

Texas Baptists offer helping hand after Dolly

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As people in the Rio Grande Valley try to piece their lives together after Hurricane Dolly blew them apart, Texas Baptists are there with a helping hand and a word of hope.

Many neighborhoods in the Rio Grande Valley were submerged. Now mosquitoes are plaguing residents. (PHOTO/Courtesy of Ricardo Brambilia)

In the wake of the Category 2 hurricane, Texas Baptists are executing a multi-pronged approach to meeting physical, emotional and spiritual needs in the area.

Five Texas Baptist Men feeding teams are providing meals, including a TBM/Baptist Child & Family Services unit offering assistance for storm victims with special needs in Port Isabel. Eight other TBM units also are ministering throughout the region. The teams have provided nearly 200,000 meals.

Relief officials continually identify new pockets of need, reported Gary Smith, TBM's volunteer disaster relief coordinator. All TBM recovery teams are on alert.

"This disaster has been as much a challenge as the Rita and Katrina responses," Smith said. "Because of the diminished magnitude, people have not sensed the need to respond. The needs of the region," Jorge Zapata, Buckner director, helps a child with his lunch. Zapata and other Buckner colonia program coordinators have been distributing aid and supplies to families whose homes have been flooded in the region.

people are as urgent as they were in Rita and Katrina. Texas Baptist Men is in the Valley offering a cold cup of water in Jesus' name."

Baptist Child & Family Services deployed 70 people to the storm-soaked region. They set up a mobile medical unit and supported two shelters, and were the first relief group to set up ministry in Port Isabel.

Dexton Shores, director of ministry development for Buckner in Mexico and along the border, reported Buckner colonia program staff have been a critical resource for the Red Cross in directing them to affected areas. On July 29, an estimated 17,400 hot meals were served to families in Los Indios, Laureles, LaSara, Monte Alto, San Carlos, Progreso, Santa Maria, Edinburg and Monte Cristo.

A child receives several meals for her family at an aid center in the Rio Grande Valley. Many families have been reported trapped in the colonias, unable to get out for basic food, water and hygiene products.

"We need prayer for our staff right now," Shores said. "Not only are they physically exhausted, giving more than 100 percent, but they are seeing so many hurting families with such need and little hope for assistance. It's an emotional drain."

In San Carlos, where the hurricane hit the hardest, mosquitoes have taken over. Babies are covered in mosquito bites, and people are covered in boils from being in the water all day, said Dora Zamarippa, at the Texas A&M-supported community center in San Carlos. Dead fish, snakes and frogs line the streets following the water's recession.

"People are losing hope," she said. "They're losing their faith. We need someone to come here and encourage them. They feel like they have

nothing to believe in anymore.”

Buckner is working with the Red Cross, Salvation Army, Texas Baptist Men and the military to feed families and provide much-needed humanitarian aid, including bug repellent, in this community.



The sanctuary of First Baptist Church in Raymondville was trashed by Hurricane Dolly. (photo courtesy of the [imlivingoutloud](#) blog by Kathy Carlton Willis)

Baptist General Convention of Texas staff members have been working with Rio Grande Valley Baptist Association staff to see if any churches were damaged by the storm. The BGCT will provide financial assistance to some families affected by the storm.

First Baptist Church in Raymondville suffered significant damage, with the storm peeling back part of the congregation’s roof and allowing rain to

soak the sanctuary. The church's carpet, pews and sound system were soaked. A stained-glass window was broken.

Despite the damage, the church worshipped together the Sunday following the storm's arrival.

"It was very humbling to see the amount of damage our church sustained because of the hurricane, but our congregation believes that this is an opportunity God has given us to show how strong our faith is in him to take care of his church," deacon Chairman Terry Buse said.

"We know that it will take awhile to fix all the damage, but we are continuing to have worship services, and we want this to be our testimony that when trials come, we will trust in God for his blessings. I don't believe it is an accident that our pastor has been preaching a series about people in the Bible who were fearless. During the next few months, our people will definitely have to trust in God and face the future without fear."

When possible, many hurricane victims took refuge in relatives' homes, decreasing the need for shelters, BCFS officials said. People in homes without electricity regularly dropped by the shelters for food, however.

"Every disaster is different," said Kevin Dinnin, president of BCFS. "At Katrina, it was like a tidal wave while here it was dispersed. But the constant is the need to work through the natural confusion in communication and organization that results when disaster hits."

"Most of our people worked 20-hour days the first 24 hours, but we got things into shape and we helped hurting families and children. That makes it all worthwhile."

To financially support these disaster relief efforts, visit www.bcfs.net,

www.bgct.org, www.buckner.org or www.texasbaptistmen.org.

Craig Bird and Jenny Pope contributed to this article.