

ORU Students, Alumni Witness Faith Amid Oklahoma Tornadoes Aftermath

The tornado that struck Moore, Okla., last week literally and figuratively tore a hole in the heart of America. We have all seen the images of loss and devastation on the news, but seeing it up close, in your own backyard, is especially eye-opening.

I had the opportunity to travel with a group of students and alumni from Oral Roberts University (ORU) and GEB America to help survivors immediately following the disaster.

The day began at a Convoy of Hope distribution site, where volunteers were unloading food and water for families affected by the tornadoes. After setting up in a church parking lot, it became apparent that we needed to take supplies directly into the neighborhoods, which were highly restricted to prevent looting.

With the help of our contacts at Convoy of Hope, the ORU and GEB America team was allowed to enter one of the hardest-hit areas in Moore. What we found was utter devastation of the buildings and homes in the area. As far as the eye could see, houses were lying in heaps, intertwined with a barrage of mangled cars, trees, lumber, metal and mud.

But amid the rubble, there was hope.

When we pulled up to the first neighborhood, we parked by a small Pentecostal church that was grilling hot dogs underneath a tent for volunteers and survivors. We were quickly greeted by a member of Victory Christian Center in Tulsa and invited to come in and get some food.

As we entered the tent, it was obvious the people from the surrounding neighborhood were happy to get some much-needed food, water and rest. What I will never forget is how thankful these people who had been impacted by the storm were to know that others cared about them.

After spending time at this neighborhood, we relocated to a church in another area of the city. Convoy of Hope had deployed supplies here, and the ORU team was putting together supply packs consisting of food, water and personal hygiene products. We took these to a neighborhood that had been largely leveled close to the high school in Moore.

We connected with First Lt. David Snuffer, a member of the Oklahoma National Guard and an ORU alumnus. He had not been activated by the guard but left as soon as he heard about the devastation caused by storm. He arrived on the scene about four hours after the tornado hit and has been helping with search and rescue efforts ever since. Lt. Snuffer walked through the neighborhood with us, making sure people were safe, fixing roofs and praying with those who were willing to receive it.

As we continued making our way through the neighborhood, we ran into another ORU alumnus, pastor David Richard, who was helping a member of his congregation. Richard had brought several volunteers from his church to help search through the family's debris for valuables. We were blessed to gather around that family, hold hands and pray for restoration.

Inside the neighborhood, we heard countless stories of survival and faith. One man shared that he didn't care about his house but was thankful to God that his family was alive and well. He told us that a week before the tornadoes, he felt God wanted him to preach on loss. He now plans to speak about what God taught him through this difficult situation.

The man had painted the words "Job 1:21" across a wall that

still stood in his decimated house. The Scripture reads, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised” (NIV).

Another man heard of the devastation while at work and frantically navigated the streets to his house, fearing that everything was lost. He found that his house had been destroyed. As he searched through the pile of wood and insulation that used to make up his home, he discovered something miraculous. One of the only objects that survived the storm unscathed was a Bible that had been signed and given to his great-grandfather by Oral Roberts. He shared with us that finding this Bible gave him a new sense of hope. He was reminded that God was walking with him.

As I left Moore that evening, I was amazed at how God uses even the bleakest of situations to share His love. Whether through the selfless act of a stranger or the excellent work of organizations like Convoy of Hope (which NBC News calls “religious FEMA”), there is a relentless and contagious sense of hope and faith in Moore.

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