

Tsunami recovery will take years, bishop says

Indonesian survivors of the Dec. 26 tsunami will need United Methodist help to rebuild their lives for up to 10 years.

That was Bishop Joel N. Martinez's assessment after four days in Indonesia. He saw the aftermath Jan. 12 to 16 of a magnitude 9.0 Indian Ocean earthquake and the massive waves it generated.

President of the denominational mission board, Martinez led a nine-member United Methodist delegation to the Indonesian island of Sumatra.

Southwest Texas United Methodists can help the long-term tsunami recovery effort in three ways, Martinez said:

- Give as much as possible to the United Methodist Committee on Relief's South Asia Emergency Fund (Advance 274305). One hundred percent of those gifts will go to recovery work in Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka and the other nine countries affected by the Dec. 26 disaster.

- Make Medicine Boxes or Health

Kits and send them to the relief committee depot at Baldwin, La. Directions for how to do that are available at www.umcor.org.

- Support the March 6 One Great Hour of Sharing denominationwide special offering even more generously than in past years. The annual offering covers relief committee administrative costs. Consequently, 100 percent of all Advance Special gifts can go to designated recovery projects.

Volunteers in Mission rebuilding teams will be needed in the future, Martinez added.

"The level of destruction (in Indonesia) is incomparable to anything I've ever seen," Martinez said.

The bishop said he had witnessed what massive flooding, tornadoes and hurricanes could do while serving in both Nebraska and Texas. But the destruction on Sumatra was many times worse.

"Everything was flattened, except for a few sturdy buildings like mosques and churches, for miles inland from the beach," Martinez said. "All the residential areas were obliterated. The smell of death filled the air."

The epicenter of the Dec. 26 earthquake—the strongest recorded around the globe during 2004—was just off the northwestern shore of Sumatra. The island—especially Aceh Province on the northern end—suffered the most extensive damage in the region. More than 100,000 people died, and another 600,000 were left homeless.

The UM relief committee is currently helping provide medicine and short-term shelter for survivors, Martinez said. The committee's long-term emphasis will be on building sturdy permanent housing and supporting microeconomic redevelopment with small loans so people can resume their lives. That work could take five to 10 years.

Churches welcome 1,527 visitors despite Christmas Eve snowstorm

Snow appeared to hold down worship attendance in parts of the Southwest Texas Conference Dec. 24.

Nevertheless, 15 Home for Christmas congregations reported 1,527 visitors to Christmas Eve candlelight services. Of that number, 496—or 33 percent—had come to the church for the first time.

"It snowed Christmas Eve, which cut down on our attendance," said the Rev. Judith Sellers, pastor of First UMC, Laredo, in her Home for Christmas feedback report to the Communications and Public Witness Office.

Similar comments came from El Campo, Goliad and Seguin.

At least 34 of the 350 Southwest Texas Conference congregations indicated they were taking part in the fifth annual Christmas Eve outreach and public witness campaign. Fifteen of those submitted follow-up reports to the Communications and Public Wit-



ness Office by Jan. 7.

The 15 reporting congregations counted 7,313 worshippers on Christmas Eve. That was 100 percent more than the total crowd at those congregations on an average Sunday.

Despite the weather, all but two of the reporting congregations had more people in Christmas Eve worship last month than they did in 2003.

The Board of Discipleship has sponsored the Home for Christmas campaign for five years. The purpose is to help church members invite acquaintances who don't usually attend church to worship Dec. 24. United Methodists then continue the discipling process with those who come.

City workers fix water damage at Mount Wesley

Kerrville officials have made good on a promise to repair water damage at Mount Wesley Conference Center.

"In fact," said Patti Zaiantz, interim Mount Wesley administrator, "the city has made it better than before."

Six weeks of runoff from the city's Hilltop water tower washed out trails and caused other damage around the 68-acre facility.

Repairs were completed in December, but not until city officials found a solution to a problem they encountered repaving the trails.

"The city didn't have access to the amount of bark required," Zaiantz said. "They offered to replace the bark with crushed granite."

The granite costs more than bark, she said. But the city paid the tab.

'Backbone' of Kempner UMC recognized

Kerrville District United Methodists recognized "the backbone" of Kempner UMC Jan. 22 in Kerrville.

Anna Mitchell, administrative council chair for the 113-member Kempner congregation, received the 2005 Bishop's Exemplar Award for the Kerrville District.

Fifty other church members and one group were given discipleship certificates during the Kerrville District celebration luncheon for distinguished Christian witness and service. The event was at St. Paul's UMC, Kerrville.

The Rev. Austin Frederick Jr., assistant to the Episcopal office, presented the Exemplar Award to Mitchell on behalf of Bishop Joel N. Martinez. Some 330 people watched.

"I was surprised," Mitchell said after receiving the honor. "I wasn't going to come, but my pastor told me I

had to. I told him there's nothing for me to do there, and he said yes there is, because all council leaders need to attend."

Martinez gives the award annually to laypeople selected by each district board of laity "for witness, commitment and service after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Pastor Tommie Tucker described Mitchell as "the unsung heroine, the backbone of Kempner UMC" in his nomination form.

Besides serving in many elected offices for more than 20 years, Mitchell "single-handedly has organized the (fall) bazaar each year, seeing it through to a successful conclusion," Tucker said.

For many years she has voluntarily cleaned church facilities, "spending many hours of her own time and financial resources," Tucker said.

Before chairing the administrative council, Mitchell served on the church finance, nominating and pastor-parish relations committees.

As outreach area leader, she helped organize the church food pantry 15 years ago.

While working at the food pantry, Mitchell tells visitors about Christ and encourages them to attend church, Tucker said.

"Anna Mitchell can always be counted on to volunteer for many special projects during the church year," Tucker said. "Anna Mitchell's tireless devotion to Kempner UMC and the Kempner community cannot be fully described.

"She always makes herself available for whatever needs to be done without being asked or prompted. She sees the need and goes to work. She is a true disciple of Jesus Christ."

Giving for 2004 climbs \$692,000 from '03

Southwest Texas United Methodists gave \$692,405 more to connectional ministries beyond local congregations during 2004 than they did in 2003.

Support for apportioned causes last year totaled \$8.75 million, the Office of Finance and Administration reported Jan. 12. That was 94.71 percent of the \$9.24 million total asking for 2004.

The apportionment payment rate was down 0.2 percent from 2003. Congregations paid 94.91 percent of the \$8.49 million asking that year.

Total giving to apportionments and designated causes, such as special offerings and Advance Specials, climbed to \$10.42 million during 2004. That was up from \$9.84 million during 2003.

"Giving to nonapportioned causes through the conference Treasurer's Office increased by 40 percent to a total of \$1.67 million," said the Rev. David A. Seilheimer, conference treasurer. "One reason was disaster relief. Our churches gave more than \$200,000 to 43 different disaster-relief projects during 2004, with \$104,279 directed to (Florida) emergency hurricane relief."

The 2004 disaster-response total includes only \$13,494 for relief from the Dec. 26 South Asia tsunami, Seilheimer noted.

"Those funds have only begun to arrive," he said. "In fact, we now are processing a large stack of 2005 checks for tsunami relief."

As of Jan. 19, giving in Southwest Texas to the United Methodist Committee on Relief's South Asia Emergency (Advance 274305) had topped \$104,000.

Of the 345 congregations with apportionments during 2004, 301—or 87 percent—paid their asking in full. That number is down from 306 in 2003 and 302 in 2002.

Six congregations sent in more than 100 percent of expenses for ministries across the state, nation and world. Bruni UMC led the list. The 20-member congregation paid 112 percent of its apportionment.

Bruni United Methodists also contributed \$10,000 to the relief fund for Florida hurricane recovery and another \$10,000 for response to the Dec. 26 South Asia tsunami.

Austin pastor named to lead Corpus district

Corpus Christi District United Methodists welcomed a new superintendent Jan. 1.

The Rev. Barbara J. Ruth, senior pastor of Oak Hill UMC, Austin, succeeded the Rev. J. Keith Wyatt.

Wyatt, 57, who has been superintendent since 2000, became senior pastor of First UMC, Corpus Christi.

Bishop Joel N. Martinez announced that Ruth, 54, would join his cabinet Dec. 5.

Ruth had been senior pastor of the 1,214-member Austin congregation since 1995. Before that she served St. John's UMC, San Antonio, from 1992 to 1995; and Gaddis Memorial UMC, Comfort, from 1987 to 1992.

Ruth was associate pastor of St. Andrew's UMC, San Antonio, from 1983 to 1987.