

Bastrop Deployment – Camp Swift
7-9 September 2011

The Office of Texas Baptist Chaplaincy received a request for chaplains to support the Texas Baptist Men Feeding Unit operating at Camp Swift Texas during the Bastrop Wild Fires of September 2011. The request was to provide 3 to 4 chaplains for the evening feeding sessions on 7 and 8 September. An additional requirement later developed for the evening of 9 September.

The primary mission was to provide emotional and spiritual support to firefighters and other support personnel during meal time. The plan was for chaplains to sit at the tables and be available to provide any needed support. The chaplains would come from the San Antonio area and would go to Camp Swift each evening.

These chaplains responded and went to Camp Swift:

Wednesday Night: Dan Franklin, Charles Moss, Will Bearden

Thursday Night: Dan Franklin, Will Bearden, T J Burris, Raymond Woodruff

Friday Night: Dan Franklin, Jerry Tanner, Charles Moss

This was the first time that the Office of Texas Baptist Chaplaincy had responded to a request from Texas Baptist Men, utilizing the newly developed SOP of the Texas Baptist Crisis Resiliency Team.

POSITIVES:

- Most conversations with firefighters were of the “friendly” type. One out of state fire fighter commented about how friendly the people were in Texas and how they felt appreciated here. These casual conversations were all that was needed in most situations.
- Several conversations did get more intense. Several firefighters expressed frustration with not being able to save houses. One specifically talked about finding a family memento in a burned out house and placing it in a location that he hoped the home owner might later find.
- Prayer did play a significant role. In most cases it was a conversation where the firefighters were assured of prayers, but in at least one case there was a specific request by some firefighters for prayer.
- Ministry to the Yellow Caps with the Feeding Unit is important. One member of the feeding unit had lost his home and the previous year his wife had died. A great deal of time was spent with him. Our prayers continue to be with him in his loss.

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.

- While it is important to care for all the firefighters, focus special attention on those from in state. Out of state firefighters were usually members of teams, whose primary job was to fight forest fires. This was not the primary responsibility of most in state firefighters. They were often more personally impacted by the fires and destruction of homes.
- 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 with the feeding unit and remain the entire time. 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.

CONCLUSION: The feedback from chaplains participating in this deployment and the leadership of the feeding team of the Texas Baptist Men Feeding Unit is that this was very worthwhile. 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



Charles Moss and T J Burris with Firefighters at Camp Swift, Texas
September 2011