

Tornado Response – Utilize Resources You Have

Plantersville, Alabama

Whether your church congregation is huge or tiny, you can still make a difference in your community when disasters strike. Our small Global Methodist Church in Plantersville is one of those tiny churches. Regular attendance averages 10 – 14 each Sunday.

Saturday night, March 15, 2025, will be remembered by our small Central Alabama community for years to come. A powerful EF3 tornado, nearly a mile wide, devastated the southern portion of our community. Two residents lost their lives, numerous others received injuries, and many livelihoods upended by this sudden destruction.

photo below only captures a fraction of the devastation; taken at first morning light Sunday morning.



Being a first responder with our local volunteer fire department, we were dispatched within minutes of the storm passing. From the 911 dispatchers report of trapped individuals and damage, an immediate request for assistance was sent out to other neighboring responders. These responders began the massive undertaking of rescue, road access, and early recovery efforts.

From the beginning, responders were faced with darkness, heavy rain, wind, lightning, blocked roads, flooded ditches, power outages, injured /trapped individuals, and damage everywhere. Our fire trucks and rescue equipment had to be parked nearly half a mile from the worst destruction due to blocked roads. As more responders arrived in our rural, remote area, work started to open roads and tackle larger search areas. By 2 am, due to darkness, fatigue, and debris, responders returned to their homes for needed rest; with plans to return in daylight to continue the search for one missing person. By 4 am, we were dispatched again when a resident located the missing person. Many of us remained on scene for many more hours to come.

Once daylight came and the destruction became more visible, a call to our pastor at the Plantersville Global Methodist Church was made. We have a very small congregation but knew the Global Methodist Alabama Emerald Coast Conference was large. Our preacher started the process of reaching out to our Global community for disaster help. Within a matter of a few hours, I received a call from the Global Methodist Conference Disaster Response Coordinator Mr. Ron Toole. Mr. Toole asked what we needed and how the conference might help. Since this was our first dealing with something like this, Mr. Toole asked several questions to help him determine our needs. Questions ranged from how many estimated homes affected, to a contact person with our county EMA (Emergency Management Agency), which was Dallas County for this area, to a delivery address with a forklift to unload the supplies. After additional calls and texts throughout the day on Sunday, Mr. Toole sent his request for supplies to their storage site. By Monday afternoon, these supplies were delivered to a local business who had access to a forklift. From this location, our congregation, with help from other volunteer responders, gathered the supplies and started to distribute them into the affected areas. *See Photo below for supply delivery*





Photo above is the first pallet of Tornado Disaster supply buckets to reach the devastated area.

Being a first responder for many years, I was surprised at the quick response by the conference and for these emergency supplies. With the arrival of the first load of disaster supplies at ground zero now came the question “how to disperse them to those who need them most”. A local resident using a side-by-side to deliver food offered to distribute many of this first batch for us. Using this side-by-side allowed better access to small roads and avoiding the many downed trees. The distribution process for us went well on into Tuesday.

For food and drink needs, the local Plantersville Baptist Church undertook this huge task. Their church members worked for 4 to 5 days straight gathering and dispersing food. Residents, Responders, and Utility Workers could all receive food at either the Baptist Church location or at a table set up at ground zero. Their church volunteers shuttled in food and drinks to keep the table supplied.

Another church a few miles south of the worst hit area, Elyton Missionary Baptist Church received storm damage to their church, but they also helped residents nearer to them with food

and supplies. Having extra supplies, our church shared some of our disaster supplies with them to prevent duplicating disaster relief efforts to that area.

Destruction and devastation can come to any area and to any of us. Whether prepared or not! As a church community, work with your local agencies, first responders, surrounding churches, and through your Church Conference to determine how best your church can help. Too many services and good deed doers can become chaotic around the scene; so be part of the overall solution. The size of an incident will determine the needs but normally the first 12 to 24 hours, first responders are working, so sightseers can become a problem. Start your talk with these responders and EMA directors during the first day or two of operations to see what services or assistance may be needed. This gives your church a little time to rally the troops, make plans, and gather the supplies. After first responders begin to clear, the next big tasks are restoring utilities and clearing remaining roads. Power is very important to homeowners who need their power restored. The next couple of days may see a flood of power, water, and gas personnel working in the area. So again, be aware of their need for access to these areas and do not interfere with or block them.



Photo above: Power crews work to restore power to a dead-end street as they set new power poles, string wire, and bring in new transformers. Blocking access with your personal vehicle will slow their efforts!

News Media will also swarm the area, but they provide a means of getting the word out about assistance needs. We had many local news stations as well as some national coverage. Politicians will also look to visit the site.

Special thanks are many and I will surely overlook some if I attempt to name them all. But special thanks go out to all the fire, law enforcement, EMS, and forestry personnel who responded to the call for help. Additional thanks to residents who stepped in to assist with saws, tractors, and heavy machinery. Thanks also to area church volunteers, county and state officials, and local businesses. Lastly, thanks to the Global Methodist Alabama Emerald Coast Conference.

This last photo shows the destruction this tornado caused to our community. This metal Butler building was no match for the devastating force from an EF3 tornado. Directly behind this location was located an occupied mobile home; nothing but a few cinder blocks remained of it. The mobile home was scattered for miles around. Two community members lost their lives here so like to leave their memory with each of you reading this.

Annie Lou Free age 82 and Floyd (Dunk) Eugene Pickering age 71.



Mark Walker

Plantersville Global Methodist Church

Plantersville Volunteer Fire Department