

At 40 years, no break for Texas Baptist Men

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DALLAS—Forty years of labor ought to entitle a worker to a break. In the Old Testament, even Noah got one. But don't tell that to Texas Baptist Men volunteers. They are nailing a church back together again in Sabine Pass.

Texas Baptist Men, a missions organization affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas, takes no spring break. Instead, its volunteers work to help people who lost their church building to Hurricane Rita.

TBM volunteers are rebuilding the Sabine Pass Christian Fellowship facility—split in half by Hurricane Rita—from its foundation.



Running the drill press at the Texas Baptist Men Builders furniture shop in Lubbock is 93-year-old Ed Smith of Faith Chapel Baptist Church in Brownfield.

Constructing buildings and rebuilding lives is only one TBM ministry. Others include chainsaw teams, chefs on wheels, pilots who airlift supplies, lay evangelists who share the gospel, men who teach boys Christian principles in Royal Ambassadors and disaster relief teams who comfort in critical times.

“These volunteers are not just workers who do (ministry), but men who have a real walk with Christ,” said TBM Executive Director Leo Smith.

Smith, who has served as the organization’s executive director the past four years, has been involved in TBM’s ministries since it began in 1967.

Since then, volunteers have provided millions of hot meals to disaster victims, delivered warm blankets to more than 15,000 people, built new homes and churches for hundreds of people and congregations, offered spiritual counsel to thousands of victims, delivered hundreds of gallons of safe drinking water and comforted nearly 1 million victims.



[Watch Bob Dixon's remarks](#) on TBM's 40th anniversary.

They have coordinated airlifts internationally, delivering medical supplies, diapers, antibiotics and more than 100,000 doses of medicine.

When Delta Flight 191 crashed in Dallas in 1988, TBM's disaster relief unit was one of the first to respond. When terrorists attacked New York City on Sept. 11, 2001, the group's disaster relief workers and chaplains arrived on the scene quickly.

As the organization commemorates its 40th anniversary this year, Smith reminisces about the journey, but he also envisions the future.

With three 18-wheel mobile disaster relief units, including one that can allow workers to prepare more than 40,000 meals a day, Smith believes TBM is better positioned today than ever to reach people in crisis.

TBM's move from the Baptist Building to its own facility in 2000 marked a milestone, he noted. Today, the group sponsors 17 ministries that work together at the Robert E. Dixon Mission Equipping Center. The disaster relief units, feeding units, childcare unit and water purification units, along with other equipment, staff, volunteers, supplies and a logistical command post, are now in one centralized location.

"For 38 years, we patched old trucks and old equipment," Smith said. "But in the past year, God has allowed us to replace every piece with brand-new equipment. God has blessed TBM with half a million dollars worth of equipment to feed in excess of 40,000 meals a day."

Another key event in recent years has been the expansion of the TBM staff by adding a Hispanic consultant and a resource development person who directs raising funds for the organization's ministries.

This year, Smith is calling for a renewed focus on helping churches minister to men, grow them and mentor them. He believes ministries to men in churches are falling by the wayside.

“We’ve got to find ways to help men feel significant—to be spiritual fathers, husbands and church members,” Smith said.

By reaching out to men who may be hurting, TBM leaders and volunteers can help lead them into a heartfelt relationship with God, he added.

“We want to help them walk hand-in-hand with God,” Smith stressed. “That loving relationship with him will, in turn, thrust men into a lifestyle of missions and ministry.”

Hurricane Beulah’s arrival in 1967 in the Rio Grande Valley prompted the “birth of Texas Baptist Siamese twins— disaster relief and River Ministry,” said Bob Dixon, TBM executive director from 1970 to 1998. Dixon recalled he was teaching boys the basics of camping and Christian values when the BGCT state missions director called him to go to the Valley.

Beulah, a powerful Category 5 hurricane, spawned 115 twisters across Texas, caused more than \$1 billion in damages and killed 58 people. TBM volunteers delivered hope, encouragement, food and the gospel.

The response to Beulah was the first Baptist disaster relief effort of its kind in the country. It blazed a trail for future states as Baptists from across the country soon patterned programs after Texas Baptists. When 7,000 people lost their lives in a Mexico City earthquake 22 years ago, TBM volunteers led the multi-state Southern Baptist response. They served 150,000 meals.

Since 1967, TBM volunteers have responded to the call of victims left devastated from disasters throughout Texas, across the United States and—increasingly—around the world.

“If you are faithful over the small things, God gives you greater ministries,” Dixon noted. “That’s what happened with disaster relief.”

TBM’s first international disaster relief mission came in 1973, after an

earthquake rocked Nicaragua. A year later, volunteers took the mobile disaster relief unit to Central America when Hurricane Fifi hit. The group's leaders recall leading several young men to faith in Christ. Volunteers served more than 500,000 meals after an earthquake rocked Los Angeles in 1994.

One of TBM's largest international missions came in 2004 and 2005 after a series of tsunamis hit Sri Lanka. The disaster affected more than 1 million lives.

Rebuilding lives has not always stemmed from tragedy. Through the Retiree Builders ministry, volunteers built the 18,000-square-foot, \$1 million Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary. They also constructed a Hospitality House for families of inmates in 24 hours and then came back later to build a conference center and apartments in Huntsville.

After a tornado ripped through the tiny West Texas town of Saragosa, killing more than 30 people and destroying most of the homes, retiree builders stepped in.

"We built the whole town of Saragosa back over Labor Day weekend," Dixon remembered. "Twenty-three houses were destroyed. Ten people came to know Christ."

Prayers permeate all the group's missions but particularly were important when the Pentagon called in 1991 and asked for blankets for Kurds in Iraq, Dixon recalled. The same year, Texas Baptists became the first evangelical Christians to participate in a disaster relief mission in Iran since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Pointing to the significance of 40 years in the Bible, Smith noted in "every 40-year block of time, there was a preparation for something greater to come... an opportunity. I believe that God has positioned Texas Baptist Men for greater things to come."

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