

# Cross Plains church helps wildfire victims through recovery

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A handwritten sign by fifth and sixth graders at First Baptist Church in Cross Plains is intended to lift the spirits of wildfire victims.

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**By John Hall**

*Texas Baptist Communications*

CROSS PLAINS—Everywhere Shayne Childers turns, he is reminded of the wildfires that devastated his community. Charred fields line the roads. They cry to him from across the street as he picks his son up from school.

Dozens of houses were burned, and two people died in the town.

“Everywhere you drive, everywhere you park ... everywhere you go, you see the remains,” said Childers, associate pastor of First Baptist Church. “It is a constant reminder.”

Childers sees victims of the wildfires daily. Between 60 and 150 people take part in a church-provided lunch for fire victims and individuals helping in the recovery process.

The church “is trying to love these people and meet their needs,” Childers said. He hopes volunteers can let people know God cares for them and will help through a tough time.

The congregation also supplies clothing and food to people in need. Some people have lost nearly all their possessions. Some families have found shelter with relatives and friends. Others have turned hotels into temporary homes.

“They're scattered all over the place,” Childers said.

The need for help is great in the area, but Childers is quick to note that more supplies are not necessary at this point.

Thanks to the generosity of towns near Cross Plains, the church has a gym full of items. He routinely asks congregations to keep the town in their prayers and call back in six months. Other items may be needed then.

Recovery is multi-tiered for an area that lives off its ranching efforts, Childers said. Homes need to be built. The land also needs to recover.

For some time, burnt fields will not produce like they once did. Hay was lost for livestock. It is difficult to estimate the economic impact of the fires.

The recovery process already has started. People are taking inventory of what they have lost and are removing debris. Childers said he is surprised how positive everyone has remained. They are anxious to put their lives back together.

First Baptist Church will be with them throughout the entire process, the minister said. The lunches and distribution of supplies will continue as long as it they are needed.

“It's going to be a lengthy process,” Childers said.

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