

Mississippi Baptist disaster relief crews mobilizing for ministry across Louisiana after Hurricane Laura devastation

By Hubert Yates
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Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief (MBDR) teams were in the first wave of a large response of Southern Baptist Disaster Relief (SBDR) teams rolling into Louisiana after Hurricane Laura raked the state on Aug. 27.



CLEANUP UNDERWAY – Members of a Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief crew from Chickasaw Association in Houston provide temporary roof repairs to a home in DeRidder, La., struck by Hurricane Laura on Aug. 27. Credentialed volunteers are being recruited for cleanup that remains to be done after the Category 4 storm came ashore near the Louisiana-Texas border. (Photo by David Smith)

A 20-person team of MBDR mass feeding specialists has been working in Lake Charles at what is known as a “super kitchen”

field facility of the Salvation Army disaster relief program. The first team of MBDR volunteers rotated out on Sept. 3 and were replaced by another MBDR team.

MBDR chainsaw teams from Chickasaw Association Baptist Disaster Relief in Houston and Temple Church in Hattiesburg have begun work in DeRidder, La. In Moss Bluff, La., MBDR chainsaw teams from Lee/Itawamba Association in Tupelo and Yalobusha Association in Coffeeville have started their work.

Rotating in for work in DeRidder over the Labor Day weekend will be a combination team with elements from Dixie Church, Hattiesburg, and Attala Association, Kosciusko. In Moss Bluff over the holiday weekend will be members of First Church, Madison; Brandon Church, Brandon; Gulf Coast Association, Gulfport; and Jackson County Association, Pascagoula,

Teams from Calhoun Association, Calhoun City; Fairview Church, Columbus; and Simpson Association, Mendenhall, will provide chainsaw services through the middle of September.

The Louisiana Baptist Joint Incident Command has asked MBDR to provide teams possibly through October 3. MBDR is currently recruiting credentialed volunteers and scheduling teams to meet this need. An assessment closer to the date of that mobilization will be made in coming weeks, but is currently expected to be needed.

MBDR assessment/chaplaincy teams continue to operate in the Deville/Alexandria, La., area. Louisiana Baptist Joint Incident Command has requested that Mississippi Baptists provide replacement assessment/chaplaincy teams when the current teams rotate home around September 11.

Additional state Baptist disaster relief teams working in the areas damaged by the Category 4 storm include:

- Arkansas Baptist Convention, headquartered in Little Rock.

- Florida Baptist Convention, headquartered in Jacksonville.
- Kentucky Baptist Convention, headquartered in Louisville.
- Louisiana Baptist Convention, headquartered in Alexandria.
- Missouri Baptist Convention, headquartered in Jefferson City.
- Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, headquartered in Cary.
- Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, headquartered in Oklahoma City.
- Baptist Convention of New Mexico, headquartered in Albuquerque.
- South Carolina Baptist Convention, headquartered in Columbia.



HARD AT WORK – Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers from Chickasaw Association in Houston labor under hot and demanding conditions at a home site in Louisiana damaged by Hurricane Laura, a Category 4 storm than made landfall Aug. 27 near the Lake Charles, La., area. (Submitted photo)

SENDRelief, a Southern Baptist humanitarian relief program administered jointly by the International Mission Board in Richmond, Va., and the North American Mission Board in Alpharetta, Ga., is also on the ground in support of the Baptist volunteer teams committed to the Laura relief effort in Louisiana and neighboring southeast Texas.

Trained and credentialed volunteers are providing assessment, mass feeding, chainsaw/debris removal, laundry, portable showers, temporary roofing services, and other support for the responding teams.

MBDR rotation crews are being recruited on standby status for entry on September 11 and September 18.

Conditions are challenging for the responding teams, as hosting sites continue to operate on generator power and portable water supplies in very hot and humid weather conditions. Even as teams are serving in difficult situations, there are many opportunities to share the message of Jesus and at least 13 professions of faith have been recorded in the past five days.

MBDR is requesting that any credentialed volunteer (assessment, chaplaincy, feeding, and chainsaw) who would like to assist during these opportunities contact the Men's Ministry Department at the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board: dvail@mbcb.org, or (601) 292-3335. Credentialed church and association chainsaw teams that are available should contact MBDR chainsaw coordinator John Henry at jhenry@mbcb.org. Mudout teams may be needed in coming weeks as well but are not being recruited at this time.

In-kind donations (clothing, shoes, diapers, etc.) are not being accepted at this time. If you feel led to give toward the disaster relief efforts, you may do so 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 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 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, 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.

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.