

Deep Water

by Marc Brooks, Pastor of Gethsemane Baptist Church, Richlands, VA



This wasn't a far-flung part of the country. This was my hometown. ...We desperately needed help.

Like many pastors, I had some Disaster Relief (DR) training, solicited multiple special offerings for disasters in other parts of the country, and faithfully prayed for those affected by natural disasters. Deep water was about to shake everything I thought I knew about DR.

Rising water is not an extraordinary occurrence in this part of our state (Southwest Virginia). Water would often rise and subsequently fall. But on this particular day in February, the water rose and left parts of Richlands underneath the Clinch River.

This wasn't a far-flung part of the country. This was my hometown. This wasn't a line on a prayer list. These were my people. We desperately needed help.

The next two weeks were filled with many challenges and an uncertainty I had never experienced before as a local church pastor.

The first call I received was from Brandon Pickett with the SBC of Virginia. The discussion was about the overwhelming destruction of my hometown. I'm sure we discussed many different challenges and topics. We had only been a part of the SBCV for about six months. The only thing I remember about that call was the end. Pickett said, "Marc, you guys are not alone."

SBCV's DR coordinator at the time, Mark Gauthier, arrived in Richlands from Lynchburg. As we began to survey the damage, he was giving encouragement and guidance to our local leaders overwhelmed by disaster. He asked to pray with everyone involved from our mayor to a random man standing in the street pondering his next move.

We prepared to host teams of volunteers who had volunteered from all over the state to help us. A huge man named Ron Steele grabbed me and introduced himself as the team leader. He had an enormous smile, and his grip engulfed my entire hand. He said, "We are here, and we're not leaving until the job is done." I believed him.

I spent hours with the team at meals, devotions, job sites, and interacting with our community. Their positive and encouraging spirits were contagious. The team dealt with homeowners with compassion and their belongings with care. These families were not just projects to be completed but sufferers who needed love and encouragement.

Team members shared the Gospel with sincerity, prayed with homeowners, offered assurance, listened to their stories, and met their families. The team even went to the lengths of making sure one small girl whose home was flooded received a

Valentine's gift. The presence of the yellow shirts was truly embraced by our community and celebrated by our church family.

Our soggy hometown slowly began to dry out and return to a normalcy we could not imagine at the time. The teams returned home and equipment moved to the next disaster site. Our church was left grateful for our partners and thankful to God. The support and investment into our community continued, thanks to the generous gifts of SBCV churches to our *Vision Virginia* Missions Offering.

I do my best to keep up with families who were impacted by the floodwaters. I try to remind them that they are not alone. We share a tie to a disaster and a love for those people in yellow shirts. My prayer is that we would also share a heavenly home because of the completed work of Jesus Christ. ■

PHOTO: The receding Clinch River retreats from Orange Street homes in Richlands, VA after two days of rain. Photographer, Andre Teague/Bristol Herald Courier

RESOURCE:

For more information on Disaster Relief and how you can get involved,

 sbcv.org/dr