

# **Texas Baptists serve neighbors hit hard by winter storm**

February 19, 2021

As Texans struggled with bitter cold, prolonged power outages, burst pipes and water-boil mandates, Texas Baptists reached out to neighbors in need.

When the winter storm dropped temperatures to the single digits and dumped record snowfall across the state, churches that still had utilities opened their facilities as shelters and warming stations.

## **Providing a warm welcome**

Like many churches, First Baptist in Temple cancelled in-person worship services on Feb. 14, offering an online alternative. But two days later, the church opened its doors as a warming center and shelter.

“Some on our staff still have no power and water, like many in our community,” Evan Duncan, the church’s teaching and communications pastor, wrote in a Feb. 18 email. “Last week, we partnered with another church to prep their warming center, but as things worsened, we knew we needed more placed throughout our community.”

For those who needed shelter from the cold but were unable to navigate treacherous roads, First Baptist in Temple offered free rides to the nearest warming center.

Vista Community Church, another Texas Baptist congregation in Temple, partnered with local assisted living facilities to house residents in its church facility.

About 35 miles to the north, Highland Baptist Church in Waco posted a

[Facebook](#) notice Feb. 15: “Highland will be a warming center from this evening (Monday) at 6 p.m. until 6 a.m. on Thursday morning. If anyone needs a place to come and rest, warm up or recharge your phones, our doors are open the next 60 hours to serve others.”

The church asked members to volunteer for three-hour shifts throughout the week, offering snacks and a warm welcome to people seeking shelter.

In downtown San Antonio, First Baptist Church opened its facility as a temporary winter shelter for unhoused people who normally live on the city’s streets and as a warming center for anyone who needed it.

## **Offering hospitality**

Some Texas Baptists who had electricity posted open invitations on social media, saying their homes were available to any friends or neighbors who needed a hot meal or a warm place to rest.

Grateful individuals around the state posted “thank you” notices on Facebook to Texas Baptists who opened their homes to families who were without power or whose houses were damaged by burst water pipes.

“Our pastor and his family hosted our kiddos at their home today,” one deacon at a Garland church wrote on social media, adding he and his wife also enjoyed a hot meal at the pastor’s home.

The deacon and his family were without power 54 hours, and their home sustained serious water damage from burst pipes, but he wrote, “We are well provided for. God’s taking care of us.”

# **‘Thankful to find relief from the cold’**

In Dallas, Buckner International opened its Family Hope Center at Bachman Lake as a warming center, providing residents of the surrounding neighborhood respite from the cold.



Local residents find warmth and shelter at the Buckner Family Hope Center at Bachman Lake. (Buckner Photo)

“It has been a hard year for the families in our community,” said Ricardo Brambila, director of the Family Hope Center. “They come into the warming center anxious. They keep their heads up, but they have sadness in their hearts. They’re so thankful to find relief from the cold.”

At mid-week, about two-thirds of the families the center normally serves were without power. The center made its warming station available to anyone in the community who needed relief from the cold and a place to recharge cell phones. The Texas Rangers Baseball Foundation provided funds to enable the center to offer food to people who were seeking shelter.

“We are all in this together,” Brambila said. “This is our community, and we

want to be a good neighbor. Families are hurting, especially children. When the families are here, we hope they see the compassion and love we have for them. We want them to leave with hope.”

## Caring for senior adults

In Houston, Tallowood Baptist Church delivered 115 cases of water to senior adults at Buckner Parkway Place after local officials issued a boil-water mandate. Church members scattered throughout the city purchasing cases of water for the senior living community.



Volunteers from Tallowood Baptist Church in Houston deliver bottled water to the Buckner Parkway Place senior living community. (Buckner Photo)

Parkway Place already had a 700-gallon emergency reserve of bottled water on hand before the winter storm. Workers at the senior living community distributed the available water to more than 220 residents on

Feb. 16 and 17, but Parkway Place eagerly accepted the extra water from Tallowood in light of the uncertain duration of the water-boil order.

Abraham Mathew, executive director of Parkway Place, praised Tallowood—as well as Gateway Church, a nondenominational congregation that provided residents 100 blankets—for “their selflessness and dedication to supporting the seniors in our community.”

“While we feel confident in the resources we had on-site already, knowing that kind people are thinking about us and want to ensure our well-being during this difficult time has been uplifting for the residents and associates in our community.”

Churches throughout the state reported flooding and damage to their facilities due to burst pipes. Pastor Joseph Fields of New Beginnings Church in Lewisville posted a video on [Facebook](#) showing water from a broken pipe spraying across the lobby of the church’s new facility, along with the message: “By God’s grace, we will be stronger after this ordeal is over.”

Even as temperatures began to creep above the freezing mark, some churches cancelled in-person worship services on Feb. 21—partly due to uncertainty regarding the conditions in their buildings and partly in response to calls for energy conservation.

## **TBM at work around the state**

Texas Baptist Men deployed a shower and laundry unit to Cedar Hill, where 700 residents were without water due to broken pipes. At the request of city officials, TBM also provided a large generator.



Disaster Relief Director David Wells. “Every city, every region of Texas is being affected. We are seeking to provide help, hope and healing as quickly as possible.”

Across the state, TBM placed its regional shower and laundry units, flood recovery crews and emergency food-service teams on standby to meet needs in their areas.

“People are hurting,” Wells said. “They’re tired. They’re overwhelmed by the situation. We are mobilizing volunteers to meet their needs, help them and lift their spirits.”

To support TBM disaster relief financially, give online at [TBMTX.org/donate](https://TBMTX.org/donate) or mail a check to Texas Baptist Men, 5351 Catron Drive, Dallas 75227.

*Includes reporting by Aimee Freston of Buckner and John Hall of TBM.*