

Calvary Chapel relief work helps hurricane survivors



September storms have kept members of the hurricane relief ministry at Calvary Chapel in Sarasota busy. COURTESY PHOTO

By CHRISTINE HAWES CORRESPONDENT

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Sarasotan Curt Hencye was still busy helping victims of Hurricane Gustav in Houma, La., when rain from Hurricane Ike started hitting the area.

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To learn more about Calvary Chapel's relief effort, and to donate in support of its efforts, please go to calvarychapelsarasota.com/306287.ihtml.

"As time goes on and things get done, people are going to do for themselves. We just try to help them get back up and to work, because it's so overwhelming for them at first."

-- CURT HENCYE,

helping with relief work in the aftermath of the hurricanes that hit the Gulf Coast

So after almost a month on the road aiding hurricane victims, during which he averages about five hours of sleep a night following days toiling away at tree cutting and removal, Hencye was back at it that weekend.

Hencye, coordinator of the hurricane relief ministry at Calvary Chapel of Sarasota, said the work contributed by him and a network of church volunteers nationwide helps residents get started on relief before formal emergency relief arrives.

"As time goes on and things get done, people are going to do for themselves," Hencye said this month while helping a fellow volunteer get his truck unstuck from mud near Houma. "We just try to help them get back up and to work, because it's so overwhelming for them at first."

The truck and trailer provided by Calvary Chapel have proven essential so far this season in southern Missouri and in Baton Rouge, in addition to Houma. Hencye is among volunteers from Calvary Chapels nationwide that strategically locate themselves in areas facing hurricanes, then begin immediately providing the most basic of tasks needed for recovery: mostly tree removal and transport of food.

Some of the tasks that Hencye and other volunteers have helped with so far include feeding 5,000 meals in three days to people in St. Bernard's Parrish, helping to unload semi-trucks full of food from relief agencies and helping to speed along the reinstatement of electric service by getting rid of trees and other debris rather than waiting for the power company.

"The more we can do upfront, the quicker the people that come by can get on with their job of getting power back on."

Calvary Chapel originally founded its relief effort to address local hurricane and flooding emergencies, inspired largely by the suffering they saw people suffer in nearby Port Charlotte following Hurricane Charley in 2004.

Since then, Hencye has made hurricane relief his full-time devotion, traveling to needy areas outside of Florida struck by hurricanes or natural disasters.

Hencye and his wife, Mary Jo, who helps keep in touch with people here at home in Sarasota, have also coordinated hurricane relief seminars for local churches.

Hencye said he learns more with each trip about the needs he and Calvary Chapel's relief effort could help fulfill. For example, nails have been difficult to come by in the Houma area.

Chains for chainsaws are a constant need. So is mid-sized machinery like Caterpillars, which can make the task of clearing away fallen debris immeasurably speedier, Hencye said.