

# **Texans on Mission volunteers deliver aid kits in Jamaica**

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After Hurricane Melissa ravaged Jamaica, Texans on Mission deployed an initial task force to support local partners on the ground as they look to find their way through the destruction to restore and rebuild.

They discovered evidence of the powerful storm across the island—damaged roofs and homes, flooded roads and piles in the streets containing families' belongings and other debris.

As part of the Texans on Mission Emergency Response Team, volunteers Melanie and Robert Howington began working closely with churches in Jamaica.

Their team visited three churches near Montego Bay to meet with pastors, provide immediate aid to families and serve as a listening ear to those in need.

"Every Jamaican we've met has been very kind and gracious to us," he said.

The initial response team was "not seeing very many relief groups," he added.

## **Assembled and distributed aid kits**

The Texans on Mission team scoured local stores to create 250 aid kits in canvas bags, full of food and hygiene necessities. But putting the kits together was no easy feat, as store shelves were quickly becoming bare.

Volunteers distributed the kits to churches to disperse among those in their

community.



Melanie Howington visited with Nadine and Madine, sisters living in the Montego Bay area. The women not only are trying to piece together life following Hurricane Melissa, but also honor their grandmother who recently died. (Texans on Mission Photo)

While visiting these churches to drop off kits, the Texans on Mission team had the chance to spend time with Jamaicans facing life after the storm.

Melanie Howington visited with Nadine and Madine, sisters living in the Montego Bay area.

The women not only are trying to piece together life following Hurricane Melissa, but also honor their grandmother who recently died.

While her death was not related to the hurricane, its timing makes it hard to grapple with all the tragedy at once, she noted.

"Nadine was in the church we were visiting to ask the pastor to please let her have her grandmother's funeral there. It was her church home." Melanie said. "But the pastor told her it's just too damaged."

The church has water damage, broken windows and roof damage, making it unsafe to host a service.

"I reminded Nadine: 'You are the church. You lost a building, you didn't lose the church. So, wherever you go, have your church to have your service,'" Melanie Howington said.

"She had such a sweet spirit, but was facing a lot of tragedy all at once."

The Texans on Mission team was able to distribute aid kits to these two women and offer a glimpse of hope in a challenging time.

## **Hearing stories of people who needed to talk**

Keisha, a proud mother and grandmother, was sitting quietly in a damaged church. Melanie Howington saw her and knew she needed someone to hear her story.

When Hurricane Melissa rushed into Jamaica, Keisha was sitting outside. She knew the storm was coming, but was enjoying the beautiful breeze during a season that's typically hot and humid. She was home with her children and grandchildren.

"But then she said it turned into a not-so-beautiful breeze," Melanie Howington said. "The windows started shaking, things started flying around. She was trying to hold her things down so she wouldn't lose them—putting her body weight on them."

Her 2-year-old grandson was outside with her when a window flew past them, and then a tree flew by and struck him in the back. While the hit could've been life-threatening, a doctor examined her grandson and found him healthy.

Even so, Keisha mourned the loss of her home.

"It took years to get it, and in one minute, it's gone," she said.

Entire homes and livelihoods in the Montego Bay area washed away with nothing but silt and receding waters left behind. Not only will it take time to rebuild, but it will take time to heal.

The volunteer team is continuing to assess needs in the storm's aftermath and Texans on Mission continues to develop response strategies in the Caribbean island nation.

"Based on the few people I've been able to talk to, they're all just still in crisis mode. They're still reeling from it [the storm]," Melanie Howington said.

"The prayer need for them is just that they'd feel God's presence, know God is there and that they're not alone. God is walking through this with them."