Pivoting to Respond in 2020

There’s a famous scene from the show Friends where they try to move a full-sized couch up a small winding staircase. It doesn’t take long before Rachel and Chandler nearly collapse while awkwardly holding the couch over their heads. All the while, Ross is yelling, “PIVOT, PIVOT, PIVOT.” This meme may best sum up 2020 for all of us.

Houston Responds coalitions are a collective effort of local churches to love their communities in times of crisis. In 2020, the demands on churches were vast, unprecedented, and constantly changing. Yet, they PIVOTED to overwhelmingly address the needs of their communities while changing almost every way they did ministry. As just a few examples, congregations PIVOTED in 2020 by…

- Transitioning from in-person worship to 100% online within two weeks
- Creating support systems for families juggling work and online school
- Providing essentials to those homebound due to the lock-down
- Adjusting staff and expenses to account for the reduction in donations
- Mobilizing volunteers to double distribution of food through local pantries
- Launching sewing ministries to give away thousands of protective masks
- Becoming sanitation experts and reinventing the Sunday morning experience
- Repurposing facilities for learning, food distribution, and COVID-19 testing
- Condemning racism and calling for unity in the body of Christ
- Responding to serve families affected by Hurricanes Laura and Delta

In any typical year, the collective 2020 highlights listed to the right would have been an enormous accomplishment for local churches and their coalitions. Considering all the ways church leaders had to PIVOT to do this in 2020, it was a God-sized expression of their love for their neighbors.

Please read through this annual update and the updates for each regional coalition. These highlights are just a portion of the work the body of Christ does in our communities. Still, we hope it gives a glimpse into the extraordinary impact of churches working together in their coalitions. Houston Responds and the leadership of 20 coalitions in Greater Houston and Southwest Louisiana are incredibly blessed to be advisors, convenors, facilitators, supporters, collaborators, and storytellers to help churches PIVOT and respond to the crazy year of 2020 and beyond. "Let us not grow weary in doing good...” Galatians 6:9

TOMMY ROSSON, Executive Director

2020 Highlights

Combined Totals for HR and All Coalitions

Thanks to the churches and organizations who made the collective impact in our community possible.

- New Coalitions Launched: 6
- Participating Churches: 515
- Disaster Response Coordinators: 188
- Volunteer Hours: 202,566
- Homes Restored: 302
- Pounds of Food Distributed: 22,075,797
- Masks Distributed: 538,936
- Funds Raised: $4,563,247
- Value Invested in the Community: $44,800,000

2021 Vision

- New Participating Churches: 200
- Disaster Response Coordinators: 450
- Volunteer Hours: 250,000
- Value Invested in the Community: $50,000,000

Stronger Together

Houston Responds coalitions help congregations respond to crises together. Congregations communicate regularly to share needs and resources and strategically mobilize volunteers when needed. They coordinate to avoid duplication of efforts and optimize their response. As part of a collaborative community, congregations can better identify needs and arrive at more creative solutions together. Local congregations represent the largest army of volunteers in any community. Congregations working together are a difference-maker in disaster response and transformational for communities.
Looking Back at 2020: Rebuilding Damaged Homes

Turning Damaged Houses Back into Homes

2020 was a year of challenge, growth, and transformation. Though COVID-19 resulted in fewer homes restored than anticipated, it was still a remarkable year. Together, churches and their communities made significant progress in recovery and resiliency.

In 2020…

- 300 disaster-affected homes were restored.
- Over $6M worth of volunteer labor was donated to restore homes.
- Over $3M in direct expenses (materials, contractors, etc.) was spent on restoration efforts.

After shutting down rebuild efforts for months, due to COVID-19, volunteer capacity was reduced by as much as 75%. Still, churches and their coalitions managed to repair nearly 300 homes. During lock-down, congregations continued to engage volunteers, shifting the focus from rebuild to COVID-19 response. When rebuild efforts resumed, new measures were implemented at worksites to ensure the safety of both volunteers and homeowners, and repair work gradually expanded.

As in previous years, mobilizing congregations for home repairs proved to expedite recovery for affected families and multiply the value of funds invested. Relying on skilled and unskilled volunteer labor allowed coalitions of churches to achieve a far greater return on investment than would have been possible for market-rate contractors. While Harvey-related home repair funds ran out and COVID-19 affected benevolent giving, Houston Responds and numerous coalitions successfully secured funds from other sources to continue home repair work in 2020.

Welcoming Families Home in 2020!

HR: Crosby-Huffman had the honor of helping the Shotlow family and welcomed them home last year. They were able to level the foundation, replace the roof, and add an ADA ramp to accommodate Mrs. Shotlow.

Katy Responds welcomed the Iverson family home in October after their home had been flooded in Harvey. The entire house needed to be restored to make it livable for the family of five.

The Restoration Team welcomed Clarence back home in December after replacing his siding and roof, installing all new insulation, drywall, and floors, and putting in new cabinets and bathrooms.

SWLA Responds restored this couple’s home in just three days in December. The couple had health concerns, so the coalition worked quickly to help provide a safe place for them to return.

HR: East Harris and rebuild partner, Somebody Cares, restored the Roberts family home after it was destroyed in the wake of Hurricane Harvey and condemned by the City of Houston.

More stories are available with each coalition's individual annual update.
Looking Back at 2020: Responding to COVID-19

Adapting to a New Kind of Disaster

The COVID-19 pandemic raised numerous questions and uncertainties for congregations and their crisis response efforts. Yet, congregations and their partner organizations adapted to this new kind of disaster to meet needs in their communities. In response to the pandemic, Houston Responds and local church coalitions expanded their scope by simultaneously mobilizing volunteers for multiple purposes such as food and mask distribution, COVID-19 testing and vaccination sites, as well as Hurricanes Laura and Delta recovery efforts.

In 2020...

- HR coalitions collectively distributed over 22,000,000 pounds of food to individuals and families in under-resourced areas.
- Over 500,000 masks were distributed through the “Masks For All” project.
- 35 congregational, denominational, medical, and organizational leaders were interviewed for the Faith Leader Insights series.
- Reopening guidelines for congregations were produced in conjunction with partnering organizations.

Distributing Food to Neighbors in Need

For many communities, access to food and basic necessities was limited during the pandemic. Coalitions, congregations, and local organizations teamed up to hold food drives and distributions for those living in food deserts and under-resourced areas. They were able to distribute over 22 million pounds of food, and many of the distribution sites are still in place today. The Restoration Team (TRT) was just one of many coalitions that focused heavily on food distribution throughout the pandemic.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March 2020, TRT made the decision to suspend their rebuild volunteer program for a few months. They were still active in rebuild through paid contractors and smaller staff work teams but shifted priorities and resources to focus on food distribution during that time.

The Restoration Team served with Chapelwood United Methodist Church's Fair Haven Food Pantry every day from March to December. Together, they organized volunteers, registered food recipients, sorted, boxed, and distributed food.

With roughly 300 families coming through each day, they served approximately 63,441 families and 316,395 individuals in need of food. Volunteers working with TRT volunteers spent 16,000 hours distributing 2,300,000 pounds of fresh produce and dry goods. All-in-all, the Fair Haven Food Pantry accounted for 13% of the Houston Food Bank’s distribution.

Northeast Houston Responds teamed up with Community Works CDC’s High 5 After School Program and the "Masks For All" project to distribute food and masks in their community. They served every Wednesday at Villas on the Green.

HR: East Harris worked with volunteers from St. Andrew’s Roman Catholic Church in Channelview every Tuesday to distribute food to families in need. Through their efforts, they were able to serve over 170 families.

HR: Southeast volunteered their time at the Oak Meadows Civic Club with Iglesia El Shaddai Ministries and Iglesia Restauración Vida Cristiana. Together they served over 300 people, including 30 homebound elders.
Looking Back at 2020: Responding to COVID-19 (continued)

Helping Ensure There are “Masks For All”

The “Masks For All” project began in April when civic leaders asked citizens to wear masks to slow the spread of COVID-19. Local government leaders asked Houston Responds to help provide masks, especially for our under-resourced neighbors. We facilitated a collaborative effort by hundreds of churches from HR coalitions to produce and distribute hundreds of thousands of masks. This collective effort helped to ensure that there were “Masks for All.”

Our Partnership with Grab Bag Masks started in May to provide local communities around with high-quality triple-layer cloth face masks. For every mask purchased through the Grab Bag Masks website, one was donated to Houston Responds to be distributed.

Meet Sophie. A kind-hearted twelve-year-old in Pearland took it upon herself to sew masks for her community and contribute to the “Masks For All” project with St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church and Brazoria Responds. When interviewed in June of 2020, she had made over 1500 masks.

Faith Leader Insight Series

The Faith Leader Insight series provided a collection of interviews with pastors about how their congregations were responding to COVID-19 and what insights they had to offer to other faith leaders. Later, we also met with leaders from partnering organizations like the Houston Food Bank, as well as local medical and government leaders. In total, we were honored to hear from 35 individuals.

Visit www.HoustonResponds.org/news to access the Faith Leader Insight Series.

Reopening Guidelines for Congregations

In collaboration with local denominational and congregational leaders, reopening guidelines were created to provide best practices and resources to help churches return to in-person services as safely as possible. Topics included sanitation, campus flow, worship services, volunteers, and communications.

Access the reopening guidelines with our online resources at www.HoustonResponds.org/resources.
Looking Back at 2020: Responding to Hurricanes Laura & Delta

Serving Families in Southwest Louisiana

Houston was on high alert as Hurricane Laura closed in on the Gulf Coast. Coalitions and their congregations prepared to respond to a direct hit. The Houston area was spared but, our neighbors in East Texas and Southwest Louisiana were hit hard. Greater Houston coalitions sprang into action to help meet the needs of the thousands of families affected by the storm’s devastation. A month and a half later, the region was hit again by Hurricane Delta, adding to the damage already done.

In 2020…

- Local coalitions and congregations participated in supply drives to help families affected by Hurricanes Laura and Delta.
- Over 2,000 recycled billboard vinyls were given to tarp damaged roofs in collaboration with Every Shelter.
- The “SWLA Needs You” campaign launched to raise awareness of destruction and the need for help from Houston congregations.
- In the aftermath of the storms, SWLA Responds was formed.

Local Congregations Organize Supply Drives

The destruction caused by Laura and Delta forced most volunteer teams to wait several weeks before accessing the affected areas. Southwest Louisiana officials and pastors communicated their immediate need for basic supplies. So, coalition churches rose to the occasion and held supply drives to collect what they could for the families in need. Houston Responds provided a list of the needed supplies and helped communicate the locations of nearly 20 supply drop-off sites. We also helped set up a central redistribution site in Houston from which supplies were transported to Orange and Southwest Louisiana. We built partnerships with organizations and congregations in Southwest Louisiana to help get supplies to families as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Partner Organizations

Lake Houston Responds congregation, First Presbyterian Church of Kingwood, delivered supplies to the warehouse where Houston Responds collected supplies to be transported to Louisiana.

HR: Southeast coalition leaders traveled to the Lake Charles area and helped Ministerio Rio De Dios distribute supplies to the underserved Hispanic communities impacted by the Hurricanes.
Looking Back at 2020: Responding to Hurricanes Laura & Delta (continued)

Recycling Billboards for Damaged Roofs

Houston Responds worked with the Houston-based nonprofit, Every Shelter, to distribute recycled billboard vinyls to cover roofs damaged by Hurricanes Laura and Delta. The billboard vinyl material is much more durable than the traditional blue tarps. Each vinyl can be used to repair one to two homes and can last two years, giving families more time to make the needed repairs.

Every Shelter's mission is to relieve suffering and grow resiliency for those displaced by war, persecution, and disaster through the design, creation, and delivery of shelter products.

"SWLA Needs You" Campaign

The “SWLA Needs You” campaign was created to bring awareness to the devastation brought to Southwest Louisiana by Hurricanes Laura and Delta. During the campaign we shared stories of individuals, families, and congregations in need of assistance. The story of the Rodrigue family is one of many stories from the campaign.

STORY: Meet the Rodrique Family

The Rodrigue family, like thousands in Southwest Louisiana, were displaced from their home after Hurricanes Laura and Delta. Their home was left in unlivable condition. Despite the hardships to come, Dana expressed the impact of the connections they have made with volunteers from churches like Church of the King and Our Savior’s Church in Lafayette, who showed up to help them gut their home to begin rebuilding. Dana and Patrick hope to continue living out the gospel by helping their neighbors recover while they also recover themselves. They stated, "You don’t just sit on this, you help yourself, and then you go out and help others."

"You don’t just sit on this, you help yourself, and then you go out and help others."

Many families like the Rodrigues are living in campers or trailers until their homes can be repaired, which can take months or even years. The work to rebuild Southwest Louisiana is far from finished. #SWLANeedsYou

Southwest Louisiana Coalition Forms

In the wake of Hurricanes Laura and Delta, pastors in Southwest Louisiana united to help their communities recover from the devastation. With the support of Houston Responds, they formed SWLA Responds to coordinate and collaborate for disaster relief.

In September, 30 local pastors gathered for the first time to pray together, share the needs of their congregations and communities, and talk about working together as a disaster response coalition.

www.HoustonResponds.org
Looking Back at 2020: Launching SWLA Responds

Southwest Louisiana Pastors United

In the months following Hurricanes Laura and Delta, congregations in Southwest Louisiana worked together to serve families in their communities and begin the process of rebuilding. The task ahead of them was daunting. Local pastors recognized the need to work together to expedite recovery and be better prepared for future disasters.

Several local pastors had heard of Houston Responds and contacted us about helping mobilize congregations in SWLA for the recovery effort. Houston Responds assigned an advisor and formed a Launch Team of pastors from local congregations, including Our Savior’s Church, Glad Tidings Church, New Covenant Faith Church, Life United Church, Lake City Church, and First Presbyterian Church of Lake Charles. As a result, Houston Responds and these local church leaders launched SWLA Responds in October.

In 2020 (Oct – Dec) …

- Pastors united to launch SWLA Responds.
- 20 disaster-affected homes were restored.
- SWLA Responds served 49 families in need.
- 1,558 hours of volunteer work was completed.
- Nearly 50 churches participated with the coalition.

The Launch Team grew to nine members, representing the ethnic and economic diversity of SWLA. The Launch Team has successfully worked to engage a large number of congregations around Southwest Louisiana to expand the coalition’s capacity to serve its communities. Houston Responds has worked alongside the launch team to help them secure the necessary funding and staff and advise them on coalition development and disaster response operations.

Additional coalition details can be found in the SWLA Responds Annual Update.
Looking Back at 2020: Willing & Able Program

Hundreds of Congregations Willing to Respond

Houston Responds developed the Willing & Able Congregational Disaster Readiness program to help congregations prepare for disaster and coordinate their response with other congregations and organizations in their community. Willing & Able congregations and community organizations are responding together to crises in their communities and making a lasting impact.

In 2020...

- 500 Willing & Able congregations and organizations registered.
- Disaster Response Coordinator (DRC) training was developed.
- A website was developed for disaster response resources.

Disaster Response Coordinators Training

The role of the Disaster Response Coordinator (DRC) is the key to a coordinated response. Willing & Able congregations are encouraged to identify an individual as their DRC to serve as the primary contact between the congregation and their local disaster response coalition.

In July, we developed training videos and materials to help equip DRCs to fulfill their role in their congregation. In October, DRC training began.

“When we heard about what Houston Responds does to put organizations together...we wanted to be a part of it. So, we organized and went out in the church and got about 15 people to be team leaders. Team leaders each identified volunteers working on their teams. We did that through a church-wide survey to ask, ‘What can you be a part of?’ Not everybody can do everything, but everybody can do something.” - Bill Ford, DRC, First Presbyterian Church Kingwood

Building an Online Resource Center

In 2020, Houston Responds developed a knowledge-base website with disaster response resources for congregations and coalitions. Our goal is to provide practical resources through a user-friendly platform to help coalitions and their congregations prepare for disaster and respond during a disaster.

Access resources at www.HoustonResponds.org/resources.

Thank You

None of this would be possible without the generosity of congregations and the following organizations.

- 89.3 KSBJ / 91.7 NGEN Radio
- American Red Cross
- Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston
- Astros Foundation
- Carey Baptist Association
- Catholic Charities
- Center for Disaster Philanthropy
- CrowdSource Rescue
- The Episcopal Diocese of Texas
- Eight Days of Hope
- Every Shelter
- Greater Houston Community Foundation
- Houston Food Bank
- Houston Habitat for Humanity
- Houston ToolBank
- Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston
- Ironman Foundation
- McCord Development
- The Moody Foundation
- Michael & Susan Dell Foundation
- National Christian Foundation of Houston
- OneStar Foundation
- Presbytery of New Covenant
- Presbyterian Disaster Assistance
- Rebuild Texas Fund
- ReachGlobal
- SBP USA
- The Salvation Army
- Samaritan's Purse
- Somebody Cares
- Texas Annual Conference of the UMC
- UMCOR
- Union Baptist Association
- United Way of Greater Houston
- William G. Schumacher Family Foundation
- World Vision International
Executive Board

- JOI BEASLEY  
Presetent  
GOGO Business Communications

- D.Z. COFIELD  
Senior Pastor  
Good Hope Missionary Baptist Church

- JIM HERRINGTON  
Co-Founder  
The Leader’s Journey

- BRANDON LACKY  
Co-Founder  
No Borders Houston

- TOMMY ROSSON  
Executive Director  
Houston Responds

- REV. JAMES SMITH  
Wharton County Responds

- ELDER CHARLES YUAN  
Houston Chinese Churches

- JESSICA SOMERVILLE  
HR: Central

- MATTHEW TOPPER  
Coalition Advisor

Support Staff

- TOMMY ROSSON  
Executive Director

- IRVIN CLARK  
Area Developer

- CHARLEY ELGIN  
Construction Advisor

- SARA MOORE  
Communications Director

- COLLEEN HENNEKE  
Director of Finance & Administration

- MATTHEW TOPPER  
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- THOMASINA BURNS  
Director of Programs

- JENNIFER CASEY  
Operations Coordinator

- DUANE THERIOT  
Communications Advisor

Coalition Leaders

- DEBBIE ALLENSWORTH  
Brazoria Responds

- JOHNNY D. GENTRY III  
Northeast Houston Responds

- ELDERR CHARLES YUAN  
Houston Chinese Churches

- JESSICA SOMERVILLE  
HR: Central

- TREVOR BARNETT  
The Restoration Team

- CARLOS GONZALEZ  
HR: Southeast

- RON PETERS  
Katy Responds

- JAMES W. REED III  
Beaumont Disaster Response

- TANYA DEBOSE  
HR: North Central

- JOSH HALE  
Liberty County Responds

- JEFF SCHULZ  
Interim Coordinator  
Lake Houston Responds

- TAMMI SCOTT  
HR: Baytown, East Harris & Crosby-Huffman

- REV. JAMES SMITH  
Wharton County Responds

- JOSHDON  
Liberty County Responds

- J HILL  
HR: Central

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