

# **Southern Baptists finalize plans for rebuild in Bahamas**

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FREEPORT, Bahamas (BP)—After three days surveying the damage from Hurricane Dorian, an eight-member Southern Baptist team returned to the United States with a keen appreciation of the Bahamian people and a commitment to partner with Baptist churches on the Grand Bahama island to help them rebuild and expand their ministry in the community.

Representatives of Baptist Global Response, Southern Baptist disaster relief, the International Mission Board, and two state Baptist conventions toured the island to scout ways for Southern Baptists to support Baptist churches on the islands.

## **‘Resilient people’**

“The island is recovering quite quickly,” said Shane McGivney, the director of Mississippi Baptist disaster relief. “The Bahamians are an amazing people. They are a very spiritual people. They love the Lord.

“From what I understand, a couple of weeks ago when our team was there, they weren’t quite smiling. They were still in shock. But when we were there this past week, they were smiling and laughing. This is a very resilient people. They understand that their hope is in the Lord, and they are loving on their church families and their communities.”

During the team’s time in the Bahamas, they finalized partnerships between 13 state Baptist conventions and 10 area churches. Several state conventions will work together on some of the most intense projects. Through the partnerships, the state disaster relief teams will help rebuild

the churches and support opportunities to minister in the community.

These partnerships come less than a month after Hurricane Dorian rocked the island with historic devastation. After sustained winds of 185 miles per hour, the most severe hurricane in the island's history killed at least 56 people. Officials are still reporting at least 600 people are missing. Initial reports suggested the hurricane made 70,000 people homeless.

Jeff Palmer, the chief executive officer of Baptist Global Response, wrote in a report after the team's return last week that the availability of local services, food supplies and other goods are returning to normal on the island.

"Some homes and structures can be rebuilt. Others will simply need to be leveled and rebuilt," Palmer wrote. "There is much water damage in many areas that will require specialized cleaning and sanitizing."

Baptist Global Response is leading and coordinating Southern Baptist engagement in the Bahamas following Hurricane Dorian.

## **Plan to rebuild 10 churches**



A Bahamian Baptist church devastated by Hurricane Dorian sits ready for Southern Baptists to return to the island to rebuild it.

Southern Baptist disaster relief teams plan to rebuild 10 local churches damaged by the hurricane. (Photo / Baptist Global Relief)

The disaster relief partnerships will focus on rebuilding 10 damaged Baptist churches with the hope that these congregations can become community hubs as the Grand Bahama island recovers, said Sam Porter, the national director of Southern Baptist disaster relief.

Porter noted the most urgent need communicated to him by Bahamian Baptists was for help in trauma counseling. Many area pastors in particular are facing massive personal and ministry challenges.

Some have lost family members, jobs and churches to Hurricane Dorian. To help these pastors, Porter said Mark Wakefield, the director of Alabama Baptist disaster relief and one of the most experienced trauma chaplains in Southern Baptist life, is making plans to visit the island in the next few weeks. While in the Bahamas, he will counsel pastors and train them in trauma counseling so they can help their congregations.

## **Challenges noted**

Disaster relief faces several challenges as they partner with local churches in the Bahamas.

First, a busy year has taxed the Southern Baptist disaster relief system. Porter notes every day since February, teams have been responding to floods in at least one state.

Even now, Southern Baptist disaster relief is responding to the massive flooding that came with Tropical Storm Imelda in Southeast Texas. Multiple

state disaster relief teams are on alert and headed to the region in the coming weeks, he noted.

Southern Baptists also have disaster relief teams serving on the outer banks of North Carolina, ministering in yet another location impacted by Hurricane Dorian.

“If someone is looking for a mission opportunity, they need to contact their state director of disaster relief,” Porter said. “I promise you they’re looking for people to step in there.”

The rebuilding projects will also be expensive. Teams will need to ship most of their supplies to the island. Volunteers also will need to obtain flights to the island. The fundraising for the projects will come through the partnering state conventions.

Since it will take time before churches in the Bahamas can secure building permits and Southern Baptist disaster relief can get materials onto the island, the first Southern Baptist teams to serve there probably will focus on mold clean-up training in some of the churches. Porter hopes these training opportunities will provide the area churches opportunities to engage their neighbors.