

What's Really Going on at Lakewood Church in the Wake of Harvey Damage

Social media users and Houstonians alike are livid at megachurch pastor Joel Osteen after he cancelled Lakewood church services and did not immediately open the campus as a shelter.

But there's more to this story than meets the eye.

"Lakewood's doors are open to anyone needing shelter. We are also coordinating with the city as a collection site for distributing supplies to area shelters. We are looking for volunteers and collecting diapers, baby formula, baby food and other supplies. Please bring these items to Lakewood Church, Circle Drive off Timmons St. ," Andrea Davis of Lakewood Church says.

Don Iloff, senior communications director for Lakewood, told Charisma News the church is not turning away people who show up but isn't exactly equipped to take care of refugees.

"The city was prepared for this dangerous storm, and the city and county have provided rescue teams that are ready to go ... there's a shelter that's five times bigger than our church just a few miles away stocked with everything people need, from food to medical needs," Iloff says.

The church has also partnered with Samaritan's Purse to meet the needs of the city.

This isn't the first time the church has partnered with Franklin Graham's relief organization. Iloff says Osteen's brother, Paul, has helped facilitate the connection.

As Harvey leaves the state, strengthens in the Gulf and

prepares to return, Lakewood, along with other Christian organizations, is preparing to handle the devastation.

The devastation was so bad that Samaritan's Purse teams were unable to enter into the state of Texas until Monday evening.

Despite these statements, many have used the internet to attack Osteen and his congregation.

Pictures surfaced of a seemingly dry campus, and the church faced intense vitriol.

Lifestyle blogger and church attender Lynne Gabriel shared photos of the damage on her Twitter account.

Seriously quite sickening when people spread negative news without knowing the situation. This is the situation of our church @lakewoodch

– Lynne Gabriel (@heyitslynneg) August 28, 2017

Just an idea of how devastated our city of #houston has been. #hurricaneharvey

– Lynne Gabriel (@heyitslynneg) August 29, 2017

"We're expecting more damage, but in aftermath, we'll work with Samaritan's Purse. We're talking to TBN about maybe doing a fundraiser show after the storm is over. We're working with the city. The last time we had a storm, we worked with the city to do a fundraiser in our sanctuary. We're looking for these opportunities. There will be no shortage of opportunities, and we'll be working extensively in the aftermath for sure," Iloff tells Charisma.

One opportunity, Iloff says, is the church's men's group, which is full of skilled laborers, contractors, architects and brick layers. Even before the storm, the group went out to fix homes in the community. After the storm, he says they might spend the next five years repairing homes damaged by Harvey.

"This is going to devastate us for years to come," Iloff says.