

Keys Vineyard Church Holds Virtual Service for Members Stunned by Irma

The members of Keys Vineyard Community Church are awaiting news of their church facility in Big Pine Key, Florida, but in the meantime, they're making lemonade out of lemons. Senior pastor Steve Lawes told Charisma News that the church had held a virtual service over the weekend via Facebook Live for his members who endured Hurricane Irma.

During the service, worship pastor Doug Lawes and his wife, Kim, led members in praise, and pastor Steve shared a message of encouragement. Other leaders also contributed to lifting up the name of the Lord in this difficult time. Viewers also were treated to an appearance by Doug and Kim's toddler, who was trying to get their attention during worship while at their Airbnb rental in Orlando, Florida.

Most of the church evacuated from the Keys, but those few who stayed behind managed through the storm, though resources are limited now.

"There is no cellphone service down there at all, so it's hard to get any sort of verifiable idea of what's happening," pastor Steve says. "We had somebody who went by our facility today. It looks intact, but there's been some roof damage. We don't think we took water in from the surge. ... I'm trying to get that verified."

He also heard that the homes of church staff are still standing, "but almost all of them have roof damage or flood damage," the senior pastor says.

The church is at mile marker 30, and "the worst part of the storm was from mile marker 15 to mile marker 34," he says,

adding that most people from the church are “scattered all over the state” and some even farther in Alabama, Mississippi and Georgia.

“There’s so many unknowns it’s hard for us,” said pastor Steve, who spoke to Charisma News from a hotel in Hollywood, Florida, where his family had internet service but no TV. “We have people waiting to bring some help to the church in the community, but they can’t get down there yet.”

He and his wife, Alice, went to Tampa first, but then with the storm changing direction and heading for Tampa, they drove to Fort Lauderdale and eventually landed in Hollywood, Florida.

Pastor Steve expects it to be three or four weeks before the area sees power restored, adding that gas for generators is also hard to find.

“We’ve been through hurricanes before but nothing quite like this,” he says. “The last time was Wilma, and that flooded out about half of our island. ... Then we had George back in ’98 come through and that flooded out the other side of the island. This time it got the whole thing and was far worse than anything. It came right over us as a Category 4, so significant damage everywhere.”

The church staff in Orlando has also lost power.

“All of us are desperate to get back so we can start helping folks,” he says, but it’s uncertain as to when they can return.

The church ministers to a “unique group of people” in the Keys, pastor Steve says. The congregation has four services and 1,200 members. The church was founded in 1984, and he has been senior pastor since 1992.

“We’ve seen God do amazing things,” he says. “A lot of people have come to the Lord down there” where he says he is

“extremely blessed” to minister.