

Christians Respond to Italy Quake

✖ **April 7, 2009** – Christian groups are assisting victims of the Italian earthquake that has left more than 200 people dead, 1,500 injured and 17,000 displaced.

Italy's worst earthquake in almost 30 years struck at 3:32 a.m. Monday in the central region of Abruzzo, about 60 miles from Rome, crushing residents in their beds and leveling blocks of homes, Reuters reported. The quake was the deadliest since a 1980 temblor that killed 2,500 people in the southern town of Irpinia.

Emergency workers and volunteers searched Monday and Tuesday for survivors who were trapped in fallen buildings. In what is being described as a miraculous rescue, a 98-year-old woman was pulled out alive from the rubble after being trapped for 30 hours, reported Agence France-Presse.

Several medieval structures were damaged in the quake, including a historic former Catholic church where a 150-member Assemblies of God (AG) congregation met. The structure in L'aquila, capital of the Abruzzo region, was leveled in the quake, and the 5-year-old daughter of a Romanian family who attended the church was killed, said Daniel Costanza, *coordinator of the Pentecostal European Fellowship (PEF)*.

"This really affected the entire church because they knew this family extremely well," Costanza said.

Costanza said Christians from across Europe were showing "massive support" for the quake victims-not only the region's 1,000 AG churches, but also the 1,000 or so other Pentecostal churches and Europe's evangelical congregations. "They're

supporting Italy through prayer and in a more tangible way," he said.

PEF is working with Belgium-based Convoy of Hope Europe, which is affiliated with the Convoy of Hope ministry, to offer relief and other assistance. A team was to arrive in Italy Wednesday to begin purchasing supplies to help victims.

David Darg, director of international disaster relief for Operation Blessing International (OBI), was also to be on hand to assist with relief and recovery operations in Italy.

Darg, who led OBI's response to the deadly earthquake last year in Sichuan Province, China, planned to begin the relief efforts Tuesday by supplying diesel-powered generators to restore clean drinking water to the hardest-hit areas.

Previously, Darg assisted with aid efforts in cyclone-devastated Myanmar, and he managed OBI's rebuilding of a village in Yao Jin, China, that was destroyed by a 2008 earthquake.

On Monday, some observers questioned whether much of the devastation could have been avoided had Italy's government implemented better building standards and heeded warnings that a major temblor was on its way.

Giampaolo Giuliani, a seismologist at Gran Sasso National Laboratory in Abruzzo, predicted that a "disastrous" earthquake would strike on March 29, *Time* magazine reported. But when it didn't, the head of Italy's Civil Protection Agency, Guido Bertolaso, denounced him in court for giving a "false alarm."

"These imbeciles enjoy spreading false news," Bertolaso said, according to *Time*. "Everyone knows that you can't predict earthquakes."

After Monday's earthquake struck, Giuliani demanded an

apology, saying he was “devastated but also angry.”

Costanza believes good can come out of the tragedy, noting that in 1980 the earthquake opened a door for the gospel. “The Lord used it to spark a wave of revival and evangelism because of the huge response there was from the Christian community around the world,” he said of the 1980 quake

He said the Christian TV show *Living 100 Percent* was birthed out of the tragedy when a Christian cameraman captured some of the only footage of the disaster available to media. He was later given airtime on a local station and launched the evangelistic program, which remained on the air for 25 years.

“Somehow, in spite of all the [devastation], God can get glory out of it,” Costanza said.