

East Texas volunteers respond to Louisiana flooding

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MORGAN CITY, La.—“Stop,” urged Chaplain Leslie Burch of the Texans on Mission Deep East Texas flood recovery team. “Can everybody stop and pray with me?”

She asked her fellow team members to halt their work as they tore out flooring in the home of Troy and Angel in Morgan City, La.



Texans on Mission's Deep East Texas flood recovery team tear out water-damaged flooring from a home in Morgan City, La. (Texans on Mission Photo / Russ Dilday)

The couple's home had been flooded during heavy rains that hit the Mississippi Delta town the week before as Hurricane Francine landed in southern Louisiana.

“Troy and Angel are talking about accepting Christ, and we need to pray for God’s Spirit,” Burch explained.

It was all she needed to say. The group left their scrapers, shovels and wheelbarrows, gathered in the living room, now an empty space with bare concrete floors, held hands and prayed for the young homeowners and their children.



Members of the Texans on Mission Deep East Texas disaster relief team pray with a couple in Morgan City, La., whose home was damaged by floodwaters caused by Hurricane Francine. (Texans on Mission Photo / Russ Dilday)

The Texans on Mission team was one of two that responded to Francine's aftermath, joining partner groups from several other states to provide flood recovery and tree and debris removal after the violent storm.

Like many Texans on Mission teams, the Francine volunteers represented a mix of churches and backgrounds from throughout southeastern Texas.

Burch, a member of First Baptist Church of Orange, said the team came to "serve the needs" of the flood victims.

Team leader Mike Petigo of First Baptist Church in Nederland explained the team had been assigned to do flood recovery.

"We're taking out sheetrock and disinfecting their homes so that survivors can get ready to put new sheetrock back in," Petigo said.

For Steve Hammer of Covenant Church in Willis, the recovery efforts were about "getting it all cleaned out so these people can get on with their lives.

"We're here today, about a week after the hurricane came through, and it's important," Hammer added. "We're cleaning out houses now, because it gets nastier and nastier and nastier as time goes on."

Pastor on the receiving end of ministry

Homeowners Tracey and Marci Smith were grateful for the team, who removed the lower two feet of their home's sheetrock to ready it for replacement after flood waters seeped in and posed a mold danger.

It was especially meaningful for Tracey Smith, pastor of First Baptist Church of Morgan City, where the combined relief teams camped in Bible study rooms and ate in the fellowship hall.



Texans on Mission volunteers removed flood-damaged drywall

from the home of Pastor Tracey Smith of First Baptist Church in Morgan City, La., and his wife Marci. (Texans on Mission Photo / Russ Dilday)

Smith has been involved in Louisiana Baptist disaster relief in previous hurricane recoveries, but after Francine flooded his home, he found himself on the receiving end of disaster response.

Taking a break from helping the Texas team tear out lower walls and treat for mold, he offered his perspective on the recent storm.

"Well, we've been through this before. We've been through Hurricanes Laura and Delta back in 2020. But we didn't have flooding like this," Smith said.

Smith rode out the flooding in his truck outside his home. Marci Smith said that as the water rose and came closer to their house, Tracey "sat in the truck with the two dogs" near his fishing boat in case he needed to "help our neighbors escape." It was not needed, but he was ready to help.



Texans on Mission volunteers from Deep East Texas pray with Tracey and Marci Smith in Morgan City, La. (Texans on Mission Photo / Russ Dilday)

The Smiths' own home became surrounded by an unbroken sea of water.

"It's just kind of a hopeless feeling not being able to stop or prevent that from happening," Tracey said.

The day after the storm, he said, the couple noticed the water "was migrating more and more throughout the house.

"So, we didn't know to what degree we were going to have to remove the flooring or walls or anything like that," he said. "It pretty much changes your routine and most definitely changes your way of life. You know that it's not going to be back to what you would consider normal anytime soon."

Tracey Smith has responded to other disasters, including Hurricane Ian in 2022 when he worked with Texas volunteers. So, he knew what to expect from the volunteers when they arrived.

"We knew the quality job" they would do, Tracey said. "We knew that they were going to be more than willing to do whatever we needed. And we were just glad to have them. ... This is a good bunch."