



# Taking Jesus to Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria

by Gary Horton, Church Health Strategist, Southwest Region

**F**irst Baptist Church of Damascus (FBD) is following the Lord's command to take the Gospel to Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria (Acts 1:8). They are ministering to the people of Damascus, their community,



Appalachian Trail Days hikers

their neighboring state of Tennessee, the United States, and the world!

Each year, over 20,000 Appalachian Trail hikers from all over the world come through Damascus to celebrate Trail Days. "I used to be judgmental and did not really want to love on people who were different than me," says church member, Linda Austin. "I started asking God to help me see people through His eyes, and He changed my heart." Over 10 years ago, God gave Linda a burden to reach the hikers. With the help of other FBD members, the Appalachian Trail Hiker Ministry was birthed to meet the needs of those hiking the trail. The ministry provides food, basic necessities, a shower unit, medical services (through a team from Alabama), and an Internet café. "Everyone has gone out of their way," says Chris Holter, one of the hikers. "You mention a need, and someone works on it." Loving others is the heart of FBD's ministry. Trail Days, according to Bob Foster, one of the doctors from the medical team, "is a time we can show God's love to hikers." The Appalachian Trail Hiker Ministry gives FBD an opportunity to share the love of Christ with hikers from all over the world.

Another ministry of FBD began about four years ago, when God gave Linda Austin a burden to reach another people group: prisoners. Linda and other FBD church members are now ministering to inmates

in southwest Virginia and northeast Tennessee. In December 2009, over 30 volunteers, myself included, visited the Northeast Correctional Center in Mt. City, TN, to host a unit party. The team fed and gave gifts to over 120 inmates. The chaplain mentioned that one of the units would not have a party due to a cancellation from its host organization. On the bus ride back to Damascus, our team sensed God calling us back to host a party for that unit. Not knowing how the money for the food and gifts would appear, Linda began planning the party. As word of the need went out, God provided, as always. Two weeks later, volunteers hosted the party, where they fed and gave gifts to another 140 inmates. In the past year, FBD has been able to touch prisoners' lives with Christ's love and lead 36 inmates to faith in Him.

FBD's missions involvement extends beyond Trail Days and the prison ministry. Three years ago, the Lord prompted church members to help residents in the community who were struggling to provide for their families at Christmas. This desire gave birth to a Christmas Store for needy families, where every item would be free.

The former Rock School in Damascus, which has been converted into apartments, allowed the church to host the Christmas



Shopping day at the Christmas Store

Store in its old auditorium at no cost. FBD and several other Damascus congregations volunteered labor and donated clothing, used toys, household items, etc. A church from Shelbyville, TN, even sent a truckload of items, and local Boy Scouts collected food. If a family mentioned a certain new toy a child wanted, FBD members tried to meet that need too. When Deb Taylor arrived to open the door for the 2009 Christmas Store, there were already 50 people in line. For three days, members of FBD were able to meet the physical and sometimes spiritual needs of over 400 people.

First Baptist Church of Damascus is committed to the *Acts: 1:8 Challenge*—reaching the world with the Gospel of Christ. Will you join them and make a difference in your neighborhood, state, country, and the world?

## RESOURCE

**■ Websites:**  
[www.sbcv.org/mobilizing](http://www.sbcv.org/mobilizing)  
[www.reachdamascusbfc.org/athikersmin](http://www.reachdamascusbfc.org/athikersmin)

**■ SBCV Contact:**  
 Call 888-234-7716 for details from your region's missionary.

**■ Consider:**  
 Isn't it amazing how God has grown a ministry that meets the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of many—church family, hikers, and visitors alike—from the simple beginning of a bonfire and grilled hotdogs?

