

Chaplains: It's Like Oklahoma 'Has Been Through a Blender'

As Carolin and Desi Perez drove across Interstate 35 Tuesday morning, there was too much destruction to take in.

"It's just carnage," said Carolin Perez. "It looks like everything has been through a blender."

She and her husband were the first Rapid Response Team chaplains to arrive in Moore, Okla., following the massive tornado that crumbled some buildings and left no trace of others. Carolin and Desi, who live just 200 miles from Moore, were on the road just hours after the twister struck.

As they drove down the familiar highway, now with all exits sealed off, they could see nothing but twisted metal and debris on both sides of the interstate.

"You can see the damage, as far as the eye can see," said Carolin Perez. "There are huge buildings with half the building just gone. There was a shopping center where it looked like the tornado peeled up the concrete."

Soon, the two crisis-trained chaplains will take their eyes off the obliterated landscape and start looking into the devastated faces of those who lost children, siblings, friends, and homes. They, along with six other chaplains with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, have arrived in Oklahoma to help meet the spiritual and emotional needs of people who are experiencing heart-wrenching loss.

"Everybody's pretty much in shock right now," said Carolin Perez. "Often times there are no words that need to be said. It's just being there, being God's presence and being available."

Tuesday morning, Carolin and Desi crossed over Moore on the way to nearby Shawnee, Okla., which was hit hard by a separate round of twisters that ripped through the area Sunday. With Moore still shut down for rescue and recovery efforts, the chaplains will begin their ministry in Shawnee, setting up a staging area in a local church. They plan to commute to Moore as soon as they are permitted to enter the town.

Rapid Response chaplains are also currently deployed to Granbury, Texas, following a deadly tornado there.

“It’s important to be available to people as they grieve and begin to deal with the shock of what happened,” said Carolin Perez. “There’s a very high level of anxiety, waiting for good news or bad news, and you don’t know which one it’s going to be.”

The chaplains have already come across hurting people. They’re asking for prayers for a woman they met in the elevator of a hotel who doesn’t know whether her mother, who suffers from Alzheimer’s, survived the tornado.

“It’s the uncertainty of not knowing that’s so difficult,” said Carolin Perez. “She was very anxious and very distraught.”

As the story of Shawnee, Moore, and the surrounding community unfolds, the chaplains will serve as a quiet but strong presence in the midst of grief and chaos. They’ll follow the Lord’s instruction to “weep with those who weep,” carrying the love of Christ, and trusting the Lord to comfort the people who need His peace now more than ever.

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