

Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief mobilizes to meet food needs in winter storm's aftermath

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JACKSON, Ms. (Special) – Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief (MBDR) volunteers and teams prepared in the days before the onset of the recent winter storm, anticipating the request for chainsaw/debris removal would be the primary need across the affected area. However, as the storm unfolded, feeding became the main issue as thousands of residents were left without power and water to prepare meals.

Four requests for assistance in providing hot meals were received through local Baptist associations and emergency management personnel. Two deployments were initiated, in Philadelphia/Neshoba County and Port Gibson/Claiborne County.

In Neshoba County where nearly 90% of county residents were without electrical power for three days prior to the MBDR team arriving, Neshoba Association led by associational missions director David Addy organized nine congregations in the hardest hit areas of the county to provide distribution of hot meals through delivery and direct feeding lines.

The association's Ministry Center was also utilized as a drive-through line to pick up hot meals. A ten-person MBDR feeding team, led volunteers Gene and Willie Ree Williamson, members of Cumberland Church, Maben, was recruited and deployed on Feb. 19. The team prepared 1,800 meals in the three-day operation.

Chaplains and team members had 60 direct ministry contacts and celebrated the great privilege of seeing two individuals come to faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.



HOT MEALS – Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers utilize the kitchen at First Church, Vicksburg, to prepare food for the people of neighboring Claiborne County, where electrical power and water were knocked out by the severe winter storm that much of Mississippi endured two weeks ago. (Special photo)

In Claiborne County, nearly 98% of county residents were without electrical power in the days prior to the request for assistance. The MBDR team had to operate outside the affected area because of the power and water outages, so a request went out to First Church, Vicksburg, where Matt Buckles is pastor, for use of their kitchen facility to support the operation.

Five MBDR volunteers from the Warren County area led by volunteer Winky Freeman, member of First Church, Vicksburg, staffed the kitchen and provided approximately 900 meals over two days of operation.

The prepared food was transported to Claiborne County by long-time MBDR partner, the American Red Cross, and distributed by volunteers working through the Claiborne County Emergency Management Agency. Marvin Ratliff, Claiborne County emergency management director, expressed his appreciation to MBDR volunteers for their willingness to provide help in his county's time of need.

In both locations, power had been restored to many residents by Feb. 22, eliminating the need for any additional feeding operations. The other two requests, Smith County and Jefferson County, were rescinded as conditions improved prior to the deployment of teams and equipment.

MBDR is a ministry of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) and the cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. MBDR provides trained and credentialed volunteers in times of disaster and crisis situations for the purpose of bringing help, healing, and hope in the name of Jesus to those affected.

To become a part of the MBDR ministry team, contact MBDR state director Hubert Yates in the MBCB Men's Ministry Department at hyates@mbcb.org. Telephone: (601) 292-3334, or (601) 292-3335.

Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief is supported by the Mississippi Cooperative Program and the Margaret Lackey State Mission Offering. For information on the Cooperative Program, visit <https://www.mbc.org/what-is-cp/>. For information on the Margaret Lackey State Mission offering, visit <https://www.mbc.org/mission-strategy/offerings/margaret-lackey-offering/>.