

Chaplains Find Flood of Ministry Opportunity After Isaac

If this story wasn't witnessed firsthand, it would be hard to believe.

A brother and sister had been estranged for 15 years, despite living next door to one another.

In fact, if Michael, the brother, ever saw his sister when he walked outside, he'd immediately turn 180 degrees and walk back inside his house.

But that was before Hurricane Isaac—and perhaps the Holy Spirit—hit this small town of LaPlace, La., in late August.

For the first time that anyone living here could remember, LaPlace had flooded, as the storm surge pounded Lake Pontchartrain at just the right angle.

More than 6,000 homes damaged by waters six-inches to five-feet deep had turned everything upside down in this town of 32,000 people.

But Rapid Response Team chaplains Dennis and Ginger Sanders had no idea how these flood waters would turn into healing waters.

The family drama between Michael and his sister had cemented into a bitter feud sometime in the mid-to-late '90s. It was so bad, that cousins growing up next door weren't even allowed to play with each other.

God, however, through words spoken by these two chaplains, gripped Michael's heart and he finally gave his life over to the Lord.

Within 30 minutes, Michael saw his sister outside and momentarily froze in his tracks.

Would he retreat back to his house, avoid making eye-contact?

"This time he didn't turn," Ginger reported the healing moment. "I told Michael, 'It's time to step out of the boat.'"

Michael's mother, an 83-year-old woman living five houses down the street, had been praying for years—decades even—for restoration in the family.

In the midst of the chaos and uncertainty that Isaac delivered to this community, Michael decided 15 years was enough.

"He walked out on the sidewalk," Ginger said.

Michael's sister, stunned by the gesture and "afraid" to walk over to her brother, summoned the courage and delivered a message she had played in her mind many times.

"Will you forgive me?" she asked. "I am so sorry."

Empowered by the Spirit, Michael gave his sister a huge hug as the two reconciled, just as mom had been pleading to God.

But that's not all.

Michael's son Brett, noticing a decisive change in his father's spirit, wanted to know what was different and later asked the chaplains for their insight.

"This is a miracle," Brett told the Sanders. "I can't believe the change in him. I already see something's going on."

The chaplains led Brett, along with his 24-year-old friend, in a prayer to receive Christ.

'Tragedy Before the Storm'

For Dennis Sanders, a 32-year police officer veteran, this deployment has touched his soul more than others.

LaPlace's trials weren't simply from the hurricane. Just days prior to the landfall, a horrific ambush of LaPlace police officers left two dead and two others wounded and rocked the community.

"This deployment has been heavy," Sanders said. "We've seen a lot of pain and hurt that's not supposed to be in a community like this.

"This community had a tragedy before the storm."

And if that wasn't hard enough to swallow, the police community was also dealing with another incident where police officers were forced to return fire on two perpetrators and ended up killing them both.

"It's just a small town. Everybody knows everybody," Ginger said. "The flood came and about 80 percent of the deputy's homes were affected."

But these first responders in many cases could not even focus on their own devastation. There were citizens to serve and keep safe.

"As soon as we rolled into town I heard about the shootings," said Sanders, who prayed with the police chief and other officers, including one who accepted Christ. "I saw the police officers on duty for hours and hours and hours, trying to serve the community during the storm. I know how they feel. I knew they were hurting.

"This storm more than others I've felt compelled to minister to the officers"

And to their families.

In fact, the Sanders were able to talk with the grandparents of one of the slain officers. The conversation took a spiritual turn and the grandfather grabbed Ginger's hand.

"I said if Billy Graham was sitting here I know what he'd say," Ginger said. "He'd tell you, 'God loves you. And He loves you so much that He sent his son to die for you.'"

"Tears were flowing down the 75-year-old grandfather's face. We led him in the sinner's prayer and the grandma joined in and prayed as well."

'There's Nothing Else They Can Do'

Part of the Rapid Response Team's responsibility during a deployment is to be ready for the unexpected.

The unexpected came two days after the Sanders arrived in the tiny town of Norco, about 7 miles away from LaPlace.

Turns out, hospice was sending home a woman in her late 50s fighting the final stages of cancer and they brought the family together to the house.

"They told them there's nothing else they can do," Ginger said. "She was just days from dying."

So Dennis and Ginger went to present a Billy Graham Training Center Bible to the family and try to help comfort them with a prayer.

They shared about the hope and love of Christ to the family and after much conversation, led six family members to receive Jesus, including the husband of the dying woman, who kept lamenting, "I'm losing my best friend."

"And as soon as we said 'Amen,' a car light shined through the window," Ginger said. "It was the ambulance who was here with her. They all had just enough opportunity to receive Jesus."

God's miraculous timing didn't stop there.

The dying woman was taken to a back bedroom and was writhing in pain and incoherent.

Ginger and the woman's pastor went to visit her in the bedroom and shared the gospel message with her anyway.

"The pastor said, 'I don't know if you can hear me or not, but God loves you,'" Ginger recalled. "If you don't know Him, if you can understand me, pray this in your heart."

And as if God was calming a raging ocean, the moment the pastor started praying, the woman went completely still.

"Even her hand stopped twitching," Sanders said. "But when he said, 'Amen,' she started moving again."

Continue to pray for the Isaac victims, as well as the 17 Rapid Response Team chaplains, who are ministering in four different parishes throughout the Gulf region (St. Tammany, St. John The Baptist, Jefferson, Plaquemines).

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