

# Pastor to ranchers heartbroken amid Texas wildfires

March 1, 2024

CANADIAN (BP)—Pastor Bob Bynum, 77, has become somewhat of a rancher's helper, wrestling cattle at times and helping when needed among the 20 or so ranchers who worship at Locust Grove Baptist Church.



Betty and Bob Bynum (Courtesy photo)

The Smokehouse Creek Fire, the largest in Texas history, came within a mile of a church member's ranch, Bynum told Baptist Press March 1, but none of the church's members have reported any direct losses.

"We have about 60 families that are devastated in one way or another" in Canadian, a 1.3-square-mile community of about 2,400 people and the only incorporated community in Hemphill County. "I think we've lost 40 homes."

At least two people have died in the flames. The Smokehouse Creek Fire covers more than 1 million acres, or 1,600 square miles, in Texas and Oklahoma and is 15 percent contained, the Texas A&M Forest Service reported March 1. It is only one of several fires driven by parched land and

high winds in the two states.

## Pastor and volunteer

Bynum was on standby at First Baptist Church of Canadian, a Southern Baptist Disaster Relief staging area, awaiting his assignment in the early stages of the response. He's also a disaster relief chaplain for Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster and is active in the multidenominational Canadian Ministerial Alliance.



Locust Grove Baptist Church Pastor Bob Bynum and his wife Betty were able to remain in the church parsonage as others evacuated Canadian in advance of the Smokehouse Creek Fire. The smoke was visible from their carport. (Photo: Betty Bynum)

“For me personally, it’s heartbreaking,” Bynum said, “and yet exciting that I can be a part of doing something positive to put people in a better frame of mind, pray for them and minister to their physical and spiritual needs.

“It’s really exciting on that level, and yet, our heart has kind of sunk.”

Bynum and his wife were able to remain in place in their parsonage when Canadian was evacuated Feb. 28, as a rancher and volunteer firefighter who attends the church kept them updated on the flames’ path. The fire came within six miles of the church, his wife Betty said.

Texans on Mission and Southern Baptist Disaster Relief units [reported](#) responses in Texas and Oklahoma as early as Feb. 28 and 29.

Surveying damage this morning, Bynum encountered seven burned homes and lots of stubble where grass once grew. But he also saw volunteers hauling trash and delivering hay to feed cattle. Ranches the fire spared are housing cattle that fled the flames.

“It’s really good to see so many people actively involved, not just Baptists but citywide,” he said. “People comforting each other and being there for each other. I’ve seen that firsthand.”

## **Relief efforts continue**

Bynum described Locust Grove’s members as generous and benevolent. A Locust Grove family is providing shelter to a family who lost their home in the fire, Bynum said. Betty is working with ranchers to coordinate grocery donations. Locust Grove Baptist will likely serve as a staging area to receive hay donations as recovery continues, Betty said.

In Fritch, about 90 miles southwest of Canadian, Texans on Mission Disaster Relief Director David Wells reported Feb. 29 that 100 or so homes were destroyed or damaged.

Weather conditions will remain favorable for wildfires through the weekend, according to weather reports. The Top O’ Texas Baptist Association serves 68 congregations in the Panhandle.