. Those volunteers include youth groups, civic and business organizations, university sororities and fraternities, and individual families.
- 9,000 Arlington ISD students received all the school supplies needed to start school.
- Across all events and activities, 820 people made first-time decisions to follow Christ.

I should mention here that the nonprofit rating site [Charity Navigator](#) gives Mission Arlington/Mission Metroplex a four-star rating (out of a possible four) and an overall rating of 97%. It’s worth noting that as of July 2023, [salary.com](#) shows the salary range for non-profit CEOs is \$140,544 to \$239,469 yearly (with an average of \$185,896), yet Tillie Burgin takes no salary from the organization. FBC-Arlington placed her on their staff so that what Mission Metroplex would have paid her can go to programs instead.

Miss Tillie still shows up every day to direct activities, encourage the volunteers, and yes, throw boxes in the warehouse. She does something else I find remarkable. I have given to Mission Arlington/Mission Metroplex over the years (an amount so small as to not even be worth mentioning), and each time I give, a few weeks later a letter will arrive (not an email, a letter).



Inside will be their current newsletter with information about upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, and updates on the work they've been doing; nowhere is there an appeal for more donations. At the bottom of each of those newsletters is a brief handwritten note from Miss Tillie thanking me for the specific area I gave to.

*Handwritten.* When's the last time the CEO of the United Way sent you a handwritten thank you note?

I've realized something else while working on this piece. I set out to highlight a Texan worth mentioning amid all the ongoing nonsense, and I've done that. However, I think Miss Tillie would probably point out that those thousands of people from different social, religious, and economic backgrounds who give their time, talent, and money to make the ministry possible are Texans worth celebrating as well. And she'd be right.

Maybe there's hope for the Lone Star State, and the Church. After all, Jesus himself said:

*"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'*

*"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'*

*"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'" ([Matthew 25:34–40 NIV](#))*