

# Southern Baptist Disaster Relief responds to weekend storms

NASHVILLE (BP) – Deadly weekend storms across several southern states and into the Midwest have prompted a widescale response on the part of Send Relief and Southern Baptist Disaster Relief.

Tornadoes, dust storms and wildfires are reported to be responsible for at least 40 deaths. At least eight of those were from a massive pileup of cars in Kansas that involved at least 70 vehicles.

Randy Garrett, state director for Arkansas Baptist Disaster Relief (ABDR), told Baptist Press that volunteers have established a base of operations at Southside Southern Baptist Church in Cave City, where feeding, showering and laundry teams joined an incident command team. Chainsaw and recovery volunteers were also preparing to go into the community.

“These storms were some of the strongest ever to hit the state of Arkansas,” he said. “They included two EF-4 tornadoes with winds reaching up to 190 mph like the one that hit Diaz. There is a lot of destruction.”

Send Relief reported earlier today that volunteers were providing more than 2,000 meals a day in Oklahoma, where a father died after he and his son tried to escape wind-fueled wildfires that are blamed for the destruction of more than 400 homes and four deaths. Volunteers are also assisting and feeding survivors in Arkansas as well as other recovery efforts such as those in Missouri, Mississippi and Alabama.

Also in Oklahoma, the Rainy Mountain Kiowa Indian Baptist Church building was destroyed. The historic structure, built

in 1921, was home to a Native American congregation, the Baptist Messenger reported. A Go Fund Me account will be set up to help offset rebuilding expenses.

“Send Relief has been in continuous contact with SBDR leaders as deadly storms caused devastation across the Midwest and South,” said Coy Webb, Send Relief’s crisis response director. “SBDR teams have responded quickly to affected communities and are responding in nine states to bring help, hope and healing.”

Seven ABDR chaplain teams – each consisting of two assessors and a chaplain – are making their way through affected areas. Two salvations have been recorded through those interactions.

“Southern Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers are helping their neighbors in a time of need,” said Garrett, who added that up to 80 volunteers are expected to be on hand in Cave City by tomorrow. “The only reason we do this is to represent Jesus.”

Oklahoma Baptist Disaster Relief reported that teams were on-site by Saturday (March 15) preparing meals for first responders in the town of Leedey.

States not as hard-hit are also preparing to send personnel. A shower unit is on standby to assist volunteers near the central Texas Crabapple fire, said Southern Baptists of Texas Convention Disaster Relief director Scottie Stice. A quick response feeding unit capable of providing 700 meals a day is deploying to West Plains, Mo., where it will set up at First Baptist Church.

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief teams are responding to areas in West Central Baptist Association, Walker Baptist Association and Salem-Troy Baptist Association, reported The Alabama Baptist.

A mass feeding kitchen unit is ready to go, but isn’t expected to be needed, state director Mark Wakefield told the state

Baptist paper.

Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief teams have been deployed to three churches for focused responses on the surrounding areas. Volunteers based at Emmanuel Baptist Church in Grenada will respond to tornado damage in the town of Elliot. Tylertown Baptist Church will host responders to Walthall County, where extensive tornado damage was left behind. First Baptist in Taylorsville will host those meeting needs in Smith County.

Assessors and chaplains have already begun work with chainsaw teams scheduled to arrive this week.

Several Missouri Baptist churches sustained damage to their buildings, The Pathway reported, including First Baptist Church of Bakersfield and First Baptist Church of Arnold.

A heavily damaged area of Paulding County brought volunteers from Georgia Baptist Disaster Relief.

“We had a team there yesterday morning,” said GBDR state director Dwain Carter. “The neighborhoods that had damage were pretty bad, but we brought help, hope and healing to several families. The greatest thing is we got to share the love of Jesus by our deeds and words.”