

Student volunteers help with Harvey recovery

October 3, 2017

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HOUSTON-When they walked into the house, one thing was clear to the volunteers from the University of Houston's Baptist Student Ministry: The homeowners were overwhelmed to the point of paralysis.

"There were dead fish in the house," said Shannon Rutherford, BSM director at the University of Houston. "The drywall hadn't been taken down. No progress had been made yet, even though it had been several days since the storm.

'We can do this together'

"We asked the homeowners how they were doing. They just stared and looked like, 'I don't know.' So we told them: 'We can do this together. We can take this out, and there is a plan to start over.'"

More than two-dozen students from the University of Houston have been involved in BSM recovery efforts, going to multiple houses and churches to pull out furniture, remove drywall and help homeowners sort through their belongings.

Since Aug. 25 when Hurricane Harvey hit, more than 700 students in 37 teams from 24 Baptist Student Ministries have worked on relief projects in Corpus Christi, Houston, Beaumont and the surrounding areas.

University of Houston students helped one congregation with a predominantly senior membership who couldn't perform heavy labor,

Rutherford said. The students' efforts saved that church because its building was at risk of being destroyed by mold, he added.

Rutherford was moved by the sweetness the students demonstrated as they worked, showing grace as they quietly and patiently helped residents sort through their possessions or remove the walls from children's rooms.

"It brings a little bit of life to that family," she said.

'The church has stepped up'

Watching the way Christians came together in this time of crisis also had a great impact on Rutherford.

"Someone on radio said that 84 percent of the recovery work has been done by churches or religious groups," she said. "It's amazing to think that the church has out-served FEMA or the Red Cross. The church has stepped up. Even that first week there were church groups coming by, asking: 'Do you need something to eat? Do you need water?' Maybe not everyone could pull out sheetrock, but there were even children who said, 'We have a candy bar for you,' because everybody can do something."



Aggies from the Baptist Student Ministry at Texas A&M University

take a break after working on a home in Kingwood damaged by Hurricane Harvey. (Photo courtesy of Joel Bratcher)

The BSM from Texas A&M University has served in Houston, Kingwood and La Grange, Director Joel Bratcher said.

“Working with students is awesome because they will mobilize really quickly,” Bratcher said. “They are adventurous, and they can go do something for a day and have the energy to do it.”

One project in Kingwood involved helping the family of two of their BSM students, he said.

“We also helped some of their neighbors and had a team provide food for 90 workers and families all in the same day,” he said.

The crew also worked in the Memorial area of Houston, where the destruction was so severe it made Bratcher recall Hurricane Katrina.

“What really struck me there is that everything these people have is sitting in their front lawn. The things of this world really are temporary,” he said, adding that being the body of Christ is crucial in times like these. “When people are at their lowest, what a great place to try to love and show help and concern. It’s hard work, but it’s a blessing to be able to help.

“We helped this one guy who wasn’t a believer, and he was really touched by the work the college students did. He said he couldn’t believe they were volunteering when they could be doing something else. It would have taken his family a week to do what a team of students did in a day. He was curious about our faith. You never know how the Lord will use all that.”