

How a Deadly Natural Disaster Sparked Revival



When a catastrophic magnitude 8.8 earthquake rattled Chile Feb. 27, some 500 youth were taking part in a 24-hour intercessory prayer marathon in the north of the country.

“Our purpose was to worship and intercede for the nation,” said Roger Cunningham, pastor of the 700-member Las Condes Vineyard Church in Santiago, Chile’s capital. “We’ve been crying out for the Lord to open the heavens over Chile, and we sense powerfully that the Lord is stirring the hearts of the youth.”

In the aftermath of one of the biggest recorded earthquakes, churches went into high gear, serving on the front lines of relief efforts despite destruction to their own facilities. The disaster killed hundreds and left thousands homeless in the central region of Chile.

Local churches distributed water, food and other urgent aid in some of the hardest-hit areas such as Concepción. Youth from the Santiago Vineyard delivered drinking water to a coastal town devastated by a tsunami. Teams from the relief groups World Vision and Convoy of Hope were also among the first responders.

One of the biggest concerns was crime and insecurity, as looters and gangs went on the rampage. But Victor Mellado, pastor of the Vineyard Church in Concepción, said churches helped to unite the community, organizing neighborhood watch committees to protect one another.

Residents of Concepción’s wealthy University Town district and the poor Lost Town district—usually separated by class

barriers—came together to help victims. “Not only was there a physical earthquake, but also social divisions were shaken and destroyed,” Mellado said. “Our church sees this as a great opportunity to build relationships, encourage others and lead people to Christ.”

But churches also faced fallout from the disaster, as panic overwhelmed some Christians and others were accused of looting. “The fear of not having provision was much bigger than our fear of the Lord,” said Juan Carlos Barrera, pastor of a Baptist congregation in the devastated city of Coronel. “I felt that we failed at the moment we were tested.”

Yet amid the ruins, the Holy Spirit is ready to unleash revival, Barrera believes. “The fact we are still alive obligates us to rebuild our country with an authentic Christian vision—an ‘earthquake proof’ vision,” he said. “We have to open the eyes of our heart and see beyond the cracks in our houses ... to lift up our eyes and observe the intervention of the King of Glory.”

