

# Group Mission Trip Continues Helping Tornado-Stricken Areas

Submitted by UMC of Libertyville

Imagine you're going to work. You've got a big project you're going to start working on. There are a lot of moving parts. Things have to go "just so" - or it will all fall apart. There are a lot of people counting on you. You'll be working with 24 different people assigned to the project. As all these details swirl around in your head, you pull up to the office. You speak, you ask who wants to be on the various teams. A rush of voices all clamor at once "Put me where it makes the most sense." Your emotions are starting to cascade, like riding a whitewater raft, each minute brings new thrills and excitement. This may be the most excitement you've seen in a long while. You make the assignments based on what you know about each person.

The groups start formulating strategies and work assignments. There is no ego; each person just wants to help. There are no naysayers, bemoaning this decision or that. And then it happens.... The first piece falls into place! Pictures are being taken and posted on our WhatsApp group chat. High fives, fist bumps and wide smiles are shared all around. After a few hours, someone asks about lunch. "Not to worry" you say. "Another division in the company got a few groups together and they will arrange a home cooked meal each day of the project. After lunch, everyone is ready to get back to work. After another productive few hours, it's the end of the day, much is accomplished, bonds were established, teamwork was the order of the day.

Sound far-fetched? "Yeah, that's fantasy," most might say. But that scenario is exactly what happened in Greenfield, Iowa, the work week of September 7 to September 12. Led by UMC of Libertyville, eight different churches sent a total of 24 people to help restore homes damaged by the May 21, 2024, EF4 tornado. The churches included First UMC in Ottawa, Belvidere First UMC in Belvidere, Faith UMC in Freeport, and Christ Church in Lake Forest. Both men and women gave up their time and energies to show what love in action looks like.

Some of these workers were here in May of 2025 and met the people affected by the tornado. Others have worked on other mission trips. Some were newbies. They didn't know what to expect. But a camaraderie was established as each person gave their all and were encouraged by a fellow

team member. If you didn't know how to do something, but were willing to learn, you could walk away with a new skill or two. There were hiccups along the way with each project, as is often the case, but people pivoted and moved on to other projects until the obstacle was overcome.

Lunch and dinner were coordinated by four different churches... not of the same denomination. Lutherans, Catholics and Methodists planned their meals and there weren't any duplicates! Think about that; isn't that what Heaven sounds like? All getting along, all working toward one goal, serving one God.

And the townspeople, seeing church people come out to help total strangers. The first day we all wore matching shirts and after work, gathered at a local establishment for a debriefing and planning session. When I was leaving, I noticed a gentleman behind me, using a cane, also heading to the door. I paused at the door and held it open for him. "Thanks," he said and looked at me with a puzzled face. "Who are you guys?" He had seen us around town, he heard our conversations about the day's work, and he couldn't help but be mystified. I explained we all came from a variety of churches in Northern Illinois and were here to help continue clean-up efforts, house repair and restoration. He thought about what I said and replied "Thank you; we really need more people like you."

Other home owners deluged us with cookies, cakes, ice cream pies and other goodies. People who had been helped in May stopped by the various job sites and gave tales of progress and heartbreak. Some homes were saved; some were not. Some families left town to start over in another town (or state) with family or friends. But overall, people saw progress, and were encouraged when they saw us and our work trailers roll into town. We even spoke with one of the local sheriffs who thanked us for our efforts. The love ran long and deep.

If you've ever thought about going on a mission trip, I encourage you to try to make it happen. You will be rewarded emotionally and spiritually. You will be proclaiming to the world that the current church is still relevant, can still make a difference and can spread the word that even one, five or twenty-some people CAN make a difference.