

# UMHB students assist FBC New Orleans

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UMHB students don hazmat gear for dirty work in New Orleans.
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**By Carol Woodward**

*University of Mary Hardin-Baylor*

NEW ORLEANS—A Central Texas college minister and 19 student volunteers from the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor spent three days of spring break working to make a difference in the lives of people who lost their homes and possessions to Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath.

Trey Bledsoe, minister to college students at Canyon Creek Baptist Church in Temple and leader of the construction team, characterized as

“unbelievable” the damage in New Orleans’ 9th Ward.



Student volunteers from the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor work in New Orleans’ 9th Ward, cleaning two homes damaged by the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

“It was like a tornado came through or bomb had exploded. Houses were totally destroyed, roofs and/or foundations without houses, cars on top of cars or lodged in what was left of houses, rubble everywhere,” Bledsoe said.

First Baptist Church in New Orleans coordinated the rebuilding efforts. The student focused on cleaning two homes during their three days.

“The students constantly were reminding themselves that no matter what they smelled, felt or saw running across the floor, they were there to serve God. Every swing of a hammer was for God’s glory and a blessing of hope in a place that was hurting beyond anything we had imagined,” Bledsoe said.

Lindsey Harkrider, a UMHB sophomore, said the most meaningful part for her was building new relationships.

“From getting to meet the owners of the two houses we worked on to

talking to two homeless men we met in the park, every relationship that was started was totally ordained by the Lord,” she said. “It was also so amazing to see how our whole group clicked. Most of us did not know one another very well when we left on Friday, but by the time we returned to UMHB on Thursday, I felt as if I had know them for years. It was wonderful to see everyone’s different strengths and how we all used them together to get the job done.”

Bledsoe agreed the venture became an opportunity to build new relationships.

“As a minister to students, any time I lead a mission trip with students, the most meaningful part of the trip is always seeing what God does in and through the students,” he said.

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“I love watching students’ lives change in ways that no one can expect or seeing God affirm his plans in their lives. It is amazing to see preconceived notions and fears melt away into a heart for people and communities that they are not a part of and may never return to.”

Harkrider acknowledged she never had worked so hard, but she found the experience rewarding.

“It was amazing to me that I never felt tired or worn out until it was time to quit or take a break. The Lord gave us so much strength,” she said.

The trip was a time for the students to bring encouragement, hope and God’s grace and mercy to a family of fellow believers, Bledsoe added.

“We helped First Baptist of New Orleans in their mission to be light in a dark time by meeting the overwhelming physical needs of a devastated city,” he said.

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