SURGE

Mercy Chefs

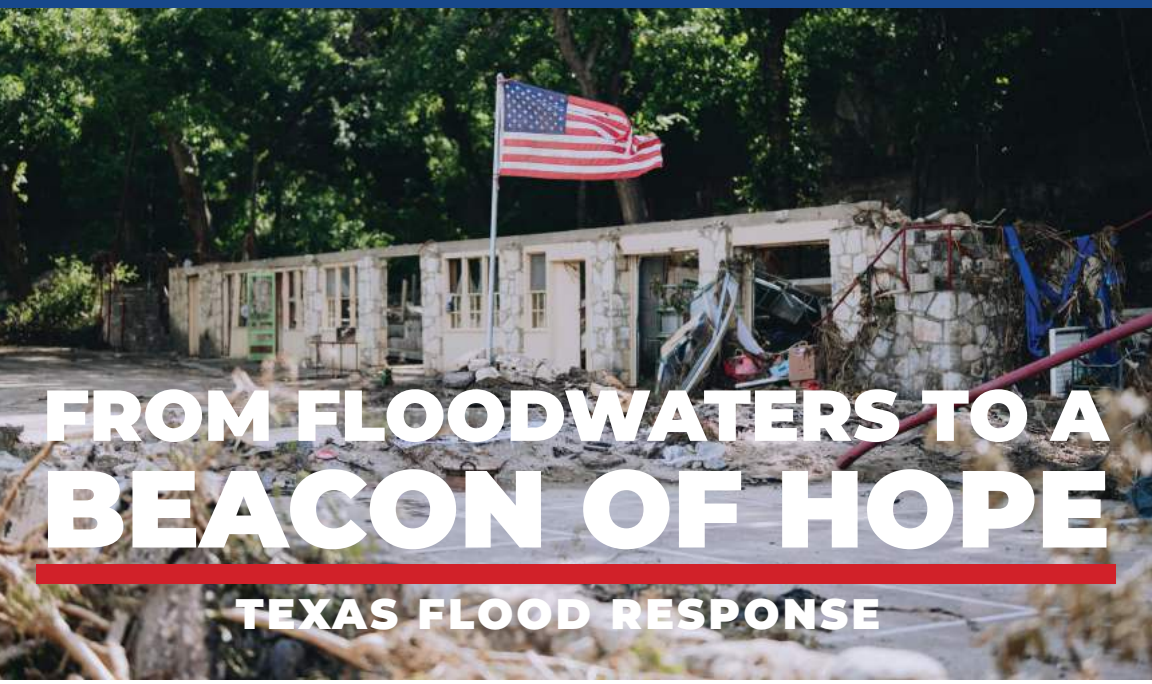
MERCY CHEFS NEWS SUMMER 2025



MEALS THAT RESTORE

WHILE JULY 4TH MARKED THE START OF A RELAXING HOLIDAY WEEKEND FOR MANY, AN UNIMAGINABLE TRAGEDY WAS UNFOLDING IN KERR COUNTY, TX—*ONE THAT WOULD FOREVER CHANGE COUNTLESS LIVES IN A SINGLE NIGHT.*

In Kerr County, TX, a catastrophic disaster unfolded as torrential rains caused the Guadalupe River to rise to its second-highest recorded level. A towering wall of water, over 25 feet high, triggered severe flash flooding across towns and rural communities. Bridges were torn apart, roads washed out, and entire homes swept away by the rushing waters. Amid the unthinkable chaos, panicked residents were forced to flee, and at least 118 lives, 38 of them children, were tragically lost. **Mercy Chefs responded immediately, serving hot meals the very next day to families affected by this devastating event.**



FROM FLOODWATERS TO A BEACON OF HOPE

TEXAS FLOOD RESPONSE

The widespread damage across Kerr County was staggering, but the emotional toll was even more profound. The pain and heartbreak of losing loved ones were etched into the faces of everyone we encountered.

Though the floodwaters receded, they left behind a blanket of sorrow that still hangs over Kerr County. Emergency crews carried out rescues and recovered those lost. First responders quietly confessed, "I can't unsee what I've seen."

The weight of loss was heavy, sudden, and without explanation. **Yet, in the midst of devastation, the people of Kerr County have—and continue to—display incredible strength.** Families, friends, and neighbors lifted each other, offering comfort, sharing pain, and holding on to faith. Mercy Chefs stood alongside them, serving meals filled with God's love, peace, compassion, and the reassurance that they were not alone, even in this dark time.

We have served over 100,000 nourishing meals to flood victims, volunteers, and first responders. From newly homeless families and frightened Vacation Bible School campers to weary medical professionals and harried search-and-rescue teams working around the clock, Mercy Chefs met people at their greatest hour of need. Each meal offered a moment of rest amid backbreaking work and a sense of peace in a time of grief and chaos.

As relentless summer rains continued to threaten Texas towns, even more families were forced to evacuate their homes, abandon their belongings, and leave behind the lives they once knew. The ongoing storms hindered relief efforts, as first responders, search-and-rescue crews, and volunteers—overwhelmed by exhaustion, fear, and anxiety—struggled to carry on. Grieving hearts are heavy and helping hands are growing weary, but Mercy Chefs remains on the ground in Kerr County, at the center of the flood zone.

We are committed to standing with this community for the long haul, serving hot, chef-prepared meals and offering solace amid a seemingly endless storm. Recovery in Kerr County won't come



In times of disaster, everyday people often become the heroes, like Romero, who opened his home on a hill to shelter a family of strangers fleeing the flood. When he woke up to pounding on his door, Romero's first instinct was to help his elderly neighbor Joe—who has Parkinson's—and his wife, whom he found trapped in their garage. He secured them with a tow strap and, without hesitation, waded through the rising floodwaters on foot, pulling them to safety. Since then, he's spent every day in the Texas heat clearing debris from neighboring homes. Mercy Chefs was honored to provide him and other selfless volunteers with revitalizing hot meals to fuel their efforts. "We need the energy and resources to keep working," he told us.



Scan the QR code to see **Romero recount his experience.**

quickly. For many families, the journey toward healing will take months—if not years. That's why **Mercy Chefs is opening a Beacon of Hope Kitchen at Light on the Hill at Mount Wesley,** a historic church camp nestled in the heart of the community. This new initiative will serve as a vital lifeline and a lasting source of hope, healing, and hospitality for those who have lost so much.

The new indoor commercial kitchen will offer ample space not only to prepare meals, but also to provide a welcoming place where residents can gather and share these meals. To increase our capacity daily, we've added essential equipment, allowing us to serve up to 10,000 meals daily.

But our vision goes beyond hot meals. With tourism halted and many jobs lost, the need in Kerr County continues to grow. We're preparing to launch a Family Grocery Box distribution program to reach families still facing food insecurity, many of whom were already struggling long before the floodwaters came. In addition, Mercy Chefs will offer job opportunities to local residents who have been displaced or are currently unemployed. We hope to provide both nourishment and stability as Texas Hill County begins to rebuild.

Even as our team prepares for this next stage, our mission hasn't paused for a moment. Hot meals are still being prepared daily at Citywest Church,



where volunteers continue distributing meals throughout the region. Thanks to their commitment, first responders, displaced families, and those in need of a hot meal continue to receive comfort, care, and hope.

None of this would be possible without friends like you. For many in Texas Hill County, this has been the worst month of their lives. Your generous support empowers us to meet these urgent needs, equipping us with the necessary culinary tools and ensuring no one goes hungry as they piece their lives back together.

Together, we can continue to extend practical love and lasting hope to a community fighting to recover.



A SUMMER OF FEEDING CHILDREN

This summer, Mercy Chefs stepped in to bridge the gap for schoolchildren in under-served communities—children who lose access to regular meals when the school year ends.

In the U.S., one in five children faces food insecurity. For many, school meal programs are their primary source of daily nutrition, but **when schools close for the summer, those meals disappear, and countless kids are left hungry.**

Nearly 18 million American households struggle to put food on the table. Through partnerships with youth camps, schools, and churches across the country, Mercy Chefs is distributing backpacks filled with the equivalent of seven kid-friendly meals—complete with bottled water and simple recipe cards. These backpacks are more than food; they're tangible expressions of love and hope for children growing up in families facing profound hardship.

No child should have to worry about where their next meal will come from.

In Hampton Roads, VA, our Feed 757 initiative is reaching thousands of local kids with these meal-filled backpacks. Across the country, our Community Kitchens continue serving hot, chef-prepared meals to children attending summer programs. From Virginia and Tennessee to California and beyond, we are actively raising awareness, offering comfort, and providing over 200,000 meals to children who need it most.





When a Community Engagement Officer in Nashville, TN, told us summer school students were getting only chips and juice boxes for dinner—often their only evening meals—we knew we had to act. Through our Nashville Community Kitchen, we served hot, nutritious meals daily to local schools.

At Jones Elementary, one of the schools we served, a little girl and her brother—neither enrolled in the summer program—walked in as we were plating meals. These siblings, who live with their grandmother, often make the 40-minute walk to school on their own. Drawn by the smell of the food, the girl asked if they could have a plate. Not long after we served them, she returned and gently asked for an extra bread roll, explaining that this would be her breakfast the next morning. Of course, Mercy Chefs sent them both off with extra meals and rolls.

Moments like these remind us that every meal matters and is a lifeline. Your support makes it possible for thousands of children to go to bed with hope, peace, and full bellies.



FAITH RESTORED

TORNADO RESPONSE

April and May brought one of the most vicious tornado seasons on record, with more than 1,000 twisters tearing across the South and Midwest. Mercy Chefs responded across multiple states, meeting the need with love and encouragement.

Tennessee

In rural Selmer, TN, known for its small-town charm, Mercy Chefs arrived less than 24 hours after an EF-3 tornado with winds over 135 mph struck the heart of the community. Many families mourned loved ones, while others prepared to welcome new life amid the wreckage. One survivor described the tornado as a *freight train* crashing into thousands of lives, leaving chaos and heartbreak behind.

From our base in McNairy County alongside local partners, we prepared over 22,000 meals for grieving families, volunteers, first responders, and relief crews. Despite widespread devastation, residents came together to clear debris, deliver meals, and support one another. Even nearby towns like Grand Junction received meals, hand-delivered by off-road vehicles, with the county commissioner and his wife leading the way—grateful for the strength and comfort these meals provided.





Missouri

In St. Louis, MO, over 5,000 structures, including homes, were damaged or destroyed. Mercy Chefs deployed *Hope*, one of our mobile kitchens, and began serving immediately. Every dish we served carried a moment of peace and normalcy. Survivors, overwhelmed by loss, were visibly moved by the reminder they hadn't been forgotten.

Recognizing the long-term need in a city already facing housing instability and food insecurity, Mercy Chefs is preparing to open a new Community Kitchen in St. Louis—a lasting anchor of nourishment, stability, and hope for a community still reeling from disaster.

Across every community we served, Mercy Chefs had the honor of serving and praying with families impacted by devastating tornadoes. **We believe something amazing happens over a shared meal.** Whether catering funeral services or providing baby supplies for new parents, we strive to create opportunities for families and individuals to open their hearts to hope.



MEALS & MIRACLES IN MYANMAR

EARTHQUAKE RESPONSE

At the end of March, Myanmar was struck by one of its most devastating natural disasters in recent history—a powerful 7.7 magnitude earthquake that shook entire communities to their core. Thousands were injured, homes flattened, and families were left homeless and desperate for basic necessities. In a country already grappling with ongoing conflict and widespread displacement, this catastrophic event only deepened the suffering. Families with small children were forced to sleep on the street, parents searched desperately for food and clean water, and hospitals, overwhelmed by the influx of injured patients, had no choice but to treat people outdoors. Entire villages were cut off, making access to food and lifesaving resources an urgent and daunting challenge.

By God's grace, Mercy Chefs Global made it to Mandalay, even when it seemed impossible. Despite warnings that military checkpoints would block our path, our team was waved through at every stop. This extraordinary miracle allowed us to reach the epicenter—while others were turned away, we were able to offer hands-on relief.





Thanks to trusted local partners and the generosity of supporters like you, we were able to deliver over 230,000 hot and grocery meals, along with essential supplies, to families devastated by the earthquake. Our chefs trained local partners in critical food hygiene practices, empowering them to safely prepare tens of thousands of meals over open fires every day. Under sweltering heat and dangerous conditions—including the sound of fighter jets dropping bombs nearby—our team set up multiple distribution sites in remote, hard-to-reach areas. We witnessed lines of hungry families stretched endlessly, each person and child waiting eagerly for a hot meal.

Each meal served and every supply delivered was a message of hope, dignity, and God's love to those enduring unimaginable loss. One church partner shared how these meals opened doors to different faith communities like never before. A hot meal became a powerful bridge for the Gospel to touch many hearts.

The road to recovery is long, and rebuilding will require sustained effort and care for many years. Please continue to hold the families of Myanmar in your prayers. We are actively serving families in disputed territories around the globe, and your support makes you a vital part of this healing journey.



A MESSAGE FROM THE FOUNDERS

Over the past couple of months, communities across America have been devastated in unimaginable ways: tornadoes ripping through small towns, flash floods separating loved ones, and children going hungry in our own backyards. In moments like these, it's easy to feel forgotten.

At Mercy Chefs, we don't just show up in the first 24 hours; we stay in the days, weeks, and months that follow.

Mercy Chefs is still on the ground even when the headlines fade, preparing high-quality meals for families still reeling from loss. We're opening permanent kitchens, like our Beacon of Hope in Kerr County, TX, to support long-term recovery through meals, groceries, and employment. We're finding ways to meet everyday needs, such as distributing backpacks and summer meal programs in communities where hunger is a daily battle for kids.

We stay because the need is still there, and that kind of presence is only possible because of **you.**

But our work is far from over. Healing goes beyond physical recovery—it involves emotional restoration and renewed hope. Real healing takes time, and for many families, that journey has just begun.

Your support allows us to be present in the middle of heartbreak. Every meal we prepare is an act of compassion—proof that someone sees them, someone remembers, and someone cares. Whether it's feeding families grieving lost loved ones or offering a moment of comfort to survivors just beginning to rebuild, your generosity is what fuels our mission.

Together, we can continue to meet urgent needs and bring lasting care to those who have lost everything and feel forgotten. Thank you for your faithful partnership, time and again, through every grocery box, every backpack, **and every meal we provide.**

With deep gratitude,



Chef Gary & Ann LeBlanc
Mercy Chefs CEO & President



Mercy Chefs Recipe

CHEF ASHBI'S ALMOND TORTE

Light, velvety, and decadent—this show-stopping dessert comes from Managing Chef Ashbi Wilson, a Texas native and our pastry chef during deployments. It's perfect for any summer occasion!

Serves 12–18 | Makes one 9" round cake

INGREDIENTS:

- 1½ C granulated sugar
- 8 oz almond paste
- 1¼ C softened unsalted butter
- 1½ tsp vanilla
- 6 eggs, room temp
- 1 C flour (or GF baking flour)
- 1½ tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt

PREPARATION:

1. Preheat the oven to 325°F. Spray a 9" cake or springform pan with nonstick spray, evenly coat with ¼ cup sugar, and shake out excess. Set aside.
2. In a mixer, blend remaining sugar and almond paste on low until mixture resembles damp sand. Add butter and vanilla; mix until smooth. Scrape the bowl's sides down.
3. Add eggs one at a time, mixing well and scraping the bowl to remove lumps.
4. Whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt. Slowly mix in wet ingredients until combined—don't overmix.
5. Pour batter into pan and smooth top. Bake 40–50 minutes, until golden brown and a toothpick 1" from the center comes out clean.
6. Cool before turning it out of the pan.

Optional: Top with fresh mixed berries and whipped cream, or enjoy with ice cream, lemon curd, or au naturel!

Tips: Soft butter and room-temperature eggs create a velvety texture.
Line the pan with parchment before spraying and sugaring for easy release.

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