

Congregation answers call to help with disaster cleanup

Paoli (Ind.) Mennonite Fellowship

Members of Paoli (Ind.) Mennonite Fellowship had been struggling to find a proper location for their annual mid-winter effort in disaster service. For several years, they had gone to the Gulf Coast to assist in recovery from Katrina and other disasters. But this year, all the places seemed to be filled. A couple of sites in Mississippi were considered, but nothing seemed to fit just right—until a sudden disaster much closer to home summoned their efforts.

During the last week of January, while much of Indiana experienced a snow storm greater than any in the last decade, much of Kentucky experienced a devastating ice storm. Hundreds of thousands were without electricity and other essential services.



A call came from **Susan Classen**, a member of Paoli Mennonite Fellowship, who operates a retreat center called **Cedars of Peace** on the grounds of the **Motherhouse of the Sisters of Loretto** in Nerinx, Ky, in conjunction with the sisters there. Susan's faith journey has led her to a commitment to this Catholic community as well as her Mennonite faith perspective.

Would members of her Mennonite faith community come to help the Sisters? The answer was an enthusiastic “yes,” resolving the question of “Where should we go to help this February?”

During Feb. 7–10, more than 20 members of Paoli Mennonite Fellowship traveled to central Kentucky (just a couple of hours south) to help at the Motherhouse. Hundreds of trees had been broken and felled, electricity was out, and frozen plumbing and other needs were plentiful.

The volunteers helped restore power and plumbing to the retreat center and picked up tree limbs and chipped them into mulch—a huge job in that setting. The Catholic community there, which includes a nursing home, was extremely appreciative of the help, as many of the sisters are elderly and unable to do the kind of work that was needed. A strong spiritual connection was also established between the Catholic and Mennonite faith communities.

So, the problem of “where to go” was solved providentially by God. Paoli helped one of its own and thus established a warm and deepened relationship between two Christian communions, and discovered how much they had in common in service to the one Lord they both serve.

—*Tim Jessen, Paoli Mennonite Fellowship*

On the way to the Convent Cemetery, there are “statues” of the Seven Stations of the Cross (or as they speak of them, the seven *dolores*.) One was broken in the course of the ice storm and cleanup, and it seemed to be symbolic of how God can take our brokenness to work his will and way. Even the “broken limbs and trees” speak of God's ability to restore and make whole after brokenness.—*Tim Jessen*



