

Baptists helping in ‘mammoth’ tornado relief operation

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MAYFIELD, Ky. (BP)—Southern Baptist disaster relief teams began working Dec. 14 in west and south-central Kentucky in some of the areas most affected by the tornadoes that tore through the mid-South on Dec. 10.



Volunteer Tim Feeney with North Carolina Baptists on Mission disaster relief helps remove downed trees at a home in Mayfield, Ky., on Dec. 14. (Photo / Morgan Bass)

Teams from Kentucky, North Carolina, Missouri and Texas have responded to calls for help.

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear said at least 100 Kentuckians remain missing as recovery efforts continue. The storms that stretched across Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Ohio and Tennessee early Saturday morning have left more than 70 dead.

Kentucky Baptist Glenn Hickey, the incident commander for the site in hard-hit Mayfield, Ky., called the destruction the worst tornado-related

damage he's ever seen.

As he drove to the site on Saturday morning, he took note of damage stretching more than 150 miles between Bowling Green and Mayfield.

Disaster relief crews are providing chainsaw assistance as they help people get to their homes and remove trees from homes, Hickey said.

"We have teams going out and tarping where there's roof damage—trying to protect whatever is left of homes, if we can," he said.

For many in Mayfield, repair is not an option.

"Many houses will be condemned and will have to be completely rebuilt," he said.

A Southern Baptist Send Relief tractor trailer made its way west Tuesday from Ashland, Ky., to Mayfield and to Mt. Juliet, Tenn., bringing enough roofing material for 480 homes, *Kentucky Today* reported.

Baptist disaster relief chaplains also are on the ground near the most gruesome sights where survivors' loss is great. Vande Slonecker is helping lead the chaplain team as they assess the area and make their first contacts with residents.

"Right now, people are having an adrenaline shock. It's very hard for them to understand what they're seeing," she said. In the coming days, she added, adrenaline will wear off, and shock will set in as residents will need help to process and comprehend the devastation.

"The reality will set in, and the grief will come," Slonecker said. "It's our job to say, 'Yes, you are going through a very rough time, but God is here, and he sent us to be here with you, holding your hand, helping you through this the best we can.'"

Slonecker, a veteran chaplain and caregiver, has worked disaster response in the Gulf Coast, along the East Coast and in Kentucky. She said the devastation is massive, because it is so widespread.

So many people have lost everything, and for those recovering, “the rebuilding process and what is ahead for this town is mammoth compared to some of the places I’ve been,” she said.