

# **Gulf Coast Texas Baptists hammered by Harvey**

August 29, 2017

Many Texas Baptists along the Gulf Coast who normally gather for worship on Sunday had only two choices Aug. 27—pray while they sheltered in place or pray as they evacuated their homes in areas with rising floodwaters.

Hurricane Harvey made landfall Aug. 25 near Rockport as a Category 4 storm. Then it began a slow crawl northeast toward Houston, dumping up to four feet of rain in some places.

Union Baptist Association sustained water damage, and its offices will be closed and events cancelled until remediation can be completed, according to a statement posted on the associational [website](#).

## **HBU cancels classes**

Houston Baptist University cancelled all classes and activities through Labor Day, with plans to resume classes Sept. 5.

“This decision is made in order to allow our faculty, students and staff, as well as their families, enough time to address any concerns at home before beginning the school year,” an announcement on the university [website](#) said.

“We ask that you keep HBU and the greater Houston community in your thoughts and prayers. At this time, we are not planning to evacuate any residents on campus.”

## **Drop-off and distribution site**

With close to 300,000 residents without utilities and many areas isolated due to submerged roads, reports about damage to church facilities remain sketchy.

Brandon Webb, pastor of Westbury Baptist Church in Houston, reported on Westbury's [website](#) the church had not taken on water, and it still had electricity. So, the church building would serve as a drop-off and distribution point for food, water, toiletries, blankets and other supplies to assist people whose homes flooded.

## **Churches provide shelter**

Some churches in areas that escaped serious damaged opened their facilities to serve as shelters for people displaced by Hurricane Harvey.

In the Houston area, they included at least two Baptist General Convention of Texas-affiliated congregations, First Baptist Church in Highlands and Golden Acres Baptist Church in Pasadena, and two congregations uniquely aligned with the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, First Baptist Church in Tomball and Calvary Baptist Church in Cleveland.

"Highlands has one of the highest, if not the highest, elevations in Harris County," said Tim Edwards, pastor of First Baptist Church.

The church building did not sustain damage, but Edwards noted he and others continued to watch the nearby San Jacinto River carefully.

"I've been here since 1996, and even after (Hurricane) Ike hit, I never have seen the water like this," Edwards said.

First Baptist began providing shelter at its facility Aug. 27. The church

housed 65 overnight guests Aug. 28 from Highlands, as well as Baytown, Channelview and other nearby communities, Edwards said.

## **‘Church being church’**

The number of people in the shelter fluctuated greatly from one hour to the next, he said, as new people arrived and others left to return to their homes or move in with relatives.

Church members are preparing meals for guests in the shelter, and people from the community are providing blankets, groceries and other needed items, he said.

“It’s the church being church, loving Jesus and loving people,” he said. “And we’ve just been overwhelmed by the support we’ve received from our community.”

## **Opening homes to ‘almost-strangers’**

Taylor Sandlin, pastor of Sugar Land Baptist Church, southwest of Houston, estimates one-third to one-half of his church members were evacuated from their homes, and others sheltered in place with floodwaters threatening.

Many families opened their homes to provide shelter to people they barely knew, he noted in a post on Facebook. Sandlin and his family—who evacuated their neighborhood—are in Katy with “friends of friends.”

“What a gift to be taken in by almost-strangers just because we are in need,” he said. “There is lots of trouble in the world, but also much grace.”

In an Aug. 29 Facebook post, Steve Wells, pastor of South Main Baptist in Houston, reported his home in Meyerland was spared from flooding.

“Today the plan is: pray for the church; try to answer the volume of email and texts from the congregation and from people who love us; pull carpet from the home of a church member down the street; (and)—if streets allow—go to George R. Brown Convention Center to pray with those who are displaced,” he wrote.