

Assemblies of God Congregation Barely Escapes Deadly Tornadoes

Multiple tornadoes and powerful winds tore across the Midwest Sunday, killing at least six people and damaging or destroying hundreds of properties, including Christian Life Assembly of God in Diamond, Ill., which is about 60 miles southwest of Chicago.

According to Christian Life AG Pastor Mark Thompson, the tornado hit the church around 12:15 p.m. on Sunday—about 20 to 25 minutes after the morning service concluded.

“We had 210 people here Sunday morning,” Thompson says, thankful the tornado didn’t strike any earlier. “Most had left for home, but about 35 had stayed behind to help get things ready for a workers’ banquet.”

Thompson says they could hear the tornado approaching, so the group quickly made its way into an interior classroom in the old sanctuary building.

“We all got into the room and started praying,” Thompson says. “We could hear the roar and things breaking. ... We thank God for His hand of protection!”

After the tornado had passed, the shaken but otherwise uninjured group surveyed the damage. The roof on the old sanctuary had been blown off, and the new sanctuary roof and interior were also significantly damaged, with a number of windows blown out of both buildings. The garage where they kept their 4-wheel-drive truck for plowing the parking lot in winter was now nothing but a pile of lumber. The vehicles in the church’s parking lot had also been moved about by the powerful winds and experienced extensive damage.

Thompson adds that an RV sales park across the street from the church was hard hit, with parts of RVs now littering the church grounds. The restaurant portion of the building neighboring the church had been totally destroyed. Thompson believes the tornado was rated an EF2 (111 to 135 mph).

Currently the church is still attempting to contact all of its members to check on their individual situations. So far, only light damage has been reported by members. However, the church buildings themselves are not in condition to safely meet in, so Thompson and his pastoral staff are working to find a place to meet until insurance claims can be made and repairs completed.

"It appears that the old sanctuary is still structurally OK," Thompson observes, "but several of the purlins [support beams] in the new sanctuary are pretty twisted inside, so I'm not sure if it will be structurally sound or not."

At this time, there have been no reports of other AG churches in the Midwest being damaged by this series of tornadoes. For more information about Christian Life AG, see its website.