

Texas Baptist chaplains offer solace in the wake of Fort Hood tragedy

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FORT HOOD—In the wake of tragedy at a mammoth Central Texas military post, Texas Baptists are helping people find comfort in Christ. Four chaplains endorsed by the Baptist General Convention of Texas are ministering directly to victims of the Nov. 5 shooting at Fort Hood that left 13 dead and 29 wounded.

Lt. Col. Jon Tidball, retired deputy installation chaplain, has been ministering alongside a currently enlisted Texas Baptist chaplain in the intensive care unit where victims are being treated.

Another Baptist chaplain's brigade sustained injuries and casualties, and he continues to care for the families that have been affected.

A fourth Texas Baptist chaplain also is working with families who have been affected by making arrangements.

Bobby Smith, director of chaplaincy relations for Texas Baptists, said chaplains are seeking to help people emotionally and spiritually, working long hours and taking on extra duties to provide needed ministry. Chaplains are helping people work through their hurts and pains and are also responding to larger questions about life.

"When adversity hits, people always turn to their faith for comfort, but along with comfort there are always questions about good and evil," he said.

“Chaplains are not only having to meet the emotional needs of soldiers and their families, they are dealing with bigger questions of good and evil.”

Serving in the wake of the shooting is weighing on personnel physically and emotionally, Tidball acknowledged.

“It seems like everyone is really exhausted because not only of the volume of care and the immediacy of care, ... but because it’s our own,” he said.

The shootings have shaken the military post at its foundation, according to the retired chaplain. The military is based on trust —trusting people to do what they say, trusting people to act honorably and trusting people to be there for each other, he noted. To have one of their own violate that trust is forcing soldiers and the families to be more guarded.

“This is their safe haven,” Tidball said of Fort Hood. “This is their castle. They never expected someone to pillage their castle. This is where their families are supposed to be safe.”

Chaplains are helping military families deal with that reality, Smith said. They are there to help people sort through their feelings and put things back together in a cohesive worldview.

“They’re all focused on making sure ministry is meeting the needs of everyone involved —not just for the soldiers and families involved, but for all the soldiers on post,” he said. “The soldiers, chaplains and families of Fort Hood and the surrounding areas continue to need our prayers.”

On Nov. 8, First Baptist Church in Killeen held a communitywide prayer service. More than 500 people, including Gov. Rick Perry, attended the service.

Pastor Randy Wallace said although no one in First Baptist Church was directly related to any of the victims, people there have been affected. One

woman saw the alleged gunman, Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan, every week. Another person was to go clean out Hasan's office this week.

The service allowed people to begin to open up about how they were feeling in the wake of the shootings and presented an opportunity to point people to the hope that Christ offers, Wallace said.

"It was a sober assembly, yet it was Christ based," he said. "Knowing we have a foundation, we know we're down, but we're not out."