

North American Baptist plan to work together on disaster relief

February 2, 2008

Posted: 2/01/08

North American Baptist plan to work together on disaster relief

By Steve DeVane

Biblical Recorder

ATLANTA—The 30 Baptist organizations in the North American Baptist Fellowship plan to form a network to coordinate disaster relief efforts.

Terry Raines, disaster relief coordinator for the Baptist General Association of Virginia, announced the initiative Jan. 31. He made the announcement during a special interest session on responding to natural disasters that was part of the Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant.

• [See latest photos](#) and the latest [video clips](#) from the New Baptist Covenant Meeting. [\(And go here to see our complete coverage of the event\).](#)

The Baptist groups in the fellowship, one of the six regional affiliates of the Baptist World Alliance, are meeting this week with the theme “Unity in Christ.”

Organizers met two weeks ago to discuss the formation of the network, and sketch an outline for the network, Raines said. Two representatives from each of the 30 groups will be invited to the next meeting on the effort, he said.

The network will give Baptists a way to help and a way to seek help during disasters, Raines said. During the workshop, panelists discussed how their organizations reach out to people during emergencies.

Millard Fuller, who founded Habitat for Humanity and now heads the Fuller Center for Housing, said people who respond to disasters often give away their help, which is appropriate in when the situation is desperate.

“There are so many other situations where there’s a much better way to do it,” he said.

The Bible teaches it is better to give than receive, and Fuller suggested that those who receive help should be given a way to give back.

Fuller held a small wooden box he called a “greater blessing box.” He said his group asks those who are helped if they’d like to give back. If they agree, the organization asks how long it would take them to repay for the help. If they say five years, the group put 60 envelopes in the box and asks them to send a contribution each month to the Fuller Center. The money is used to help other people, Fuller said.

“We don’t give them a legal obligation,” he said. “We give them a box and the opportunity to pay the money back.”

Fuller urged other groups to adopt similar practices, saying the idea is not copyrighted.

“When the people you help are able, you can give them the opportunity for the greater blessing by giving back,” he said.

Samuel Tolbert, the pastor of Greater Saint Mary Missionary Baptist Church in Lake Charles, La., and general secretary of the National Baptist Convention of America, talked about disaster relief efforts since Hurricane Katrina ravaged the region.

The National Baptist Convention of America and the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Society formed “resurrection centers to help people rise again” in several cities. The centers include a social services worker, a mental health worker, a pastor and programs for children. The facilities

have helped about 15,000 families, Tolbert said. The group also gives people Bibles.

“Many people coming to the centers had not been to church in years,” he said.

Gordon King, the director of The Sharing Way for Canadian Baptist Ministries in Ontario, Canada, focused on hunger. He said poverty and famine are related, noting that about 2.8 billion people in the world live on less than \$2 a day.

“The number of hungry people in the world will increase significantly in the coming decade,” he said.

While many people in the world are hungry, many Americans are overweight or obese. King suggested a distinctive vision of relief efforts based on justice, compassion and faith.

“This is a vision of the church that requires us to act the gospel and not just proclaim it,” he said.

Baptists cannot count on governments to stop hunger, King said. Even so, he said he believes the hunger crisis can be averted.

“I think this lack of government commitment creates a place where Baptists can respond,” he said.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Baptist churches, in Texas, the BGCT, the nation and around the world.