

First Church, Greenville, rescues Easter outreach after tornado

*By Tony Martin
Associate Editor*

Matt Alexander, senior pastor of First Church, Greenville, got a call from a longtime family friend, a member of First Church, Rolling Fork, who told him that every Palm Sunday the church hosted an Easter outreach to the community but after the devastating EF-4 tornado that swept away much of Rolling Fork on March 24, the church was trying to figure out a way to make it happen – or just cancel it for this year.



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On Palm Sunday, members of the Greenville church drove the 40 miles down the highway to minister to the children and families of the Rolling Fork community with an Easter egg hunt.

“I had been to Rolling Fork several times over the last week or so, so I had a good feel for all that was going on,” Alexander said. “We’d been sending teams to do several things, but this was a very special moment.”

The Greenville church made a special effort to get young people and their parents involved in the Palm Sunday egg hunt. “It was a good reminder to us all for our congregation to respond,” Alexander said. “There are many other organizations on the ground, but they won’t be here forever. We’ve partnered with First Church, Rolling Fork, as a sister church because we know this will be a long-term process.”

The Rolling Fork church, though significantly damaged by the tornado, has served as the headquarters for Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief (MBDR) volunteers and fellow Baptist disaster relief units on the scene from Arkansas and Alabama.

“We spent time with members of the church, with citizens of Rolling Fork, and listened to their stories,” Alexander said. “We connected with people who just walked up, and talked to people who’d lost everything.

“It was a surreal moment of seeing the Gospel in action, and that the joy of the Lord is always present. I was reminded that our joy is not dependent on the circumstances of life.”

Just before the egg hunt was to begin, it started to rain. Everyone went into the church sanctuary for a time of worship, which was part of the plan anyway. During the worship service,

Alexander shared the hope of Easter and the Gospel message.

Before the service was over, the rain had stopped and everyone was able to go outside for the egg hunt. Youth from the Greenville church led in games, and the Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief team cooked hot dogs and provided supper.

“We just blessed the people as they left,” Alexander said. “We fed them, gave them treats, and sent them away with Easter goodies and other gifts for children and adults. It was a great afternoon of being the hands and feet of Christ.”

Alexander was called to First Church, Greenville, five years ago. “The Lord has blessed our family and the church,” he said. Alexander and his wife Virginia have a nine-year-old son who was adopted from Eastern Europe, a three-year-old biological daughter, and are expecting twins in a couple of months.

Hubert Yates, disaster relief director for the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board in Jackson, listed prayer requests for immediate needs in the aftermath of the storms:

- 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](#).

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