

Disaster relief soldiering on after latest wave of bad weather

By William Perkins
Editor

Arkansas Baptist Disaster Relief (ABDR) volunteers – an important component thus far of the response effort to the deadly tornadoes that moved through the Mississippi Delta on March 24 – have returned to their home state after powerful tornadoes there on March 31 caused massive damage and a number of fatalities.

Baptist response operations in Mississippi will continue, said Hubert Yates, disaster relief director at the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board in Jackson. “ABDR requested that their teams be released to return to the Little Rock/Wynne areas as they were struck by a catastrophic tornado late Friday afternoon [March 31].

“Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief (MBDR) was able to arrange release, with MBDR providing site leadership, chainsaw, assessment, and chaplain volunteers. Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief provided a feeding team on Sunday [April 2],” Yates reported.

Bryant Wright, president of Send Relief, the joint compassion ministry of Southern Baptists’ International Mission Board in Richmond, Va., and North American Mission Board in Alpharetta, Ga., visited Rolling Fork March 31 to offer encouragement to the Baptist volunteers on scene and to assess the needs to which Send Relief will be able to respond.

The former two-term president of the Southern Baptist Convention and retired pastor of Johnson’s Ferry Church in the

Atlanta area toured the devastated city, offered encouragement in an address to as many of the Baptist volunteers as could be assembled at the noon hour, and shared lunch with them afterward.

Wright also met privately with Britt Williamson, pastor of First Church, Rolling Fork, which was damaged in the March 24 storm but is serving as headquarters for the Baptist response and relief effort.

To date, 103 chainsaw, tarping [securing tarpaulins over damaged roofs], and cleanup requests in the Rolling Fork/Silver City area have been received and 76 have been completed or closed, Yates said.

"At the current time, we anticipate that due to the large number of groups/volunteers that responded we may be able to conclude cleanup operations by Saturday [April 8]," he estimated.

"MBDR has scheduled an 'operational pause' for Easter weekend, April 8-9. We will continue to evaluate the need to continue feeding into the following week," he added.

In Amory, another area of the state that sustained significant damage on March 24, MBDR is involved in cleanup, chainsaw, and tarping, Yates said. To date, 197 Chainsaw, tarping, and cleanup requests have been received and 169 have been completed or closed, he reported.

"A mass feeding effort for the Amory area was staged but did not go operational due to the available spontaneous feeding groups," Yates said. An Easter weekend operational pause is scheduled for the Baptist response in the Amory area, and operations there will be reevaluated after that time, he said.

"As with the Rolling Fork site, large numbers of spontaneous groups/volunteers have responded and we may be able to complete operations by this Saturday [March 8].

In Montgomery and Carroll Counties, three “drive-in/drive out” chainsaw/cleanup teams coordinated by Brent Barker, pastor of Emmanuel Church, Grenada, were utilized. To date, 15 work requests for chainsaw/debris cleanup have been completed, primarily in the Somerville and Winona areas.

“Three current work requests remain and will be completed [this] week... Assessors continue to work to identify additional homeowners [in] need of assistance,” Yates said.

In the Eudora area of southwestern DeSoto County, Yates said “initial assessment was completed April 1 and MBDR deployed local teams to assist. X-tended Missions Association MBDR Team Leader John Hampton is coordinating the work of two X-tended Missions chainsaw teams and a team from Panola Association to complete 12 work requests” from homeowners affected by the storm that moved through March 31.

“Approximately 47 homes received damage,” Yates said. “MBDR continues to monitor the situation to determine if additional resources are needed.”

In Pontotoc County, initial assessment was also completed late on April 1. “The local Pontotoc Association Disaster Relief Team deployed following the storm and is assisting with tarping and tree removal,” Yates said,

“After consulting with Pontotoc Association Missions Strategist J.R. Ray, at this time it is not anticipated that additional assistance will be needed,” he reported. “MBDR will continue to monitor.”

In the Tupelo area, the March 31 storm primarily damaged commercial/industrial sites, Yates said. “The MBDR-affiliated team at Belden Church, Belden, and Lee Association are monitoring the needs that may be identified, in coordination with the Lee County Emergency Management Agency.”

Yates listed prayer requests for immediate needs in the

aftermath of the storm:

- 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 facilitate transportation, handling, and storage.

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 volunteering and credentialing, click [here](#).

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