

Disaster Relief efforts continue following weekend tornadoes

With Christmas just around the corner, many residents are dealing with the aftermath of a series of tornadoes that swept through West and Middle Tennessee on Dec. 9. A total of six deaths have been reported. Tornadoes were also reported in Alabama over the weekend.

Tennessee Baptist DR teams responded immediately to the storms, and recovery efforts are under way.

The Tennessee Emergency Management Association reported Dec. 10 that the Storm Prediction Center's preliminary findings cited 13 tornadoes from Saturday storms. Two short-lived tornadoes also caused extensive damage in several Birmingham, Alabama neighborhoods in the overnight hours of Dec. 9-10.

The National Weather Service in Birmingham confirmed the tornadoes after a preliminary investigation. An EF1 tornado with 100 mph winds struck in Homewood near Samford University. An EF1 tornado with 90 mph winds struck in Mountain Brook and Cahaba Heights, near Brookwood Mall.

In Tennessee, counties affected by the tornadoes included Cheatham, Davidson, Dickson, Gibson, Montgomery, Robertson, Stewart, Sumner, Trousdale, Weakley and Wilson. Radar also indicated possible tornadoes in Lawrence and Rutherford counties, but that does not necessarily mean they touched the ground.

News reports indicate six people were killed, dozens injured and an estimated 80,000-90,000 people left without power as a result of the storms. A reported 18,000 were still without electricity in the state as of Monday, Dec. 11.

Ready to respond

Wes Jones, disaster relief specialist, issued a call early Saturday evening for all Tennessee Baptist Disaster Relief teams to be ready to respond as needed.

Randy C. Davis, president and executive director of the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board, was in contact with dozens of pastors on Saturday and was "very encouraged by a 'can do' compassion articulated by these brothers. Past responses to difficult times would assure us that we will take care of each other through this event," Davis said.

Davis pledged that Tennessee Baptist Disaster Relief "will show up, clean up and help rebuild in the days ahead.

"I am thankful for the generosity of churches and brothers and sisters from across our state that allows us to respond immediately after the storms and be there for the long-haul of restoration," he added.

Relief efforts began on Sunday as local DR teams in affected area assessed the damage.

Cross Creek Baptist Church in Indian Mound received extensive damage, Jones reported. He said a DR team from JST Association, led by Bill Lowe, helped the church with clean up on Sunday.

In Weakley County, Tommy and Karen Wilson, DR directors for Weakley Baptist Association, assessed damages in Dresden and Rutherford. A team from Woodland Baptist Church in Brownsville, which includes volunteers from other West Tennessee churches, were at work on Monday in the Rutherford area.

A spokesperson for First Baptist Church Hendersonville, one of the towns that took a direct hit from a tornado, said the church is grateful it was spared.

“The Lord was so good to us tonight. About 800 people were in the sanctuary for ‘Christmas In the Ville.’ The tornado went directly over the church, but everyone is safe! Thank you, Lord.”

Jones said three DR operations will be set up in Middle Tennessee.

- First Baptist Church, Gallatin, will host volunteers beginning on Tuesday, Dec. 12. John and Kaye Thomas of First Baptist Church, Sevierville, will serve as site commanders. A combined team from Nolachucky and Knox County Association of Baptists is scheduled to help with relief efforts in the Gallatin area.
- First Baptist Church, Goodlettsville, will host a DR team from Alabama to assist homeowners in the area.
- A third site will be set up at Real Life Church near Fort Campbell to assist residents of Clarksville and Montgomery County. Cumberland Baptist Association DR, led by Juanita Dearth, are coordinating efforts there with local teams early in the week and outside teams who might be available later.

If you have a team and want to assist with clean up efforts, contact Jones at wjones@tnbaptist.org; Garry Maddox at gmaddox@tnbaptist.org; or Elizabeth Holmes at eholmes@tnbaptist.org.

EDITOR'S NOTE – This story was written by Lonnie Wilkey and originally published by Baptist and Reflector. With reporting from The Baptist Paper.