

Texas Baptists minister in Piedras Negras

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By John Hall

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PIEDRAS NEGRAS, Mexico—Juan Molina can't remember the last tornado that hit Eagle Pass or Piedras Negras, Mexico, prior to the one that swept through the area last month.

So, when it started to rain April 24, he thought it was another spring shower. Hours later, he was huddled with his pregnant wife and their 1-year-old daughter on the floor of their mobile home watching a tornado peel off the roof of their house.

BGCT
Congregational
Strategist Noe
Trevino, who
helped
coordinate
Texas Baptist
disaster
response in the
area, delivers
supplies.

“I thought it was going to be the last day of my life,” Molina said, describing how the storm rocked his home like a ship on the ocean.

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Days after the tornado, Molina still could not find his wallet, which had his checkbook and credit cards in it. All his family’s clothing was ruined, and they had nothing to eat.

The Molinas were three of several hundred people staying at an American Red Cross shelter in Eagle Pass, where a Texas Baptist Men shower unit operated and Baptist General Convention of Texas staff members counseled victims and offered family financial assistance.

Across the Rio Grande in Piedras Negras, the situation was grimmer. An eight-square-block area nearly was leveled by a tornado that touched down there. Days after the storm hit, limbs still were strewn everywhere. Large pieces of sheet metal remained imbedded into broken trees. Rubble lay where homes once stood. Windows were either blown out or had holes in

them where softball-sized hail came through.

“It looks like a bomb exploded,” said Robert Cepeda, a Baptist General Convention of Texas church starter who, along with BGCT Congregational Strategist Noe Trevino, helped coordinate Texas Baptist disaster response in the area.

In the shadow of what remains of a 200-year-old Catholic church, Texas Baptist Men volunteers were cooking 4,500 meals a day for tornado victims and recovery workers. A constant flow of people came through the tent, creating opportunities for ministry and relationship building for the TBM unit.

“We have been compelled by Christ to serve mankind as demonstrated to us when he was here on earth,” said Ed Alvarado, TBM ethnic coordinator. “We’re just trying to imitate Christ.”

In the community, a TBM chainsaw unit was cutting and clearing limbs for residents. Four Baptist University of the Americas students spent time in the neighborhoods counseling and praying with people. A load of clothes and food from Buckner International was due into Eagle Pass.

“We’re an extension of the local Baptist church,” Alvarado said. “We’re hoping our presence will influence and undergird the local churches in Piedras Negras.”

The BGCT also called in trained counselors to help victims—including friends and family of those affected by the tornadoes—decompress. Many people continued talking about where they were and what they were doing when the storm struck. Sharing their stories helped them process what had happened to them, said Cepeda, a trained counselor. The addition of people trained to help victims will help the recovery process, he noted.

“Just seeing their faces makes your heart melt,” Trevino said.

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