

# **Despite Harvey's horrors, survivors experience God's grace**

September 20, 2017

HOUSTON—Survivors of Hurricane Harvey have experienced God's grace in the aftermath of one of the worst natural disasters in U.S. history.

"Harvey was one big, bad storm, but so many good things have come out of it," said Panha Mey, pastor of Cambodian Baptist Church of Houston.

The congregation has ministered to Cambodian refugees in nearby Rosharon, where the hurricane flooded nearly the entire community.

"We've seen neighbors talking to neighbors, churches working with churches," Mey said. "That's the redeeming work of Christ."

## **Angels followed after storm's devilish blow**



Ana Garcia, community ministries

leader at Templo Bautista de South Houston, and Joyce Deffern from First Baptist Church in Abilene work together on Hurricane Harvey recovery. (Photo courtesy of Ana Garcia)

Ana Garcia, a community ministries leader at Templo Bautista de South Houston, knows Harvey dealt a devilish blow to the Texas Gulf Coast. But she's sure she's seen angels following in his path.

Cambodian Baptist and Templo Bautista, both located near Hobby Airport southeast of downtown Houston, have helped with Cooperative Baptist Fellowship-sponsored recovery projects conducted by volunteers from upstate churches.

Members from Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, DaySpring Baptist Church in Waco, First Baptist Church in Austin and Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas conducted a variety of disaster recovery chores the week of Sept. 10. Then volunteers from First Baptist Church in Abilene followed on their heels.

Templo Bautista and its members felt Harvey's wrath, Garcia reported.

"The church suffered between five and six inches of water in our buildings," she said. "We had just passed all the inspections to operate a daycare—after a year and a half—and it opened two weeks before Harvey hit. We had to shut it down.

"We also had 23 families from our congregation who were affected in varying degrees. All had to muck-out their homes."

# Upstate volunteers tackle dirty jobs

The congregation's first priority was to help those families, and they also wanted to begin repairing the church buildings, Garcia said. So, they were delighted when Baptist sisters and brothers from other parts of the state arrived to help.



Volunteers scrape up and remove soaked flooring from a flood-damaged building. (Photo / Courtesy of Dan Freemyer)

David Deoluseo, pastor of Templo Bautista, and Butch Green, a CBF field personnel based in Houston, surveyed the damage. Green, who is coordinating CBF recovery work in the Houston area, initially dispatched the volunteers to help pull out carpets, remove content and cut out sheetrock from several flooded homes. Then they set out to do the same work inside the church facility, she said.

The volunteers' efforts supported the work of exhausted Templo Bautista members, whose energy had been depleted by attempting to save both homes and church buildings, Garcia said.

What did the presence of volunteer workers mean? "Angels," she said.

“They are angels.

“The first time (church members worked on the church), we had 44 people from our own church. The next time, we had 22. Some of these people had even higher water in their homes than we had in our church. So, to have someone come from another town, another city and just put hands to the work—to say, ‘Tell me where I can work and what I can do,’—it was like answered prayers.”

Cambodian Baptist Church members also appreciated assistance from their upstate sisters and brothers, Mey added. He learned about severe flooding experienced by a community of Cambodian refugee farmers in rural Rosharon, south of Houston, halfway to the coast.

“We went to visit the people in the community, and one of them took us around,” he said. “That’s when we realized the magnitude of the problem. The whole community got hit. About 95 percent got water in their homes.”

The flooding dealt a devastating blow to the farmers, who raise water spinach, a common Asian vegetable, as a cash crop, he reported.

## Giving shelter



Baptist volunteers provide tents to

offer temporary shelter to families who are rebuilding their homes after Hurricane Harvey. (Photo / Courtesy of Dan Freemyer)

Even though some of the farm families' homes had been condemned, they continued to live in them, fearful of loss if they abandoned their property. So, their new Baptist friends provided tents for temporary—or, unfortunately, longer-term—housing.

Members of Cambodian Baptist Church and the upstate volunteers pitched tents in the displaced families' yards.

The group of a dozen volunteers from Broadway, DaySpring, First Austin and Park Cities “ended up being ideal size for the work that Butch had lined up,” noted Dan Freemyer, director of community ministries at Broadway and organizer of the trip. It also was an ideal inaugural group for Baptist Temple, an Anglo congregation in The Heights area of Houston, which provided volunteer lodging in its facilities.

And the trip provided a blessing unrelated to Harvey and disaster relief, Freemyer said.

“We had folks from Broadway, DaySpring, FBC Austin, Park Cities and Baptist Temple working, praying, eating, drinking, lodging and talking together,” he explained. “While our congregations represent varied perspectives and positions on issues in Baptist life which we were able to discuss openly, we ended the trip talking mostly about how we can partner together for ministry projects.

“We cooperated successfully in ministry with folks in tremendous need, joyfully celebrated our Baptist identities, and enjoyed engaging fellowship in spite of—or maybe even because of—our differences.”

CBF response to Hurricane Harvey will continue for months. To volunteer to help—or to record a need—visit the Harvey response website: <http://www.cbf.net/harveyvolunteer/>.