

# *Joplin Church of God Seventh Day*

## Joplin, Missouri May 22, 2011 Tornado Relief Report

As of October 13th, it has been 125 day since the storm that no one was expecting, changed the lives of thousands of people in thirty two minutes time. Left behind were 162 dead which although sad, it was a miracle in itself, considering the utter destruction of homes and buildings such as nursing homes that were completely razed to the foundation. It would be reasonable to expect thousands of deaths after viewing the power of nature upon this city. Countless stories of undeniable miracles have been attested to as a result of the storm. In these miracles many have come to realize that God was in it all and every day ponder how their lives should change as a result. Our prayer is that we may utilized to meet the many needs both physical and spiritual.



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I will lift up my eyes to the hills--  
From whence comes my help? Psalms 121:1

Dear Friends and Brethren,

As you know, on May 22, 2011 at 5:41pm, an EF-5 tornado churned through the heart of Joplin and Duquesne, Missouri. It left in its wake 162 people dead and hundreds of people injured. Thousands of buildings - homes, churches, schools, businesses, medical offices, a hospital - were destroyed and many people lost everything.

This was the deadliest tornado on record for many decades - everything in its path was destroyed. Perhaps you saw the devastation on TV. However, for the amount of damage done, the death toll is very low. Had it been on another day of the week except Sunday, or at a different time, it would likely have been an even more horrific story. Businesses and medical offices



would have been filled, schools would have been in session... and all directly in the heart of the path the tornado took.

The brethren of our local church here in Joplin were on the north side of town at our annual church picnic.

The sky was sunny and it was a pleasant day. Around 4 PM, a few clouds rolled in, hiding the sun. A neighborhood man rode up to the park on his bicycle and told us we should leave as there was a tornado on the ground heading in our direction. We immediately packed up and headed home, some of us barely making it home to shelter before the storm struck. Others took cover in our nearby church basement.

God protected all of the church brethren that day. No one was injured or had significant property damage. But that was not the case for friends, neighbors and co-workers who were killed, injured and lost it all that day.

The community of Joplin and surrounding towns all pulled together that evening and in the days that followed and went to work ministering to all those who were hurting and in need. Such an out pouring of Gods spirit and love was shown as hands touched hands and hearts became one. Everyone was reaching out to all with help, comfort and support. The devastation

was so complete and widespread, it was incomprehensible even as you looked out on the devastated city with your own eyes.

Within 24 hours, help started pouring into Joplin from all over the world. Volunteers came from all over the United States and as far away as Australia and Haiti. The world had heard and the world answered. Truck loads of donations started pouring in daily. Tents and shelters were set in place and food was served 24 hours daily for the homeless and workers. Unaffected churches opened their doors, providing triage stations and a safe haven for the homeless and the volunteers.

The Red Cross, Salvation Army, Samaritans Purse, FEMA, and many other local and non-local organizations, were up and running. The cogs of these wheels started turning smoothly. Insurance companies set up in RV's in the midst of the devastation and began helping those who lost their homes and businesses.

But as is the case many times, there were those who were not insured or who were renting and there was no insurance check. They lost it all and were in dire need. A week after the storm we became aware of these needs and sent out a notice asking for support for these people. You so graciously responded to the need with your donations. Words cannot adequately express what it meant to these folks. It has changed lives. Thank you so much for helping us in this effort to sustain the lives of those who otherwise might have fallen through the cracks.

The donations you gave were used to provide shelter, clothing, shoes and boots, food, gasoline, travel expenses, diapers, formula and medicine. These were the immediate needs that folks had.

More than four months have passed and the devastation is 90% cleaned up. This would not have been possible without the toil of thousands of volunteers in the brutal heat of this summer and the monetary support of generous people like you. People are starting to rebuild and piece their lives back together again. Homes are being built. Businesses are rebuilding and several have opened. The trees that remained standing were stripped of almost all branches and bark – yet, many of them are now covered with green leaves – a seemingly impossible sign of life and hope.

Your tremendous support, love, prayers and outpouring of monetary donations have been such a blessing to the folks here in Joplin and surrounding areas that were hit. Thank you and praise God.

Untold stories of miracles came out of this storm. People spoke up and gave God the praise. On the following pages we have included just a few of many stories shared by a local church member who works at Wal-Mart and was in daily contact with people who were injured and or had lost everything. A good deal of the tornado relief funds we received were distributed in the form of gift cards for people such as these.

Thank you for your patience with us in sending you the enclosed receipts and this update. May God richly bless and keep each one of you.

## Working at Wal-Mart After The Tornado

May 22 thru June 1

The first 10 days after the tornado were very gruesome and oppressive. The people came in without shoes or proper clothing on. They were hurting. They wanted to show you their stitches and their brokenness. They wanted to cry and be held and tell you their story. I listened to their stories and I held them and cried with them.

The cheapest pair of shoes wasn't cheap enough. Some of you sent gift cards and it was with these cards and other donations that were able to care of these immediate needs. I told them as I helped them that it was friends and church folks that made this possible. They were so appreciative.

Some even told me that no-one had ever given them anything free in their life. This allowed me to remind them that God had so freely given His son for them and that salvation was free for the taking. Most agreed and one man said that he had forgotten to stop and thank God for saving his life in this storm. We stopped and did that right there in the shoe department.

On one occasion, an older man and his wife had come in after leaving the hospital. He needed a pair of sandals because his feet were cut, swollen and bruised. All that I had left were more expensive ones which were more than they could afford. I was able to share several gift cards with them as they needed other things as well. Tears coursed down the man's face as he told me that this humbled him.

June 2

They came today to buy clothing and shoes for funerals. They didn't have anything but wanted to do the best they could for their loved ones. We did what was right and helped them. They told me how good God was to them and cried.

June 11

Some are living in tents at the KOA camp grounds and other places. Your donations helped to pay rental fees, food and gas for these folks. Follow up has been made with these folks as well.

July 11

Forty-nine days after the tornado, she came into Wal-Mart. She lost everything. She said she lived up on the hill. She is 91 years old and is a spitfire.

Her granddaughter brought her here because she thought Gramma needed a new pair of shoes. Gramma had on sweats 3 sizes too big for her. Her small feet fit in a child's size 3 shoe but the shoes she had on were two different styles and colors and were so worn that they looked like they had been chewed by an animal. Actually, we sold those same shoes 15 years ago. Despite this, she said she is a lot better off than most others. She had just enough money left out of her Social Security check to buy a \$3.00 pair of shoes. I asked her if she needed anything else - socks, clothes, underwear. She informed me she didn't wear underwear . . . but I told her it was okay. I gave her granddaughter some gift cards and told her to buy her what she needed. The granddaughter cried and said God Bless you.

July 19

When you have to make a decision about whether you can buy food or your medicine, it's a sad day. I was passing thru the grocery department today when I overheard the middle-aged lady ask her husband if he could do without his medicine until Friday so they could get a few groceries. I asked her if I might be so bold as to ask them how much they needed for medicine. I don't think she wanted to trust me but he calmly said \$48.00. I told them about the emergency fund and asked if we could help them today. He cried and she smiled. We took care of the pharmacy bill and bought them \$100.00 in food. IA huge weight had been lifted from them that day. (Thanks for helping these folks.)

July 22

A man and his wife came in. They were with their thirty year old son. The son had gotten a job with FEMA to help with the ground work in the clean up. He needed a lightweight t-shirt as the weather was so hot. He also didn't have any socks to wear in his work boots. The parents asked him if he was going to get Sarah, his wife, a shirt (I guess she was going to work too) but he said he didn't have enough money. The parents looked like they didn't have a penny. But, the son was willing to go out there and work. As they were leaving I walked over and gave them two gift cards to get what they needed. The look on their faces said it all.

There are too many stories to tell of folks who needed help. Thanks again for helping Gods children.

**One last Story**

Things are trying to settle down here a little. It is still very difficult in a lot of ways. FEMA has just this week started bringing in modular homes for

the displaced people so this will free up the college dorms and motel rooms. Everything is still full and no rooms available in the region. Even the old run down motels that have been vacant for several years are full.



I bought up some terry cloth fabric and elastic and sister Dixie made up some sweatbands. What a difference it makes to those guys who toil in the heat and sweat all day. I continually look for ways to lessen stress and make things easier for those folks who lovingly give of themselves to come help in this venture.

The big equipment has started rolling and are picking up trees and limbs. These are all taken to one site out of the city for burning and the other debris from businesses and homes will be taken to another site and buried. It will be a long process as it is a huge area to cover. Our death toll has risen to 156 today.

I think a lot of lives and priorities in this town have changed. I live these people's stories every day with them. They all have a story to tell and I want to share a special one with you that I was blessed to hear about yesterday.

My store manager came to me and said that he had a miracle story that he was sure that I would appreciate and wanted to share with me. He and Jim have been friends since the age of seven. They grew up together, graduated from high school together, both got married and had kids. Jim had two and Andy had five. Jim and his wife divorced several years ago. But Andy and Jim have remained friends.

The Sunday of the tornado, Jim was driving down Rangeline Road. He looked over to the west and noticed that the weather had suddenly changed to a dark green and didn't look right. He suddenly realized that things were about to get real bad so he whipped off of Rangeline onto 15th St. and sped up to the Wal-Mart store. Before he could get close, he saw cars starting to move together with no one in them. Some were hopping over each other. The windows were blowing out of them and signs were sailing over him. Still he continued to be able to move closer to the front door of the store. The sound outside was almost unbearable. He drove right up to the front door and raced inside just as the front doors blew in. He couldn't find any-

one and was wondering where they had gone. He started running towards the back of the store. When he got about half way back, the power went out. Light bulbs in the ceiling started exploding and merchandise was blowing in every direction. It was pitch black and he couldn't see anything. The only way he knew which direction to run was because he heard the screaming and praying of the people in the back of the store.

He could barely stay on his feet. He was holding on to everything on the way, trying to make it back to the "safe place." People were screaming and now the people were being tossed around like rag dolls. He was able to grab a couple of kids that were hysterical and in the dark, pushed them to the floor and lay down on top of them to protect them. Then, the roof was ripped off and things and people were being thrown in every direction. It seemed to last forever and then it was deadly still and silent. It took several



minutes for anyone to move. It was light above them as there was no ceiling or walls. Just utter devas-

tation. Jim managed to get to his feet. He turned the kids over and got them up. He then looked at them . . . they were his own children! His ex-wife and their children had been in the store shopping. She had been thrown several yards away and was injured when they found her. She was taken to the hospital in the back of a pickup truck along with several others.

This family's lives were changed. And, yes, they are together, now.

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So many stories .  
. So many  
changes . . . God  
is still on the  
throne.



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