

Christians Respond Quickly in Devastated Texan Coast

Though the destruction will require much more than charity, Christian networks are proving to function as some of today's best first responders to natural disasters.



[] After a massive hurricane lashed the entire Texan coast last Saturday, leaving coastal towns underwater and thousands of inhabitants in need of help, Christian groups from across the nation responded quickly to the crisis with truckloads of supplies.

“[Evacuation] help, staging areas for relief distribution, shelters, warehouses and distribution sites were in place in the strike zones before the storm made landfall,” said Doug Stringer, founder and president of the Houston-based Somebody Cares America (), an award-winning relief ministry whose staff and volunteers rode out Hurricane Ike even as their Houston offices lost power and had windows blown out.

“[But] we are in desperate need of things like water, nonperishable food items and cleaning supplies,” Stringer said. “The devastation is wide, and the needs are extensive up and down the Texas Coast and into Louisiana.”

Though Christian organizations nationwide were quick to respond to the victims of Ike, leaders from relief organizations are

complaining that maybe not enough attention is being paid—at least not when compared to the damage inflicted by Hurricane Katrina three years ago.

“Ike has left the Texas coast looking like Katrina was here,” said Bill Horan, president of Operation Blessing International (). “Folks down here are in a state of shock, plus they are hot, hungry, thirsty and wondering where the cavalry is. They need a lot more help than they are getting and they need it now.”

He added: “Sadly, the nation’s attention is not focused on the Texas devastation the way it was with New Orleans following Katrina, so most Americans are unaware of the massive damage and suffering that we are seeing.”

But even if a lack of widespread support is evident it has not impeded the outpouring of Christian involvement both before and after the massive storm struck. One ministry out of Springfield, Mo., staged its relief trucks a safe three hours away from Houston before the 500-mile wide hurricane pummeled the Texan coast.

“Our relief teams are rushing truckloads of food, water and ice to desperate people right now,” Hal Donaldson, president of Convoy of Hope (), said last weekend as his trucks moved into the area on the weak side of the storm.

“This relief and recovery effort will take many weeks. This is a time for

Americans to come together, to reach out to people who have lost everything they own."

The disaster relief team at Samaritan's Purse () packed semi-trucks in North Carolina days before Ike made landfall in order to head south and "help people who just won't have the ability to pick themselves up," said Kirk Nowery, the group's chief operating officer.

Along with providing aid to those in dire circumstance, the group also hoped to introduce residents to the gospel. Nowery said that Franklin Graham, president and chief executive officer of Samaritan's Purse and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, told him before they pulled out for Texas: "We'll get as dirty as we have to get to earn the right to share the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ just one time."

A Texas storehouse belonging to World Vision () served as a hub for thousands of state-supplied cots, ready to be distributed to evacuees and the homeless. "A lot of people just evacuated for Hurricane Gustav and are now low on cash," said Todd Haumann, a storehouse manager in Dallas.

"Some families haven't even unpacked [since Gustav] and now they're leaving their homes again [and] may not have had the time to stock up on supplies."

Aside from supplying children's clothing, shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrushes, body wash and hygiene kits, World Vision also sees the value in "play therapy." The humanitarian giant shipped two pallets of Hasbro toys and

games to help occupy the time of children and families sheltering at the Dallas Convention Center.

Stringer, whose building in downtown Houston was condemned after Ike, told *Charisma* a major challenge his organization faces since Katrina, which drew enormous media coverage, is how meager the public resources and funding have been during some recent Gulf Coast storms.

He also attributed shortfalls in public responses to a weak economy, "compassion burnout" and also people being plain "tired of giving to large organizations that spend [up to] 80 percent of the money on administration rather than helping those on the front lines."

But he said he was very encouraged by a flood of phone calls from Christians to a makeshift office he's set up at a local Houston parish. "Here's what's amazing," he said, citing an example. "A church in the ninth ward of New Orleans that we helped out during Katrina, and other churches we helped to get them out during Gustav, they were the ones calling us before and after Ike to say: 'How can we help you?'"

"Through the relationships we have from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, things are so much smoother than when we were trying to get things going back then. The kingdom of God is already established and people are in place," he said.

"People call it 'networking,' but a lot of nets don't work," he said. "The

only net that truly works is the body of Christ [when it] is
looking at doing
what Jesus said, and that is serving people by washing their
feet so to
speak.” **–Paul Steven Ghiringhelli**