



-- BAPTIST PRESS
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE
SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Herb Hollinger, Vice President
Fax (615) 742-8911
CompuServe ID# 70420,1

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W. Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232
NASHVILLE Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va., 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Tom Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223

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16 SBC churches in Miami area
malled by Hurricane Andrew

By Barbara Denman

Baptist Press
8/28/92

MIAMI (BP)--The number of Southern Baptist churches in Dade County, Florida, damaged by Hurricane Andrew now stands at 16.

According to Carlos Cobos, education director for the Miami Baptist Association, the churches are located in the southern part of Dade County where hurricane wind gusts were measured as high as 160 mph.

Cobos said the count may increase. Efforts by the association's staff to contact and visit each of the churches has been hindered by transportation and communication problems.

Anglo and American black churches with reported damage are First Baptist Church of Perrine, Tommy Watson, pastor; Wayside Baptist Church in Miami, Murrill Boitnott, pastor; First Baptist Church of Homestead, Emit Ray, interim pastor; First Baptist Church of the Redlands, Homestead, William Baggett, pastor; First Baptist Church of Florida City, David Cobb, pastor; Glendale Baptist Church in Miami, Joseph Coats, pastor; Modella Baptist Church in Homestead, Lee Outlaw, pastor; Naranja Park Baptist Church in Naranja, Leon Essex, interim pastor; and First Baptist Church of Cutler Ridge, Charles Koch, pastor; South Miami Heights Baptist Church, Mason Van Tassell, pastor.

Ethnic churches include: Iglesia Bautista Betania, Homestead, Disodado Abella, pastor; Evangelique Haitian Church in Homestead, Jean Alfreide, pastor; McCall Spanish Mission in Miami, Camaliel Matos, pastor; Silver Palm Spanish Church, Miami, Eduardo Jordan, pastor; Hermosa de Leisure City Hispanic, Guillermo Pichs, pastor; and Cristianos Unidos in Princeton, Apolonia Olveras, pastor.

Cobos said Miami Baptists are grateful for the massive outpouring of concern and quick response of Southern Baptist relief efforts. "Pray that we in Miami and others coming as volunteers will make the best use of this opportunity to minister in Jesus' name," he added.

Persons interested in helping may contact the Florida Baptist Convention Brotherhood Department. Contributions designed for Hurricane Andrew Disaster Relief may be sent to the Florida Baptist Convention, 1230 Hendricks Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32207.

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Baptists bring initial healing
to Andrew-devastated Cutler Ridge

By Barbara Denman

Baptist Press
8/28/92

CUTLER RIDGE, Fla. (BP)--Thousands of families in Cutler Ridge, Fla., have been left without a roof over their heads -- homeless but not friendless.

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Forty-eight hours after Hurricane Andrew erased the south Dade community, Florida Baptist men were serving the community their first hot meals in days. Within four hours, more than 2,000 were fed. In a day they fed more than 6,000.

Upon their arrival in the community, dozens of people swarmed to the Florida Baptist disaster relief feeding unit in the parking lot of First Baptist Church. Their cars blocked the road, their excitement filled the air as if a football game was about to begin.

Friends greeted each other with "How did you make out?" They were not inquiring about a lottery; they were wondering if their friend's home had been left standing.

Only then did the facade crumble, as person after person shared their fate and tears began to flow. "We lost everything" was heard all too often.

Sandra Kitt's home had "no roof, no windows, no nothing," she said. When she came to the feeding site, she said the effort showed that "this church cares about us. This is the first place I've seen doing this.

"We don't know what to think," she said. "We're living from day to day and can't get hold of anybody. Every member of my family has seen their homes destroyed."

Dan Chandler, a deacon at the Cutler Ridge church, said although his house had only a few broken windows, "almost all of the church members' homes have been damaged," including the home of pastor Charles Koch. "Some are worse than others. Some have lost everything, but the Lord spared me."

Chandler is coordinating the church's ministry during the disaster, a role that came out of necessity. "I would like for the people of this community to see the name Baptist and know that we really care," he said. "Ninety percent of these people are lost. I want them to see we can also meet their spiritual needs."

The presence of many cars and people at the feeding site drew national attention to the feeding efforts. Charles Jaco, a reporter from the Cable News Network, came to the feeding site on Wednesday -- day two in the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew.

The reporter asked Gary Roberts, Florida Baptists' on-site coordinator, what would happen if the food ran out. "Southern Baptists won't let that happen," Roberts replied.

John Kelly, a fireman in the Broward County town of Westin, drove to Cutler Ridge to offer assistance. When he discovered Florida Baptists' efforts, he stayed all day staffing the food line. "I think they're (Baptists) are doing a great job here," he said. "They're the only people we've seen that's doing it."

For the first time, Florida Baptists are offering a child care unit in conjunction with the feeding units. Women volunteers from throughout the state are providing child care and distributing hundreds of diapers, powder, wipes and baby formula to families.

Only a few accepted the offer of free child care on the first day of operation, said Brenda Forlines, state convention director of church and community ministries. "I think their response will pick up," she said. "I talked with many of the women who came to the site. Right now, they are in shock and their children are terrified of being away from the parents."

Elliott Rivera's face lit up when he learned the Baptists were providing free diapers and formula. "Praise the Lord," he said. Rivera said he has had 10 women and their children staying in his home since the hurricane. His house had been the only one in liveable condition.

"I'm the only man there and am having to locate supplies," Rivera said. "We are running out of everything. This is the love of Christ. This is what it's all about."

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Dozens of trucks from well-meaning benefactors dropped off food and supplies at the church. Forlines and her volunteers have arranged the food and are escorting individuals into their "makeshift store" to pick out what they need. "This gives us a chance to counsel them about their grief," she said.

Forlines and other Florida Baptist associational church and community ministers are distributing funds to those in need. The money is being handed directly to church members and non-church members at the six Southern Baptist feeding sites.

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Baptist relief in Florida
approaches 'Herculean' size

By Steve Barber

Baptist Press
8/28/92

MIAMI (BP)--The Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission activated seven additional mobile feeding units from five states Thursday as Southern Baptist disaster relief efforts in south Florida continued to expand in the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew.

"Baptists are responding in heroic ways," said Cecil Seagle, Florida Brotherhood director and on-site coordinator. "It is a Herculean effort."

Feeding units are working without exception "to the maximum," some under extreme physical conditions, with the heat and humidity "out of sight," Seagle added. "People are going to have to be patient with us."

Units from Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, Illinois and Ohio are now en route and will be joining those from Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, Ohio and South Carolina.

Tennessee has three units en route, the state unit from Brentwood plus two associational units from west Tennessee. The state unit expects to arrive at 3 p.m. Aug. 28.

The Kentucky unit left at 5 p.m. Aug. 27 and expects to arrive at 9 p.m. Aug. 28.

The Virginia unit left Richmond at 7 a.m. Eastern Standard Time Aug. 28 and expects to arrive 7 a.m. Aug. 29 in Fort Lauderdale.

The Illinois unit left Carlinville, Ill., at 8 p.m. Aug. 27.

Each unit will rendezvous at the Pembroke Road Baptist Church in Broward County (305) 987-7050, before receiving their assignments.

Operated by the Brotherhood departments of state Baptist conventions and associations, the disaster relief units range from tractor-trailer units to fifth wheels. Training and coordination of disaster relief volunteers is a ministry of the Memphis-based Brotherhood Commission, a Southern Baptist Convention agency.

The status of the state units already in south Florida is as follows:

One Georgia unit has returned home, but the other unit remains at the Miami-Dade Community College South Campus, where it has averaged more than 3,000 hot meals per day.

The South Carolina unit served 5,000 meals Aug. 26 at First Baptist Church in Homestead. No subsequent meal counts were available.

North Carolina's 18-wheel unit continues to serve meals at Richmond Heights Middle School in Miami.

The Florida unit, located at First Baptist Church of Cutler Ridge, served 6,000 meals Aug. 27. Another unit from Orlando has been activated and is now feeding 300 at a camp for migrant workers in Homestead.

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The Ohio unit is at First Baptist Church in Perrine.

"Hurricane Andrew is stretching our disaster relief system the way Hurricane Hugo did in 1989," said Douglas Beggs, Brotherhood Commission vice president for program services and national off-site coordinator for the response.

In 1989, Brotherhood disaster relief units served an estimated 265,000 meals in 11 days when 13 units from 11 states went to South Carolina following Hurricane Hugo.

Those wishing to make donations to the Brotherhood Commission's disaster relief effort may do so by sending contributions to Brotherhood Commission, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, TN 38104 and designating them for disaster relief.

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Jim Burton contributed to this story.

EDITORS: A Hurricane Andrew Information Center has been established at the Brotherhood Commission, 901-272-2461. A 24-hour information and message line can be reached at 901-278-7839.

Baptists provide relief
to Louisiana storm victims

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press
8/28/92

LAFAYETTE, La. (BP)--Within 24 hours after Hurricane Andrew made landfall in south Louisiana, Southern Baptist disaster relief volunteers were on the scene providing hot meals to storm victims.

Roof damage was visible at a number of churches, said Wallace Primeaux, director of missions for Evangeline and Gulf Coast Baptist associations which includes the hard-hit towns of New Iberia and Morgan City.

Primeaux said he had surveyed only a limited number of the 31 churches and 21 missions in the two associations. One church sustained heavy damage to the end of its education building while some of the churches had water damage, he reported. He said he had not yet traveled to outlying areas of the associations.

Nine mobile feeding units representing the Louisiana Baptist convention and six other state conventions along with four child-care units have set up operations in areas of Louisiana impacted by Hurricane Andrew.

By the end of the first full day of disaster relief operations, Texas Baptist volunteers had served meals to about 8,400 hurricane victims in Lafayette, New Iberia and Jeanerette, La.

The Texas Baptist Disaster Relief Mobile Unit set up food service near the courthouse in New Iberia, a city of roughly 32,000 that was directly in the path of Hurricane Andrew. The mobile unit is a Dallas-based 18-wheel, tractor-trailer rig equipped with a self-sustained field kitchen capable of serving 15,000 meals daily.

Volunteers aboard the Texas Baptist Command Post -- an RV equipped with computer and communication equipment -- and a regional disaster relief unit from Tyler, Texas, served meals in hard-hit Jeanerette.

Other Southern Baptist disaster relief units were stationed throughout southern Louisiana.

State mobile units and their positions Aug. 28 were Oklahoma in Bayou Vista; Louisiana in Thibodaux; Alabama in Houma; Mississippi in Baton Rouge; and Arkansas in Morgan City.

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Houston-area volunteers working on a regional disaster relief unit from First Baptist Church, Beaumont, Texas, served breakfast Aug. 27 to about 2,000 people at the Cajun Dome in Lafayette, La., a city of more than 94,000 where about 20,000 homes and businesses were without utilities.

A clean-up crew with chain saws and other needed equipment arrived late on Aug. 27 from Gulf Coast Baptist Association, and volunteers began work the following day. A second crew from Galveston that was bringing baby food and child care supplies was slated to arrive Sept. 1.

Temporary Emergency Child Care units were scheduled to begin operating at 9 a.m., Aug. 29, near Federal Emergency Management Agency offices at four disaster sites. The Texas child-care unit was stationed in New Iberia. Other units and their locations were: Oklahoma, Plaquemine; Arkansas, Morgan City; and Tennessee, Houma.

TECC is approved by the Department of Human Resources as a licensed child care center in disasters, allowing children to get a hot, balanced meal at noon and providing parents time to clean up their homes and businesses. Trained volunteers use carefully developed instructional modules to help children cope with the traumatic ordeal of disaster.

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Lacy Thompson and Art Toalston contributed to this story.

Baptists work amid tension
in Miami's devastated areas

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
8/28/92

MIAMI (BP)--Temperatures in the 90's, high humidity, no electricity, little shelter, no jobs, no refrigeration, high frustration, short tempers and firearms.

Mass confusion in Hurricane Andrew's aftermath drew questions about the security of some Southern Baptists working in the hardest-hit areas, relief coordinators said. Reports of shots fired at National Guardsmen and potentially unruly crowds were among the concerns, said David Wideman, minister of education at University Baptist Church in Coral Gables, which served as a receiving site to send goods farther south.

"Everybody wants to go down there but I don't think they realize the danger," he said.

National Guardsmen arrived shortly after Andrew's onslaught to prevent looting and restore order in the weakened communities.

By Aug. 26, Baptist food distribution sites needing security had guardsmen posted around them.

In Richmond Heights where North Carolina Baptists staffed one of five Baptist-operated feeding stations, unit director Mike Anders said some residents rumored of rioting because officials planned to close a school serving as a shelter. The school housed residents of two elderly communities and a children's home for three days after Andrew. When these people were relocated officials tried to close the shelter.

"We had one individual come up to us and tell us we might not be safe here tonight," Anders said.

Police, however, promised ample security from officers and National Guardsmen during the night, said Franklin Beam, assistant director for church extension for the Miami Baptist Association.

An order from the governor's office prevented the school from closing, he said.

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In Homestead, where the South Carolina Baptist disaster relief unit is stationed, crowds rushed a Coast Guard helicopter Aug. 26 flying in military-type ready-to-eat meals for residents, said officer Mary Campbell of the Homestead City Police.

An arrival of both SWAT police and National Guardsmen restored order, said Campbell, who estimated the crowd at more than 600.

Theft is one of the hazards of operating a mass feeding ministry, said Hugh Cater, on-site coordinator for the Florida Baptist Convention's disaster relief crew stationed at First Baptist Church of Cutler Ridge.

"Any time you have this many things laying around, it's always a possibility," he said.

Crowd control shouldn't be a problem as long as residents "feel like we're adding to the solution and not the problem," he said.

Volunteer Tom Council of Winter Beach Baptist Church agreed. "I haven't seen anything in the crowds that would make me feel insecure."

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Hurricane Andrew 'answers'

Miami Baptists' prayers

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press

8/28/92

MIAMI (BP)--Hurricane Andrew may be an answered prayer for Miami Baptists. It just isn't the answer they were looking for.

"We did not pray for Hurricane Andrew, but what we did pray for was God to open the door to let the people of Miami know that Jesus loves them and we love them too," said Franklin Beam, associate director for church extension for the Miami Baptist Association.

"We started praying for the disaster relief trucks to come down to Miami over a year ago," said Tony Poncetti, volunteer for Miami Baptist Association. Not for a disaster, he quickly added, but just an opportunity to feed residents who may never have heard about Jesus.

While the storm was still raging across metro Miami, Southern Baptist disaster relief trucks from state conventions in Ohio, South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia and Florida were already rolling toward the region.

"It wasn't on our timetable, but ... when the time came they were ready," Poncetti said.

Despite the destruction, described by many as the worst they've ever seen, south Florida Baptists are talking about opportunities as much as they are devastation.

"We can feed those people for two or three weeks and walk away from them, but we haven't done them any good," Poncetti said. "As Southern Baptists we have an opportunity to help put them back together physically -- but more importantly, we have an opportunity to put them back together spiritually."

Equally important, Baptists may have an opportunity to bring spiritual healing to a community affected by years of high crime rates, poverty and drugs, Poncetti and Beam agreed.

Poncetti claims too many churches in Miami's changing communities have not been working in their own Jerusalem.

"Those churches have tried to hang on to the property and minister to their people who are 50 miles away and not minister to the people who the Father has brought right there," Poncetti said. "That's why we have so many struggling little churches."

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"I think God's calling his church out from behind the walls," he said. "We're never going to reach the city of Miami until God reaches his people."

Despite the challenges, Poncetti and Beam point to recent successes, including churches established where many would have believed impossible, in a jail and in a Jewish community.

"God's just taken the plans we originally had and opened up doors for us we never expected," Beam said. "The opportunity is for us to become unified in purpose and in prayer for every door God opens."

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Response to hurricane
25 years in the making

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press
8/28/92

DALLAS (BP)--Before Hurricane Andrew was a tiny blip on the radar screen, Texas Baptists began preparing to offer disaster relief ministries.

"There is really a quarter-century of preparation that went into Texas Baptists' response to Hurricane Andrew," according to Bob Dixon, executive director of Texas Baptist Men and coordinator of the Disaster Relief Emergency Task Force.

The Texas Baptist Disaster Relief Committee was formed in 1961 following Hurricane Carla to help provide a coordinated response to emergencies. But it was 25 years ago, following Hurricane Beulah, that Texas Baptists built the first disaster relief mobile unit and set into motion a response system that served as a model for Southern Baptists nationwide.

At the state level, TBM staffers maintain the Disaster Relief Mobile Unit and the Command Post. The mobile unit is an 18-wheel tractor-trailer rig equipped with a self-contained field kitchen. The command post is an RV equipped with computer and HAM radio communications equipment.

The command post was donated by an individual and the mobile unit trailer was purchased and equipped through Texas Baptist gifts to the Mary Hill Davis Offering for State Missions.

Small associational mobile relief units are maintained by volunteers near Tyler, Beaumont, San Marcos, Belton and Wichita Falls, Texas. Units also are being built in El Paso and Clear Lake, near Houston. And in numerous states across the Southern Baptist Convention, disaster relief units are prepared for disasters such as Andrew.

In Texas, Texas Baptist Men maintains a list of about 600 volunteers around the state who can be called when disasters strike. Most volunteers are trained in some needed specialty such as HAM radio communications, food service preparation or mechanics.

Two weeks before Hurricane Andrew captured the national spotlight and became the most costly national disaster in U.S. history, Dixon began plotting the storm's course as it was spawned off the African coastline.

By the time it intensified in the Caribbean, Dixon was in contact with Jim Furgerson, director of the Brotherhood Commission's adult division and national coordinator for Southern Baptist disaster relief.

Initial plans called for Texas volunteers to be placed on standby to assist with disaster relief in south Florida. But as Andrew continued growing, it became clear the 100-mile-wide peninsula would do little to blunt the hurricane's fury. Texas volunteers would be needed for Andrew's second strike.

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Furgerson and Dixon decided Baptist volunteers from states along the East Coast should be directed to Florida, teams from states west of the Mississippi should prepare for the storm's second strike after it passed through the Gulf of Mexico, and volunteers in the mid-South should stand ready to respond wherever needs were greatest.

Once the hurricane cut its arc through the Gulf of Mexico and starting bearing down on the Louisiana coastline, preparation in the Texas Baptist disaster relief "war room" at the Baptist Building in Dallas shifted into high gear.

"Battle plans" were scrawled on marker boards covering two walls of the HAM radio room adjacent to the TBM offices. They were filled with phone numbers of contact persons and color-coded listings of volunteers' names, special skills and assignments, along with continuously updated information on operations in Florida.

Realizing that the possibility of telephone communication from the disaster sites being unlikely, six HAM radio operators were enlisted to serve on the disaster relief crews.

"In a multi-site, multi-state operation like this, communication is critical," Dixon said.

All official communication is channeled from the off-site coordination office in Dallas through the on-site command post to other remote points via HAM radios.

Since the exact location of landfall was uncertain, a Texas staging area had to be determined. Pineywoods Baptist Encampment, south of Lufkin, was selected since it that would place relief workers close enough to the disaster site to respond, but not on the wrong side of the hurricane's path where they would be cut off.

Because Texas crews were recruited from the Dallas, Tyler and Houston areas, rendezvous points had to be established along the route to the disaster site. Also, charge accounts at wholesale warehouses had to be established quickly near these rendezvous sites, enabling volunteers to buy bulk food and other supplies.

Along with Texas Baptists, disaster relief teams from the Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Mississippi and Alabama Baptist conventions also responded to Andrew's second strike. The multi-state response demanded close contact and constant coordination with the Brotherhood Commission.

At the disaster sites, the Baptist teams worked closely with local and federal officials, the American Red Cross and other volunteer relief organizations.

Coordinating a multi-state, multi-site disaster relief ministry is a constant juggling act and a logistical challenge, Dixon acknowledges. But he insists it is worth the headaches.

"Sometimes we say emergency response centers around 'three Rs' -- relief, recovery and restoration. But in our case, woven through it all and permeating every part is that fourth R, reconciliation," he said.

"Our prayer is that through our efforts, people might be drawn to the Father and reconciled to him."