

Pastors of burned St. Landry churches respond to outpouring of support; here's how to donate | Crime/Police

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Offers of help are flooding the three churches that recently burned down in St. Landry Parish as their pastors work to regroup and rebuild their church communities.

The three churches — St. Mary Baptist Church in Port Barre, Greater Union Baptist Church in Opelousas and Mount Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church in Opelousas — burned down between March 26 and April 4.

Each of the historically black churches has been in the community for more than 100 years, and families have worshiped in them for generations. Congregants at several churches said they've never worshiped anywhere else, and they're struggling to grasp that a source of solace and constancy in their lives is gone.



The pastors say they have received offers of help from around the state and country, and they're working to organize formal recovery efforts.

The Rev. Harry Richard of Greater Union Baptist Church said the public's outpouring of love has been overwhelming and uplifting.

"I think that God has allowed this to happen to really bring us closer together," Richard said. "God always intervenes with love...It's the kind of love we're getting now that will carry us forward."

Richard said he's working with his church congregation and deacon to better organize public response, but there are many things that need to be accomplished. They've met with an insurance representative and are waiting to learn whether their claim will cover rebuilding.

Richard said the church doesn't currently have online fundraising efforts established, but he said they wouldn't rule it out.

"The fundraising is important, but right now my deepest concern is for the people who were affected," he said.

If anyone would like to assist, donations can be sent to the church's post office box, Richard said. Donations should be addressed to Greater Union Baptist Church, P.O. Box 1254, Opelousas, LA 70571.



The Rev. Gerald Toussaint of Mount Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church said he cautions supporters not to donate to online efforts that may not be organized by his church. Toussaint's niece, Tenishia Toussaint, created a GoFundMe page for the church in the blaze's aftermath, but the pastor said he plans to ask her to take the page down.

It was a kind and generous gesture, he said, but he doesn't want there to be any confusion. There's too much fraud happening nowadays, and while his niece is trustworthy, others may not be, Toussaint said.

If the church pursues online fundraising, Toussaint said the campaign will need the approval of the church's finance committee and the fundraising efforts will be operated under the church's name. He wants to ensure any money collected goes directly to the church, he said.

Toussaint also said the fire should be covered by insurance. They are waiting to see how much financial support they'll receive through insurance before turning to the public.

“My father always used to say, ‘Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth,’” Toussaint said. “We don’t want to turn down help, but we don’t know how much help we need.”

If supporters are committed to sending donations, donations can be made through Chase Bank or sent to the Chase Bank branch at 1737 S. Union St. in Opelousas, he said. Donations should be addressed to Mount Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church, Attn: James Espree and Ernest Hines.

The Rev. Kyle Sylvester of St. Mary Baptist Church said donations are being coordinated through [Tithe.ly](#), a giving platform that caters to churches. Those interested in donating can either download the platform’s app or [access a donation page through the church’s website](#).

Donations can also be addressed to St. Mary MBC at 103 Saquette Road, Port Barre, LA 70577, Sylvester said.
