

Unity Bay Area Houston Harvey Relief and Flood Update

Monday, September 4, 2017



We are so grateful for the many phone calls, contacts and prayers supporting our communities through this unprecedented experience with Hurricane Harvey floods.

Unity Bay Area Houston in League City, Galveston County, Texas serves our city along with many from **Webster, Dickinson, Alvin, Galveston, Friendswood, Pearland, and South Houston**. We had between **48" to 52" of rain** in a very short amount of time and some of our communities are even now just able to enter their homes for the first time. Some are without power still. We currently average 80 to 110 in our Sunday service.

We are blessed that the **church has only had roof damage and manageable leaks** (working with insurance) and a deck that floated off to the edge of our beautiful pond. Only one of our staff had home flooding.

Status reports on congregants and their families are being constantly updated still. There have been nonstop phone calls, email and texts since before the storm. Our first priority was making sure everyone was safe and dry and out of danger. We are still investigating with our larger mailing list.

Our area continues to be challenged as waters impact levees and dams upstream and then overflowing our bayous, creeks and neighborhoods. In response, we have become a center for connecting resources, cleaning supplies, and volunteer teams for cleanup. Next week we will be adding counseling services and on grounds support for FEMA applications.

We have a mostly midlife to older congregation and they have been quite amazing to behold. First phase support involved hauling out of flooded furniture and belongings, carpet and drywall removal, and support in sorting through, etc. I have 80 year olds who have been out daily hauling, cleaning, laundering, feeding, transporting and supporting families whose homes had between 3 inches to 8 feet of water as well as serving our local shelters and housing the evacuees.

Since Tuesday, our volunteer teams have **directly served 25 families from our congregation** in home cleanup and countless others in our congregation have supported their own family members and friends. The urgency of removing toxic waters and mud before mold multiplies is critical. Another **20+ families** have been served so far with cleaning supplies, gift cards and spiritual support. There are **many others in our spiritual community that are in a position to hire their own help or have extended family supporting them. We have filled the initial crisis support gap as others arrive from around the country.**

Counting those we know so far, at least 25% to 30% of our regularly attending congregants have lost homes and cars. Others have lost financial means as jobs have disappeared or clients are stopping services. We are now working to find temporary housing and support many through the losses. Emotional experiences of PTSD and overwhelming feelings of helplessness have been triggered in some from past hurricanes and floods. Now that the first wave of panic is past, the emotional response is starting to wave through. Not only from those that have been flooded and lost their family heirlooms and lifetime treasures, but also all those serving them. There is the empathetic response, guilt from being safe, and so much more.

Evacuees are expressing fear of the unknown, overwhelm, grief and shock. Many feel embarrassed, as their life seems exposed and vulnerable as strangers or friends drag their belongings to the curb. Healing and rebuilding will be a long-term marathon even though the moment feels like a full-on sprint. Adrenalin drives our volunteers until their exhaustion sets in. Then the need for self-care and balance for the long haul hits home.

There are many, many life-affirming stories of love and Divine order revealed in what some would call miracles. Christ Consciousness is embodied in every outreached hand, home opened with a heart of love, and sandwich served. We are one family of humanity and this has never been more evident. The animals adopted, the prayers shared and the experience of oneness is undeniable. Many have received communications from school companions and workmates from long ago that have reached out to connect and check in though they have not spoken in 30 years.

Catholic Charities will have people both here inside and via a mobile unit to take FEMA applications and offer support and services starting Tuesday.

Centers for Spiritual Living in Webster has brought gift cards to share with families.

Lifeway International has brought high school teens and parents to support our efforts along with **Texas A&M Galveston** Sailing Coach & students.

Congregants partnered with **Clear Lake Regional Hospital** Tuesday to drive released patients through high waters to their homes so beds could be made available. Others drove doctors and nurses home after five days straight serving at the hospital. And some brought truckloads of cleaning materials and supplies from out of town the moment the roads were clear.

We have heard from the **Unitarian Universalist Church** and the **Clear Lake Islamic Center** in Webster in support of one another's families. We are currently in communication with **Crossroads** in Dickinson to discuss supporting their worship service needs while their ministry is restored.

Anita Kruse wrote a beautiful song that exemplifies the real experience here,
"There's More Love than Water in Houston."

Thank you for your continued support and all the ways we know that our Unity family will rally together for all the ministries here in our area and our beloved families. We have added expanded expressions of community service, shifted priorities, and now live our values in a more profound way. Our Divine connection has been the guiding force as we have learned to be the embodied Christ and distribute resources quickly and more powerfully than we previously knew was possible. And we have GRATITUDE! Immense, immense gratitude for the gift of spiritual commUnity.

Our Hurricane Harvey Relief Fund started through friends and loved ones and will be needed for recovery at all of our local ministries. Through Unity of Houston's Relief Fund Drive, we hope to see even more support for all of our ministries. We lost revenue from a Sunday closure and are aware that any circumstance with this dramatic effect on the congregation members will also impact ongoing income available through tithes and offerings. These are yet to be measured.

Through it all, the real message is how blessed and grateful we feel for each one that we are able to hug again as we see them safe and dry. Divine messages are all around and that conversation will

wait for another day. For now, we'll acknowledge that our Divinity is leading us through our humanity more brilliantly than ever.

In Loving Gratitude and Oneness,

Rev. Kyra Baehr