

Helpers become the helped in West

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WEST (ABP)—It's hard being helped when you're used to being the helper. Just ask the folks at [First Baptist Church in West](#).



Phil Immicke, associate pastor at FBC West, speaks with “Loving West” volunteers. (Jeff Brumley/ABPnews) Church member Presley Landrum, 16, said she and her youth group friends are accustomed to volunteering on mission trips and other ministry projects. But that changed April 17 when the local fertilizer plant exploded, killing 15, injuring 200 and destroying around 150 homes—including Landrum’s.

Now she and most of the rest of the city have been the target of prayer vigils, fundraisers and volunteer campaigns.

“It’s weird,” Landrum said. “It’s different, because I’m used to going to other people’s homes and helping them.”

Wrestling with that acceptance has become even tougher as close to 600 volunteers descended on the small town for "[Loving West](#)," a weeklong rebuilding project sponsored by the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Participants were everywhere in the city mowing lawns, clearing away rubble and searching debris for victims' valuables.

Phil Immicke, associate pastor at First Baptist Church in West, noted one of the hardest things to accept was turning over the volunteer coordinator role he had instantly assumed after the explosion. That role is now being handled by the BGCT.



Shelby Wines, Madison Tyra and Presley Landrum worship at FBC West after a day spent delivering water to volunteers. (Jeff Brumley/ABPnews) "That had been a way for me to cope" with the disaster, said Immicke, who also serves as a police officer in nearby Waco. West residents as a whole have been "overwhelmed by the help."

Not that First Baptist and others in West were sitting idly by while volunteers did all the work. Since the night of the blast, the church has been a recovery operations center and has dedicated its own money and

personnel to the demolition and rebuilding effort, said Pastor John Crowder.

And its members were heavily involved in “Loving West,” working alongside volunteers from around the state, he said.

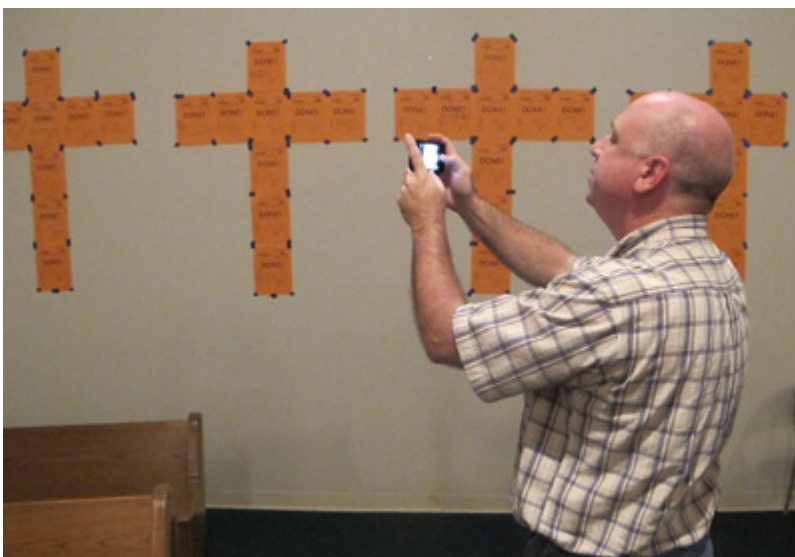
But letting others in takes a lot of determination to accept help, Crowder said, even though his home was destroyed in the blast and his property now contains only a slab.

“I’m trying to learn that’s how God works—through other people,” Crowder said.

But Landrum and her friends at First Baptist hadn’t stopped much to dwell on those difficulties. They spent the first couple of days during the “Loving West” initiative crisscrossing the streets of West delivering water and meals to the out-of-towners toiling in the Central Texas heat and humidity.

They’re also motivated by their experience the night of the explosion, when they were at church worshipping with other youth.

“The whole building shook and the lights went out,” said Madison Tyra, 16.



Pastor John Crowder of

First Baptist Church in West snaps photos of completed work orders posted on the sanctuary wall. (Jeff Brumley/ABPnews)A few minutes later, Landrum got a call from her mother that their house had been destroyed.

“Seeing her (Landrum) cry and stuff, you could tell something really bad had happened,” Tyra said.

Landrum and her family have been living in two campers at a local camp ground ever since and likely won’t see a new house built until next year.

But she didn’t seem bothered by that as she and friends Shelby Wines, 16, and Allyson Hamilton, 12, delivered water.

“We gave out 600 waters yesterday,” she said.

The task of visiting the ravaged neighborhoods is taking its toll, however.

“Who’s house is that?” Landrum said, pointing to a house pancaked in the blast.

“I don’t know,” Wines replied. “There’s too many.”