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## Flood Effects in Clyde

by Mike Creswell

*overview:*

### **Flood effects in Clyde: Back-breaking, heart-breaking**

CLYDE, N.C. -- A map on a wall at First Baptist Church said it all:

Thin lines representing the Pigeon River were marked on either side with sprawling black areas -- the parts of the town where a fierce wall of water bulldozed through like a giant angry snake. It shoved houses off foundations, broke bridges and floated mobile homes and cars away to ruination.

By early October the river was back to flowing by in its normal, civilized way. But it's doubtful residents of Clyde and surrounding Haywood County will ever see the river in the same way.

Weather-wise, it was a double whammy. First around Sept. 7 Hurricane Frances dumped rains so abundantly that the river flooded. That had hardly drained when remnants of Hurricane Ivan dumped still more water onto the already soaked ground and another flood swept through in mid-September.

A foot of rain fell in less than three days, locals said.

The TV news crews have left; the flood is not news any more. But try telling that to local residents who lived near the Pigeon River. On



Gordon Wilder, left, and Richard Rogers of New Sandy Creek Baptist Church in Henderson remove flood-damaged flooring from a mobile home near the Pigeon River in Clyde. The two were among more than 200 Baptist Men who helped clear flood-damaged houses on Saturday, Oct. 2.



Eleven workers from Riley's Creek Baptist Church in Rocky Point, near Wilmington, used their new disaster response trailer for the first time on Saturday, Oct. 2, to remove mud from flood-damaged homes in Clyde.

one street alongside the river, big piles of debris sat outside every house.

If you've never visited a flood site, maybe you're thinking the residents just need to shovel out the mud, clean things off and bring in new furniture. People here wish it were that simple.

First, the water ruined more of the house than its contents. Wet floor boards and panels, wall panels and sheetrock all must be removed. Left wet, the wood will quickly attract mold and mildew and will begin rotting. Electrical wiring must be replaced.

Second, the flood left a coating of mud. This is not simple mud that sits on a river's banks. It is mud that stinks because it has been contaminated from a sewage treatment center upstream -- and nobody knows what else. Workers in the muddiest sites wear bio-hazard suits and masks to protect themselves.

After a house is stripped down to its basic frame and supports, the whole must be pressure washed and treated with disinfectant. Then it must dry out before rebuilding can start.

Multiply that process by every flooded building and you begin to see why the flood is not gone for people here. It hits them in the face every time they open their eyes -- and it will do so for months to come.

When rain started falling a few days ago, many people here became fearful: Was another flood going to come?

In Clyde, relief workers said clearing basements was especially hard -- many of the houses were built 40 or 50 years ago and basement access was only from inside the house. In some houses workers were reduced to bucket brigades to bring out ruined boards, panels and household effects.

It is back-breaking work.

And it is heart-breaking work, as they sift through lifetimes of family possessions, reduced to piles of smelly, muddy waste.

This is just one of the places where hundreds of Baptist Men -- and women -- have come to bring help and hope. People here will need an abundance of both for a long time.

### **At one house, almost nothing saved**

CLYDE, N.C. -- It was a sad sight.



Volunteers from Riley's Creek Baptist Church in Rocky Point, near Wilmington, haul damaged boards and other material from under a flood-damaged house in Clyde.



At Clyde, disaster response coordinator Jasper Evans talks with Mrs. Ruth Sass in front of her flood-damaged house as volunteers from Forest Hills Baptist Church in Raleigh work to clear the basement.



Ms. Annie Jones, left, of Scotch Creek Baptist Church, Sylva, and Mrs. Lisa Walker of Flat Rock Baptist Church, Louisburg, unload food supplies at First Baptist Church in Clyde. The two women are among many local volunteers who have worked long hours to help flood victims. First Baptist Church's building is a disaster response command center for relief work by Baptist Men. Some 2,000 volunteers have served there in recent weeks. The church is feeding more than 500 people a day.

Want to give to support relief efforts like this through North Carolina's Cooperative Program Missions Giving? You can do so on-line at [Supporting Missions](#).

On muddy ground that was once a lawn with grass, Mrs. Ruth Sass poked through a lifetime of possessions -- dishes, furniture, a trunk of family photos. All of it was coated with black, smelly, sticky mud.

Water marks showed that eight feet or so of water had surged by during the flood.

Behind her, a team of 14 yellow-capped Baptist Men from Forest Hills Baptist Church in Raleigh hauled wheelbarrow after wheelbarrow of mud and mud-ruined household goods, furniture and appliances from the basement of the Sass home.

The pile of muddy boards and other stuff grew steadily through Saturday, Oct. 2.

Jay Andrews power-washed mud off household goods so Mrs. Sass could see if anything was worth saving. Almost nothing was.

"This is heart-breaking," said Andrews, shaking his head.

To gain outside access to the basement, a son of Mrs. Sass had sawed a door through a basement wall. The tractors were used to cut a trench down to it. John Spencer III and Alan Chandler wrestled wheelbarrows of debris up that sloping trench all day.

Spencer, 21, is a senior at NC State University and Chandler is a seventh grader at West Millbrook Middle School in Raleigh.

Mrs. Sass, a member of Ratcliffe Cove Baptist Church in Waynesville, said she barely got out before the flood waters hit. They lost three vehicles to the water, she said. She was clearly dazed by the destruction, but she was also amazed at the Baptist Men.

Asked what their help meant to her, she replied, "It means everything, because I don't have anyone else to do it and I would never get it done.

"I just can't believe that people would donate their time to do a yucky job like this. It's unbelievable. And I'm so grateful," she said.

Did she have insurance? "Not flood insurance," she answered.

It could have been worse. While Mrs. Sass's home probably can be rebuilt, a neighbor's house across the street was knocked off its foundation; it sagged on one end where a sinkhole opened under it.

The houses are on a street that leads to the bank of the Pigeon River, little more than a stone's

throw away.

A few doors down, 11 members from Riley's Creek Baptist Church in Rocky Point, near Wilmington, worked at their first mudout, hauling bucket after bucket of debris from under a house. Crew chief Joey Hardee said their church has 26 people certified in four areas of disaster relief.

He was especially proud of a new supply trailer which they used to haul tools and other equipment across the state. Church members had raised more than \$12,000 to help mobilize their Baptist Men for disasters. "The Lord opened doors for us," said Hardee, recently elected deacon at his church.

"It's heart-warming to come out and help people hurt in disasters," he said. "I get chills just talking about it and knowing I'm able to come and help someone. It's very uplifting."

A few blocks away Mrs. Rose Mary Brewer worked alongside Baptist Men as she unloaded a wheelbarrow of debris from a house. She is a member of Green Street Baptist Church in High Point.

A block or two further down, four Baptist Men from cleared the inside of a flood-ruined mobile home. They used power saws to slide through damp pressboard flooring, kicked the pieces loose and hauled them away, leaving the trailer stripped to its bare frame for treatment, drying and rebuilding.

Talmadge Burgess, Gordon Wilder and Richard Rogers, members of New Sandy Creek Baptist in Henderson, worked inside while Phillip Roberson, a member of Raleigh Road Baptist Church in the same town, worked outside.

At another house six workers from First Baptist Church, Mayodan, laughed as Jimmy Lawrence told of finding a live fish still swimming in the basement of the house where they worked. One of the workers carried the fish over to the nearby Pigeon River and threw it in.

But Lawrence grew serious as he said, "We're just doing what the Lord wants us to do."

Roger Knight, a member of Riverside Baptist Church at Lake Logan in Bethel, said flood waters had gotten as far as the church parking lot but not into the church. Knight, who runs an accounting business in Waynesville, was putting tarps on hurricane-damaged roofs in Melbourne, Fla., when he got a call to head back to North Carolina and help. Knight has worked in other flood cleanups. It is hard for people still in shock from the double floods to understand all that must be done to their

houses before they can be repaired, he said.

Volunteer Steve Byrd from West Asheboro Baptist Church, has spent two weeks talking and counseling with flood victims. "It was absolute, complete devastation for most of these people. They've lost everything they ever had. A lot of people don't want to go back home; they don't want any part of that. But we're trying to tell them that Jesus is still in the temple. He's still on the throne and still in control. We don't understand why floods and hurricanes and tragedies come, but we're telling them that Jesus is still in control and He loves them," he said.

Byrd almost wept as he talked about some of the experiences. He talked with one woman whose house had been damaged by the flood. But the real problem was that her husband had been killed just before the flood. He and other Baptist Men knelt with her on her back patio and prayed together.

Baptist Men have handed out many Bibles and tracts as they have worked with flood victims, he said.

"These people are in shock. You may not be able to share the plan of salvation with them. Just put an arm around them and tell them God loves them," counseled site leader Jasper Evans during an evening devotion.

## **229 Baptist Men work in Clyde Oct. 2**

CLYDE, N.C. -- "I just need you to fill out these forms and we'll get you to work right away," Mrs. Hilda Keener told an arriving work group.

First Baptist Church in Clyde has been set up as flood relief coordination center for Baptist Men; Saturday morning volunteers started to materialize out of the morning fog very early. They came from across North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee.

By the day's end, 229 workers had come to help with flood relief.

No signs about money were in sight, but North Carolina Baptist missions giving was at work. Though volunteers paid their own way to Clyde, the planning, support and coordination that fired the work all came from offerings to the North Carolina Missions Offering.

Volunteers arrived to check in, find rubber boots that fit and head out again. Some volunteers pressure washed and cleaned tools. At one point

men worked on a broken water pump, using the back of a pickup truck as a workbench.

Hopeway Church, a Southern Baptist church in Simpsonville, S.C., brought 23 people, many of them young people, to work on Saturday. "We want our young people to develop hearts for helping others," said leader Mrs. Kathy Coker.

Inside the church Jasper and Sue Evans, local coordinators for Baptist Men, checked forms and made assignments, talking constantly with volunteers on directions needs or to give advice. "Saturdays are real busy," Mrs. Evans said of the obvious as she reached for a ringing phone.

Volunteers are being housed at the church and also at nearby Camp New Life, run by Haywood Baptist Association. The church is providing food for upwards of 500 people a day, including volunteers and flood victims. They even take meals out to workers to save them from coming back.

In the dining hall Ms. Annie Jones of Scotch Creek Baptist Church in Sylva and Mrs. Lisa Walker of Flat Rock Baptist Church in Louisburg cut and wrapped cakes and pies for dessert. Churches of Haywood Baptist Association are providing much of the food, Ms. Jones said, but some also comes from the Salvation Army and other contributors. Throughout the day vans, pickups and cars arrived with food.

Last Saturday they provided lunch to 542 people, she said.

The two women have been working with food preparation for three weeks, arriving before 5 am most days to start cooking. The idea is to leave by 3 p.m. but many days it's later, she said.

Two more of the many unsung, behind-the-scenes workers are Martin and Nellie Love of Antioch Baptist Church, Monroe, N.C., who have spent two weeks at the church doing 25-50 loads of laundry a day. The laundry is both for volunteers and local flood victims.

During a Saturday evening devotional layman Charlie Stroud from Parkview Baptist Church, Moorehead City, urged the volunteers to have a vision for the way the houses were going to look once rebuilt. "The people here need a vision," he said.

Perhaps one of the best comments about the project came from a member of First Baptist Church during the devotional service. The church currently has no pastor, a layman said, but he said the church has grown from having so many Baptist

Men working in and through the church. "You have all been a wonderful blessing for the congregation. We thank you for that," he said.

**Jasper & Sue Evans:  
Retirement is opportunity**

CLYDE, N.C. -- One minute Jasper Evans is giving directions to a volunteer crew on where to find their work; the next he is repairing a broken pump.

His wife, Sue, is inside keeping up with work records and giving order to this huge work project involving thousands of man-hours a week. They are again working on a Baptist Men project, this time heading up flood relief work in the Clyde area. Capable and willing to work, the Evanses are the sort of long-term volunteers Baptist Men projects depend on to get done.

"No! Don't just show up here," Jasper tells a caller with friendly firmness. "Let us know when you're coming so we can plan what you'll be doing!"

They are retired but on a recent Saturday they were putting in another long day of helping people -- and loving it. A retired mechanical engineer, Jasper is one of those guys who knows at least a bit about anything mechanical. Sue's human resources experience with a phone company has equipped her to deal with both people and the paperwork that are perpetual parts of volunteer projects.

Their home church is Pritchard Memorial Baptist Church in Mooresville, but they're hardly ever there. Their post-retirement projects have taken them to Ukraine, Czech Republic, Macedonia, West Africa, South Africa, Germany, Honduras, Jamaica and Poland, plus a number of U.S. states.

Jasper and Sue were just back from Ukraine when they were asked to go to Swananoa to assess damage from Hurricane Frances. A day after getting back from there they were asked to go to Clyde and head up disaster recovery work there.

They have worked with some 2,000 volunteers there in recent weeks. Already they've rented a small apartment so they can stay on and oversee flood relief work in coming weeks.

Theirs is an unusual lifestyle but Sue Evans wonders why more retired people are not like them.

"A lot of people will say they're bored or don't

know what they're going to do if they retire. But there are so many people in need! There are too many organizations crying for volunteers and I really don't see any need for people to sit at home and feel sorry for themselves when there are so many opportunities," she said.

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