

Tornado destroys AG church, but opens ministry doors



Brian Lewis/Springfield (Mo.) News-Leader

The bricks that survived the tornado unscathed have been an inspiration to members of Lighthouse Worship Center.



Michael Nene photos



Lighthouse Worship Center Pastor Christa Zapfe (right) has been assisted by Karen Yancey, wife of Kansas District Superintendent Terry Yancey.

Last year, Pastor Christa Zapfe called the 45-member congregation of Lighthouse Worship Center Assembly of God in Greensburg, Kan., to 40 days of fasting and prayer. Afterward, she encouraged the parishioners to write what the Holy Spirit had spoken to their hearts. They wrote words such as “healing,” “transformation,” “restoration” and “protection.”

Just as the biblical Joshua instructed the priests to gather stones to build a monument after crossing the Jordan River, Zapfe transferred the congregation’s words to bricks and placed them inside the church. “We did not worship the bricks,” she says, “but they were a reminder of God’s faithfulness.”

When a 205 mph tornado ripped through Greensburg on May 4, about 95 percent of the town was destroyed, including

the church. But the bricks remained untouched.

Zapfe says the bricks will be used when the church is rebuilt — as a symbol of the Lord’s protection. “We know God was with us,” she says. No members of the Assemblies of God church in the town of 1,500 perished.

Lighthouse Worship Center plans to erect a tent on the church’s property as a temporary

sanctuary, while a new facility is constructed.

The Kansas District of the Assemblies of God, led by Superintendent Terry Yancey, responded quickly to the disaster, along with ministries such as Convoy of Hope plus teams of workers from across Kansas, Mississippi, Louisiana and elsewhere. A large tent was erected to serve as a feeding station for the

community. More than 800 hot meals a day were served.

As residents descended on the feeding station, members of Zapfe’s congregation ministered to them. Meanwhile, church-based clean-up crews, coordinated by presbyter Dwight Dozier, helped with the removal of debris.

When Steve Irwin and Paul Coroleuski, Convoy of Hope’s disaster response coordinators, first arrived on the scene they saw complete devastation.

“Telephone poles and trees were snapped like toothpicks, cars were overturned and thrown everywhere, and virtually no buildings were standing,” Irwin says. “It was a city of rubble.”

“God has given the church here and Pastor Christa great favor,” Irwin, fighting back tears, relates. “We’ve gone street by street passing out drinks and sharing the



Michael Nene



Greensburg resident Judy McIntosh wipes away a tear during the community worship service led by local pastors (below right) nine days after the twister struck.

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Convoy of Hope officials (l. to r.) Steve Irwin and Hal Donaldson (left) talk beside an undamaged cross at the AG church while local residents receive free beverages in a Convoy distribution.

love of Christ with people who were rummaging through the debris that was once their homes. People are so thankful.”

Irwin is heartened by the cooperation across denominational and ministry lines. “No one is trying to bring glory to their own organization or church,” he says. “They’re working to lift up the name of Christ.”

An estimated 1,800 people gathered for a nondenominational community church service on Sunday, May 13. The service included clergy speakers from various local congregations providing optimism and encouragement in the midst of calamity.

“We are a scattered, dispersed community,” said Gene McIntosh, pastor of First United Methodist Church in Greensburg. “But the Lord Jesus is our Redeemer and is with us. ‘Do not fear for I am with you,’ says the Lord.”

“Trust in the Lord with all your strength,” said Tim Henning, pastor of Peace Lutheran Church in Greensburg.

Zapfe reminded residents and relief workers of God’s promise in Jeremiah 29:11: “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’”

When Zapfe looks across Greensburg, she sees more than rubble and a town that needs to be rebuilt; she sees an opportunity to rebuild lives.

“We need to pray that people’s lives will be transformed for Jesus,” Zapfe says. **tpe**

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

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