

Baptists mobilize to meet needs after Hurricane Harvey

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HOUSTON—Before most Gulf Coast residents returned to their homes, about 175 Texas Baptist Men disaster relief volunteers already had worked more than 5,500 hours and prepared 30,000-plus meals for first responders and sheltered evacuees.

And as the rain stopped and floodwaters receded, Texas Baptists intensified their efforts to minister to people affected by Hurricane Harvey.

Cooking meals at downtown Houston shelter

About three-dozen TBM disaster relief workers set up a field kitchen outside the George R. Brown Convention Center in downtown Houston Aug. 31, where they prepared meals for evacuees inside the mega-shelter.



Texas Baptist Men disaster relief volunteers prepare meals at the George R. Brown Convention

Center in downtown Houston. The American Red Cross serves the meals to hurricane evacuees who are sheltered there. (Photo / Ken Camp)

“I remember when the Katrina people were here,” said one of the shelter residents, a homeless man who simply identified himself as James. “I never thought I would be.”

Gene Pepiton, director of missions for Wichita Archer Clay Baptist Association, had served with a TBM crew at the George R. Brown Convention Center after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, when people from New Orleans were evacuated to Houston. He returned to the same site after Harvey with a vanload of TBM volunteers from his association Aug. 30.

Before his crew left the TBM Dixon Missions Equipping Center in Dallas, he reminded the volunteers of the difference they could make as they showed Christ’s love by providing nourishing hot meals people who had experienced trauma.

“For a time, we can take their minds of some of their worst hurt,” Pepiton said.

He recalled incidents after Katrina when volunteers in downtown Houston faced what seemed to be insurmountable challenges. But God opened doors of opportunity when his people ceased to rely on their own resources and depended on him, he noted.

“When we can’t do it, God shows up,” he said.

‘Gospel in motion’

Dwain Carter, deputy director of TBM disaster relief, encouraged the volunteer to look for every occasion to demonstrate the love of God, both through their actions and through words of Christian witness.



Dwain Carter, deputy director of Texas Baptist Men disaster relief, gives instructions to volunteers before they deploy from Dallas to Houston. (Photo / Ken Camp)

“We are the gospel in motion,” Carter said. “We are the hands and feet of Christ.”

Additional food-service teams worked in Victoria, Katy and in support of the Texas Task Force 1 search-and-rescue team.

Six days after the hurricane first made landfall in South Texas, TBM crew—together with Southern Baptist disaster relief workers from Arkansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Missouri, Illinois and South Carolina—had washed nearly 600 loads of laundry and provided access to more than 800 showers in support of shelters and first responders.

Shower and laundry mobile units were deployed to shelters in Angleton, La Grange, Victoria, Katy and Portland, as well as multiple Houston-area sites and with Texas Task Force 1.

Damage assessors, asset protection personnel, chainsaw crews, heavy equipment operators and volunteers who distributed boxes to residents to help them reclaim and store scattering belongings worked in Victoria.

TBM childcare workers ministered to children and volunteer chaplains offered spiritual counsel at the shelter set up at the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center in Dallas.

Victim Relief Ministries—an interdenominational ministry that grew out of TBM's restorative justice ministry program—also sent chaplains, crisis responders and comfort dog teams to the downtown Dallas shelter and to Refugio County in South Texas.

TBM established mobile command posts in Victoria and Katy, and the group deployed flood recovery units to La Grange and Katy.

'A marathon, not a sprint'

Thousands of additional TBM volunteers remained on alert, waiting deployment—not only to meet immediate needs, but also to provide care over the long term.



Ray Gann, on-site coordinator for the Texas Baptist Men disaster relief volunteers at Houston's George R. Brown Convention Center, consults with an American Red Cross official. (Photo / Ken Camp)

"This is a marathon, not a sprint," said Mickey Lenamon, TBM executive director. "We will still be responding, whether it's a month from now or a year from now."

To contribute financially to TBM disaster relief, click [here](#) or send a check designated "disaster relief" to Texas Baptist Men, 5351 Catron, Dallas 75227.

More than one-fourth of the congregations affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas—more than 1,200 churches and missions—are located in the region affected by Hurricane Harvey, BGCT Executive Director David Hardage noted.

"While we are saddened by the unprecedented destruction, we are encouraged by the good work of first responders, volunteers, and our churches and partners," Hardage said.

Making adjustments

Leaders of Bounce—Texas Baptists’ student disaster recovery program—already are making plans to send volunteer teams to the Gulf Coast during spring break and summer 2018, he added.

Spring break mission trips to Houston are scheduled March 7-10 and March 11-14. Summer mission trips are scheduled June 11-16, June 18-23, June 25-30, July 9-14 and July 16-21 at various locations in South Texas and Southeast Texas.

The hurricane hit the Texas Gulf Coast just a few weeks before many Texas Baptist churches collect the annual [Mary Hill Davis Offering for Texas Missions](#). In addition to providing funds for programs such as Bounce, the Woman’s Missionary Union of Texas board of directors voted to dedicate every dollar received over the \$3.6 million goal to long-term disaster recovery.

“We anticipate working with Texas Baptist staff, TBM and directors of missions to know where and how funds will best be used,” said Carolyn Porterfield, interim executive director of Texas WMU.

Texas WMU also deployed its own laundry unit to a shelter at Latham Springs Baptist Camp and Retreat Center that housed about 400 evacuees from the Gulf Coast.

Houston churches care for neighbors

Union Baptist Association sustained water damage, but personnel worked remotely to receive reports as Houston-area churches assessed damage, said Tom Billings, executive director of the association.

Several area churches opened their facilities as shelters and many others

provided meals and others services to their members and neighbors.



Volunteers from Woodridge Baptist Church of Kingwood in Houston mop up water and clear debris from a flooded home in their neighborhood. (Photo /Ken Camp)

Woodridge Baptist Church of Kingwood, in northeast Houston, lost electrical power but did not sustain any serious damage to its campus. However, the homes of many member families were flooded.

By Aug. 31, members had prepared between 1,500 and 2,000 meals volunteers delivered to affected households, said Matthew Dillingham, executive pastor.

The church received donated cleaning supplies, diapers and other items, and it opened its facility to enable families to eat on-site and pick up the supplies they needed.

Volunteer teams from the congregation fanned out into the neighborhoods surrounding the church campus, helping residents remove water-damaged furniture, rip out soaked flooring and mop up standing water from their homes.

“There are a lot of people who are working really hard,” Dillingham said.
“As people

are working, they are meeting neighbors they never would get to meet otherwise, and new relationships are developing.”



Houston resident Davie Vanderwalt marks the water damage line on the interior wall of his home. (Photo / Ken Camp)

One crew from Woodridge joined other volunteers in helping Davie and Bobbie Vanderwalt clear out damaged goods from their home, which took on about three feet of water.

After the area flooded, Vanderwalt talked on the phone with a good friend who is a member at Woodridge. He told his friend, who was traveling in Nevada, about the damage he and his family sustained.

“He told me, ‘We’ll get a team out from our church to help you,’” Vanderwalt said.

‘In God’s timing’

Buckner International is donating about 12,000 pairs of shoes collected through its Shoes for Orphan Souls initiative to survivors of Hurricane Harvey.

“What a blessing it is for Buckner to be able to donate these shoes. In God’s timing, we had just finished a shoe drive in Houston and have 10,000 pairs of shoes at a partner church there,” said Albert Reyes, president and chief executive officer of Buckner International.

The shoes collected in partnership with South Main Baptist Church in Houston will be delivered directly to Houston families.

“That’s great news. But the downside of it is that this donation is now leaving us desperately short on shoes for needy children in other places,” Reyes said.

To make a donation to help replenish Buckner’s supply of shoes for vulnerable children, click [here](#).

Buckner also has initiated a collection of personal hygiene items for families affected by Hurricane Harvey. Requested items include soap, body wash, shampoo and hair conditioner, toothbrushes and toothpaste, razors, deodorant, laundry detergent and fabric softener, diapers and other baby care supplies.

Other needs include packages of underwear in all sizes, pots and pans, paper towels, paper plates, backpacks and school supplies for elementary and middle school students.

One way to donate is by buying items at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and directing the company to ship the purchase directly to the Buckner Center for Humanitarian Aid at 5405 Shoe Dr., Mesquite, TX 75149.

