

Baptists swing into action after deadly tornadoes

By William Perkins

Editor

Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief (MBDR) volunteers are responding in multiple locations after a series of massive tornadoes were spawned by a super cell weather system that moved through the state on the evening of March 24. The number of fatalities statewide is estimated at 26.

Hardest hit were Rolling Fork in Issaquena County and Silver City in Humphreys County (EF-4). Significant damage was also reported in the Amory area of Monroe County (EF-3) and to a lesser extent in several other locations across the state.

Hubert Yates, disaster relief director at the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board in Jackson, estimated 90% of Rolling Fork has been affected.

"Damage is catastrophic to most of the central business area, commercial development along U.S. Highway 61, and most of the immediate residential areas," he said. "Residential areas on the far west of town and far south of town are the only areas that are without major to significant damage."

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SPECIAL SERVICE – Members of the Rolling Fork community gather in the worship center of First Church, Rolling Fork, Dion Sunday morning [March 26] after a massive tornado on the evening of March 24 took out most of the Mississippi Delta city and resulted in a number of fatalities. The church's steeple was blown off and roof damage is extensive. (Photo credit: Tanner Cade)

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“This site will be a bit more difficult due to lack of power and water to get operational but should be working by Tuesday [March 28],” Yates said, estimating that Chainsaw/Cleanup operations are likely be active for six to eight weeks.

In Silver City, a community of approximately 50 homes located on U.S. Highway 49 West about seven miles south of Belzoni, every home is affected with approximately 40 units suffering significant damage or total destruction, Yates said, adding that local volunteers were assisting in that area with MBDR continuing to monitor and assess.

“Large areas of west Amory, downtown Amory, north Amory, and south Smithville experienced major to catastrophic damage,” Yates reported. “MBDR completed initial assessment this morning [March 27] with a decision to deploy to support

Chainsaw/Cleanup operations.”

Nine miles northeast of Amory on MS Highway 25, the city of Smithville sustained considerable damage. On April 27, 2011, an EF-5 tornado struck Smithville and resulted in a number of fatalities.

MBDR will initially deploy Incident Management/Administration personnel, Feeding Support teams, Chaplain/Assessor teams, and Chainsaw/Cleanup teams, he said, with an estimated five to six week deployment in that area.

An initial survey of the Winona area in Montgomery County indicated several homes damaged and a large electrical substation out of service, resulting in widespread power outages through Monday morning [March 27].

Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves toured the Rolling Fork area and declared a state of emergency. He said he had talked with U.S. President Joe Biden, who assured him the federal government would devote all available resources to the response and relief efforts.

Yates listed prayer requests for immediate needs:

- Prayer for each community affected, the churches and their staffs, the volunteers as they respond, and their leadership as they plan and lead.
- Financial donations to allow for purchase of items in bulk quantities which will ease transportation, handling, and storage needs.

Tax-deductible donations to assist MBDR are being accepted. At the present time, in-kind contributions such as clothing and furniture are not being accepted. “The need right now is for critical supplies to be purchased in bulk, such as food and cleaning materials. Monetary gifts will help accomplish that,” Yates said.

Monetary gifts may be made by check, or electronically by clicking [here](#). Checks should be made payable to Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, with "Disaster Relief" designated on the memo line, and mailed to MBCB Business Office, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530.

For general information about MBDR credentialing and volunteering, click [here](#).

MBDR is supported by gifts to the Mississippi Cooperative Program, the Margaret Lackey State Missions Offering, and donations from individuals.