

Joplin tornado survivor ministers in Moore

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MOORE, Okla. (BP)—Gary Hunley had seen it all before. As he surveyed the damage left behind from a tornado in Moore, Okla., he saw an all-too-familiar scene of overturned cars, metal signposts bent to the ground and houses reduced to rubble.



Southern Baptist Disaster Relief volunteer Shad Schlueter, a member of First Baptist Church, Lockney, Texas, clears the ground from the property of a survivor of the May 20 EF5 tornado that struck Moore, Okla. (Photo/John Swain/NAMB) Almost two years to the day before the Moore tornado, another twister destroyed Hunley's home in Joplin, Mo. That tornado killed 158 people. Since then, Hunley, the leader on his Spring River Baptist Association disaster relief team, has participated in numerous disaster relief missions. Yet because of the amount of damage in Moore, the latest assignment brought back a variety of memories.

"I understand it," Hunley said. "I saw it yesterday for the first time. It was

like Joplin—the scene, the smell, the look on people’s faces. Some are trying to be uplifting and act like everything is OK. They’re hiding it though. I can see it on their faces. I feel so sorry for them.”

Hunley and his team of three Missouri Baptists were among hundreds of Baptist disaster relief volunteers serving in Moore and Shawnee, Okla., following recent tornadoes, including the May 19 Shawnee twister that killed two. Southern Baptist volunteers ministered to the practical and spiritual needs of Oklahoma residents by removing fallen trees and other debris, searching for personal items, putting tarp on roofs and counseling survivors and performing other tasks.

TBM joins other state volunteers

Texas Baptist Men disaster relief teams worked alongside other Baptist volunteers from Texas, as well as Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Louisiana, Missouri, North Carolina and Oklahoma.

Through May 25, Southern Baptists had prepared more than 30,000 meals, presented the gospel 47 times and distributed 278 Bibles.

Shad Schlueter, a member of the disaster relief team from First Baptist Church of Lockney, described his work as his “witness to people.”

“I believe the Lord blesses some people to preach,” Schlueter said. “I’m not blessed that way, but he did give me two hands to work. I believe the Lord sent me here to do this.”

Hunley and his team helped a young Moore couple find irreplaceable memorabilia they’d given up for lost, having thought they’d already found everything left behind.

A tub of photos

But thanks to the Missouri team, homeowner Jill Thompkins found a tub of

photos yet undamaged, featuring her with her father.

“I’m so grateful,” Thompkins said. “It’s so amazing how people have come from all over to help us. I’m so thankful, because no one can do this kind of stuff by themselves.”

The Missouri team members, who live near Joplin, leaned on their personal experiences to minister in Moore. Floyd Morris of First Baptist Church in Diamond, Mo., shared his faith in Christ with a renter who lived across the street from Thompkins. The renter had no insurance, wanted no help and expressed bitterness to God as he cleaned up the property.

“I told him that the anger was a part of the grieving process,” Morris said. “It’s going to get better, so much better.”

Although Morris had been trained for disaster relief work for some time, he hadn’t been able to go on other trips because of work.

“I told (my boss): ‘I don’t want to quit you, but this is a God-thing. I don’t question my Lord, and he is telling me to go,’” Morris said. “This hurts. You come in here and see this, and it’s Joplin all over again.”