

What now for West, Texas?

April 28, 2013

The outpouring of sympathy and solidarity for West, Texas, has been immense since a fertilizer plant explosion killed 15 - including 12 first-responders - on April 17. [Thursday's memorial](#) in nearby Waco underscored that by drawing thousands, including the Texas governor and President Barack Obama.



Volunteer counselors from Texas Baptist Men helped talk residents through their shock and grief. (PHOTO: TBM) "I think it was the best way to honor all these deceased firefighters," said Duane Henry, a retired assistant chief with the Conroe, Texas, Fire Department, who attended the service. "It was a very impressive ceremony."

But what, now?

Meeting the challenge

The answer to that question is already being answered in words and action. The president, a local preacher and many others in between say a combination of government and religious muscle will meet the challenge of

long-term emotional and physical recovery ahead.

“We will be there even after the cameras leave,” Obama said during the memorial held at Baylor University. “Your country will be ready to help you rebuild.”

Faith-based groups have made similar pledges - some of them even as they conduct ongoing support in and around West.

Texas Baptist Men

[Texas Baptist Men](#) have recently added mobile shower and laundry units to the feeding, counseling and chaplaincy operations they’ve been conducting since hours after the deadly blast. Terry Henderson, TBM’s disaster-relief director, said its volunteers also are helping place tarps on roofs of damaged-but-salvageable homes to prevent rain damage.



A home in West completely destroyed by the blast. (PHOTO:TBM)But that’s just a beginning, he said.

[Local media reports](#) project total damage to exceed \$100 million, and say that nearly 150 homes were damaged - many of them beyond repair.

Rebuilding the community

Officials with other groups, including the Texas and national [Cooperative Baptist Fellowship](#), are standing by to hear from local ministries about what the long-term needs will be. Henderson said the mid- and long-term is when that kind of wider support will be needed.

“This will be a couple-year project to rebuild this community,” he said. “It could be a five-year project.”

Local residents also realize they are in for a long-term healing process - and yet say they are feeling blessed.

First Baptist Church in West

“Things are going well - especially emotionally and spiritually,” said John Crowder, pastor of [First Baptist Church of West](#). The church sustained superficial damage in the blast, but enough to prevent its congregation from using the sanctuary on Sunday, April 21. Plus officials had the neighborhood surrounding the church cordoned off. So they worshiped in a field, instead.

Now that the neighborhood has been reopened, First Baptist members are looking forward to Sunday, April 28, because they’ve been cleared to re-enter their building, Crowder said. Parking is expected to be a challenge, however, because TBM disaster-relief crews have taken over most of the church’s parking lot with a water tanker, a first-aid station and a kitchen unit. [Southern Baptists of Texas](#) have also set up operations there.



TBM Point Men Bill Holmes and Tex Phipps with the HEB mobile kitchen in West. (PHOTO:TBM)“So, parking is going to be a problem,” Crowder. “But we’re going to celebrate that problem because so many people are here helping us.”

Crowder offered some suggestions for how to help the church and community:

— **Churches, groups and individuals** interested in helping with long-term recovery may contact Baptist General Convention of Texas disaster recovery coordinator Marla Bearden at (214) 537-7358 and marla.bearden@texasbaptists.org.

— **The congregation has established a disaster-relief fund** to help members and other West residents with expenses related to disaster recovery. To contribute, designate checks to “Disaster Relief” to First Baptist Church, 501 N. Marable, West, TX 76691.

— **Contribute to the church fund to send its youth to summer youth camps** - an expense their parents can no longer afford. Send checks to the church designated “youth camps.”

— **Keep praying.** “When the TV cameras go away, that is when we’ll face the hardest work, and people can forget to pray,” Crowder said. “We’d ask folks to remind each other to pray for us, even after the media leaves.”

— *With reporting by Daniel Wallace*