

TBM team offers compassion care to children in lava's path

December 4, 2014

PAHOA, Hawaii—A [Texas Baptist Men](#) crisis response team journeyed to Hawaii's Big Island to provide what they call "compassion care"—what some others term "psychological first aid"—to children and families in the expected path of a lava flow from the Kilauea volcano.



Members of a Texas Baptist Men volunteer team who traveled to Hawaii to provide crisis response to children in the expected path of a lava flow are (left to right) Henrietta Gentry, Tracy Barber, Barbara Henderson and Karen McMath. They work with Karl Ragan, disaster relief coordinator for the Big Island. (TBM PHOTO) Tracy Barber from [First Baptist Church in Farmersville](#), Barbara Henderson from [First Baptist Church in Sachse](#), Karen McMath from [Central Baptist Church in Carthage](#) and Henrietta Gentry, TBM volunteer chaplain coordinator from [First Baptist Church in Vidor](#), served eight days at the invitation of the [Hawaii Pacific Baptist Convention](#). They followed a similar Mississippi Baptist team.

All four women hold specialized certification from the [National](#)

[Organization for Victim Assistance](#) or Critical Incident Stress Management. Barber and Henderson served with a similar crisis response team in American Samoa after a tsunami hit.

“The children in Samoa and the children in Hawaii were on opposite sides of loss,” Barber said. “In Samoa, they were dealing with what they already had lost—homes and family members. In Hawaii, they were worried about what they were going to lose.”

The Kilauea volcano has erupted continuously for three decades. In late June, lava began flowing northeast toward Pahoa, threatening to cut the town in half and burning everything in its path. Less than a week before the TBM team arrived Nov. 16, the lava destroyed a home on the outskirts of Pahoa.



Henrietta Gentry, a member of First Baptist Church in Vidor and chaplain coordinator for Texas Baptist Men disaster relief, talks with a new Christian in Pahoa, Hawaii. (TBM PHOTO) “Many families already had packed boxes, getting ready for evacuation. Kids left for school each morning wondering, ‘Will I be able to

come home after school?” Barber said.

Children and their families continue to struggle with the “prolonged crisis,” she said, recognizing the lava inevitably will flow somewhere in their direction, but living with uncertainty about exactly where or when it will happen.

“They are living with uncertainty, wondering what is going to happen and when it’s going to happen. Waiting is one of the hardest things to do,” McMath said.

The TBM team originally planned to make presentations in school classrooms or conduct workshops for teachers to help them recognize warning signs of emotional distress among students. However, when the lava flow stalled outside Pahoā—potentially changing course—school officials cancelled the presentations.

Information packets and teddy bears

Instead, the team focused on Puna Baptist Church and its surrounding area. Volunteers distributed informational packets and teddy bears imprinted with “Jesus Loves You” to participants at a weekly community assembly in which public safety and Civil Defense Agency officials provide updates on the lava flow’s progress. They also walked through the neighborhood around the church, offering direct ministry to families.

“We ministered to anybody the Lord laid in our laps,” Henderson said.

Because the projected lava flow would have separated many students from the schools they normally attend, those schools were closed and their pupils transferred to other schools closer to their homes.

While moving to another school can be disruptive for children at any age, it particularly can be traumatic for teenagers whose social lives revolve

around athletics and cheerleader squads, Barber observed.

“For some high school students, that meant moving to a rival school,” she noted.

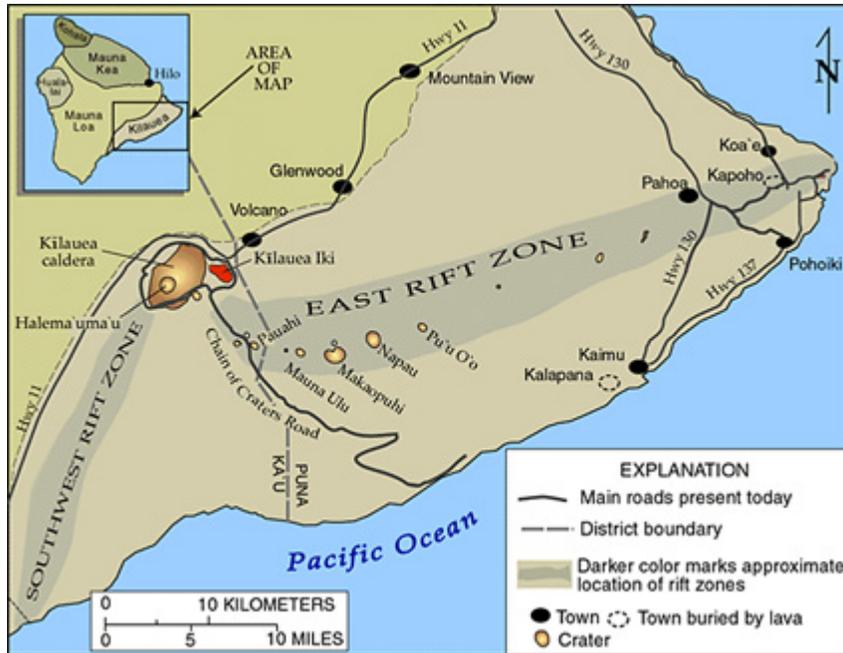
For one youth group, it also involved moving to a different church. Pahoa Christian Mission Church, a Filipino mission of Hilo Baptist Church, had to pack all its furniture and supplies, relocating to its sponsor church. The TBM team spent an evening ministering to the teenagers from the mission.

‘Hard on the youth’

“It’s hard on the youth,” Barber said. “First they left their school. Then they left their church.”

Henderson recalled one family who relocated because their home was in the originally projected path of the lava flow.

“They moved into a different area, and now that’s where there’s a new outbreak” of lava, she said. “They don’t know what’s going to happen. And if mom and dad don’t know what to expect, how can the children know?”



The TBM team also rendered unexpected assistance to [Puna Baptist Church](#) when its pastor, Alan Tamashiro, had to leave the Big Island to attend a family funeral. The team offered prayer and comfort to Tamashiro and his family, and they provided them

peace of mind about being away from their church for a few days.

“We were able to fill in at the church while their family went to another island,” Henderson said.

In Tamashiro’s absence, the team led the church’s meal ministry for homeless people and represented the church at an interdenominational pastors’ meeting, where they provided information about how churches could minister more effectively to children and their families in times of crisis.

“The Lord had laid on my heart that we needed to minister to the ministers,” Gentry said. “They are under tremendous stress as they minister to members who are in danger of losing their own homes—if their own homes are not affected.”

In addition to making the presentation to the ministers they originally had planned for public schools, the team also offered direct crisis intervention for the caregiving pastors.

They realize they are not alone

“We started the conversation so they could tell their own stories,” she said. “Once one starts sharing, the process really starts. They realize they are not alone in what they are feeling and experiencing.”

In spite of initial disappointment about not being able to serve in the schools, team members noted satisfaction in the way God used them.

“It was all about being in the right place at the right time for the right reason,” Henderson said. “God’s plans weren’t what we had in mind, but we were there to minister to the people he put in our path—not necessarily the ones we planned.”