

Joplin Tornado is Deadliest in US History

The Joplin, Mo., tornado may have caused up to \$3 billion worth of damage and destroyed roughly 25 percent of the buildings in the city.

The National Weather Service records indicate that the Joplin tornado is the deadliest in U.S. history. They also note that tornadoes have killed 482 people in the United States this year.

The Christian Reformed World Relief Committee is assessing needs along with federal and local disaster agencies to help devastated families and determine priorities in the hard-hit town of 50,000 residents. Bill Adams, of CRWRC-Disaster Response Services, says, "It's not just Joplin. There are other communities also in this area of Kansas and Missouri that have been pretty much completely destroyed."

The monster storm left a half-mile footprint of destruction through Joplin's downtown area, causing power disruptions, fires, gas leaks and communications outages. Adams says the assessment will include the longstanding impact of the disaster. "Whether it's homes or churches or schools, I mean everything has been destroyed. So there's going to be an enormous amount of work to get things back again for people."

President Obama has committed support from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and National Guard, public safety and search-and-rescue personnel have been sent into the area from surrounding states to assist.

In the meantime, the week-long forecast calls for more rough weather ahead. "Pray that lightning doesn't strike the same place twice. People are praying. We're in that part of the country where tornadoes are a way of life this time of year."

The shock and disorientation are beginning to show. Survivors are trying to salvage something from the rubble that was their life. Adams notes that this is where spiritual care is critical.

“Very often, simply being on the ground with folks who have been traumatized by something like this and being available to speak with them, to pray with them and to hear their story is probably one of the more powerful things that we could do.”

In the weeks ahead, as the shock wears off and the grind of cleaning up begins, the questions will begin. Adams says CRWRC teams will be ready with an answer.

“All of our volunteers are devout Christians. It’s why we do what we do. It starts with our own love for God and love for the Lord and what He’s done for us and then love for our fellow man. What we’re able to do then is carry that to the communities.

“In this early stage where people really need hope, they need someone who can assure them that things will get better. And what better way than to talk about the love of Christ?”

CRWRC is seeking to raise \$1 million to respond to urgent and long-term needs from spring storms in 2011.