

Hurricane Sandy Victims Open to Gospel Message

Hurricane Sandy seems like a distant memory to most of the country.

After all, it's been three full months now since the "superstorm" tore through countless coastal towns up the New Jersey and New York coast.

But to those still trying to rebuild, the memory of floodwaters rising in a matter of minutes is still very real.

In many cases, they've lost everything. And in some cases, they're still emotionally and spiritually reeling.

But through it all, nearly 10,000 people have been ministered to by the Billy Graham Rapid Response Team. More than 200 crisis-trained chaplains were honored to listen, comfort and pray one-on-one with more than 9,500 Sandy survivors since October 29.

"It was phenomenal (ministry)," Rapid Response Team director Jack Munday said. "The openness to the **gospel** was evident at each of the deployment sites."

Chaplains were deployed in four New Jersey counties—Atlantic, Bergen, Monmouth and Ocean, where ministry was recently concluded—as well as Nassau County in New York, where ministry is scheduled to continue through Feb. 8.

"The interest to engage with the ministry of Rapid Response Team was encouraging," Munday said. "The **Holy Spirit** was moving in the lives of people."

"When I was in Bergen County one day from 9 a.m. to noon, there were four of us who prayed with 35 people at one trailer park and four decisions were made for Christ. They would see

the blue shirts and just come up and ask for prayer.”

Hurricane Sandy was a moving natural disaster for many crisis-trained chaplains, partly because of the proximity. Very few deployments have happened in the northeast, where so many trained chaplains reside.

Within the first 24 hours after the storm hit, more than 130 chaplains—from the BGEA’s network of more than 1,000 nationwide—responded with interest to deploy to N.J., most residing on the East Coast.

And a majority of the 200-plus chaplains who deployed were ministering for the first time with the Rapid Response Team. One of the factors in such a high level of response was the “scope and intensity of the tragedy.”

“They just felt compelled to respond,” Munday said. “They had been eagerly awaiting an opportunity to minister.”

The five Sandy deployments—along with the tragic **Newtown school shooting** in December—ended one of the busiest Rapid Response Team years since the ministry began in 2002.

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