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Recommended Citation

Office of University Communications, "GWU Alumnus Volunteers His Time to Demonstrate God's Love to Disaster Victims" (2018). *Gardner-Webb NewsCenter Archive*. 473.

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GWU Alumnus Volunteers His Time to Demonstrate God's Love to Disaster Victims

webpublish.gardner-webb.edu/newscenter/gwu-alumnus-volunteers-his-time-to-demonstrate-gods-love-to-disaster-victims/

Office of University
Communications

January 25, 2018

Steve Sellers '14 Serves as a Chaplain with the N.C. Baptists on Mission

Disaster relief volunteers work side-by-side to help people recover from their losses. While cleaning up debris and restoring homes, their focus is on building relationships. Steve Sellers, a 2014 alumnus of Gardner-Webb University, witnesses this truth every time he volunteers with the North Carolina Baptists on Mission.

Recently, he participated in recovery efforts in Big Pine Key, Fla. This was his third trip as a volunteer chaplain with the Baptist group. Everyone who worked that week—from the person who washed clothes to the carpenter who rebuilt walls—was driven by their motivation to provide hope and healing to people affected by Hurricane Irma.

“When we have a difficult situation, the people of God are good about coming together and supporting people where they are, despite our differences,” Sellers observed. “When life is good, we tend to focus too much on the differences in how we practice our faith. That is a very sad thing to me, because we have so divided ourselves—not just from people who are not believers—but within our faith, so that sometimes it is hard for us to come together and do the things we need to do.”

Steve Sellers took this picture of the devastation in the Florida Keys.

Steve Sellers took this picture of the devastation in the Florida Keys.

Sellers, who is white, said he benefited from the diverse group of students who attended the GWU School of Divinity. While working on his Master of Divinity in Christian Education and Spiritual Formation, he was in class with people from different cultures and denominations. Their terminology and interpretation of scriptures were not the same as his. “You get an ‘ah-ha’ moment and think, ‘It’s not just about me,’” he reflected. “My job is to be the hands and feet of Christ with as many people as possible so that we can grow the kingdom. It is not to demean the people around me because I don’t understand them.”

As a minister of Christian education and outreach at First Baptist Church in Mooresville, N.C., he coordinates several opportunities for members to fellowship with other congregations. Sellers and a black minister recently held joint Bible study sessions at their



Steve Sellers, 2014 GWU Alumnus, poses with Laverne, left, and her son and daughter-in-law. The family lost three trailers in the storm.

churches. “We just finished a class on faith and racial reconciliation,” Sellers offered. “The people got to know each other and talked about the issues. It was a fabulous experience.”

His trips with the N.C. Baptists on Mission give him more chances to meet people and show them God’s love. He follows the example Jesus gives in the Bible by addressing physical and emotional needs first. “If they needed healing, Jesus gave them a healing and spoke to them a word about faith,” Sellers observed. “He removed all the struggles that kept them from seeing the spiritual opportunity.”

The first night he was in Big Pine Key, Steve Sellers slept on the floor in the sanctuary of the church that was hosting the volunteers.

A volunteer cleans out a home damaged by Hurricane Irma.

The residents of Big Pine Key welcomed the hard-working Baptist volunteers. At the end of the week, a woman named Laverne encouraged him with her steadfast faith. Her family and a friend lost three single-wide trailers in the storm, but nobody was injured. When Sellers asked Laverne how she was doing, her answer was, “We are doing good. God is taking care of us.” He was refreshed by her attitude, and when the volunteers got ready to leave, she told them she loved them. “The chaplain got ‘chaplained,’” Sellers declared. “Laverne is real and has a meaningful faith. She is not a minister, not rich and powerful, but she is a child of the King.”