



WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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The Power of the Human Spirit

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They say that this year's weather related tragedies will go down in history. Just as our neighbors in Middle America struggle with the devastating Mississippi flood waters slowly cutting through the heart of the country, tornados and thunderstorms attack community after community. It might make one wonder how much the human spirit can endure; then we hear the courageous voices of survivors.

Sunday's news of the tragic tornado striking Joplin, Missouri sent a shudder through the nation and the world. The call out of family names missing is truly a heart breaking sound. Parents are searching for their children, friends are looking for their classmates, and colleagues are waiting to hear word of their co-workers. In the midst of grief, rescue workers hurriedly scour through the rubble during what promises to be a very short break in the weather. Even in their most anxious moments, their spirits are hopeful.

I have only seen a tornado from afar, so I don't know what that feels like. However, it sends chills down my spine when I see the firsthand reports of those who are in the "belly of the beast" as they use cell phones to record messages and videotape in real time. In the face of extraordinary fear, we can hear people holding onto

to each other with words of encouragement in the midst of shouting and screams. The human spirit endures.

Joplin, Missouri is a small, tight-knit community near the Kansas border. Neighborhoods, businesses, schools, churches, and a hospital; this sounds like many towns across the country. The residents of the surrounding area are not strangers to one another, they know each other. They know who is found and cry for those who are lost. Many of us had not heard of Joplin until Sunday; but, most of us will never forget these neighbors and the power of their human spirit.

It is not over. Today's news tells us of the tornados that continue to rip across Oklahoma, Kansas and other plains states. Most of us want to do something! What can we do? There is much help needed, but it's important to listen to local officials to determine what kind of help that is. First, it is important to stay out of the way of immediate rescue efforts of those attending to the emergent need to save lives.

Second, we cannot forget the devastation a few months from now when it is no longer in the news. People will need our help to rebuild their homes and communities so we must stand ready to volunteer when called upon. The United Church of Christ, National Disaster Ministries works closely with faith partners and local communities to support the needs of our neighbors. Please go to the following website to see how you can contribute to current and future efforts in response to these weather disasters, <http://www.ucc.org/news/ucc-issues-us-storm-appeal.html>

Third, and perhaps most important, we send thoughts and prayers to all those who have suffered the results of these deadly floods and storms. I do not doubt the power of God to watch over those in need. Nor do I doubt the power of the human spirit at work in America's heartland this week.

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,300 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.