

# Vital Plan

## How disaster becomes compassion

**Bruce Homontowski** had only been in his new pastorate a month when Covid hit. What was a challenge in so many ways, given closures and other limitations, proved to be a blessing in others.

“One thing Covid has done, of course, is that it’s opened up families in need to hear about hope,” the pastor said. Visiting the new distribution warehouse operated by Illinois Baptist Disaster Relief in Mt. Vernon, Homontowski tells how his church started delivering food to hungry people in their area. Now Forsyth Baptist Church is witnessing gospel fruit. “We’ve got 10 people who are coming to church from that. We’ve had salvation decisions, we’ve baptized some. It’s exciting,” he says of his congregation and their neighbors, “because they’re reaching out.”

Food distribution was not part of the usual work of Illinois Baptist Disaster Relief (IBDR). The 1,600 trained volunteers are usually at the scene of natural disasters, providing hope and help after hurricanes and tornadoes, wielding chainsaws, digging out after floods, and praying for hurting people. With those ministries shut down in 2020, IBDR began delivering cleaning supplies and masks.

“I think our eyes were closed,” said **Butch Porter**, IBSA’s Disaster Relief Director. “We knew people were out of work, but we didn’t realize how many people were hungry.”

While the network of trucks and churches grew, food producers began looking for partners to distribute goods they were unable to sell. The IBDR food distribution network was born. “We’re finding partners from all over the state where we



never thought to look,” Porter said.

“We’re getting great response from churches,” said IBSA Missions Director **Brad Lovin**. “Churches are sharing with other churches. So there’s just a really good spirit of making this work across multiple communities.”

That includes IBDR volunteers and churches serving as distribution sites from Chicago to Metropolis. NAMB’s Send Relief network provided two tractor-trailer trucks volunteers used to haul massive quantities of food. And a business owner donated a large warehouse space in Mt. Vernon.

Both Porter and Lovin are IBSA employees. It is through their service that Illinois Baptists support compassion ministries such as this, by giving infrastructure, administration, and networking assistance.

And it’s all for the sake of sharing the gospel.

Volunteer **John Danner** said he may not know what it is to go hungry, but “I do know what it is not to know Jesus.” Choking up a little while thinking of his salvation, “I want everyone to have the same experience I’ve had.”



**BUTCH PORTER**



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