

# **Church feeds hard-hit neighborhood from family's lawn**

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RICHARDSON—When God protected her family and spared their home from a tornado that destroyed houses up and down her street, Amanda Pritchard knew what God wanted her—and her church—to do.

“We just want to make sure everybody is nourished—emotionally and physically,” she said.

So, grills set up in her family's front yard became the place where members of First Baptist Church in Richardson cooked meals and delivered them door-to-door throughout the storm-devastated neighborhood.

“I'm so thankful we didn't have to focus on our own home, so we can be there for our neighbors—to walk with them through the experience and share their pain,” she said.

## **‘A tornado came tearing down my street’**

Pritchard, marketing director at First Baptist Church in Richardson, had returned to her home near Richland College about 8:45 p.m. on Oct. 20 from a fund-raising event at church.

When she saw an initial weather alert on her cell phone, she dismissed it, thinking it was about a thunderstorm somewhere else in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

“I was busy. I had pictures from the event I needed to post” on social media, she recalled.

A few minutes later, her husband, Scott Geddie, called to her attention a more urgent weather warning about a possible tornado.

Within a matter of minutes, the couple, their 12-year-old son and their 8-year-old daughter were huddled in a bathroom, with the children covered in a bathtub.

About 20 minutes after Pritchard received the first weather alert on her phone, “a tornado came tearing down my street,” she said.

She tried to comfort her terrified children.

“I told them: ‘What do we do when we are scared? God wants us to take our fears to him and put our trust in him.’ So, that’s when I started praying. I told our lead pastor later that’s when I learned about a whole new kind of praying—crazy scared mama prayers,” she said.

## **Assessing damage**

Once the storm passed, Pritchard and her husband checked outside. The entire area was eerily dark, left without electricity.

“It was dark, so we couldn’t see much. But we knew it was bad,” she recalled. “We didn’t sleep much that night. The first thing the next morning, we went outside. It was far worse than we ever anticipated.”

An overturned car was in one neighbor’s front yard. One house had collapsed. Another house lost a roof. Trees had fallen on most homes.

“We were spared. There was not one shingle off of our house,” Pritchard said.

She noted one other bright spot in an otherwise dismal scene.

“Texas Baptist Men were on the spot, clearing debris,” she said.

## **‘Our community is broken’**



Amanda Pritchard and her family turned their front lawn into a ministry center—grilling hamburgers, distributing food and offering comfort to neighbors whose homes were hit by a tornado. (Facebook Photo)

As she and her husband gained their bearings, they began to take stock of their own experiences and to think about what their neighbors must have been feeling.

“We wanted coffee. We were desperate, tired parents. So, we could only

imagine the overwhelming anxiety of other families who were waking up to far worse situations than we faced,” she said.

Her husband tried to pick up enough coffee and donuts at a nearby store to deliver to people on their street, but he discovered the shop was closed, due to lack of electricity.

Pritchard knew many of their neighbors would need meals later in the day. So, she contacted First Baptist in Richardson.

“I said: ‘We want to do a cook-out for our neighbors. Our community is broken,’” she recalled. She placed an order at a warehouse club for enough food to provide lunch for all the neighborhood. Student pastors from First Baptist delivered a large grill to their home, and they all went to work grilling hamburgers, hot dogs and vegetable burgers.

They served more than 150 people from the family’s front lawn.

## **‘Being the hands and feet of Jesus’**



TBM chainsaw crews who were working in Richardson lined up for water and snacks outside Amanda Pritchard’s home. (Courtesy Photo)

At the church's request, a local restaurant donated enough pizzas to serve all the residents in the neighborhood—as well as volunteers and laborers working in the area—the next meal.

“Our lead pastor was delivering pizza to men working on rooftops,” Pritchard said.

Others donated additional food, and church members helped cook and serve.

For the noon meal on Tuesday, the ministerial staff from First Baptist in Richardson arrived to grill hamburgers and hot dogs for 120 people.

“I knew we had an incredible church, but it's amazing to see them in action,” Pritchard said. “It's wonderful seeing so many people being the hands and feet of Jesus, serving our community.”

While Pritchard provided some coordination for the church's involvement, the ministry developed organically.

“We didn't have any kind of contingency plan,” she said. “I already have a checklist in mind for the next time anything like this happens.”

On Oct. 22, plans already were in place for the next day's meals. Beyond that, Pritchard and her fellow church members just wanted to continue to be “a comforting presence” in their community—whatever that might involve.

“We're just taking it one day at a time,” she said. “Each day is a new day.”