



Help Comes in Teal

By Ginger Smith

Using a teal blue pick-up truck, staff from the UBA Baptist Mission Centers and volunteers moved through the hurricane-stricken neighborhoods distributing food, ice, and other necessities to the community.

“Crisis” and “relief” are words that are used on a daily basis as the staff and volunteers of the three UBA Baptist Mission Centers seek to offer compassion and love to hurting, oppressed neighborhoods in the inner city communities of Near Northside and Magnolia Park. When Hurricane Ike threatened the city of Houston with potential flooding, power outages and destruction, the need for crisis relief was raised to a new level. The staff of BMC was concerned for their neighborhoods; many of whom have limited transportation and few financial resources. Hurricane-readiness measures were unrealistic for many in these neighborhoods who struggle with a day to day need for food, clothing and shelter.

When the storm hit and power outages marked the city, the staff members of BMC made a hurried approach to assess damages and offer relief of a new kind to the inner city. Upon arrival at Gano Mission Center, debris and tree limbs were commonplace but the greatest concern was the walk-in freezer and cooler that contained over \$3,000 in perishable food. With the power out, the food would ruin if not given away to those who had grills or other methods of cooking. Over the next few days, the mission centers utilized a teal colored pick-up truck to distribute this food to the community.

On the Monday following Ike’s arrival, the truck filled with semi-frozen chicken, fish, beef and a few staff members weaved their way through the streets of Near Northside to distribute food. Initially, the neighbors thought they were FEMA and ran to the truck to receive commodities and prayerfully request ice. The staff was able to give away all the food in just two hours and returned to Gano Center with a greater understanding of the immediate needs of the people. More help was certainly needed. Without power, information regarding PODS or other distribution sites was unavailable. Everyone was asking when more help would come.

Armed with the final truckload of perishable food, the staff went out again a second day to distribute items. Again, people begged for ice, milk for their children and additional food. Realizing the need was greater than the supply, Ginger Smith, executive director of BMC, began calling on North American Mission Board and other out-of-state friends to help. With a lack of electricity and limited cell phone usage, calls were difficult and emails impossible. Communication was complicated and help seemed like a long way away.

Damage to Facilities

There was no evidence of major damages at Gano Mission. However, both Fletcher Mission and Joy Fellowship Center endured flooding. Joy Fellowship had roof damage which caused the gym to flood; thankfully, aside from water that was successfully removed, only the roof remains in need of repair. Fletcher Mission suffered the most damage with the Christian Women’s Job Corps building flooding. A volunteer team from Bellview Baptist Church in Westlake, Louisiana, responded immediately to provide clean-up and restore the flooded carpet.



On Wednesday, the staff of BMC along with a few volunteers, met to clean up the properties at Gano Mission and Fletcher Mission. During the day, Ginger was in communication with North American Mission Board who connected her with the Red Cross office in Dallas. The contact was glad to consider helping but needed a written request before things could proceed. Again, no electricity prevented email and fax requests so Ginger called a friend in California who wrote the request by phone dictation and emailed it to the Red Cross.

Thursday morning, the Red Cross arrived at Gano Mission and brought 800 meals for the community. Since no one knew if they would actually be coming, no publicity had been made and only a few hundred people showed up for food. The remaining meals were split between the Red Cross truck and BMC's now infamous teal pick-up truck. Both vehicles drove through the neighborhood distributing food and advertising the return of the Red Cross that evening for a meal. That night, they returned with 800 meals and ran out of food! The line wrapped around the parking lot at Gano Mission. The Red Cross saw evidence of the need and committed to returning with food as long as the people were without electricity. This ministry continued for 7 days with a total of 10,000 meals served!

During one meal, the staff and neighbors were surprised to see **Ms. USA, Crystle Stewart**, on the truck serving food to those that were hungry. It was an encouraging day as it communicated love and concern for those in the neighborhood.



In addition to the amazing work of the Red Cross, a truckload of ice was delivered from Bellview Baptist Church in Westlake, LA. Trinity Baptist Church in Katy baked homemade goods and distributed them to the community. They also returned to serve a hot meal at Fletcher Mission and provide much needed clean clothes and ice to people. All of these wonderful gifts were distributed out of the back of the pick-up truck! This truck has become synonymous with the ministry of Baptist Mission Centers and has served as a symbol of hope to their inner city neighbors. Through this desperate time, God gave BMC an opportunity to meet new neighbors and offer love and relief to the inner city of Houston.

For more information on the mission and ministries of the Baptist Mission Centers, go to <http://www.bmchouston.org> or call Ginger Smith, Executive Director, at 713.227.0304.