

Texas Baptists minister in wake of Uvalde school shooting

May 25, 2022

Texas Baptists are responding following a mass shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, where 19 students and two adults were killed by a gunman May 24.

Joe Aguilar, Texas Baptists area representative for the Rio Grande Valley, was meeting with church leaders nearby and responded to the call to provide pastoral care following the shooting.

He was onsite Tuesday evening and prayed with members of law enforcement outside the school building.

“They went through a lot,” Aguilar said.

People from the community gathered outside the school awaiting information from officials who still were processing the scene.

“It’s a small town. Everybody knows everybody,” Aguilar said. “They are going to need a lot of help.”

Pastoral care in a specialized setting

Aguilar worked with Department of Public Safety Chaplain Mario Samaniego to coordinate trained chaplains from around the area and to provide comfort to families and officials. He explained that in times of tragedy, it is essential that appropriately trained chaplains are available to provide the care people will need.

“You want to make sure the people that are providing care are trained,

because we want to give the best help, the best assistance, to these families who are in their worst part of life. And not just anybody is prepared for something like this,” Aguilar explained.

As chaplains provided specialized care to law enforcement and immediate family members, local pastors sat with extended family members, teachers and school counselors and prayed with them. Local pastors provided a familiarity and a comfort, Aguilar explained.

“They are the familiar faces. So, the pastors there can be that voice of comfort,” Aguilar said. “They will be there long after everyone else leaves.”

Already on-site were Tony Gruben, pastor of Baptist Temple Church in Uvalde; Neftali Barboza, pastor of Iglesia Bautista Nueva Jerico Uvalde; and Sonny Garza, pastor of Primera Iglesia Bautista San Diego and a Texas Baptist Men chaplain, among others.

Bobby Smith, director of Texas Baptists Chaplaincy Relations, confirmed chaplains from the San Antonio area with special training in trauma and disaster spiritual care were on standby and awaiting instructions.

He stressed that in a situation like this, it is important to work through the proper channels to provide the help most needed.

TBM chaplains among those responding

May 25, pastors and chaplains continued to arrive to minister to those in need. Among them were Bobby Contreras, pastor of Alamo Heights in San Antonio and vice chair of the Texas Baptists Executive Board, and additional chaplains from TBM.

[TBM chaplains](#) are specially trained to minister in the aftermath of

disasters. Typically, they serve after tornadoes, hurricanes and other natural disasters, but TBM chaplains have served after other situations such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

“Our chaplains will offer a shoulder to cry on, an ear to listen, an encouraging word and an offer of prayer,” TBM executive director/CEO Lenamon said. “They serve as a reminder to the community that people care about them and God cares about them.”

David Hardage, Texas Baptists executive director, reached out to pastors and associational leaders in the aftermath of the shooting and offered his full support. In a statement Tuesday evening, he called for Texas Baptists to pray for those impacted and offered added help in the days ahead.

“Our Texas Baptists family joins many others in praying for the families of those whose loved ones were senselessly killed in today’s Uvalde school shooting. We stand ready to help in any way that’s needed,” he said.

Additional response opportunities will be made available at txb.org.