

News of the Church

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Preparation of All Kinds Blesses Saints in Joplin, Missouri

By **Melissa Merrill**

Church News and Events

Candles. Granola bars. A lantern. These emergency supplies from the storage of several Latter-day Saint families played a role in facilitating the Joplin Missouri Stake's organization and action in the initial hours after a tornado devastated Joplin on May 22.

The stake center had been destroyed, as had other major buildings in the area, and electricity was out in many other parts of the city. But a small group of area, stake, and ward leaders was able to meet together in council, by candlelight and lantern light, in the home of Joplin Second Ward bishop Dave Richins to determine what to do in recovery, relief, and rebuilding.

As that council and so many other members in the Joplin Missouri Stake discovered, physical and spiritual preparation both played crucial roles in those efforts.

Physical Preparation

Fortunately, the Joplin stake had an emergency plan in place, and members were prepared to account, assess, and report promptly in the wake of disaster.

“Our emergency plan, while there is a lot of detail to it, is quite simple: account, assess, report promptly,” said stake president Creed Jones. “You need to account for your people. Everybody goes out to find out how the missionaries are, how the members are, and

if everyone is accounted for. Then they assess. Who is missing? Who has injuries? Who is without a home? Who is without power? What are their physical situations, family needs, and so forth? And then you report promptly, communicating that information back through the priesthood line.”

The process worked well, President Jones reported, and he said that he received several accounts of people running or walking for miles (roads and other infrastructure were impassable at first because of debris) to check on family, friends, coworkers, and ward members.

“What you really learn is that the Church is not just what takes place in a chapel or classroom on Sunday,”

PHOTOGRAPH BY CARMEN BORUP



Spiritual and temporal preparation has blessed the lives of Latter-day Saints and others in Joplin, Missouri, following a devastating tornado on May 22.

Assignments Take Leaders to Their Roots

On June 25, 2011, President Thomas S. Monson dedicated a campground near Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The camp—which bears his name in honor of his service as mission president over the Canadian Mission from 1959 to 1962—will be used by local stakes.

The month of June took several other Church leaders to locations that have been significant in their lives:

President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, dedicated a reconstructed meeting-house in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA. President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, also attended and spoke; he and President Eyring both attended the chapel earlier in their lives.

Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles spoke in Perry, Utah, USA, on June 3, during the city's centennial celebration. Elder Perry's ancestors helped settle the area.

Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles organized the Moscow Russia Stake—the first stake in Russia—on June 5, 2011. He first visited Russia in 1966 to teach Russian surgeons. ■

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President Jones said. “The real test comes when there are needs and we have to look out for each other.”

Because of the nature of the destruction, food storage and other emergency supplies weren't always preserved. But those whose homes were spared were prepared to share what they had with others.

Spiritual Preparation

Mike and Becky Higginson have faithfully built their home storage over time, and while the tornado destroyed their home, their food storage shed survived the destruction.

The Higginsons are grateful for this blessing, but they are quick to point out that physical preparation alone is not enough to sustain someone through this kind of event. They know that obedience to the counsel of prophets and apostles builds another kind of storage.

“We've had hard experiences before, and the gospel is what sustains you through everything,” Sister Higginson said. “So although this was a shock and a trauma . . . it didn't change anything. You revert to your gospel roots, your spiritual roots, immediately.”

The morning after the tornado, Bishop Chris Hoffman of the Joplin First Ward met with several other priesthood holders at a central spot in town to begin accounting and assessing. With communication lines down, “it was hard to determine where to start,” said Bishop Hoffman, but they relied on prayer for direction.

“You recognize very quickly—if you

didn't already—how reliant you are on Heavenly Father for answers, because you need them, and you need them quick,” he said. “But the answers came. They always did. They always will.”

That kind of faith and reliance on the Lord has continued to buoy up members in Joplin. On the Sunday following the tornado, Elder Jonathan C. Roberts, Area Seventy, attended a joint testimony meeting of the Joplin First and Second Wards.

“People who had lost everything—their homes, their workshops, everything—stood up and said, ‘We're some of the most blessed people.’ How does that happen?” Elder Roberts asked. “How could anybody in those circumstances have the courage and the backbone to square their shoulders, lift their chins, and say, ‘We're fine’? Well, it only happens one way. They have a perspective of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

“In this case, the 72-hour packs, as important as they were, the food storage, as important as it was, went away because of the calamity,” he continued. “And yet the things that were deep rooted, the foundational things of priesthood keys, of testimony, stood strong. And as the Saints gathered together, it was spectacular to watch the preparation that came from spiritual roots that had been set deep; that windstorm, tornado, or hurricane weren't going to take away; and that extends beyond mortality and to eternity.” ■

Watch a video about the Saints in Joplin at news.lds.org.