

TBM offers help, hope and healing in Southeast Texas

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MAURICEVILLE—Two years after Hurricane Harvey, heavy rains still make Bruce Smith nervous.

The most recent barrage of water pellets on Sept. 19 was so intense, he began pacing between rooms of his home in Mauriceville at 3 a.m. Eventually, he moved out to his workshop, where he started moving his belongings to higher shelves.

‘We’ve got to get out of here’

Shortly after repositioning the last item, he and his wife Renee escaped before Tropical Depression Imelda unleashed a deluge. Water filled the floor of their home, ruining their flooring, carpet, furniture, baseboards and drywall, among other things.

“I went and got my wife and said, ‘We’ve got to get out of here,’” Smith said as tears welled up in his eyes.

The Smiths’ home in Orange County is one of more than 14,000 devastated by Imelda. Although it wasn’t as large as Hurricane Harvey, the tropical depression pelted the region with as much as 42 inches of rain, flooding homes of residents who had just finished rebuilding after Harvey and impacting houses that Harvey didn’t reach.

Flooding caused by Imelda affected about 25 member families of First Baptist Church in Nederland “to varying degrees,” [Pastor Jason Burden](#) said.

“Some were the same homes affected by Harvey, but they got an inch or two of water this time, whereas last time it was a foot or more,” Burden said, adding the flooding was far worse in outlying rural areas.

Five people died as a result of the flood, and authorities performed hundreds of rescue operations that saved multitudes.

TBM volunteers on the scene quickly



TBM volunteers provided fresh fruit and hot meals to first responders in Southeast Texas. (TBM Photo / John Hall)

Even before the rain stopped falling, [Texas Baptist Men](#) volunteers were preparing and serving 800 meals a day to first responders and victims of the storm at a convention center in Orange.

Conversation accompanied every meal served as the volunteers helped people express what they'd experienced and asked to pray for them. Almost

everyone took the volunteers up on the offer. Several individuals came to faith in Christ.

“In the darkest days of our lives, all of us want to know that someone cares,” said Dwain Carter, director of [TBM disaster relief](#). “We care, and as Christians we represent a God who cares about them deeply as well. Many times, we are a physical reminder of how much God truly does love each and every one of us.”

In the days after the storm, TBM’s efforts mushroomed to include a kitchen in Nederland capable of feeding up to 15,000 meals a day for the community. First Baptist Church in Nederland made its facility available to TBM, and the church will continue to house volunteer teams in the days ahead, Burden noted.

“We’ve kind of turned the building into Hotel First Baptist for all the relief workers coming in,” he said.

Mud-out crews go to work



TBM disaster relief volunteers remove water-damaged drywall from the home of Bruce and Renee Smith in Mauriceville. (TBM Photo /

John Hall)

A mud-out team of local volunteers began cleaning out the Smiths' home in Mauriceville a few days after the storm. By lunch of the first day, they had removed all the affected drywall, flooring and the furniture the couple hadn't yet removed.

The work is difficult and—in the hot, humid Southeast Texas weather—exhausting.

In the first moments of beginning their work, streams of sweat started running down volunteers' faces. Even with short breaks, the perspiration was incessant.

The team continued unhindered. In a few hours, the TBM crew accomplished what would have taken the Smiths days to accomplish. For older people throughout the region, teams do what residents cannot do on their own.

“Make no mistake, clearing out a home after a flood is incredibly hard work,” Carter said. “It requires long hours and grueling effort.”



TBM disaster relief volunteers pull remaining nails after removing damaged drywall from the home of

Bruce and Renee Smith in Mauriceville. (TBM Photo /John Hall)

“By helping people with this effort, teams are jump-starting the recovery process for each home. When a team leaves a house, it is ready for reconstruction.”

In the days to come, more TBM mud out teams as well as partners from Alabama, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri and Tennessee will descend across Southeast Texas and prepare hundreds of homes for reconstruction. The process will be lengthy, but TBM is committed to it, Carter said.

“God has blessed us immensely,” he said. “We want to be a blessing to others by providing help, hope and healing. Whether we’re serving a warm meal or removing a piece of sheetrock, I pray that God guides our words and actions to do just that.”

‘It’s such a blessing’

TBM’s impact on the Smiths is undeniable, Bruce said. Their presence is encouraging. Their work is extremely helpful. Their spirit is incredible.

“It’s amazing the amount of people will come and help you. It’s the wonderful part of this right here—the people will come out here and help, work their rear ends off. They’re here for one reason: To help us out. It’s such a blessing,” Smith said.

“It’s just so heartwarming to see them and what they do. This is what Christianity is all about to me. I’m so thankful for family and people like you who come and help us out.”

TBM disaster relief ministries are made possible by gifts from individuals

and churches. All gifts designated for disaster relief through TBM are used for disaster relief ministry. To contribute financially, send a check designated "disaster relief" to Texas Baptist Men, 5351 Catron, Dallas, TX 75227, call (214) 275-1116 or visit TBMtx.org/donate.

With additional reporting by Managing Editor Ken Camp.