

Iowa churches light the way after devastating storm

by Daniel Sunne

On Thursday, July 19, a tornado ripped through Marshalltown with wind speeds reaching 144 miles per hour. Over 700 homes were damaged, and around 90 of them were destroyed. The Courthouse clock tower was toppled, and the main hospital, City Hall, police station, and veterans' home all received extensive damage.

Pastor Dave Martin was in his church, Faith Assembly of God, with around 15 others preparing for a block party when the tornado hit.

"The tornado just missed us by a half a block," Martin told The FAMiLY LEADER. "We were just a block and a half from the real bad stuff."

It was immediately apparent the town had been devastated. Seven or eight families from Faith were affected by the tornado.



The next morning after the storm, churches considered the damage and went to work. Pastor Kerry Jech with New Hope Christian Church described meeting with church staff Friday morning: "They were all out there cleaning, all of our staff just pitched in. We divided up into teams and just went out."

Before there was even time for a coordinated plan, churches and volunteers were cleaning up debris and carrying hope into Marshalltown. New Hope Christian Church had 25-75 volunteers a day for 10 days divided into groups cleaning up the city.

Disaster relief organizations responded quickly, including Christian organizations like Samaritan's Purse, the Salvation Army, and Southern Baptist Disaster Relief. Many operated out of churches and with church help. Faith Assembly of God hosted Convoy of Hope, which brought in two semi loads of emergency relief supplies, including water and food as well as often forgotten necessities like diapers and cleaning supplies. And churches came or sent volunteers too, from Waterloo, Reinbeck, Des Moines, and even Nebraska and Missouri.

As organizations conquered clean up, churches tackled other community needs, such as meals for those affected by the storm. Faith Assembly of God served over 8,000 meals in 10 days, and First Presbyterian Church served hundreds of meals every evening for three weeks. Pastor Martin's church gave away quarters at the laundromat, so those without power or in shelters could take comfort in clean clothes. His church paid for \$1,000 of laundry.

Iowa State Rep. Mark Smith from Marshalltown wrote in a statement, "The light of the faith community was certainly shining brightly after this disaster. Churches offered refuge, provided meals, ensured the people in the community were safe, and turned out in mass to help with the clean-up. The efforts are continuing: Trinity Lutheran has provided space for the Mid-Iowa Community Action Agency (MICA) to distribute emergency funds, First Presbyterian offered meals, and Central Christian Church is becoming a Week of Compassion Church that will bring in teams to repair during the coming months. Second Baptist continued to hold services in their badly damaged church so that members continued to have the security of their worship center. The Samaritan's Purse and the Billy Graham Disaster Relief efforts arrived in town very quickly and helped so many. The Salvation Army responded as they do so often and provided services even though they, too, were victims of the storm. These are just a few of the efforts that have occurred in our community. I am so very thankful for all the efforts of our faith community!"

Rebuilding Marshalltown remains an immense task, but in clean-up and in the disaster itself, God's hand was visible.

"The entire thing, God was in the process," said Pastor Jech. "To have the kind of weather that we did [during clean-up after the tornado], to have the people cooperating ... it goes back to what Joseph said to his brothers: 'That which you intended for evil, God used for good.'"

PLUS: Watch the story of the man who received salvation in Christ through the storm in Marshalltown!