

Victims and Volunteers

by Rev. Daynette Sneed
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In Eastern North Carolina, Hurricane Florence left behind a flood of unwelcomed memories and began a new chapter of mission and ministry for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Since the epic storm, I have been serving in the town of Trenton, North Carolina as the Local Coordinator of Disaster Response for Volunteers and Activities.

Trenton is a one-stoplight town with just over 300 residents. There's a grocery store, a pharmacy, a gas station, a bank, and a couple of places to eat out. The town has a volunteer fire department and during special holidays, the American Legion Hall is decorated to host community events. Ask anyone who calls this home, Trenton has it all, or at least it did until Hurricane Florence flooded most of its homes and businesses. This is a story of relationships between victims and volunteers and our ministry efforts to connect with a small town in Eastern North Carolina.

After the disaster, CBF and CBFNC put its arms around Trenton and Whiteville, which seemed to be off the major grids for assistance. CBF came into Trenton



flooded with three feet of water. CBF volunteers helped with the tear-out including removing their beautiful, river soaked, sixty-three-year old hardwood floors secured with handmade nails. Volunteers served the congregation of St. Stephen's Church in Trenton with the tear-out of their entire facility. The sanctuary and family life center filled with four feet of water, losing everything including the pews, kitchen, church and office furniture. Others served Mrs. Mattie Wilder. Her home flooded in the Haiti area of Trenton. She shared the story of her husband who died while he was rescuing someone during Hurricane Floyd in 1999. In each family, most to all possessions were soaked by flooding waters.

Jerry, a homeless veteran, arrived with a special group of fellow veterans to labor for three days of volunteer work. His poem about his experience in Trenton is a witness for us all. There is no gap between victims and volunteers because Christ stands in the gap to connect us all in holy relationships.

*No matter what color or beliefs,
I realize we all have a heart.
It amazes me when all is lost, how people come together.
The ones that have a life, and ones that have no life at all.
We do this with our heart because we feel the pain of each other.
If we're close or far apart, thank you for all that you do.
We just want you to know that we love you too.
There's a lot of love that is shared, you don't have to thank us,
Just remember that we care.*

—Jerry, volunteer FBC Asheville, NC



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to ask about their needs after the storm. Shortly afterwards, teams began arriving from partner churches with one purpose in mind, to be the hands and feet of Christ after disaster. Physically, they are helping residents tear out drywall, floors, insulation and other materials affected by the flood and growing mold inside homes. Spiritually, they are providing the light of Christ to a town in need. Encounters in Trenton are the beginning of holy relationships between victims and volunteers.

Church groups from Georgia, Kentucky, and North Carolina brought many of the necessary tools to tear out flooded homes, provide smiles to exhausted souls, and speak and pray words of God's healing to listening ears. During this time of ministry, these volunteers have felt the pain of the community, experienced tears, and listened to stories of disappointment and stalled dreams. In moments of full transparency, victims expressed how they were forced to let go of life as it had been.

The Sawyers were rescued by helicopter and their home was