

Eleven people went to Sullivan, Ind., October 11-14, 2023, on our recent mission trip. Three were first-timers and impressed with what we were able to accomplish.

We stayed at Terre Haute First Baptist Church, about 45 minutes away. They fed us breakfast and supper each day. As with all Baptist churches, they have wonderful cooks and were great hosts! This was their first time to host a mission group in their newly-expanded building. Hopefully, they will be open to hosting future groups as well. Two different businesses in Sullivan sponsored our lunches from local restaurants –again, *great* food!

We worked on two houses. For the first, we installed indoor and outdoor plumbing lines, inserted baffles into rafters and cleaned up a large concrete slab in the side yard. Working alongside the homeowner, we got to hear his story of how he and his three kids survived the tornado with only the bathroom left standing, which was where they had taken shelter. I could see in his eyes how he was reliving the event while telling us their story and how grateful he was that his family had survived. He was reluctant initially to allow us --as strangers-- to help him but warmed up to us over the couple of days as we worked there. He is hopeful to be in his house no later than Christmas.

The other house we worked on is owned by a husband and wife who have been living in a fifth-wheel trailer since the tornado. Naturally, they are tired of living in it and eager to move into their house very soon even if it might not be 100% complete. They had professional drywall installers (who donated their labor) working inside their house, and we hung drywall in the garage and installed receptacles in the house. We took them to lunch and got to hear their story as well.

A tornado hit the area on March 31 at 10:21 pm with three deaths and 200 buildings destroyed. It was obvious that there are still many empty lots where rebuilding hasn't begun, but a few new houses are in various stages of being built. Many of these homes are small, no more than 1000 sq. ft. but are homes nonetheless! Many homeowners were underinsured or had no insurance. FEMA has a limit on how much money homeowners can receive, and there are still huge gaps [unmet needs] in the amount of money needed to rebuild.

The city of Sullivan is helping as many people as possible with the rebuilding. They have raised some money to date but need to raise much more. They have formed "Sullivan County Long-term Recovery Coalition," which you may follow on Facebook. This group walks beside the residents, offering them case management assistance while trying to be creative in meeting their needs. The director of this Coalition, Richard Payonk, visited us Friday night and shared details of their work.

Volunteers play a huge part in the rebuilding process by providing free labor. We did our best, and I believe God used us to bless these two homes' owners. We are *not* done helping in Sullivan County; we will return. Estimated time for recovery/rebuilding there is about five years. Watch for details about additional trips next year. They will be publicized here in *Observations* (ABC-IN/KY Region e-news). Please also pray about the possibility of joining us in the future!