BGAV Disaster Response: Ongoing and Life-changing

When storms come, Virginia Baptists respond—offering help on the road to healing by sharing the hope of Jesus through words, actions, and relationships.

This year, Virginia Baptists have responded to forest fires in Gatlinburg; a tornado in Powhatan County; a search and rescue operation in Chesapeake; the devastating hurricanes in Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico; and the ongoing rebuilding efforts following earlier disasters in Appomattox, Essex, Virginia Beach, West Virginia, and North Carolina.

In 2017, 309 volunteers served more than 17,419 hours—preparing 44,758 meals and working on more than 191 homes. Virginia Baptist Crisis Care Chaplains have spoken with more than 405 residents who have been affected by the storms, and they have provided a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on, and the encouragement of prayers.

But BGAV Disaster Relief has never been about how many meals are distributed or how many homes are cleaned up; it is about people. It is about joining together with the work God is already doing in communities across the country and around the world—partnering with local churches to make an eternal impact in their neighborhoods.

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After Hurricane Irma, a feeding team left Virginia on September 12 and headed south to Palm Coast, Florida. Because of their experience with Hurricane Matthew last year, First Baptist Church of Palm Coast knew what to do. When the BGAV team arrived, they weren’t there to take over; they went to join the efforts already begun by that local church. The volunteers worked side by side during every meal, every day, for two weeks in that community.
On August 25, Hurricane Harvey made landfall, and Virginia Baptists responded to a call from pastor Steve Bean of First Baptist Church of Liberty, Texas—continuing a relationship that started in October 2008 when a BGAV team traveled there to work alongside that church following Hurricane Ike.

So when Hurricane Harvey brought 53 inches of rain to the Liberty area, “I knew who to pick up the phone and call,” Steve said. “I called Virginia Baptists, and they have come to partner with our church. That’s why we’ve been able to do what we’ve done. It’s been a life-changer, a church-changer, and a community-changer. We thank God for Virginia Baptists.”

Providing help and hope through chaplaincy has proven to be a critical element in disaster response, and Virginia Baptists have recently increased their efforts tremendously in this area. “This August we trained 14 new chaplains,” explained Aaron Lee, disaster response coordinator. “Just weeks later, we had the opportunity to mobilize many of these team members to Texas and Florida—to hear the stories firsthand and to offer support to individuals. What had been hypothetical situations became real-life experiences.”

Chaplains are able to provide spiritual and emotional support that is of great importance during the multi-faceted, complex process of recovering from disaster, helping individuals in unique ways that go beyond physical assistance.

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