

Mission:Dignity, Mississippi Baptists to the rescue

*By Tony Martin
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Retired pastor James McKneely had a tree fall across his home in Monticello during one of the storms that has wreaked havoc across Mississippi since early June. He reached out to Mission:Dignity, a ministry of Guidestone Financial Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention that assists elderly ministers, workers, and their widows during financial emergencies.

“When we heard of the need of the McKneelys, a simple contact to Dr. Shawn Parker [executive director-treasurer of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board] is all it took to meet it,” said Mission:Dignity director Aaron Meraz.

“Mission:Dignity is grateful for our partnership with Mississippi Baptists,” Meraz said. “Cooperation is at the core of who we are as Southern Baptists and that is what was highlighted in meeting this need. We are always stronger when we work together and our sweet soldiers of the cross like the McKneelys are the beneficiaries.”

Mission:Dignity devotes more than \$11 million annually to help retirement-age Southern Baptist ministers, workers, and their widows whose income may be insufficient to meet their basic needs.

Many of the ministry’s beneficiaries served small, rural churches that paid only modest salaries and couldn’t afford to contribute toward retirement for their faithful servants.

The Mississippi Baptist Convention Board’s Disaster Relief Department (MBDR) got involved. “Men showed up from the

disaster relief group and worked all day long," McKneely said, "They were able to get the tree removed and the roof tarped [placement of blue tarpaulin over areas of roof damage]. It was such a relief to us."

Hubert Yates is Mississippi Baptists' director of disaster relief. "As it was a single request, we contacted our teams in the area to provide assistance," he said.

Danny Ivy, team lead for disaster relief at Lincoln Association in Brookhaven, and Anthony Sanders with the Simpson Association disaster relief team from Mendenhall coordinated with John Henry, MBDR consultant for construction and disaster relief training, to quickly mobilize for the McKneelys.

"Our report shows eight volunteers, 32 volunteer hours, trees removed, and tarping," Yates reported. "This is the type of response that many of our teams did during the recent series of storms.

"Damage was scattered and often affected just individual homeowners in an area. I'm thankful for the MBDR teams who are available to work not just the 'big' events but faithfully care for their neighbor in the events that only affect a single homeowner and don't receive the publicity of the big events," he said.

The Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief ministry is supported by gifts to the Mississippi Cooperative Program, the Margaret Lackey State Missions Offering, and tax-deductible donations.

Much of the funding for Mission:Dignity comes from direct gifts of individuals, groups, and churches that are members of the Southern Baptist family. Through these gifts, recipients can purchase much-needed food, pay a utility bill, receive prescriptions and medical care, and provide for other necessities.