

Saved to serve

Iowa volunteers help rebuild lives in Joplin, Missouri

In 2011, an EF5 tornado devastated Joplin, Missouri, causing 158 deaths and around \$2.8 billion in damage. Four years later, some Joplin residents are still in need of help getting their lives back on track. Several teams of volunteers from Iowa recently traveled to Joplin to help complete repairs on a house damaged in the storm.

In November, Larry Dokter from Orange City, Mike Aalbers from Monroe, and John Bandstra from Oskaloosa joined Al Kopaska and Case De Haan from First CRC in Pella on a mission trip to remove and replace 11 windows in the house. In October, Mike and Case, along with a group of Central College students, had helped replace the roof on the same home. Thanks to their work and the work of other teams, the house is close to being suitable for occupancy.

While in Joplin, the workers are fed and housed by Abundant Life Church, which has been active in rebuilding efforts since the tornado. The church not only helps with disaster relief, but also runs an organization called We Care, which collects food and used furniture and distributes it to those in need in the area. The house the Iowa teams worked on will be occupied by a church family. "This itty bitty church has done great big things," said Al Kopaska. "After the tornado, they were housing and feeding two meals a day to 300 people for over a year."

Case described some of the experiences of the volunteers in Joplin, including attending a worship service at Abundant Life Church: "Pastor Larry preached about our need to do more, rather than just to pray or donate. It is part of accepting Christ as Savior and Lord and recognizing that we are saved to serve. The churches in the Joplin area are set up to house those who come to help. Many are open 24/7 and are much more active than churches in this area. There are blessings that can result from terrible tragedy." He went on to say, "We met and spent time with a service group that is associated with the Catholic Church, and I see them as being a lot like us. They also feel that showing the love of Christ by helping those in need is much better than just donating. Our group ate, worshiped, discussed, laughed, and lived together . . . oh yes, and worked together."

While the tornado brought devastation, most of those who were displaced have now been helped. Abundant Life Church, which developed large facilities to house volunteers and displaced people following the disaster, has found a way to turn those facilities into another opportunity to witness while helping others. The facilities will be renovated into hostels to provide food and lodging for travelers on Route 66, which passes within four miles of the church. Al Kopaska is looking for small groups of volunteers to help out with this project for short weeks in January, February, and March. The work will include framing, sheet rocking, and painting. If you are interested in volunteering, contact Al Kopaska at [email] or by calling [phone number].