

‘Spiritual Paramedics’: How Churches Bring Hope, Healing in Wake of Disasters

When the water got within a foot of their house, Troy and Kristen Dickerson knew it was time to go.

Troy grabbed their four kids and waded through the floodwaters threatening their home in Richmond, Texas. As he took the kids to his truck, he told Kristin to grab “whatever is important.”

She took their wedding album and then turned to go.

“You realize how unimportant everything else is,” she said from her parents’ house, where the family camped out after Hurricane Harvey flooded their home.

It’s been an exhausting experience, say the Dickersons. But they’ve gotten through with more than a little help from Sugarland Baptist Church, where the Dickersons are longtime members.

Folks from church showed up with meals, cleaning supplies, and volunteer labor once floodwaters receded.

They also provided an emotional pickup, says Troy.

“To have all these guys show up on my doorstep was a relief,” he says.

The Dickersons are not alone. Like many disaster victims, they needed food, shelter and a dose of kindness to help them get by, says Southern Baptist chaplain Endell Lee.

Lee, a Naval Reserve chaplain and self-described “spiritual paramedic,” spent six years as national coordinator for disaster spiritual care with the North American Mission Board.

His job: Train volunteers to “infuse faith, hope, love, grace and comfort into the situation, so people can begin picking up the pieces and putting their lives back together.”

That grace and comfort can be found in a bottle of water or hot meal—or a listening ear. It’s especially important as people take stock of their lives after a disaster and figure out what to do next.

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