

Miss. Baptist Disaster Relief in multi-state response as hurricanes continue to batter Gulf Coast

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Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief (MBDR) teams, as part of the overall Southern Baptist Disaster Relief (SBDR) response to Hurricane Laura, continue to rotate in and out of the hard hit Lake Charles, La., area as cleanup work continues. As of Sept. 21, over 12,457 volunteer days have been reported by the 19 Baptist state/regional convention response teams, with a total of 108,003 volunteer service hours.

In addition, Mississippi Baptist volunteers have joined the response effort for Hurricane Sally, the Category 2 storm that whipped across the Alabama Gulf Coast and Florida panhandle on Sept. 16.

Hurricane Laura

MBDR teams were some of the first out-of-state responders into Louisiana after the Category 4 storm struck on Aug. 27, serving at the request of Louisiana Baptist Disaster Relief and have provided chainsaw/debris removal in the Deridder and Moss Bluff areas, mass feeding assistance in support of the Red Cross and Salvation Army, and direct-to-the-public mass feeding utilizing drive-through feeding lines at numerous locations.

Departing and returning home on September 20 were members of the MBDR Task Force feeding team that had been supporting a church-based feeding operation and meals for volunteers at the

Moss Bluff site. Over 334,415 meals have been prepared and distributed/served by the five SBDR kitchens that are on the scene.

More than 1,200 Priority 1 chainsaw/debris removal requests have been completed across the 19 SBDR operations sites in southwest Louisiana and southeast Texas. A Priority 1 chainsaw request is made when downed trees block access to a home or are physically on a home, usually with the additional need of having to place tarps over damaged roofs once debris is removed.

During the week of Sept. 14, MBDR chainsaw teams from First Church, Gautier, and Temple Church, Hattiesburg, rotated in to replace Simpson County Association volunteers. With the closure of the Moss Bluff operations site on Sept. 21, MBDR teams rotated into the consolidated operations headquarters at Trinity Church, Lake Charles, and began work in anticipation of the arrival of heavy rain from the Sept. 21 landfall of Tropical Storm Beta along the southeast Texas coast.

MBDR teams have also provided access to showers and laundry services through portable facilities that are towed into place and connected to local utilities for use by storm victims.

Hurricane Sally

With the landfall of Category 2 Hurricane Sally Sept. 16 along the Alabama Gulf Coast, MBDR teams are again being called to action. Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief has requested chainsaw/debris removal assistance in the Baldwin County areas of Gulf Shores, Robertsdale, and Bay Minette. This call has been answered by:

- Jackson County Association, Pascagoula.
- Wade Church, Moss Point.

- Gulf Coast Association, Gulfport.
- X-tended Missions Network, Hernando.

In addition, Florida Baptist Disaster Relief has asked MBDR to stand by to provide a relief feeding team for the panhandle region of that state, also affected by the slow-moving Hurricane Sally, should the need continue into the week of Sept. 28.

Call for volunteers; church-to-church program

Disaster Relief volunteer service in both Louisiana and Alabama is expected to continue into the month of October, with the needs being for chainsaw/debris removal, roof tarping, muckout (removing flood debris from inside homes), and repair teams. Credentialed MBDR disaster relief volunteers who can serve in the coming weeks are requested to check in with the Men's Ministry Department at the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board: dvail@mbcb.org. For the latest information on developing hurricane conditions, visit <https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/>.

With many Louisiana Baptist Convention churches damaged by Hurricane Laura, the convention is coordinating a church-to-church recovery program, whereby individual churches interested in helping repair/rebuild affected churches are directly connected to the churches in need of those services. More information on that program can be found at <https://louisianabaptists.org/churches-helping-churches/>.

Souls saved

While the opportunity to provide physical assistance has been great, the opportunity for spiritual service has been greater. Over 13,000 personal contacts have been made by teams and chaplains associated with SBDR, and more than 267 individuals have made professions of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Donations

In-kind donations (clothing, shoes, diapers, etc.) are not being accepted at this time. Monetary donations may be made online at mbcb.org/giving. Select "Give as an Individual," and then designate your gift to "Disaster Relief." Check donations are also accepted. Simply make the check payable to the "Mississippi Baptist Convention Board," designate "MS Disaster Relief" on the memo line, and mail to MBCB, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530.

All financial donations given through Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief are tax deductible and go directly to support relief/recovery efforts in partnership with local Baptist churches and associations.

By making financial donations to reputable response organizations like MBDR, those who give enable the purchase of needed materials in bulk, allowing for the efficient storage and distribution of large quantities of those materials using pallets and forklifts and thereby reducing the time needed to get the supplies to the hardest hit areas.

Please encourage financial giving to reputable groups like MBDR operating in the area. Thanks to the generous support shown by Mississippi Baptist churches for the Cooperative Program, administrative costs of the MBDR ministry are covered and all donations go directly to support relief/recovery efforts in partnership with local Baptist churches and associations.

Prayer needs

Please encourage your churches to pray for all the Southern Baptist teams that are at work or are preparing to go in the coming days and weeks. SBDR has disaster relief ministries ongoing in Colorado (fires), California (fires), Pennsylvania (floods), Iowa (windstorm), Minnesota (domestic unrest), Wisconsin (domestic unrest), and Virginia (domestic

unrest).

Pray especially for the MBDR teams – your disaster missionaries on point to share help, healing, and hope in Jesus' Name.

Yates is Mississippi Baptists' interim state disaster relief coordinator.