



Houston churches fight flooding after Harvey cancels services

It takes a lot to cancel church in the shiny Bible Belt stronghold of Houston, Texas, home to more megachurches than any city in America. Specifically, 9 trillion gallons of rain in a weekend.

Hurricane Harvey shut down Sunday services from downtown to the sprawling suburbs, where churches replaced typical worship gatherings

with sermon videos posted on Facebook or simply messages to stay safe.

Almost all Houston-area churches—including the Bayou City’s biggest congregations such as Second Baptist, Houston’s First Baptist, Church Without Walls, Wheeler Avenue Baptist, and Woodlands Church—canceled all Sunday activities as a precaution.

The congregations were glad they did when unprecedented rain levels ended up blocking many routes and leaking into some church buildings by Saturday night and Sunday morning.

“We have five services on the weekend, and I cannot ever remember canceling all services,” said Chris Seay, lead pastor at Ecclesia. “We asked our community to stay home with family and to look out for their neighbors.”

Gregg Matte, pastor at Houston’s First Baptist, spent the weekend checking in with members of his congregation—from elderly evacuees to a local TV meteorologist—with whom he has been texting Bible verses in between broadcasts.

“I don’t know that I’ve ever prayed like that, like I prayed today, just asking God to have mercy on

us,” Matte [said](#) in a Facebook video Sunday evening. “Just make the rain stop.”

Houston Christians did more than pray from the dry refuge of their homes or evacuation spots. Clergymen were featured in a couple viral news reports from Sunday: a preacher who checked submerged cars for trapped drivers, and a priest who tried to paddle his way to Mass at Houston’s Catholic Charismatic Center.

Several churches located on higher ground served as temporary shelters or meeting points for evacuees. Members with clear routes shuttled friends or dropped off supplies.

“Right now we are getting supplies together to take to a few area shelters. Baby stuff seems to be in short supply,” said Jason Crandall, pastor of CityView Church in Pearland, a southern suburb.

However, there’s only so much they can do right now, with many churches themselves affected and more rain on its way. For example, celebrity pastor Joel Osteen’s Lakewood Church, which meets in a 16,800-seat arena, cannot open its doors to house displaced families because the church itself is [inaccessible](#) due to the flooding.

So churches eager to help have taken an “already-but-not-yet” approach, rallying resources for more large-scale and long-term recovery, even if they have to hold off on major outreach right now.

“We are following the guidance of our officials and hunkering down in order to remain safe while they focus on those in the most immediate danger,” said Andrew Doyle, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas. “We want to emphasize that we need to wait until the danger has passed to make our response so as not to complicated further the ongoing rescue operations.”

Churches serving as unofficial shelters can quickly find themselves overwhelmed by demand and logistics. After several members tweeted Sunday that First Baptist Church North Houston had opened its doors to stranded residents, the building ended up with 300 evacuees, not enough food, and no working toilets. “It’s frustrating, but I’m just relying on God to fulfill his promises to us,” youth pastor David McDougle told The Washington Post, “We’re all praying.”

Nine churches in the Houston area served as temporary shelters for the city until survivors

could be moved safely to other venues, such as the downtown convention center where officials are coordinating relief efforts. One of them, Fallbrook Church in north Houston, has already transported all of its evacuees and [closed](#).

Pastor Kirbyjon Caldwell, a former faith adviser to George W. Bush and pastor of Windsor Village United Methodist Church, announced that from Monday, his church would shelter residents affected by another round of evacuations.

Dozens of churches have launched web sites where people can request relief, sign up to volunteer, or make a donation, so they can mobilize once the storm clears.

Seay at Ecclesia has reached out to fellow pastors to request that churches send relief teams to help:

We will begin organizing teams to help as soon as possible. I don't know what the full impact on the city will be. I don't know how much longer the storm will continue. What I do know is that we need your help. And as a fellow pastor, let me say this—we need it soon.

If you would be willing to send a team to Houston equipped with tools and supplies to assist in cleanup and recovery, Ecclesia will

provide housing for you. We are also looking for opportunities to provide breakfast each morning as well as morning devotions and prayer for your team.

Once the storm is over, the big work will begin. The faith community can get to work before FEMA and other national groups since they have churches ready on the ground. National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (National VOAD) represents more than 50 denominational relief agencies and secular charities that make up the “faith-based FEMA.” A team from Samaritan’s Purse arrived Sunday in Victoria, about two hours south of Houston, where they slept without power or water in a local church. After meeting with officials Monday morning, the aid organization will send out assessors to begin gauging damage.

“We will do as much as we can,” said Kristin Koning, an assistant program manager with Samaritan’s Purse, which is already signing up volunteer teams online.

The Episcopal diocese will soon deploy spiritual care teams to walk the hardest-hit neighborhoods, distributing Home Depot gift cards and offering pastoral care, according to diocese spokeswoman Carol Barnwell. After

Hurricane Ike in 2008, the Episcopal Church relief team rebuilt more than 150 homes in nearby Galveston, Texas.

Jamie Aten, director of the Humanitarian Disaster Institute at Wheaton College, shared [four spiritual survival tips](#) to keep in mind amid a storm like Harvey. “When we seek spiritual community, we can experience God’s presence, provision, and love in tangible ways,” he wrote. “We can choose to allow pain to isolate from others, or to bring us together.”

Singing priests hit a high note in reshuffle

Changes in Down and Connor were announced by Bishop Noel Treanor this week, Alf McCreary writes in the Belfast Telegraph.

Fr Manuelito Milo, the first non-national to be ordained in an Irish diocese, has also been given a new appointment.

The Very Reverend Eugene O'Hagan, one of singing trio The Priests, who is already the Chancellor of the Diocese, has been given the additional appointment of Vicar-General.



Eugene O'Hagan (Centre) has been appointed Vicar General of Down and Connor.

In Canon Law the Vicar-General has responsibility for the Diocese in the absence of the Bishop.

The Very Rev David Delargy, also part of the singing troupe and at present Parish Priest of St Michael the Archangel in west Belfast, becomes Parish Priest of the Lough Shore Parishes of Whitehouse, Greencastle and St James. Fr Martin O'Hagan, the third member of The Priests, is currently the Parish Priest in Newtownards and Comber.

As well as this series of best-selling CDs which have brought them widespread international

fame, The Priests undertake regular concert tours in Ireland, the UK and elsewhere.

However, their recording contract also allows them to fulfil their normal clerical duties in their different roles.

Fr Manuelito Milo, the first non-national to be ordained in an Irish diocese, has also been given a new appointment.

Fr Manuelito Milo, who was born in the Philippines, was ordained into the Diocese of Down and Connor on June 25 last year, and he has been appointed as a curate at St Patrick's, with additional duties at the Mater Hospital.

He was educated at St Malachy's and Queen's University, and later at Maynooth. He was a chaplain in Cork University Hospital before coming to Belfast where he was engaged in pastoral work, prior to his ordination.

Other appointments include that of the Very Rev Martin Magill, currently administrator of Ballyclare and Ballygowan near Larne, who will become Parish Priest at St John's in Belfast.

Fr Magill is a well-known ecumenist who has worked closely with the Rev Steve Stockman, minister of Fitzroy Presbyterian Church, in

establishing the annual Four Corners Festival in Belfast.

Last night Fr Magill told the Belfast Telegraph that he was moving with mixed emotions.

"I am heartbroken to be leaving the Ballyclare and Ballygowan parish, where I really enjoyed my last 11 months as administrator," he said. "However, I am also looking forward to returning to Belfast, having been in west Belfast for 15 years.

"I'm looking forward particularly to coming to St John's and working with the local politicians and the community."

Another significant appointment is that of Paula McKeown, who becomes director of the Living Church Project, in succession to the former director Alan McGuckian, who was recently installed as Bishop of Raphoe.

Fr Ciaran Feeney, the Parish Priest of St Colmcille's on the Newtownards Road, has been appointed to St Michael the Archangel's.

Fr Feeney informed his congregation at yesterday's Mass, and afterwards received a standing ovation. All appointments take effect from September 22.

Three priests ordained for Down and Dromore



Families, supporters and sponsors gathered in Down Cathedral on Sunday (27 August) to celebrate with three newly ordained priests.

Bishop Harold Miller ordained Revd Christopher St John, Revd Mark Gallagher and Revd Stuart Moles, and the diocesan Bible Week speaker, The Most Revd Greg Venables, gave the address at the service.

Bishop Greg preached on the Gospel reading in John 20 when Jesus appears to the disciples in the upper room. It was, he said, “an encounter which offers a message of hope to all who are fearful, anxious and confused”.

Speaking to the ordinands, the bishop reminded them that God, who sends them, gives them peace, purpose and power. As they served as ambassadors of the Kingdom, he urged them to put their relationship with God above all other things as Jesus’ presence would make all the difference to their ministries.

Mark Gallagher was ordained for the curacy of Bangor Abbey. Mark grew up in St. Andrew’s Killyman, just outside Dungannon, and before training for ordained ministry, was a research scientist. He completed his deacon internship in Ballinamallard, Co. Fermanagh with Archdeacon Brian Harper.

Christopher St John was ordained for the curacy of Dundela. Chris grew up in Newtownabbey and before training for ordination he worked in public protection,

safeguarding children and vulnerable adults and teaching others in these spheres. Chris served his deacon intern year in Holy Trinity Woodburn where his training rector was Revd Alan McCann.

Stuart Moles is from Lurgan. Before training, Stuart was a youth worker for over 8 years and prior to this studied theology at Queen's University Belfast. He spent his deacon intern year in St Patrick's Greystones (Diocese of Dublin and Glendalough) with Canon David Mungavin.

Trudeau: abortion should be a 'human right' in Ireland

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has told his Irish counterpart that abortion in Ireland should be a "human right".

At a three-day meeting between Mr Trudeau and Leo Varadkar, the Irish taoiseach, the two leaders spoke about Mr Varadkar's plan to hold a referendum next year to repeal the Eighth Amendment to the Irish constitution, which protects the right to life of the unborn child.



Leo Varadkar, Taoiseach of Ireland left, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau middle, and Montreal Mayor Denis Coderre right, walk along Boulevard Rene-Lvesque during the Pride parade in Montreal, Quebec

“We discussed the issue of abortion, which I know is an important issue for a lot of campaigners for women’s rights in Canada,” the taoiseach said.

“I updated the prime minister on our plans to have a referendum next year to give the people of Ireland the opportunity to remove our constitutional ban on abortion, should they wish to do so.”

Asked whether he had any advice for Mr Varadkar, Mr Trudeau said so-called “reproductive rights” were a fundamental human right.

“On the issue of reproductive rights, I shared our perspective that reproductive rights for women are integral to women’s rights in general and women’s rights are human rights and I encouraged him to look at it as a question of fundamental rights for women and we had a good discussion on that,” the Canadian Prime Minister said.

Canada has one of the laxest abortion regimes in the world, with women able to terminate their pregnancies at any stage up to birth for any reason.

Mr Trudeau’s comments are the latest case of foreign intervention in Ireland’s abortion debate.

Last year, the United Nations Human Rights Council said Ireland’s tight abortion laws violate human rights in a similar ruling to that of European Court of Human Rights in 2010.

Previous Irish governments have defended their laws, saying they are based on “profound moral values deeply embedded in Irish society”,

however the present government is seeking to overturn them.

Pope to visit Myanmar

The Vatican has confirmed that Pope Francis will be visiting Myanmar and Bangladesh towards the end of November.

He will visit the cities of Yangon and Nay Pyi Taw in Myanmar. He'll also travel to Dhaka in Bangladesh.

While Myanmar's government and religious leaders look forward to the visit, Buddhist nationalists have said they don't want the pope to instigate issues over a persecuted Muslim minority group called the Rohingya.

There's a dispute over where the group belongs.

Buddhists in Myanmar believe that Rohingyas are from Bangladesh, although Rohingya families have lived in Myanmar for generations. Many have become refugees over the issue.

Ashin Wirathu, a leader of a hard-line Buddhist movement, Ma Ba Tha, told the New York Times: "There is no Rohingya ethnic group in our



country, but the pope believes they are originally from here. That's false."

In February, Pope Francis rebuked Myanmar for its treatment of the Rohingya.

He said: "They have been suffering, they are being tortured and killed, simply because they uphold their Muslim faith."

In May, Pope Francis and Burmese state counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi met and agreed to start a diplomatic relationship.

Speaking of the upcoming November visit, Benedict Rogers from Christian Solidarity Worldwide said: "The pope, as a world religious and spiritual leader, has the potential to speak well in this situation" and win the trust of both

Buddhist nationalists and members of the Rohingya community.

"But there is a potential for a negative action from groups like Ma Ba Tha and what scale that will be really remains to be seen."

Motives for IRA murders questioned

University of Ulster academic Prof Henry Patterson has questioned whether the conflict in parts of Northern Ireland was a simple "war of liberation" or an exercise in "ethnic cleansing" carried out by the IRA, The Irish Times reports.

Prof Patterson said unlike other struggles for liberation, it was the "self designated 'anti-imperialist' force that killed far more victims of the Troubles than did the state forces".

Addressing the sixth international conference of the Spanish Association for Irish Studies at the University of Valladolid in Spain, he detailed the murder of Fermanagh-based UDR members on their farms, a feature which continued on and off until the 1980s.

At this point, he said Gerry Adams had realised the political damage the killings were doing to

his efforts to build a pan-nationalist alliance, while the Ulster Unionists had already branded the IRA campaign as "genocide against the Protestant people".

Prof Patterson said the Provisional IRA was responsible for 48 per cent of deaths while the RUC was responsible for 1.4 per cent and the UDR 0.2 per cent. "Even if it was accepted that there was widespread collusion between state forces and loyalist paramilitaries and 50 per cent of those killed by loyalists was added to the security forces' figure, it would still amount to only 17 per cent of all deaths," he claimed.

In his address - War of National Liberation or Ethnic Cleansing: IRA violence in Fermanagh during the Troubles - Prof Patterson examined the IRA campaign in that county.

The politics professor noted that during previous campaigns the IRA leadership had decided that the part-time B-Specials would not be targets. But the UDR, which replaced the B-Specials, was targeted from the outset. In 1972 six members of the UDR in Fermanagh were killed, four of them on their Border farms. Four farming families with UDR members sold their land and animals in the Garrison area to move to safer areas.

Prof Patterson emphasised different phases of the campaign against UDR part-timers in the area. In the seven years after 1972 only one UDR man was killed in the county. That, he believed, was partly as a result of revulsion at the killing of a UDR man and his wife on their farm and partly because the IRA leadership was dominated by southern-based activists who had taken part in earlier Border campaigns and who may have had qualms about attacking part-time UDR members.

The situation changed at the beginning of the 1980s, he said, when hardline northern activists took control of the Provisional IRA.

It changed again when political considerations also led to the Provisional IRA unit in Fermanagh being disbanded when Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams began his attempt to build a pan-nationalist alliance with the SDLP and Fianna Fáil in the late 1980s, he said.

"The IRA in Fermanagh had carried out a number of widely-condemned killings including the Enniskillen Poppy Day bombing in which 11 people died and the shooting of a 21-year-old Protestant girl sitting in a car with her fiance."

Prof Patterson said the potential political costs to Sinn Féin of such activities led to the standing down of the local IRA unit.

Prof Patterson said: "No doubt many Provisionals then and now would sincerely and forcefully deny that their campaign in Fermanagh was a form of ethnic cleansing." Yet he said "that the killings struck at the Protestant community's morale, sense of security and belonging in the area was undeniable."

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