

‘Neighbors helping neighbors’ after Sanderson tornado

June 6, 2024

After a tornado ripped through Sanderson, Pastor Mike Ellis said residents of the small West Texas town did what they typically do.

“It was neighbors helping neighbors,” said Ellis, pastor of First Baptist Church in Sanderson.



A tornado destroyed homes in Sanderson. (Photo / David Vela / Texas Baptists)

The tornado that hit Sanderson Sunday evening, June 2, left the church building unscathed, he noted.

“The church property was untouched—not even a broken window or a dent in a vehicle,” Ellis said.

However, the tornado hit the homes of two church member families. One

family expects to be able to rebuild. The other was a complete loss.

Texans on Mission chainsaw volunteers from Big Bend Baptist Association helped clear fallen trees from homes.

The debris field from the disaster covered two to three miles, Ellis said.



Sanderson residents representing all the churches in town gather in the parish hall of the Catholic church for a meal. (Photo / David Vela / Texas Baptists)

In the immediate aftermath of the tornado, members of First Baptist Church worked alongside volunteers from the local Presbyterian and Catholic churches to provide meals to displaced families, using groceries donated by WalMart.

“It was kind of like Jesus feeding the 5,000,” Ellis said. “It’s been a blessing. People serving together forget which church they even belong to. We’ve come together as one serving God.”

David Vela, area representative for Texas Baptists, helped serve at a luncheon for volunteers at the local Catholic parish hall.

“There were a lot of people from First Baptist helping out. It was good to see the community come together,” Vela said.



A tornado hit Sanderson on June 2. Members of the community rallied to help their neighbors. (Photo / David Vela / Texas Baptists)

Ellis—who serves bivocationally as pastor, also working as an electrical, plumbing and building contractor—noted the town began moving pretty rapidly from disaster relief to disaster recovery.

He recognizes the difference, having served in Oklahoma during several disasters over 20 years and receiving emergency management training.

“I’m glad to be here. I feel like God put me here seven years ago for a time like this,” he said.

The experience has been mentally and physically taxing, but Ellis was struck by the compassionate care residents offered to one another.

“I’ve seen Jesus Christ in the last few days, represented well by the people here,” he said. “Neighbors just kind of showed up at the right time, knowing when to offer a shoulder for somebody to cry on or to be there for

somebody to lean on.”