

Bastrop Deployment
16-18 November 2011

The Office of Texas Baptist Chaplaincy received a request on 8 November for chaplains to support the Texas Baptist Men (TBM) operating at Bastrop, Texas following the Bastrop Wild Fires of September 2011. The request was to provide 2 chaplains each day for 9-11 November.

This deployment of chaplains followed the SOP of the Texas Baptist Crisis Resiliency Team. Bobby Smith, as the Director of Chaplaincy for Texas Baptists and the Texas Baptist Crisis Resiliency Team, received the request and handed off the responsibility for coordinating the team to Dan Franklin, the Crisis Resiliency Team Coordinator.

The primary mission was to provide emotional and spiritual support to disaster victims and members of the TBM response teams. The plan was for chaplains to:

- Arrive at the First Baptist Church (FBC) Annex at 0630 each day and eat breakfast with TBM members.
- Go with one of the Texas Baptist Men Chain Saw teams to disaster site.
- Be available to respond as needed.
- Return to First Baptist Church annex and eat supper with TBM members.

These chaplains responded and went to Bastrop:

Wednesday 9 November: Dan Franklin

Thursday, 10 November: T J Burris and Scott Atkinson

Friday, 11 November: Will Bearden and Aaron Treanor

POSITIVES:

- Several times, home owners were at the sites being worked by the TBM Chain Saw Crews. In one case, the Blue Cap called the chaplain for assistance with a homeowner. This turned out to be a tremendous opportunity to do ministry and provide emotional and spiritual support.
- There were two accidents with TBM members during the time chaplains were present. Fortunately neither of these turned out to be serious, but cutting trees and removing brush does have an inherent danger. It is good to have a chaplain available in case there is a serious incident.
- The chaplains pitched in to help with brush removal when there was no specific needs for chaplain support.
- Prayer played a significant role. Chaplains were able to pray with TBM teams and disaster victims.

IMPROVE:

- Need more chaplains trained and ready. The list needs to be very long of those trained. Because of other commitments, not everyone is able to respond. This is an issue we have seen on other call outs. Most of our chaplains work in other positions and it can be difficult to respond on short notice.
- A shirt or hat to identify us as Texas Baptist Chaplains would be a plus. There was some discussion about what this should look like, but no clear consensus.
- It would be ideal to have a chaplain deploy and remain for a longer period of time than one day. This would establish a better continuity of support at the site and the chaplain could also coordinate with the Office of Texas Baptist Chaplaincy for additional chaplain support as needed.

DISCUSSION: Every disaster situation is different and the needs for chaplains can vary significantly based upon the phase of the disaster and the situation changes from day to day. On Wednesday I saw four homeowners. I had opportunity to visit with them and to pray for them. On Friday, Will Bearden and Aaron Treanor did not see any home owners. This is a normal dynamic of disaster response teams. Sometimes there will not be any disaster victims in the area and the only ones to provide chaplain support to are the members of the disaster response team.

In this phase of the disaster response, there is really only a need for one experienced chaplain. At the same time, there is value in sending two chaplains. This was the first deployment for Scott Atkinson and Aaron Treanor. Scott shared that he really was not sure what to do in this situation. It is valuable for new chaplains to go on several deployments with experienced chaplains.

The basic plan for the chaplain response was good. It is also good to deploy with one team, and then to move to another team. Sometimes the team leaders (blue caps) are expecting home owners at their site. This should be the priority teams to support. When home owners are not present, the chaplain should be prepared to assist the team by moving brush or any other support needs required. The chaplain should not just hold a Bible and watch others work. However; the focus must be maintained on the primary mission. The primary mission of the chaplain is there to provide emotional and spiritual support and the chaplain needs to be looking for opportunities to do that mission. It would be easy to lose focus and do brush removal.

There were also needs at the TBM coordination center at the FBC Annex. Home owners go to the annex to request assistance. I went back to the FBC Annex and had lunch. While there a homeowner was having significant issues and needed emotional and spiritual support. I was able to visit with that person for about an hour and provide support.

On the issue of chaplain deploying for a longer period of time than one day. This would be ideal when feasible, but may not always work. Since many of the chaplains work other jobs (chaplains in other jobs or pastors), it is not always feasible for them to deploy for more than one day at a time. Doing like we did by deploying chaplains who live close enough to go to the site and return on the same day is a workable plan, but not ideal. If we have more advance notice, some chaplains may be able to coordinate with their work to deploy for a longer period of time.

We also need to enlist retired pastors and chaplains to serve as members to the Texas Baptist Crisis Resiliency Team. Almost everyone on our team is NOVA trained, but for the Chaplain specific piece of response to disasters we can utilize CISM trained chaplains. While they could not deploy on a NOVA team response they can deploy on a requirement for disaster response trained chaplains. We need to enlist more of these people to be a part of our team.

CONCLUSION: The feedback from chaplains participating in this deployment and the leadership of the TBM was very positive. The Office of Texas Baptist Chaplains will continue to be prepared to support the needs of Texas Baptists responding to disasters.

Chaplain Dan Franklin
Coordinator, Texas Baptist Crisis Resiliency Team