

# Billy Graham Team: 'Pray, Pray, Pray'

A retired educator. A social worker. A powder coating technician. An electrical engineer. A pair of professional chaplains and a couple full time pastors.

From various walks of life, this group of eight trained **chaplains** gathered in an RV trailer in Linwood, N.J., that serves as one of the mobile offices for the Billy Graham Rapid Response Team following **Hurricane Sandy**.

One of the eight is a veteran who has deployed more than a dozen times with the ministry. Three are on their first deployment. Each will spend the next week as a listening ear and a shoulder to cry on as they meet the emotional and spiritual needs of hurricane survivors.

But first, they're gathering here for their chaplain orientation, a regular first step of the deployment process.

Chaplain Pat Geyer, a law enforcement chaplain from Maryland who admits that she lost count of her deployments somewhere around No. 13, starts the meeting off with prayer: "For some, Lord, it's their first deployment," she prays. "Make it their best."

There are an incredible number of bullet points that need to be covered in the two-hour meeting, and the chaplains in attendance listen carefully, taking notes and asking questions. "Will we have a list of cell phone numbers?" "Are we supposed to help muck out the homes?" "Do you have a resource list?"

Chaplain Coordinator Sandy Bender goes over the history of the ministry (which has roots up the road in Manhattan in the days following 9/11), logistics, daily schedules, follow-up forms

and the chaplains' mission.

As with previous natural disasters, the Billy Graham Rapid Response Team chaplains will be supporting the work of disaster relief organization Samaritan's Purse however they can, including visiting and praying with volunteer work crews at destroyed homes. "We're very cautious on-site so we don't disrupt the team," said Sandy.

They'll also "pray the teams out" in the morning as the crews prepare to leave for their tasks of mudding out basements, removing fallen trees and tacking tarps on roofs.

"Don't be surprised if someone you 'prayed out' in the morning comes back and shares with you something they're anxious about or a concern about their family and ask you to pray for that too," added Pat.

In fact, prayer is a topic that comes up regularly during the orientation. "Make sure that you're 'prayed up,'" said Sandy. "Pray before you leave here. Pray as you go. When you're ministering, one of you talks while your partner prays. The Lord has sent you here, so pray, pray, pray."

In addition to their work alongside Samaritan's Purse, the chaplains will minister to the homeowners whose lives have been devastated by the hurricane.

"These people have just lost everything that they've ever held dear," said Sandy. "Yeah, I can replace the toaster and the clothing, but I can't replace my dad's Bible. I can't replace my wedding pictures or the dead flowers I saved from the first time he gave them to me."

She also warned the chaplains to remember that in most cases the storm survivors will have been dealing with other issues in their lives before the hurricane, such as lost jobs, bankruptcy, poverty, illness, deaths in the family and divorce.

“These people had storms before the storm,” Sandy said. “And the storms that hit before this storm might have been just as devastating.”

Sandy doesn't shy away from the fact that the task before the chaplains is daunting. “There's so much need that it can be overwhelming, and you can only do so much.”

Her advice on how the chaplains should respond in the face of such need? Just be there. “We are a ministry of presence. It's what we do most of the time. It's a ‘show up and shut up’ type of ministry.

“You need ears that are bigger than your mouth. Listen, listen, listen.”

Near the end of the orientation, Sandy's husband, chaplain coordinator Chuck Bender, returns to the RV after a full day of meeting with local church, civic and political leaders to let them know of the services being provided.

He shares a story of driving the Rapid Response Team vehicle to a concrete barrier where the authorities were turning people away from an area that was particularly hard hit. After mentioning the name ‘Billy Graham’ the officer stepped to the side and said one word: ‘Go!’

The chaplains drove right through, and—according to Chuck—there wasn't a dry eye in the truck as they realized how God was opening doors for ministry in the wake of Hurricane Sandy.

Apparently that focus on prayer is working.

More than two dozen chaplains are ministering in New Jersey this week. Some have deployed multiple times, and some are on their first deployment with the Billy Graham Rapid Response Team. Please pray for the chaplains as they minister to the emotional and spiritual needs of the storm survivors. Pray

especially for:

- Boldness, unity and protection.
- Physical strength during long days, with early mornings and late nights.
- Emotional and spiritual strength as they take on the grief of homeowners and offer the hope of Christ in return.

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