



The Salvation Army Emergency Disaster History

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The Salvation Army's History in Disaster Response

The Salvation Army has continuously provided emergency services to individuals and communities affected by disasters and other catastrophic events since its first charter was enacted in the United States in 1899. The first major disaster The Salvation Army responded to in the United States was in September 1900 in Galveston, Texas. A hurricane (unnamed in those days) literally destroyed the city of Galveston and 5,000 people died. The National Commander at that time sent Salvation Army officers from all over the country to Galveston to bring comfort and counseling and help in any way that they could.

Since that time, The Salvation Army has responded to thousands of disasters across the United States, honoring a century-old commitment to serve those in need, at the time of need, in the place of need. This has ranged from responding to fires, ice storms, and hurricanes to the tragedies of Oklahoma City and 9/11. The following are several examples of The Salvation Army's work over the years.

San Francisco: April 18, 1906

On April 18, 1906, the city of San Francisco was shattered by what modern analysts believe was a magnitude 8.25 earthquake. Three days of fires followed. Almost 700 deaths were reportedly caused by the earthquake and fire, although experts now say that the actual figure may have been 3-4 times larger than that.

In 96 hours, the Southern Pacific train and ferry service to Oakland reportedly carried 225,000 refugees arriving from the city. Salvation Army personnel in Oakland met the hordes of refugees arriving from the city by ferry. They set up feeding stations downtown and turned Beulah Park into a tent city where refugees lived for weeks. The tent city housed about 700 people, 159 of whom were children. After the military took over some of the responsibility of running Beulah Park, Salvationists returned to San Francisco to assist in recovery efforts. Meanwhile, Chinese Salvationists from San Francisco played a major role in feeding thousands.

All this information trickled back east. National Commander Evangeline Booth responded "like a cavalry horse in action" and kicked off a fundraiser in New York's Union Square that ultimately raised \$12,000. Rallying the troops in New York, Booth did what she knew best – rousing the crowds with the famous words of her father William Booth: "Do something! Do the most you can – do it well – do it now!"

All but two Salvation Army buildings were destroyed by the earthquake and fire. Officers and soldiers were scattered far and wide among the refugees. Yet, their resolve never faltered. Colonel George French wrote in his annual report: "While it is impossible to give figures, it is hard to overestimate the spiritual work accomplished by our lassie officers who lived for weeks in the relief camps, visiting the refugees, holding meetings and in many ways alleviating physical suffering."

New York: September 11, 2001

Nearly nine months and three million meals after the World Trade Center attack, The Salvation Army's work at Ground Zero came to an end on Thursday, May 20, 2002 as recovery operations at the site officially concluded. The relief effort, named "Operation Compassion Under Fire," was unprecedented in the history of emergency and disaster services for The Salvation Army.

In response to 9/11, The Army served **3,231,681 meals**, requiring the efforts of **7,149 officers and staff**, and **32,275 volunteers**, representing a total of almost **one million volunteer hours**. The Salvation Army was **the first relief agency** at Ground Zero, reporting within a half-hour of the first

plane crash. With its mobile canteens, counselors and thousands of volunteers, The Salvation Army served those at Ground Zero.

Despite formidable logistical challenges, The Salvation Army's efforts at Ground Zero were effectively carried out from the time the first mobile canteen arrived at the site. In the first two days, some 20 canteens (mobile feeding units) from Greater New York, the Empire State Division, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Jersey and Pennsylvania responded to the disaster.

But The Salvation Army dispersed much more than food during the relief operation. Quickly assessing the needs, Army personnel began distributing work boots, gas masks, Visine, lip balm, clothing and other items to workers. Perhaps even more importantly, Salvation Army counselors provided words of encouragement and comfort to rescue and recovery personnel working under incredibly difficult conditions.

Counseling tents and hydration stations were set up within feet of "The Pit" for easy access to workers. On many occasions, Salvation Army chaplains would enter "The Pit" to pray for firefighters and others as they recovered the bodies of victims. The feeding program was bolstered by the arrival of a Salvation Army tractor trailer from Florida, converted into a full working kitchen where more than 10,000 hot meals could be prepared each day. The trailer and attached tent became known at Ground Zero as "Café Florida."

And then, beginning in December, the entire feeding operation at Ground Zero was turned over to The Salvation Army which moved into the 35,000 square foot tent owned by the Environmental Protection Agency and located at Murray and West Streets, which was nicknamed "The Taj Mahal" for its imposing presence. "The Taj" became a sanctuary for workers, a place where they could enjoy delicious hot meals and escape the anxiety that accompanied their recovery work. Volunteers and Salvation Army personnel from all around the country helped to make the tent a place of comfort and solace.