

TBM engaged in myriad relief ministries in West

April 26, 2013

WEST, Texas—The mammoth fertilizer plant explosion that rocked this Central Texas village demanded a range of relief endeavors.

Eight days after the blast rocked West—on the afternoon when President Barack Obama helped lead a memorial service for the fallen first responders in nearby Waco—Texas Baptist Men operated, participated in or stood ready to carry out eight distinct relief activities.

Stephanie Midkiff, director of communications for TBM, listed those ventures:

- **Volunteers distributed packing boxes—5,123 to date.**

“When the area opened and residents could visit their homes and assess the damage, they needed boxes,” Midkiff explained.



TBM Chaplain Rachel Schieck counsels with someone from the West community. (Photos: Stephanie Midkiff, TBM director of communications) The demand

cleaned out the initial supply, which has been restocked.

- **TBM chaplains walked West's shaken neighborhoods**, providing listening ears and visible demonstrations of Jesus' care and concern.

In the first week, the chaplains participated in 439 spiritual conversations, she said.

- **TBM set up and staffs two facilities where residents can take hot showers and wash their laundry.**

Much of the community does not have running water, and other sections operate under orders to boil water before using it. So, in the First Baptist Church parking lot, a milk truck filled with 6,000 gallons of water stands connected to a shower/laundry truck.



There is currently no water available in West. TBM's shower and laundry unit was hooked up to a milk truck filled with 6,000 gallons of water. Neighborhoods may not have running water for another three weeks, Midkiff said.

- **A specialty feeding unit** based in San Angelo started cooking meals Wednesday evening, April 24, as soon as TBM received a request for a mobile kitchen.

- **A TBM childcare team** works from a reception center, where residents can request assistance. The facility sits beside a playground, and workers care for children while their parents work out the logistics of putting their lives back together.

- **TBM has begun processing orders for help from homeowners** whose task of putting their houses and property in order is too much to do alone.



TBM volunteers helping community members with their laundry. Early requests ask volunteers to help clean up glass, remove drywall and pick up fallen ceilings, Midkiff said. In coming days and weeks, other requests for restoration endeavors will follow.

- **The city's liaison asked TBM volunteers to recover records** from a demolished retirement home adjacent to the fertilizer plant, she reported. But that building is too unstable and dangerous, so recovery must wait.

- **Families of the first responder victims reached the memorial service thanks to Christian volunteers** who donated a day to making life easier for people who lost precious loved ones.

R.L. and Elaine Barnard of First Baptist Church in Duncanville participated

in that project, each driving a van for victims' families.

The van drivers met at the Catholic church in West, then picked up the families at their homes and drove them to the campus of Texas State Technical College in Waco. From there, the families rode together on buses to the memorial service at Baylor University.

R.L. Barnard accompanied the family of a victim who operated a business in West that repairs and maintains fire trucks, he said.

This family's loved one heard about the fertilizer-plant fire and quickly made his way to the site, Barnard said.

"He and a friend went to lend support, in case one of the trucks broke down," Barnard said. "Right when they got there, the plant blew up."

A little more than a week later, and after the Waco service generated international attention, the family was coping, he said.

"They seemed to be doing well," he noted. "The dad ... lost his son, and it hurt him pretty good. But they understand others lost more. They lost a son and a brother, but another family lost two sons.

"They are strong people, but it hit them hard."

Editor's Note: The last bullet point was edited to add additional information on April 26.