



Disaster Response Update

We here at St. Paul join United Methodists in Kentucky who are responding to the disasters in Kentucky by praying, giving and volunteering.

Praying: We pray for all who feel the impact of severe storms and tornadoes in loss of life and property, especially those places hardest hit like Mayfield and Bowling Green. Let us take comfort from Psalm 46 and give thanks to all who are responding with acts of compassion.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
though its waters roar and foam, the mountains tremble with its tumult.
God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns.
The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. (From Psalm 46)

Giving: Your regular giving to St. Paul will help Disaster Relief because the Annual Conference is going to give 10% of the Mission Covenant dollars that are received in December toward Disaster Relief. The Annual Conference is also giving \$50,000 toward Disaster Relief. Also, Here are a couple of additional ways you can give.

- Donations for Mayfield UMC, which is in the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference, can be sent to <http://twkumc.org/disaster-response/>. (Both Conferences are working closely together on disaster relief and will soon set up a mutual cooperation structure.)
- Donations also can be sent online to UMCOR, the United Methodist Committee on Relief, at: <https://umcmmission.org/advance-project/901670/>

Volunteering: The Kentucky Annual Conference and the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference are partnering in this response effort. Please fill out the appropriate form to volunteer to serve on a team or to bring a team to assist during the coming weeks and months. Thank you!

Early Response Team Volunteer Form – This form is specifically for those who are or have recently been credentialed by UMCOR to serve.

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An Article from the Kentucky Annual Conference Communications team:

A Conference team led by Bishop Leonard Fairley visited storm-stricken southwestern Kentucky on Thursday, Dec. 16. In the group besides Fairley was his wife, Dawn; Rev. Gary Graves; and Conference Communications staff members Cathy Bruce, Connie Offutt, and Alan Wild. This is what we saw:

Bowling Green

Bishop Fairley and our delegation arrived at St. James UMC around 8:45 CST and met Rev. Mark Dickinson, the South Central District Superintendent, and Rev. Caleb Wheat, the Pastor at St. James. It was overcast and windy but mild for December – low-60s – as we arrived. Rain was scheduled to arrive in the next couple of hours.

Three tornadoes have been confirmed in Warren County, according to news reports. Dickinson told us one went directly over his and his family's house. He remembers feeling the intense change in air pressure and the noise. "It sounded like the largest freight train ever."

Their home was spared, but many others nearby were destroyed or badly damaged.

David Graves, a State Farm Insurance agent in Bowling Green, also met us at St. James. He is the brother of Gary Graves, who is serving as Secretary of the UMC's General Conference. Gary Graves has pastored churches in some of the hardest-hit areas and accompanied us as we surveyed the damage and talked with people.

David Graves said one of the biggest things that has stood out for him is people near and far "truly being good neighbors" after the storms. "I've never seen so many donations come in so fast," he said. The same with local people with chain saws who have been working to clear fallen trees since right after the storm.

Graves, who also coached women's college basketball for 12 years, was reminded of a slogan he used in his coaching days: "Team work makes the dream work."

"It warms your heart. ... Everyone just wants to help."

Asked what advice he would offer from an insurance perspective, he said people should take pictures of their damaged property, contact their agent, and be patient as the insurance people wade through all the claims.



Judy Moore, a member of State Street UMC, joined the group in the St. James parking lot to talk about her family’s situation. Her home was badly damaged, but the initial assessment is that it is repairable.

She and her husband were at home when the tornado hit, and they had their 5-year-old granddaughter with them. Judy Moore was watching the news. Her husband was upstairs asleep. There was a loud crash, and he yelled to her, “There’s a tree that just landed on my head!” she recalled.

It turns out it was not a tree, but a beam from their home – which thankfully hit him nails-side up. He was not hurt. None of them were. After the initial terror, Judy Moore said her granddaughter seemed most struck by the bizarre spectacle of the pots and pans they quickly put down to collect water pouring from the broken pipes.

“Our house is stone, and I think if it wasn’t stone, it might not be there,” she said.

She also recalled another amazing sight: The hummingbird feeder they have in their backyard was not touched.



Fairley took her hand and prayed with her there in the St. James parking lot. Afterward, he offered words of praise and encouragement to Wheat for his team at St. James. "I'm just grateful for all your work," the Bishop said.

Wheat said that he's been hearing that the rebuilding could be a two-year project. "I'm looking forward for us being a part of that. That's what we're here for."

Dickinson said he has met with his pastors in Bowling Green and across the district and has impressed on them that "even in the midst of great tragedy, we still can do Kingdom work."

The two pastors then took us around the neighborhood near St. James where many houses were hit. Damage on some streets seemed minimal – perhaps some trees down and tarp-covered roofs. Other streets had houses with hardly a wall left standing. Cleanup crews were removing fallen trees and other debris. Here and there, Wheat pointed out damaged homes that belonged to St. James members.



We then headed to Faith UMC, where Pastor Mark Rogers joined us and took us around the nearby neighborhood, where some of the worst damage occurred in the city, along with most of the 15 confirmed fatalities. (Those killed included seven members of one family; the last unaccounted-for member, a 13-year-old girl, was found Thursday.)

Like St. James and the other Bowling Green churches, the storms bypassed Rogers's church. "How Faith got missed, I have no idea. ... We were just lucky."

The damage near the church was staggering, with entire streets reduced to piles of debris. Houses that hadn't been leveled were tagged by crews from FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, who had marked homes that could be safely entered and those that couldn't.

Some homeowners had spray-painted messages on the walls that were still standing. One message told of a missing black cat.

Rogers said he and his church have been handing out meals, snacks, and coffee in the stricken neighborhood to first responders, homeowners looking through the rubble, and whoever else they encounter.

“One person cleaning out his house, you’d think I had handed him a cup of gold,” Rogers said. “He was so thankful.”

We drove back to our starting point at St. James and then headed up the road to Madisonville, 80 miles to the northwest.

Madisonville

The town itself was not hit by a tornado, but it was a near miss: We could see downed trees and brush on each side of Interstate 69 about five miles south of Madisonville. It apparently was part of the same supercell that had flattened most of Mayfield, Kentucky, earlier. We arrived in the city in a driving rain.

Fairley and the Communications Team were met at Madisonville First UMC by the pastors, Rev. Drs. John and Loletuth Kalz, and Rev. Yasmel Reyes, and Rev. Dr. Wade Arp, the Pennyriple District Superintendent. Also there was Rev. Cameron Edwards of Webb Memorial/Slaughters First, who chairs the Pennyriple District’s Disaster Response Team; Jim Morse, who oversees the Conference’s Disaster Response Team; and American Red Cross representatives.





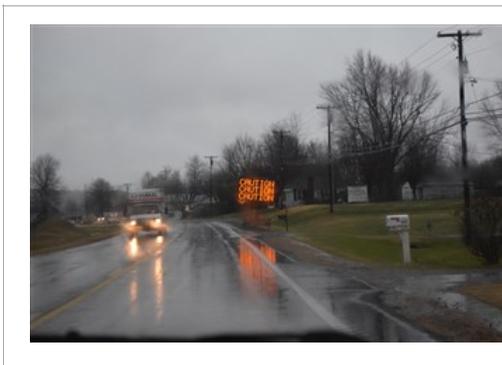
Dawson Springs/Princeton

Dawson Springs is an 18-mile drive from Madisonville. The rain was easing off as we got to town, and it was growing chillier. It looked like at least half the town of about 2,600 people had been destroyed. At least 13 fatalities have been confirmed, with others still unaccounted for as of Friday, Dec. 17.

Damage at Dawson Springs UMC, near the center of town across the street from Beshear Funeral Home, appeared relatively light. The front door was boarded. But the casualties in Dawson Springs included two members of the church, sisters Carole Grisham, 80, and Marsha Hall, 72, who lived together, and according to [a CNN story](#), were also best friends.

On the way out of Dawson Springs, a wall had been spray-painted with storm-related graffiti. It was the encouraging kind: "*God's not dead,*" read part of the message.

We drove 12 miles up the road to Princeton. The tornado there missed the center of the city of about 6,000. But a subdivision on the edge of town was heavily damaged. What really stood out in the growing dusk was a huge fire in a nearby field where the remains nearby homes were being burned.



We could see a front-end loader adding debris to the blaze. It looked like an image from hell.

From there, we drove back into the center of town. The Ogden Memorial parsonage had lost a tree, but it looked as if it had been partly cleaned up by the time we drove past. The church, several blocks from the parsonage and near the center of town, was undamaged.

We left Princeton to begin the three-hour drive back to the Conference Center in Crestwood. Night had fallen.

WE NEED VOLUNTEERS!

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Video - Recovery for Storm-Ravaged Areas First Steps Part 1

Photo Gallery December 16, 2021

