

Miss. Baptist Disaster Relief teams receive first assignments for Hurricane Laura disaster relief effort

*By Hubert Yates
Correspondent*

The recent landfall of Hurricane Laura in southwest Louisiana has left a trail of damage from the Gulf Coast to the I-20 corridor in northern Louisiana. The damage is extensive and because of major damage to vital electrical transmission lines and associated water supply systems, the response has been slowed. However, things are beginning to progress toward the recovery process for these hurting people.

Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief (MBDR) feeding team leadership departed on the morning of Aug. 29 for Lake Charles, La., to meet the Alabama/Mississippi/Louisiana Salvation Army field kitchen. The remainder of the 20-member team will be traveling Aug. 30. Operations will begin on Aug. 31 with a capacity of 10,000-plus meals per day in support of the mobile feeding efforts of the Salvation Army. Other Southern Baptist Disaster Relief (SBDR) mass feeding units are/will be operating in Lake Charles; Orange, Texas; DeRidder, La.; and Moss Bluff, La. Smaller cooking units will be operating in other locations due to loss of power and water. Because of the extended time of recovery for local power and water systems, it is anticipated that a relief MBDR feeding team will be needed in September (09/11). A few slots remain open for this relief team. Volunteers credentialed in mass feeding should contact the Men's Ministry Department at the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board: dvail@mbcb.org.

At the request of Louisiana Baptist Disaster Relief, four MBDR chainsaw/debris removal teams will depart Aug. 31 for DeRidder, La. (two teams) and Moss Bluff, La. (two teams) to begin chainsaw and debris removal operations in those areas. The MBDR teams will be working alongside Baptist disaster relief teams from Louisiana, Missouri, and Oklahoma. Hosting and support for these teams is being provided by Louisiana Baptists. We do anticipate the need for additional teams in the days and weeks that are ahead. We are currently scheduling teams for early September. Credentialed church and associational chainsaw teams should contact the Men's Ministry Department to schedule availability.

MBDR feeding and chainsaw teams will be operating in areas of destruction where damage is extensive. Hosting and operations will be conducted using self-generated power and water brought in by tanker truck. Without the support of Louisiana Baptists and their partners and the support of these other state Baptist organizations, these operations would not be feasible. Again, this is one of those areas where it is critical to work within the system to insure that the necessary support systems are in place to provide for the safety of the volunteers and insure the maximum effect of volunteer efforts. Sometimes it takes a little time to get everything in place, but there is a reason that we delay our response. Please encourage groups not to self-deploy and to work within the SBDR system.

Also at times like these, there is a push for the collection of goods and materials to send to the affected areas. While understanding the thoughts and desires to collect these items (we want to help), please assist us in communicating the complications that these efforts create for many on the receiving end who will actually distribute the materials. Individual items and even case lots have to be handled one at a time. This requires a large amount of

volunteer manpower and time. Pre-distribution storage is difficult. Therefore, in-kind donations are not being accepted at this time.

By making financial donations to reputable response organizations like MBDR, however, those who give enable the provision of needed materials in bulk, allowing the handling and distribution of items using forklifts and pallet jacks and reducing human effort and time involved. Storage and distribution are simplified as materials can be effectively handled. For a smaller event with a single point of need (i.e., school supplies), a collection works well. However, in disaster situations where the need is great and ever-changing, collection drives only serve to tax the limited volunteer resources even further. Please encourage financial giving to reputable groups like MBDR operating in the area. Thanks to the generous support shown by our Mississippi Baptist churches for the Cooperative Program that provides for administrative costs of the MBDR ministry, all donations go directly to support relief/recovery efforts in partnership with local Baptist churches and associations.

If you feel led to give toward the disaster relief efforts, you may do so online at mbcb.org/giving, selecting "Give as an Individual," and then designating your gift to "Disaster Relief." Check donations are also accepted. Simply make the check payable to the "Mississippi Baptist Convention Board," designated "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 go directly to support relief/recovery efforts in partnership with local Baptist churches and associations.

I would like to commend Jackson County Association in Pascagoula; Gulf Coast Association in Gulfport; Pearl River Association in Carriere; Jones County Association in Laurel; Briar Hill Church in Florence; and Rankin County Baptist leadership for assisting in lining up

intermediate relief team housing for teams traveling through Mississippi into Louisiana to work or when they are returning home. This is a ministry opportunity that allows the teams to break their travel into manageable segments without having to incur additional costs. I am not sure how many teams will take advantage of it, but the other state Baptist disaster relief directors appreciate the effort greatly.

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 work 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.