

# Small Baptist association finds renewed purpose

November 25, 2024

Several hundred people in North Carolina, who continue to deal with the aftereffects of Hurricane Helene, will be warmer this Thanksgiving due to the generosity of a small Baptist association in Texas.

Keith Blanton, pastor of Cedar Shores Baptist Church in Morgan and new director of missions for Bosque Baptist Association, and Greg Beard of Grace of Giving left from the Baptist General Convention of Texas annual meeting in Waco, Nov. 10-12, to deliver heaters to two churches in the mountains of far west North Carolina.



Greg Beard, Grace of Giving president, loading the heaters in the trailer.  
(Courtesy Photo)

Beard is a member of Blanton's church and president of [Grace of Giving](#), a

ministry that has delivered needed food and supplies to partners in the Rio Grande Valley since 2004.

When the churches in the association expressed interest in providing support to people affected by Hurricane Helene, Beard had connections in North Carolina who helped identify lack of heating as a serious concern heading into colder weather.

Propane tanks were available in North Carolina in the area the association planned to serve, but the contact noted they did not have access to heaters.

Beard pinpointed a specific type of propane heater that is safe to use indoors and affordable. The association would need to purchase the heaters and hoses to adapt them to the propane tanks for \$150 per unit.

The association put out a call for heaters, allowing three to four weeks to collect the contributions before delivery. Blanton set a goal of 30 units for the association, believing it to be a reasonable goal for a small association comprised of small rural churches. With Grace of Giving contributions, they hoped to provide 100 heaters in all.

## **God had other plans**

But the churches responded quickly and generously, providing enough funds for 118 heaters. Grace of Giving collected enough for 104 heaters.

“I know God is in this because every little piece has just fallen into place,” Blanton noted.

Because the initial hoses they purchased didn't work when they came in, the hoses were exchanged for hoses that were \$12 cheaper, reducing the cost per unit to \$148. And a donor had offered to close the gap if there was a minimal shortage on the full cost of one unit.

In total, the association collected enough funds to purchase 240 heaters and hoses, the exact maximum number of heaters the trailer could hold. Additionally, the gooseneck of the trailer can fit exactly the number of milk crates needed to hold and transport the individually packaged hoses.



Keith Blanton loads the final heater into the trailer.  
(Screengrab)

One hundred heaters were delivered to Plumtree Church in Plumtree, N.C., where Ryan Bridgeo is pastor. Fifty of these heaters will be shared with a local Baptist church, Roaring Creek Baptist Church.

One hundred and forty heaters were to be delivered to Matthew Toney, a deacon at The Ark of Western North Carolina, a nondenominational church in Spruce Pine, N.C.

But Blanton explained that while packing the trailer they discovered they

could fit 10 more heaters. A last-minute donation to fill the trailer came through, bringing the Spruce Pine donation total up to 150 heaters and hoses.

The heaters will be distributed to those in the greatest need in the local tri-county area, including the local Hispanic community, Blanton noted.

## **At-risk association**

This ministry might not have happened just a couple of years earlier.

On the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic, the dwindling association considered disbanding.

Bosque Baptist Association, comprised of 19 churches from several small towns in Bosque County, near Lake Whitney, particularly was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, Keith Blanton director of missions and pastor of Cedar Shores Baptist Church in Morgan, explained.

The rural churches sorted out how to adjust to the constraints the pandemic brought in the way each church felt worked best for the particular needs of its congregation.

The association cancelled its first meeting of 2020 in response to the COVID threat. Then in April of that year, the director of missions resigned to take a pastoral role in one of the churches in the association, Blanton said.

The association attempted to fill the open role, but with limited interest from applicants, struggled to find the right person for the job.

The association continued to hold annual meetings, with officers agreeing to continue their leadership during the interim. But in October of 2022, at the Bosque Association annual meeting, the future of the organization was

up for discussion, Blanton explained.

The small group who came to the meeting considered options to “keep going along like we were at the time. One was to perhaps join with another association. Another was to just disband completely.”

The association decided to form a committee to explore ways to revitalize the association and encourage churches to become more active as an association again. Blanton said he wasn’t on that three-person committee but asked to meet with them, because he had some ideas.

The upcoming holidays delayed the start of the new committee. But one committee member, who is a music minister in the association, went ahead and planned for February 2023 an annual music festival the association holds.

Turn out for the festival was good, with 10 of the churches in the association participating, Blanton noted.

The church where the festival was held can hold 210 people, and it was packed, he explained. “So many of our churches came.”

People were singing and worshiping. “It was clear to everyone that was in there that the Holy Spirit was present. And it was really a good time of worship and fellowship between the people in our association,” Blanton said.

When he got up the next day at 5 a.m. to drive his school bus, Blanton said he was still “pumped” from the uplifting associational meeting the night before. As he was driving his bus, he thought to himself, “This association is not dead.”



The Grace of Giving trailer packed with heaters, ready to go to North Carolina. (Courtesy Photo)

“We thought as recently as October that we’re on life support, and it’s just not functioning,” he added. “[But] the people are here. The people are enthusiastic. The people can get excited. If only somebody would step up to lead them, we could do some really great things in ministry.”

## **When “somebody” is you**

Blanton recalled how he’d raised his girls not to be the person who walks past a piece of trash on the ground and thinks, “Somebody ought to pick that up.” But instead, be the person who stops to pick up the litter or do whatever it is that needs doing.

He said it occurred to him: “You are somebody. If you volunteer to lead the association, maybe we could do some really great things in ministry.”

So, Blanton called the secretary of the association and asked to meet with the committee to discuss his willingness to be considered for the director of missions position.

He told the committee that director of missions was not something he'd ever aspired to be and assured the committee if they did not sense God was calling him to that role, "you're not going to hurt my feelings."

But the committee members all sensed God was leading that direction and Blanton added DOM to his pastor and bus driver titles in June of 2023.

He began the work with reestablishing connections between the association and the pastors of churches in the association.

In early 2024, the association hosted more opportunities to connect, with missions- and revitalization-focused workshops, than they'd held in a long time.

In the summer, the association worked together on a mission trip to Brownsville to help a church plant. Fourteen people participated and made many beneficial contacts for the church plant.

Several families the Bosque Association team met in canvassing were willing to host Bible studies in their homes and to join in the work of planting the new church.