

# Churches in flooded Central Texas overflow with compassion

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The Colorado River and its tributaries overflowed their banks, flooding hundreds of Hill Country homes. In response, Baptist churches in Burnet and Llano counties overflowed with compassion for their hurting neighbors, providing disaster relief with the support of Texas Baptist Men.

“We are here to support the ministries of local churches and strengthen their missional presence in their communities,” said Dwain Carter, [TBM](#) deputy director of disaster relief.

TBM just completed most of its work in North Carolina after giving more than 11,000 volunteer hours in the aftermath of Hurricane Florence and deployed much of its equipment and personnel to Florida, where volunteers continue to serve after Hurricane Michael. Even so, the missions organization sent eight mud-out crews, heavy equipment operators and an incident management team to Central Texas, along with volunteers to staff laundry and shower units.

## Marble Falls church mobilized to minister

Early on Oct. 16, [First Baptist Church in Marble Falls](#) became the base for Texas Department of Public Safety’s aviation operation and for Texas Parks and Wildlife’s water rescue operation.

“We heard reports there was more rain coming, and we knew a lot of people were displaced,” Pastor Ross Chandler said.



Elvin Bowman, a Texas Baptist Men volunteer from Wylie Baptist Church in Abilene, sprays disinfectant, providing mold mediation for a water-damaged home in Granite Shoals. (Photo / Ken Camp)

So, First Baptist made its facility available as a shelter, borrowing mattresses from Highland Lakes Baptist Camp and from the Camp of the Hills.

“We had 165 beds set up at the church,” Chandler said, noting TBM sent a shower and laundry unit to support its shelter ministry. Church members served three meals a day and staffed an on-site hospitality center with coffee and snacks between meals.

First Baptist personnel organized a registration system both for people seeking assistance and for individuals who wanted to volunteer. By the afternoon on Oct. 17, volunteers mobilized and deployed by the church were helping with evacuations.

Chandler, who had received TBM disaster relief training and worked with mud-out teams before, recognized the need to intervene as early as possible to begin tearing out damaged drywall and flooring from homes and

treating surfaces with disinfectant to mitigate mold.

So, a deacon from First Baptist began walking the streets in affected neighborhoods to assess damage and gather contact information from residents. The church's technology department developed a comprehensive database from the information he gathered, and the church began dividing affected areas into zones.

By the end of the second day after the flood, the church showed the database of 45 damaged homes to the Burnet County emergency operations manager, and the church was ready to start sending mud-out volunteers.

Working through the Marble Falls Ministerial Alliance and its Highland Lakes Crisis Network, First Baptist communicated to its members and to the community at large it would begin daily orientation sessions for walk-up volunteers at 8:30 each morning. By the third day after the flood, First Baptist sent out a half-dozen mud-out teams.

"To whom much is given, much will be required," Chandler said, quoting Luke 12:48. "These are our loved ones, and we stand in solidarity with them. When anyone hurts, we all hurt. We are only as strong and healthy as the most vulnerable, struggling person."

## **Kingsland church becomes beehive of activity**

About 15 miles to the northwest in Kingsland, a Llano County community of 6,000, [First Baptist Church](#) opened its facility, lodging TBM volunteers and providing space for them to establish an on-site incident management center.

The church also allowed personnel with the National Guard and Texas A&M Forest Service to distribute water and ice from its parking lot, and

also provided space for Llano County Emergency Relief and Team Rubicon.



Marion Smith, a TBM volunteer chaplain from Wylie Baptist Church in Abilene, pulls nails left behind after damaged paneling was removed from a home in Granite Shoals. (Photo / Ken Camp)

Pastor David Henneke arrived in Kingsland just four months before his community flooded, and the church had a four-night revival scheduled just five days after the disaster. In spite of everything else going on in the church building and in the community, the church proceeded with its scheduled evangelistic outreach.

One week after neighborhoods near the Colorado River flooded, Henneke still was in the process of accounting for all his members, but he estimated the flood affected “at least a dozen families” from First Baptist.

While seeking to minister to those families, Henneke also tried to meet the needs of others who came to the church seeking help.

He recalled one man who arrived at First Baptist feeling overwhelmed. Four days after his home filled with four feet of water, his mother died in a nearby nursing home. The man was staying in a motel 15 miles away, but his available funds were depleted, and he didn't know where to go to obtain a housing voucher. Henneke made arrangements for him to remain in the motel an additional four days—buying him some time and calming his fears.

While the situation in his community seemed overwhelming, Henneke remained confident of God's presence and his church's part in God's mission.

"We realize God wasn't taken by surprise by any of this," he said. "He's still sovereign. We're just here to try to help with food and water, assist with homes and give people a whole lot of Jesus. That's our hope."

## **'Not business as usual'**

By Oct. 23, First Baptist in Marble Falls was coordinating daily morning orientation sessions for spontaneous volunteers both at its church and at First Baptist in Kingsland. Within one week after the flood, more than 600 volunteers had been deployed after the orientations, working in more than 250 homes.

In addition to the walk-up volunteers, trained TBM mud-out crews also worked throughout the area and provided logistical support and oversight for the spontaneous volunteer teams.

While the situation in Burnet and Llano counties deviates from the norm, in which TBM volunteers who have been trained and passed background tests are the only workers in the field, it provides additional manpower at a time when the TBM ranks are spread thin due to widespread, back-to-back deployments.

“This is not business as usual,” Chandler said. “We have to adjust to the crisis at hand.”

TBM needs trained and certified volunteers to serve both in Central Texas and in Florida. Trained volunteers should contact an area TBM disaster coordinator or specialty ministry coordinator, or they can email [volunteerdr@tbmtx.org](mailto:volunteerdr@tbmtx.org).

First Baptist Church will continue to provide daily orientation for walk-up volunteers as long as necessary, Chandler said. First Baptist will provide housing, showers and breakfast at its church for out-of-town volunteers. Contact First Baptist in Marble Falls at (830) 693-4381.

To contribute financially, send a check designated “disaster relief” to Texas Baptist Men, 5351 Catron, Dallas, TX 75227, call (214) 275-1116 or click [here](#).