

## Looking toward a Hope-filled Future

Union University suffered massive damage from an EF-4 tornado on Feb. 5, which is described throughout this issue of the Unionite. Bringing destruction to almost all aspects of our residence life area and to several other key buildings on campus, the \$40 million hit has been declared one of the most significant disasters in Southern Baptist history. On the morning of Feb. 5 we had about 3300 students in class. More than 1200 of those were on campus when the tornado struck. That evening, we took 51 students to the hospital. Nine were seriously injured. Thankfully all have now been released from the hospital. The work of our student life team on Feb. 5 can only be described as heroic. Everyone who saw the campus during the first 36 hours has been overwhelmed by the fact that the lives of all of the students who were on campus on that Tuesday evening were spared. For God's providential protection we are most grateful.

Amazingly, we were able to gather together on campus as a community exactly two weeks later (Feb. 19) in a standing-room-only worship service in our chapel. We lifted our voices in praise and bowed our hearts in

prayer, recognizing anew our deep dependence on God. We have asked God to bring renewal out of the rubble across our campus. The 14 days between Feb. 5 and Feb. 19 were some of the most demanding and challenging that any of us have ever faced. Our faculty, staff, and students came together as volunteers to do whatever they could to help with the initial recovery efforts, including the retrieval of student belongings from the dorms. The diligent efforts of our trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, and students working together across the campus have been a joy to behold.

Classes were able to begin again on Feb. 20, yet, things have been anything but normal. The spring schedule has been revised by Union's gifted and creative academic leadership. Numerous classes have had to be rescheduled in various places around the city. More than 800 students have now been relocated from the residence life area that has now been demolished.

We played our first home basketball games in front of a packed house on Thursday (Feb. 21). The next day we held a forward-looking and hope-filled ground-

breaking for 14 new residence life complexes. We continue to make progress, though each day for the past several weeks has seemed like a week unto itself.

We are grateful for God's grace to us over these past days as we have moved from "uue-mergency" to "uurecovery" to "uurebuilding" for those of you who have been following on the Websites (all news is now at [uurebuilding.com](http://uurebuilding.com)). While we have a lengthy path in front of us, we certainly have much for which to be grateful. The new residential life project is moving forward. We all pray for God's blessings on this important project. The repair work on all of the other buildings has now started. We have five contractors and numerous subcontractors at work on campus led by a single architectural and engineering firm. Each day seems busier than the day before.

Our Trustee Board has approved a five-phase plan that has enabled us not only to function this spring, but has mapped a path that will help us move forward with the fall semester, and will help us complete all of the rebuilding, repair, and recovery efforts by 2009, Lord willing. Well more than 4,500

volunteers have come to campus to offer their help for us. To date, we have had more than 5,000 donors from all 50 states respond to our recovery and rebuilding efforts. We thank God for every donor and every gift. We have received more than \$9 million in gifts and commitments, for which we are so very grateful.

Our estimates are that even after the insurance settlement, we will need an additional \$9 million above and beyond the gifts that have already been received. Of course, this is not just for rebuilding, but also for recovery of lost revenue. We have refunded more than \$2 million in spring housing fees to students who moved off campus. We also have lost considerable revenue from other programs we have had to cancel this spring and summer. We are in uncharted waters functioning in an "essentialist mode," but we are pressing on with God's enablement and the encouragement of friends from around the country.

We move forward from this unforgettable event with hope. Hope is a powerful word—a driving force in life. Hope includes a desire for something, but it is even more than that. It is an eager, confident expectation that sus-



starting to move in directions that are a bit more normal in terms of work patterns, at least a "new normal."

We ask that you please continue to remember us in your prayers. Please pray for our students, particularly our injured students who need God's care and blessing. We will pray for God to touch the hearts of many friends in the days to come to help us with the massive challenges that we now face. We have been overwhelmed with volunteers who have helped immensely, and we will probably need more help in the months to come. But for now, we really need your faithful prayers as we trust our great God to open the windows of heaven to provide for our significant financial challenges. We thank God for your friendship and your encouragement to Union University during these most challenging and hope-filled days.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

*David S. Dockery*  
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