****

**Young professional serves Christ through disaster relief**

Micah Roden was beginning a well-deserved vacation from his job as manager of a Jacksonville Beach retail store when he learned Florida Baptists’ disaster relief volunteers were being deployed to flood-ravaged South Carolina in 2015.

Serving as a trained emergency resource team volunteer, the young father of three quickly sacrificed his vacation plans to be the hands and feet of Christ to the survivors.

Several months later another call out was issued and once again Roden forfeited his own scheduled vacation to join the clean-up efforts after historic floods hit West Virginia in July. He helped families living along the Elk River recover after a wall of water inundated their homes, destroying floors, walls and contents.

“Some of these families had lost their entire home, others had lost significant parts of their homes,” Roden said. “When we first arrived, as we walked through the house, we were able to listen to their story and share the love of Christ with them.”

And when their labor was completed, the volunteers “stood with them, held their hands and prayed,” the businessman said. Then, with relationships established, the DR workers shared information about the family with local pastors, hoping the families can be plugged into the ministry of a local church.

“We plant the seed for the pastor to go back to water that seed and watch it grow.”

Rhoden is one of 7,000 trained Florida Baptist DR volunteers dedicated to help others who have nowhere else to turn when disaster strikes. Funds from the Maguire State Mission Offering enable the Florida Baptist Disaster Relief Ministry to be prepared to react to urgent needs in the state and nation.

The young professional knew to participate in a disaster relief response, “God would have to make a way,” Roden said. “Disasters aren’t planned. Because I had scheduled to take a vacation each of those times, I felt like it was a God thing for me to respond in His perfect timing.”

It was not the first time God called the genial young man, a member of Fruit Cove Baptist Church in metro Jacksonville, into mission service. As a first year student at Florida State University, he planted his collegiate life in Baptist Campus Ministries. There, he met his wife and assumed leadership positions, including as State Collegiate President his senior year.

As a member of the DR Emergency Response Team, Roden provides safety, security and medical support to volunteers and local communities, while ministering to emotional and spiritual needs during times of disaster. “Our goal is to serve the volunteers, and ensure they have a safe, comfortable experience.”

Recently a disaster relief volunteer from another state died while serving in West Virginia. Others have been injured on the job or learn of tragic events back home. And still others, come back to the command center at night exhausted from a day of physical labor only to sleep on the church floors in gymnasium and classrooms.

As Roden secures the location where the volunteers sleep at night, he handles late night calls, emergencies and communication needs that arise when dozens of people live in a temporary shelter. “Being on-site is where I have seen God open doors for us to minister and provide encouragement and hope.”

Roden developed a passion for this ministry when a training event was held at his church several years ago. He got to know the men and women serving as volunteers who were dedicated to helping others through disaster relief. He felt God leading him to plant his own ministry there.

What compels him in this ministry, he said, “is the experience of being the hands and feet of Christ to people who are hurting and hopeless. You can provide healing and hope to those in need.”

Disaster relief volunteers can choose from many ministry areas to use gifts God has given them, including mass feeding, clean up and recovery, temporary child care, emotional and spiritual care; as well as administrative and logistical support. Training for these roles are available each Spring in locations across the state.

No matter your own gifts and talents, Florida Baptist disaster relief can find a place of service for you. If you are interested in serving as a DR volunteer, contact Delton Beall, at dbeall@flbaptist.org. Or go to www.flbaptistdisaster.org.