

WATCH: What This Christian 'Army' Is Doing on the Border

Some churches in Texas are frustrated because they want to help the flood of immigrant children that have crossed the border into America this year. But they're still waiting to hear just how the federal government will use them.

Many churches in the Lone Star State, especially those on the border, have known for months about the tidal wave of immigrant children crossing the border.

Border Patrol agents have already detained more than 50,000 kids this year. Children as young as 6 years old are crossing on their own, spurred on in many cases by parents hoping they can escape chronic violence or poverty or both.

Most of the children come from three countries: Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala.

What will happen to these children in the coming months? CBN News' Heather Sells addressed that issue and more on CBN News Today, July 8.

At the annual meeting of the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas this month, leaders from 1,100 congregations expressed concern for the safety and salvation of these children, as well as frustration over their lack of access.

Although Baptist leaders have worked with the Obama administration for weeks, they've not received any clear guidance as to what role churches will be able to play in ministering to the unaccompanied children.

Gus Reyes, director of the Christian Life Commission for the Baptist General Convention of Texas, says churches are ready to help now.

“We have an army of chaplains,” he told CBN News. “We have an army of disaster-relief trained people. We have an army of children’s ministers and leaders who have background checks who are ready to come. We have an army of medical physicians and nurses and dentists that are believers who are just ready to give their time.”

In the border town of McAllen, Pastor Chad Mason of Calvary Baptist Church works the phones daily trying to find ways to help the immigrant children and fielding calls from churches and individuals that want to help.

He knows first-hand of the need because many Border Patrol agents worship at his church and others in the community.

“They tell us the stories of kids that are in their care who are traumatized by what they’ve seen or are incredibly impoverished,” Mason told CBN News.

“And we wonder, ‘How are you dealing with that?’ because we know Border Patrol is not designed to be a child care facility – they’re designed to be police officers,” he said.

With the current surge and resulting backlog, Border Patrol agents are detaining kids for as many as 14 days, a condition that human rights activists say is unacceptable.

By law, however, agents cannot quickly return unaccompanied child immigrants from Central America to their home countries. They must screen them as potential trafficking victims or refugees.

That process leaves thousands of kids stranded in Border Patrol stations for days and later in Health and Human Services facilities for possibly months.

“That’s what breaks our hearts,” Mason said. “We know that there’s a need and at this point we have no access to try and care for that need.”

Churches in the Rio Grande Valley are cooperating to minister to adult immigrants and their children who have crossed the border.

After Border Patrol agents initially detain them they release the families at bus stations in border towns like McAllen and Brownsville. With their deportation hearings months away, they are free to go until their hearing date.

At that point, these immigrants are usually in need of food, clothing and sometimes medical care after perilous journeys from their home countries to the border.

Sister Norma Pimentel, executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley, leads the effort.

"We don't foresee this ending anytime very soon," she said.

This week, the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference (NHCLC) has begun a campaign to work with Latin American churches to warn parents not to send their children to the United States.

The Rev. Samuel Rodriguez is president of NHCLC/Conela which represents more than 40,000 Hispanic evangelical churches in the U.S. and 500,000 worldwide.

He warns unaccompanied children here could fall victim to the same drug gangs that threaten them in Central America.

In the meantime, Texas churches are standing by, ready to help those who have come and will come.

"In the future we'll have to figure out what's right and wrong and those kinds of things," Reyes said. "But biblically we're going to love people right now."