

Churches Respond to Flood Danger

✖ **March 27, 2009** – -Christians in North Dakota say they are getting the opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the mist of what may be the worst flooding in the Fargo area in more than 100 years.

(Photo Credit: Wday News)

Since last week churches have been working alongside the National Guard, state troopers and other government agencies to prevent the Red River from overtaking the levees protecting the city. On Friday morning, thousands of residents were asked to evacuate as the crest levels reached 41 feet. With the water level expected to rise above 43 feet this weekend, Christians also were preparing to assist with disaster relief.

“We are in uncharted territory,” Fargo Mayor Dennis Walaker told the Associated Press (AP). “Nobody has ever seen the river at this level in the city of Fargo since the beginning of history.”

Schools, universities and businesses closed Friday to provide the city with as many volunteers as possible to help erect a sandbag wall to barricade the city. The AP reports that the prolonged heavy winter, rain and frozen ice, which have clogged ditches and other water outlets, also have exacerbated the flooding. Due to below-freezing temperatures earlier this week much of the ground has frozen, which has caused the water to divert toward homes in the area.

Pastor Bob Ona said his church, First Assembly in Fargo, and other local congregations have seen this crisis as an opportunity to serve their community.

“We’ve opened a facility, of course, as a volunteer point for

people in the community.” the Assemblies of God minister told *Charisma*. “It’s meant coordinating massive amounts of foods.

“We had pizza places and stores and restaurants and grandmas baking pies,” he added. “People providing food for us so that we can in turn give that to the community.”

Ona said his 1,800-member congregation has not only been providing food to the thousands of volunteers, but they also have been able to pray and share their faith with the non-believers who come to the church to eat or rest.

“I have seen people, believers, helping wherever they could and anyone they could, and I’ve asked them, ‘Why are you doing this four days in a row with two hours of sleep a night?’” the pastor said. “They told me, ‘This is what Jesus Christ would want me to do.’ They view what they’re doing as ministry to the community.”

The Christian Emergency Network (CEN), a national disaster response agency, told *Charisma* that being a light in a dark situation is one of the most important things Christians can do during crisis situations.

“From our perspective we want to encourage the Christians to remain calm and realize that this is the time when many non-believers will be greatly impacted ... by the calmness and pleasantness of the Christians that are involved in not only responding but also evacuating,” said CEN spokeswoman Judy Hannestad, who is also a Fargo resident.

The community has made great strides to secure the city, but Ona and Hannestad stressed the need for Christians around the world to pray that God would intervene on their behalf.

“We’d like people to be praying that the circumstances will help instead of hinder,” Ona said. “That the city would avert a major disaster.”

Ona said that if the dikes fail, his church would likely be completely flooded. But he said he and other members are sticking around until they've used their church buses to help other area residents evacuate.

"Our people would be the last to leave because we serve our community by getting people out, and we've got the vehicles to do it," he told *Charisma*. "We are going to put our community first. We want to serve as Jesus would have us serve."