

Tornado-Stricken Churches Worship Outdoors

Congregations in Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee and Georgia gathered in tents, borrowed space or in buildings with the sunlight streaming through the damaged—or nonexistent—roofs. Last week's storm, which has claimed 340-plus lives so far, was the most devastating natural disaster since Hurricane Katrina destroyed New Orleans in 2005.

In the town of Phil Campbell, Ala., a tornado killed 20 people and destroyed 40 percent of the homes. At the Phil Campbell Church of God, congregants gathered on a bare concrete slab. Pastor Chris Burns—who lost his own home in the tornado—delivered his sermon behind the remains of the altar and in front of a cross with a hand-lettered sign reading, “He makes all things new.”

Christian relief organizations such as Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, The Salvation Army and Samaritan's Purse have moved quickly to respond to the storms' devastation with resources and helping hands.

By Saturday morning Convoy of Hope (COH) crews were coordinating mobile distributions from three sites in Bessemer and Tuscaloosa, Ala., and resourcing three other partner sites in the greater Birmingham area. COH volunteers donated more than 3,000 hours since Wednesday evening distributing supplies to survivors in the affected areas of Alabama. The Springfield, non-profit has delivered five tractor-trailer loads of emergency relief supplies, with a total of 26 loads planned in response to this deadly storm.

“This service is our response to tragedy,” said Pastor T.L. Lewis, who led a Sunday service with 5,000 members of Bethel Baptist Church, outside the remains of their sanctuary in

Pratt City, Ala. "It shows that we are not victims. We are victors. We are visible victors,"