

# Faith Groups Outperform FEMA in Disaster Relief

It's not necessarily a knock against government, but it also shouldn't be surprising.

Louis DeBroux · Sep. 13, 2017



After a dozen years without a major hurricane, the U.S. has been hit hard in recent weeks, getting rocked first by Hurricane Harvey in Texas, and then Hurricane Irma hitting Florida. In both cases, the storms destroyed thousands of homes and impacted millions of lives. And in both cases, ordinary faith-based groups and churches beat government to the scene to aid victims.

What the average American news consumer may not know is that faith-based relief groups have provided roughly 80% of the aid. Methodists, Presbyterians and other denominations sent out relief crews to help with cleanup after Harvey. Samaritan's Purse, the Christian non-profit founded by the Reverend Franklin Graham, brought a convoy of trucks loaded with food, chainsaws and other goods. Seventh Day Adventists began dispersing bottled water, diapers, clothing and other supplies. Mormons have also gotten in on the act, providing truckloads of water, hygiene kits and other relief supplies for the victims of Hurricane Harvey, as well as opening up their church buildings as command centers for coordination of relief efforts. They will also be sending in thousands of volunteers to help with the cleanup and recovery from these storms.

Beyond the U.S., Baptist volunteers are already on the ground in the Caribbean, assessing needs there. That's just scratching the surface.

It's amazing to see churches and their volunteers already on site giving assistance before FEMA shows up. Many of these Christians are veterans of previous disaster relief efforts, able to assess needs and get to work without waiting on government bureaucrats for direction. Often times, FEMA plays a supporting role in the work the churches have begun. This is the essence of the American spirit, and of the Christian spirit — self-reliance and charity working hand in hand.

While the victims of these disasters rejoice at the sight of these Earth-bound angels come to provide assistance, not everyone is pleased at non-government-authorized charity. Some have sought to prohibit churches from receiving federal funds to aid in their disaster relief efforts.

As of now, FEMA guidelines prohibit federal aid from going to any institution that allocates more than half of its space to “religious programming,” which would obviously include virtually every church. This despite the fact that many of the same churches being denied federal funds have already opened up their facilities to victims of these disasters and as coordination centers for relief efforts. Several churches are suing.

Last Friday, President Donald Trump tweeted the following message on the subject: “Churches in Texas should be entitled to reimbursement from FEMA Relief Funds for helping victims of Hurricane Harvey (just like others).”

(We’ll offer the caveat that churches should do and are doing what they can whether backed by the feds or not.)

Sen. Ben Sasse (R-NE) also highlighted the unfairness of targeting for discrimination the very religious organizations that are doing the most to alleviate suffering. “This policy discriminates against people of faith. It sends the message that communities of worship aren’t welcome to participate fully in public life,” he said. “It reduces the facilities and volunteers time, talent, and effort available to support the broader community. And it is inconsistent with the Supreme Court’s recent 7-2 ruling in Trinity Lutheran. ... In other words, it is unconstitutional. It is unreasonable. And it is impeding ongoing recovery efforts.”

Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, a militant secularist organization seeking to eradicate every last vestige of religion, and specifically Christianity, from American public life, has actually condemned allowing faith-based charities the same access to government resources that non-religious groups enjoy.

Barry Lynn, founder of the anti-religious group, made the following statement, stunning in its abject contempt for religion and its heartlessness toward the victims these Christian groups assist: “We know a lot of people in Texas are suffering, and we are sympathetic. But the fact that something bad has happened does not justify a second wrong. Taxpayers should not be forced to protect religious institutions that they don’t subscribe to.”

Not discriminating against religious groups providing critical aid to disaster victims is a “wrong”? Lynn’s is an outrageous statement worthy of condemnation. The irony of the anti-religious secularists’ position is that they are not themselves willing to provide the same relief they seek to prevent churches from providing. As Arthur Brooks, respected social scientist and president of the American Enterprise Institute, points out regarding charitable giving in America, “Religious people are far more charitable than nonreligious people. In years of research, I have never found a measurable way in which secularists are more charitable than religious people.”

When seeing those in need, Christians act upon a moral imperative required by their religious beliefs, without thought of earthly reward. In the Christian faith, when we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, or give drink to the thirsty, we are serving Christ, for it was Christ himself who declared, “Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”