

God's Divine Timing Allows Volunteers to Immediately Help Tornado Victims

Sometimes God puts His people in the right place at just the right time. That's exactly what happened in the U.S. last week when a massive tornado swept through North Carolina.

A World Renew Disaster Response Services (DRS) team was working on long-term repairs from a 2011 disaster in Belhaven, N.C., when the EF2 tornado hit nearby Pantega. Two homes were destroyed and at least six more damaged by a twister measuring 300 yards wide, carrying winds up to 135 mph.

Volunteers who faithfully obeyed God's call to help repair homes damaged by Hurricane Irene soon found themselves helping more families in Christ's name.

"Our group was just finishing the day's work in Belhaven at about 4 p.m. when the tornado warning was issued," says one of the World Renew DRS volunteers, Peter Roukema.

After quickly regrouping, the team set off for Pantega.

While no one was killed by the April 7 tornado, multiple people were injured, and three had to be hospitalized. One was Carla Van Essendelft, eight months pregnant with her and her husband Mark's seventh child.

"My biggest takeaway from this is that there is an almighty God that saved this family," remarks one Pantega resident.

When Mark Van Essendelft saw the storm approaching, he moved his family from their home's bathtub into a nearby ditch. A few minutes later, the tornado tore their house apart and scattered remnants across the landscape.

“The home was literally ripped from its foundation, and the family narrowly escaped with their lives,” Roukema says.

“Their house and its contents had become a huge pile of rubble and was lying 50 yards away in what was left of the trees. The entire roof was torn off and came to rest about a mile further down the road,” he says.

The World Renew team helped the Van Essendelfts cover the roof of one of the damaged buildings on their property with tarp to protect the structure from further damage. They helped other families affected by the storm in similar ways.

“From 7:30 p.m. until after midnight, DRS volunteers .. and I nailed plywood to replace blown-out windows and doors and secured tarps to damaged roofs,” Roukema says.

World Renew’s DRS volunteers were soon joined by others in the cleanup effort—friends, relatives, neighbors, local community groups and another World Renew DRS team. This one was a spring break team from the Oak Hill Evangelical Presbyterian Church youth group in Grand Rapids, Mich.

“We were all working together on a common cause,” Oak Hill leader Mark Wybenga told World Renew. “Our group sprang into action and worked late into the night to tarp damaged roofs to protect houses from the rain. We helped families and neighbors rummage through debris to find their precious belongings.

“We were so blessed to ... help minister unexpectedly to people in immediate need this way.”

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