

HELPING PEOPLE

Rise Again

POST HURRICANE IKE REPORTS FROM GALVESTON, TEXAS

Thousands receive food in Galveston through resurrection model used following Hurricane Ike

By the time the large truck pulled into the parking lot across from West Point Baptist Church about 10 a.m. on a recent Thursday, hundreds of people had already formed a line stretching around the corner and down the block.

They were a melting pot of area residents: black, white, young, old, Hispanic, disabled and others. Many started lining up hours before they knew the truck would arrive just to get whatever food was being handed out.



Food distributed through the resurrection center has helped feed Wanda Hayes and her family.

In the immediate aftermath and subsequent months, Galveston and the surrounding communities have struggled to recover.

The federal government responded through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), but a considerable amount of help has come from religious-based and community based agencies.

A partnership between the Missionary Baptist General Convention of Texas, the National Baptist Convention of America and the Lott Carey Baptist

Foreign Mission Convention provided targeted support using a “resurrection model” of care.

In Texas, the relief operation was facilitated through the Isaac Thompson Church Resurrection Center, the Benford-Johnson Church Relief Center and the G.W. Daniels Church Resource Center. The centers have now closed because the funds have been expended.

Ensuring those in need had enough to eat was a constant in the recovery effort in the Galveston area. West Point Baptist Church had a regular food distribution program under way prior to Hurricane Ike, but it intensified under the “resurrection model.”

In the first five months following the storm, 3,500 families were served via the weekly food distributions.

The people come without fail, “including in the rain and in the dead of winter,” said the Rev. K.W. Tillmon, coordinator of the Isaac Thompson Church Resurrection Center. And, “it’s constantly growing.”

❖ See “Resurrection model” on next page

“Wherever you are at in life, you have to make the best of it.”

“I’m here today to get some groceries for the family,” said Wanda Hayes, a single mother of four biological children and one she is raising. “Wherever you are at in life you have to make the best of it. You have to be more humble.”

Standing in line for the weekly food giveaway at West Point surely has been a humbling experience for Hayes and the rest of the throngs seeking help. It’s the hand they’ve been dealt as survivors of devastating Hurricane Ike, which hit the Texas Gulf Coast in September 2008.

By all accounts it was the most intense storm of the 2008 Atlantic hurricane season, as Ike made its final landfall east of Galveston on Sept. 13.

The same model, which includes a relief center, social services, pastoral care and food distribution, was first successfully employed after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005 by Lott Carey, the Louisiana Home and Foreign Missions Baptist State Convention, the National Baptist Convention of America and the African-American Catholic Congregation Cathedral of the Lafayette Province, Imani Temple #49.



Community members like these line up for hours to receive the distribution.

Baptist churches suffer in storm, find relief in its wake

Church is part of the natural fabric of life in Galveston, nestled on a barrier island along the Texas Gulf Coast.

Not just one, but two or three congregations appear to dot practically every corner of town, and African-American worship houses make up a considerable portion of the lot.

So when Hurricane Ike charged through the island like a stampede of wild horses in September 2008, the island's churches received a stomping unlike any they had ever seen before.

When the high waters receded, displaced worship services, uninsured or underinsured buildings and emotionally scarred congregants were left in the storm's wake.

A water mark shows water from Hurricane Ike was waist high in some parts of Sunlight Baptist Church, the Rev. Alfred Tryon points out.



"That water was not playing," said the Rev. Charles Wheat, pastor of St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church. "This is the first time (in recent history) that anything has happened like this."

Storm water was at least five feet deep in parts of St. Luke with more than \$200,000 in damages to spaces including the sanctuary, fellowship hall and offices, he said.

The congregation of about 175 members was unable to use the church for months, and finally the worshippers returned on Resurrection Sunday, April 12.

"I still have some people who are displaced ... who can't get here," Wheat said seven months post Ike.

The message at St. Luke can be echoed multiple times over by Galveston's other church leaders. Seventeen of 19 African-American Baptist churches were reportedly impacted by the storm, and many had no comprehensive plan in place for dealing with the destruction.

The Missionary Baptist General Convention of Texas, the National Baptist Convention of America and Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention partnered to provide help for these churches via a "resurrection model" of relief and recovery. The model included food distributions, social services and pastoral care. Operations have now ended because the funds have been expended.

"It's really been rough," said the Rev. Alfred Tryon, pastor of Sunlight Baptist Church, which suffered more than \$250,000 in damage. The church had flood insurance, but not windstorm coverage.

Alongside the physical damage, the biggest impact has been a sharp decline in attendance, he said. Tryon believes the people are psychologically wounded, especially the seniors.

"Membership is not what it was," he said. "It's a mind thing."

Before Ike Sunlight averaged about 110 members, but now the count is down to about 50, Tryon said.

"The psychological effect of this storm is still ongoing," said the Rev. A.J. Jefferson, executive director of the relief and recovery effort,

which included the Isaac Thompson Church Resurrection Center, the G.W. Daniels Church Resource Center and the Benford-Johnson Church Relief Center. "Many of our churches have had reduced attendance."

"Six months is not going to be long enough to restore the area," he said. "My conservative estimate is at least two years." ♦



The Rev. Charles Wheat, pastor of St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church in Galveston, and his congregants were displaced from their church for months following Hurricane Ike.

Resurrection model

✧ *Continued from previous page*

On that particular distribution day, more than 300 people walked away with a bag full of items such as canned tuna and chili, baked beans, bananas and fresh squash. Sometimes there is even meat, but it all depends on what arrives on the truck from "Gleanings From The Harvest," a Galveston-based interfaith organization that receives surplus food and then re-distributes it.

Hayes, a West Point Baptist Church member whose house sits just steps away, had to relocate and commute from a town 20 minutes away from Galveston so her children could remain in their same school.

Seven months after the storm she still had not been able to move back home. Hayes must now make serious choices about things as basic as food.

"Right now I'm sacrificing," she said with tears in her eyes. "Your comfort zone has been taken."

Yet, "what this has taught me is to be grateful," said Hayes, who works at The University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB). One of the area's largest employers, UTMB suffered millions of dollars worth of damage from Hurricane Ike. Subsequently the medical center laid off thousands, dealing the community yet another horrific blow.

"We still have our lives," she said. "I still have my kids." ♦

Resident gets help with housing crisis through resurrection center

Sharon Corbin was at her wit's end over what to do about her Galveston home rendered uninhabitable following Hurricane Ike.

As was the case with many area residents, churches and businesses, she had flood insurance, but not windstorm coverage. Ike made U.S. landfall in Galveston on Sept. 13 with winds of 110 miles per hour.

Corbin's insurance company paid out \$35,000 to repair her home, which she lives in with her young son and three dogs. But they made the check out to her mortgage company, which kept the money and applied it to her loan principal.

"I was just so frustrated," she said.

Then Corbin read a newspaper article that mentioned a disaster relief center where she might get help. She called and spoke with the Rev. Kevin Tillmon, pastoral care associate for the Isaac Thompson Church Resurrection Center.

The center, along with the Benford-Johnson Church Relief Center, was part of efforts by the Missionary Baptist General Convention of Texas, the National Baptist Convention of America and the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention to provide comprehensive hurricane relief and recovery. The "resurrection

model" of care used also included the G.W. Daniels Church Resource Center. All three centers are now closed because the funds have been expended.

Corbin said Tillmon connected her with Edna Courville, the resurrection center's social worker, who in turn referred her to agencies and resources that could provide some tangible relief. Courville also advised Corbin on how to receive funds through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), through which Corbin received money she is using to now repair her home.



Sharon Corbin was "frustrated" and didn't know where to turn for help with her housing issues after the storm.

"Day by day I just try and clean something else," Corbin said of the home she and her son moved back into even though she knew it was unsafe. "Right now we are living out of one room."

"They gave me the resources that I needed and the knowledge that I needed to be able to work with FEMA better and to be able to get ... additional help."



Numerous Galveston homes, and everything in them, suffered severe damage from Hurricane Ike.

Nearly 75 percent of homes in Galveston were damaged in the hurricane and approximately 20,000 people displaced, according to the Galveston Housing Authority.

The city's public housing projects also were taken offline after the storm, and available places to live are nearly non-existent.

Many of those affected "need an outreach person," said Courville. "They don't know how to be connected."

She and her co-workers operated under the premise that "anybody can come," and Courville served as many as 75 to 80 clients a week while the center was operational.

"They gave me the resources that I needed and the knowledge that I needed to be able to work with FEMA better and to be able to get ... additional help," Corbin said.

Also, "they gave me a lot ... of empathy, which I needed," she said. "I think all of us need it a little bit." ♦

Emotional turmoil plagues Galveston residents, yet there is still hope enough to 'rise again'

Most people on Galveston Island who experienced Hurricane Ike can comprehend what it means to not have a job or be displaced from their home.

Yet more difficult to come to terms with has been the sadness of such an all-encompassing major loss.

"I think the people are going through depression," said the Rev. K. W. Tillmon, coordinator of the Isaac Thompson Church Resurrection Center.

"They are kind of in a daze," echoed Tillmon's brother, the Rev. Kevin Tillmon, pastoral care associate for the resurrection center. They are "still not seeing or feeling everything."

Helping Galveston residents cope emotionally with the aftermath of devastating Hurricane Ike was central to the relief and recovery effort.

Pastoral care – whether simply listening to people and their heartaches or connecting them to social service resources – was high on the list of priorities in the "resurrection model" of care implemented in a partnership between the Missionary Baptist General Convention of Texas, the National Baptist Convention of America and the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention.

"I have seen people come together, a closeness that I did not see before the storm. There is a reason God uses storms. People will draw together in times of trouble."



Delores Longoria is still dealing emotionally with the destruction from Hurricane Ike.

A good deal of the pastoral care was "mostly about talking to them, allowing them to tell their stories," said Kevin Tillmon. "A lot of what we've done is personal."

Delores Longoria, who was born and raised on the island, can hardly talk about what happened to her without crying. When she came back to her house about three weeks after the storm, she said it smelled like everything was dead.

"I lost everything," clothes, furniture, appliances, she said. "It's so sad for the whole community."

Now Longoria stays at her father's Galveston home, which suffered damage too. But she returns to her own house often to work on restoring it.

There's also the issue of employment. Before the storm Longoria worked two jobs: home care for an elderly woman and house cleaning. Yet now, she said, "there is no work."

Lillie Wheat, coordinator of the G.W. Daniels Church Resource Center, another component of the "resurrection model" that was implemented, concurred that people are internally suffering. But also there are glimmers of hope, she said.

"I have seen people come together, a closeness that I did not see before the storm," Wheat said. "There is a reason God uses storms. People will draw together in times of trouble."

"There is hope," she said. "We will rise again." ♦



Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention

220 I (Eye) Street, NE, Suite 220
Washington, DC 20002-4389
(202) 543-3200
lottcarey.org



National Baptist Convention of America

1700 Baptist World Center Drive
Nashville, TN 37207
(866) 531-3054
nationalbaptist.com



Missionary Baptist General Convention of Texas

2938 E. 13th Street
Austin, TX 78702
(512) 477-8080
mbgct.org



For more information on Lott Carey's work around the world, go to www.lottcarey.org.