

Billy Graham Chaplains Respond to Conn. School Shooting

The Billy Graham Rapid Response Team is responding to the horrific mass shooting today at an elementary school in Newtown, Conn., deploying crisis-trained chaplains to provide emotional and spiritual care to those affected by this tragedy.

By tonight, 10 chaplains trained in crisis management will be on the ground in Connecticut, including two chaplain coordinators each from Toms River, N.J., and Lynbrook, N.Y., stations for Hurricane Sandy relief work.

"The community itself is going to be in shock and denial," Rapid Response Team deployment manager Al New said. "Then anger comes in.

"We're just there to try to provide some comfort to them."

New said the chaplains deploying to Connecticut are some of the team's most seasoned, with experience dealing with mass shootings, either at Virginia Tech or the Aurora, Colorado, movie theatre tragedy in July.

"Residents are going to ask 'How did this happen?' or 'Why did this happen?'" New said. "We don't have the answers. And we can't even begin to understand what they're going through. We just try to provide them some hope."

Most recently, the Rapid Response Team has been working in the Hurricane Sandy aftermath, deploying to five different New York and New Jersey counties. Since the end of October, more than 150 chaplains have prayed with more than 6,000 storm survivors, and ministry continues in both Nassau County, N.Y.,

and Ocean County, N.J.

Since the ministry launched in 2002, the Rapid Response Team has deployed to more than 125 disasters, including hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, fires and shootings. The network of chaplains encompasses 48 of the 50 states.

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