

Southern Baptists near 500,000 meals prepared during hurricane responses

PENSACOLA, Fla. (BP and local reports) – Every year, the World Meteorological Organization maintains a list of 21 official names for major storms that originate in the Atlantic. In 2020, the season has been so active that they have had to turn to the Greek alphabet for names including Tropical Storm Beta, which hit the Texas Gulf Coast Sept. 21.

“That’s just been the kind of year that we’ve had, from COVID hitting in March, through the hurricane season getting started early,” said Sam Porter, national director of Southern Baptist Disaster Relief (SBDR) with Send Relief, a compassion ministry managed by Southern Baptists’ International Mission Board and North American Mission Board. “We as Southern Baptists have to be ready at all times, and I’ve been grateful for the way we have been able to respond in unison.”

Hurricanes Laura and Sally have been the most significant storms to make landfall in the U.S so far this year. SBDR volunteers have prepared more than 477,000 meals for survivors in the aftermath of those storms.

Nearly 400,000 of those meals have been served in regions struck by Laura. As mass care public feeding starts to wind down in Louisiana, storm recovery efforts will continue at least into mid-to-late October following Laura’s widespread damage, which affected much of the state. Volunteer chainsaw crews have completed more than 1,700 jobs, cutting up downed trees primarily for residents who otherwise could not afford such help.

Recovery efforts following Hurricane Sally are well underway in Alabama and Florida after the storm made landfall late last

week. SBDR teams have already prepared more than 80,000 meals, and relief teams have begun shifting into response mode.

The needs are great, and hundreds of requests for assistance have come in to SBDR leaders in Alabama and Florida. Delton Beall, director of SBDR for Florida Baptists, expects their response to last at least three to four more weeks. "People don't know what to say when we tell them this is a ministry provided by Southern Baptist churches and that it is free," Beall said. A volunteer in Florida told one homeowner struggling to believe there would be no charge that it would, at most, cost a few minutes of his time while volunteers spoke and prayed with him once the work was completed. "I thought that was a pretty good line," Beall said.

Beall and Mark Wakefield, disaster relief director with Alabama Baptists, are both requesting assistance from disaster relief teams in other states to help meet the needs of survivors. Requests have centered primarily on tree-related damage more than flooding both in Alabama and in Florida, and teams have completed dozens of jobs so far.

For the latest information on Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief (MBDR) work in Louisiana and Alabama, [click here](#).

"We are very grateful for our Southern Baptist family and for the prayers and financial support and for being here and being the hands and feet of Jesus when people need to have such a witness," Beall said.

On Sept. 18, Send Relief missionary Kay Bennett and others from Baptist Friendship House in New Orleans delivered meals to SBDR teams in Alabama to feed survivors and volunteers who were already serving in the wake of Sally.

"I am energized every day seeing how God has been providing for our needs with supplies arriving at just the right time," Porter said. "We have about a month left in hurricane season, and Southern Baptists, through SBDR and Send Relief, are

together in this as we continue to meet needs.”