

# **Voices: Uvalde has specific needs: Eight ways to help**

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The horrific tragedy in Uvalde is unlike most disasters. Usually, when a disaster occurs, we know how to respond. We send money or gift cards. We deploy teams of trained volunteers, like the Texas Baptist Men. Perhaps we even go to the affected community and volunteer our time in service.

This disaster is different, though, and many are unsure how we can respond. We are used to cleaning up and repairing damage after floods, fires, tornadoes and hurricanes, but in Uvalde there is virtually no property damage.

In most disasters, we move quickly to provide for the immediate needs of people who have suffered material losses. In Uvalde, people did not lose their homes. So, in most cases, they still have the same access they always had to food, clothing and shelter.

Even finances are different this time. Due to the nature of the events, state and federal governments are providing relief much more quickly and directly than we usually see in disasters. So, the need for an immediate influx of cash and gift cards may not be as urgent as it is after a hurricane or an explosion. Also, people all over the country already have made many generous donations.

Yet, we want to help. What can we do? My answer is not an easy one, because it might feel inadequate. My answer does not provide for the personal satisfaction that comes from seeing the direct results of our efforts.

# Prayer needs

The community of Uvalde has different needs than we are used to seeing. The needs of this tragedy are more emotional and spiritual than material. Therefore, our responses should be mainly emotional and spiritual.

Their pain will last for years, and many survivors will struggle with various degrees of post-traumatic stress. What they need from us is encouragement, support and qualified counseling.

They need our prayers. So often, when we try to help, prayer is a given; it's just assumed. So, instead, we focus on the "hands-on" work and the physical donations with a gentle reminder to pray as we give and serve. This time, prayer cannot be added to other activities or just assumed. It is the greatest way we can help the people of Uvalde.

When disaster strikes a community, it is not uncommon to see the local pastors take leadership in guiding their community to available resources and helping their people get through the difficult times.

In Uvalde, the role of the pastors is paramount. They are the people best equipped to help meet the emotional and spiritual needs of their community. And since those are the greatest needs in this disaster, the local pastors will carry some heavy burdens.

I recently had the privilege of meeting with some of those pastors in Uvalde, and they are doing well, but they need our prayers and our support.

## Meeting emotional and spiritual needs

Focusing on emotional needs instead of financial ones, and spiritual needs instead of physical ones will call for some creativity on our part. Below are

a few ways we can help. I hope these spark your imagination and lead to more ideas about meeting the greatest needs of the people of Uvalde.

1. In your prayer closet and in your small groups, pray for all the families who lost loved ones and the hundreds of other people otherwise affected by the shooting. Pray for all the people currently helping them, and pray help will continue to come as long as it is needed.

2. When your church gathers for worship, pray specifically for Uvalde pastors. In the coming weeks, stress and exhaustion will weigh on them heavily. They will feel physically tired and emotionally drained all day every day for quite some time. They need our prayers, and they need to be reassured we have not forgotten them.

3. Send those pastors cards or emails encouraging them and letting them know we are praying for them, and do not expect any kind of response. They will not have time or the presence of mind to worry about writing you back.

4. Put reminders on your calendar every few weeks for the next couple of years to pray for Uvalde. This recovery is not going to be a quick rebuild, it is going to require years of healing. Our response needs to be long term, as well.

5. Consider helping with backyard Bible clubs, block parties and other local events. But don't expect to help with small group events any time soon, and only conduct them if one of the local churches requests that kind of help.

Remember, this recovery will be spiritual in nature. These small events can build meaningful relationships.

Also, big events such as concerts and fundraisers may not be as helpful in these circumstances as they are with other disaster recoveries.

6. When the political rhetoric dies down and the news media move on to the next disaster, keep praying and looking for updates from Uvalde.

7. While the need for cash is not as urgent as it would be in a different kind of disaster, sending money might still be an option for you. Just be aware of your motivation.

Instead of meeting an immediate need for food or clothing, your monetary gift simply would be a way to express love and compassion.

You can send your donations to the “Robb School Memorial Fund” at the First State Bank of Uvalde. All of the money donated to that fund will go to the shooting victims and their families.

8. Most likely, the school district will decide to demolish the school and build a new one in a different location. If they do make that decision, the federal government might pay for the new school.

If the government does not pay the full cost, there may be an opportunity for us to send money for the new school. We need to keep thinking about Uvalde and be ready to give at that time if needed.

## **Before you go ...**

If you feel called to go to Uvalde to help in any way, give it a little time. It is so crowded and chaotic there right now, it would be hard to find ways to be helpful.

To volunteer in Uvalde, start by filling out the [Uvalde Ministerial Alliance “Aiding Uvalde” form](#). This will help the pastors make the appropriate plans and coordinate your work with the people in their community whose needs fit what you have to offer.

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