

Texas Baptists join worldwide Tsunami relief response_11005

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By Ken Camp

Managing Editor

Texas Baptist Men volunteers are joining Baptist World Aid and other humanitarian agencies in what many observers have called the largest international disaster relief effort in history, after a series of earthquake-spawned waves struck 12 countries in South Asia and Northeast Africa the day after Christmas.

Texas Baptist Men became involved in the relief effort after David Beckett, a member of Currey Creek Baptist Church in Boerne who is serving as a missionary in Sri Lanka with Gospel for Asia, asked for help.

Texas Baptist Men planned to send 12 volunteers to Sri Lanka to do water purification. The volunteers will take two water purification units with them, along with parts to build eight more once they are on-site.

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TBM also planned to send four 10-member emergency food service teams to South Asia—three to Sri Lanka and one to Thailand—as well as help set up a refugee camp in Sumatra, said TBM Executive Director Leo Smith.

Children’s Emergency Relief International—an agency of Baptist Child & Family Services—has been invited to set up child care centers and help establish foster care programs in Sri Lanka.



An Indian
child
tsunami
survivor
holds on to
a shirt
donated by
a volunteer
organization
in
Cuddalore,
about 112
miles south
of Madras,
India.
(REUTERS
Photo by
Arko Datta)

Gospel for Asia, whose headquarters is in Carrollton, contacted the San Antonio-based family services agency and asked its personnel to set up five child care shelters in eastern Sri Lanka and to help the Sri Lankan government develop foster care programs and train local people to manage them.

Each emergency care center will house up to 1,000 orphaned children. The tsunami victimized about 30,000 people living in the 60-mile stretch along Sri Lanka's eastern coast where the centers will be located.

Baptist Child & Family Services initially is sending several children's home administrators—including Kevin Dinnin, the agency's president—a physician and a psychologist.

Buckner Baptist Benevolences is making its existing inventory of shoes, socks and other materials available to its ministry partners working in South Asia, including the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Baptist World Alliance, said Jeff Jones, operations director for Buckner Orphan Care International.

Buckner is working closely with its partnering organizations to assess needs and determine additional ways to be involved, he noted.

“We are waiting on a few reports in order to best assess what aid needs to be sent,” Jones said. “It is a given that we will be able to respond through clothing and some limited medical supplies. We will post other needs as they become apparent.”

Buckner also is collecting funds on behalf of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Baptist World Aid, the relief arm of the Baptist World Alliance.

“While our focus is not disaster relief ministry, our hearts were too moved by the scenes of destruction and the human suffering to not respond immediately,” said Buckner President Ken Hall. “Collecting funds for our partner ministries that do have disaster relief made the most sense and will let us coordinate efforts to offer aid to children over the long run.”

The Baptist World Alliance has sent a medical and relief team to South Asia through Baptist World Aid and Hungarian Baptist Aid.

Baptist World Aid allocated an initial \$25,000 for relief work. The medical team is using \$110,000 in donated medical supplies from Hungarian Baptist Aid.

Paul Montacute, director of Baptist World Aid, said the international body of Baptists grieves with those whose lives have been affected.

“What a tragedy,” he said. “On behalf of the Baptist World Alliance, I express our concern about the current situation in such a wide area of Asia. Be assured of the thoughts and prayers of the world family of Baptists at this time.”

Montacute particularly noted the response of Baptist World Alliance member bodies and their agencies in the affected region, such as the Thailand Baptist Missionary Fellowship and the Union of Indonesian Baptist Churches.

In Sri Lanka, many Baptists are working closely with the National Christian Evangelical Alliance and LEADS, an independent social service organization. Indian Baptists are working with the Evangelical Fellowship of India Committee on Relief.

In a pastoral letter to Baptists in South Asia, Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Denton Lotz and President Billy Kim—who recently retired as pastor of Suwon Central Baptist Church near Seoul, South Korea, after 45 years—expressed grief and long-term support for victims of the natural disaster.

“Your brothers and sisters around the world are in suffering and pain with you due to the destruction brought about by the tsunami earthquake,” the letter stated.



Baptist health workers help a victim of the tsunami that hit Sri Lanka and other Asian nations.

“During this horrific period when the world is shocked and dazed at the great tragedy that has brought loss of life and suffering to millions, your Baptist brothers and sisters have been praying and working for your relief. Millions of people are continuing to pray for you, and in thousands of worship services worldwide, brothers and sisters are calling upon our gracious God to bring relief and comfort to those who have suffered.”

Lotz and Kim pledged Baptist World Aid would work with Baptist unions and conventions, secular organizations and governments to bring help to people in need, saying, “We will not stop until the job is completed.”

Officials continue surveying the massive human and economic casualties in the region, as casualty figures topped 150,000. Governments have pledged more than \$2 billion to aid victims in the 12 affected countries, with \$350 million coming from the United States. Private donations are pouring in as

well. Former presidents George Bush and Bill Clinton are spearheading a fund-raising effort in the United States.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas initially has set aside more than \$40,000 to help finance relief efforts in South Asia. The BGCT is working in partnership with several entities also focusing on the region, including the Baptist World Alliance, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Global Missions, the Southern Baptist International Mission Board, Texas Baptist Men and North Carolina Baptist Men.

Both the Southern Baptist International Mission Board and Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Global Missions reported their personnel in the region escaped immediate harm, but some families were displaced by flooding.

By Jan. 3, the International Mission Board had approved \$300,000 in project requests from relief workers on the field, with two-thirds of it earmarked for Sumatra and its hard-hit Aceh province. Funds will pay for food, clean water and purification equipment, blankets, tents, medical supplies and body bags.

Through CBF Global Missions field personnel, the Fellowship has disbursed about \$100,000 to the impacted region.

Individuals with ties to Texas Baptist institutions also are involved in the disaster relief effort. Sohani Cooray, a graduate of the Baylor University School of Social Work, was visiting her family in Sri Lanka when the tsunami hit. Cooray, who works in Waco, decided to prolong her stay in South Asia to coordinate the efforts of a group from Antioch Community Church in Waco.

The volunteer team, which includes a nurse and an emergency medical technician, will work with a Methodist in the port city of Galle to provide aid.

WorldconneX, the BGCT-related missions network, has turned the front page of its website—www.worldconnex.org— into a clearinghouse for tsunami response information.

“WorldconneX has identified and contacted credible, verified ministries doing wholistic, gospel-driven relief and development and included links to them on our website,” said network leader Bill Tinsley.

Stan Parks, international liaison for WorldconneX, was scheduled to leave Texas Jan. 7 for a nine-day trip to Indonesia to meet with business leaders, government leaders and Christian leaders. Parks served 10 years as a missionary in Indonesia. He will continue to network with other leaders in Thailand, Sri Lanka, India, the Maldives and Malaysia.

Parks emphasized the greatest needs in the impacted region may be two or three months from now “when most of the world has forgotten these areas, and there is a lot less money and many fewer volunteers, despite the much more expensive and time-consuming task of rebuilding homes, buildings, roads and other infrastructure and of re-economizing—job and business creation—which will be desperately needed.”

For more information, contact WorldconneX at tsunamirelief@worldconnex.org or (214) 421-7999.

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