

SPIRIT

Episcopal Diocese
of West Missouri





SPIRIT



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ON THE COVER: The Rev. Frank Sierra, rector at St. Philip's
in Joplin, and his wife, Debi, talk to homeowner Ramona
Shields (seated, left) and a friend on the lawn of Shield's Joplin
home that was destroyed in the May 22 tornado. Shields is one
of Sierra's parishioners at St. Philip's.

Photograph by Melodie Woerman

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I visited Joplin three weeks after an EF-5 tornado tore
through its southern section. I wondered if I would be
too late, if all remnants of the tornado's wrath would be
gone, extracted to a landfill somewhere. I was unaware of
the scale of the disaster, one that will need the good will
of volunteers for years, perhaps a decade.

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Thomas Carpenter's active role at St. Paul's in Clinton,
where he is a lay reader and member of the Bishop's
Committee, can be attributed to his close-knit
relationship with its parishioners. He values their
contribution to his Christian development and recognizes
that, as a small rural church, St. Paul's needs his help if it
is to survive.

By Hugh Welsh



A man seeks medical attention for his daughter after an EF-5 tornado struck Joplin. AP Photo

8 Prison Ministry

Kairos Prison Ministry is an international organization addressing the spiritual needs of prisoners and their families, which sprung out of the Cursillo Movement. In May, Kairos held its ninth weekend at the Crossroads Correctional Center in Cameron, Missouri, one of two prisons in the state that host the program. Brian Jones, a parishioner at Grace Church in Carthage, led the May event at Crossroads. Eighteen-year-old Russ Helder, an acolyte at Grace and Holy Trinity Cathedral in Kansas City, is the founder of Episcopal Prison Ministry, in which volunteers will visit prisoners once a month at the United States Penitentiary in Leavenworth.

By Hugh Welsh

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On the evening of May 22, an EF-5 tornado struck Joplin and parts of Newton County, killing at least 159 people and leaving nearly 7,000 homes uninhabitable. The recovery process will have as much to do with rebuilding psyches as it will rebuilding structures.

By Hugh Welsh

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A St. Philip's (Joplin) parishioner describes life in Joplin after the tornado.

By Debi Sierra

21 Lessons from Hurricane Katrina

The Rev. Stan Runnels, rector at St. Paul's in Kansas City, was serving the same position at St. John's in Laurel, Mississippi, when a hurricane named Katrina was spiraling toward the Gulf Coast in August 2005. When roads became impassable, St. John's evolved into a valuable resource for the entire community.

By Hugh Welsh

22 Arts

Paul Johnson, Christ Church in St. Joseph, has written a memoir, *Murder and Redemption at a Benedictine Abbey*, that tells of how he lost and regained his faith after his brother's death and the fatal shootings of two monks at Conception Abbey (Johnson is a professor at Conception College). It is a loving tribute to monastic life.

By Hugh Welsh

I FIRST VISITED JOPLIN IN MY YOUTH AS PART of a family trip spanning the state. I can't say there was anything jaw dropping about the place: I was far more intrigued by Wilson's Creek battlefield and prospect of a "spook light" on the outskirts of town.

I do remember its residents, modeled after the miners who originally populated the town.



There is a southern gentility and humor about them – and a best-not-turn-your-back grit. As I entered town three weeks after an EF-5 tornado swiped southern Joplin, I saw proof: written on a canvas in front of a house with moderate tornado damage were the words “you loot, we shoot.” Piloting my visit were the Rev. Frank Sierra, rector of St.

Philip's in Joplin, and the Rev. Steve Wilson, rector at Grace Church in Carthage. I was joined by David Albright, there to photograph the destruction for St. Paul's in Kansas City. Before depositing David and me near the Greenbriar Nursing Home – where 11 people were killed – Wilson, the driver, showed us a house stripped of a roof, the living room furnished in thrift store kitsch. A turkey decoy was watching television. “A little Ozark comedy for you,” Wilson said. We weren't driving long before the smiles dissipated. First, a roof bare of shingles, a stop sign sheared in half, a mattress aloft a tree, an uprooted tree plopped onto a car, “FARMERS INS” spraypainted on its driver's side door. Wilson turned – and the sky opened. For miles, Joplin was a flatland, a town of foundations and mutilated trees. It's when I realized the magnitude of the event. What can be done when everything seems beyond reach? Much, whether it's the Rev. Stan Runnels, rector at St. Paul's in Kansas City, coordinating shipments of supplies with clergy in the Joplin area or the diocesan plan to give Joplin a pair of garage sales and new trees, or Sierra's willingness to listen to whomever enters his office.

West Missouri Futuring Task Group

The West Missouri Futuring Task Group, previously known as the Resolution #5 Committee, was created by a resolution passed at the 2010 Diocesan Convention. The resolution mandated the creation of an ad hoc committee to work with Bishop Martin Field to consider his vision for the ministry of the diocese in relation to ongoing assessment levels and the existing plan for mission and ministry expenditures.

The bishop appointed persons to serve on the committee along with elected deanery representatives. The bishop convened the group at Grace and Holy Trinity Cathedral on May 10, 2011, and it has adopted a monthly meeting schedule.

At the group's first meeting, Bishop Field asked members to consider an expansion of their scope of work. Acknowledging the importance of Resolution 5, he noted that along with it, the will of the 2010 convention and previous conventions supported study of such issues as provincial and diocesan realignment.

He also drew the group's attention toward the need to address a variety of challenges and opportunities including congregational sustainability, lay leadership development, communications and West Missouri's sense of diocesan identity. To that end, Bishop Field proposed that the group work with parishioners, clergy and congregations to develop a sense of vision and mission for the overall future of the Diocese of West Missouri and a plan for realizing them. In expanding its scope of work, the group would not lose sight of the Resolution 5 mandate, but would incorporate it into the larger “futuring” task. The group has since adopted the name Diocese of West Missouri Futuring Task Group. The name was intended to communicate a long-term, global scope of work, a commitment to specific outcomes and a defined end to the project. The group will report its progress on an interim basis through diocesan publications as well as its formal report at the Diocesan Convention in November.

Your Feedback on Spirit

Do you have an opinion about the diocese's quarterly publication, Spirit? Complete a quick five-question survey by clicking the Spirit Survey link on the diocesan Web site, www.diowestmo.org.

F.A.Q.

What if someone wants to be confirmed but physical disabilities keep the person from leaving his or her residence?

By the Rev. Dr. Susan Marie Smith

The Holy Spirit, through the Rt. Rev. Martin Scott Field, confirmed the faith and baptism of Ms. Marta Brown of Christ Church, St. Joseph, on Pentecost Sunday (June 12, 2011). Yet Marta has never set foot in the church at 7th and Francis Streets. “Church to go” was born, all because of a series of God-given opportunities to which individuals and the congregation of Christ Church said a resounding YES.

It all started when Mtr. Mimi Savidge’s telephone rang in the rector’s office a year ago. A woman Mtr. Mimi had never met asked whether someone could bring her communion. “Please,” her voice tone said, for she had called another church, which was not in a position to bring her the sacrament, and she was unable to leave her building. Mtr. Mimi said YES. She spoke to the Eucharistic Visitors about expanding the reach of their ministry beyond known church members and, by the grace of God, they said YES. Several agreed to take Holy Communion to Mrs. Brown weekly at the East Ridge Manor, a residence for seniors. Week by week, Drew Brown, Cosette Hardwick, Carolyn and Paul Johnson, and Sandy Miller became regulars in the East Ridge Manor activities room right after the Sunday liturgy.

Mrs. Brown delighted in the care and in the liturgy. As her appreciation grew, she sought the full Episcopal experience. She invited some friends and neighbors to join her. They said YES – and an ecumenical Eucharistic community was born. More questions and conversation about Episcopal Church traditions ensued.

Eventually, Marta expressed her desire to be confirmed. Not so easy to arrange or schedule. However, Marta persisted as her desire grew. During Lent this year, Amma Susan Smith, supply priest at Christ Church, joined Drew Brown for Communion at East Ridge Manor. Marta again asked, “When

could I be confirmed?”

Amma Susan knew the bishop was scheduled for his visitation at Christ Church on Pentecost, so she made an appointment with Bishop Marty and asked him if he would confirm Marta at her residence building. And Bishop Marty said YES.

“Church-to-Go” they called it! The altar guild scoped out the room, figured out how to make an altar out of an on-site table, and asked the Junior Warden, Jim Vega, to bring extra chairs. Several of the Eucharistic Visitors offered to host and serve at a reception. And Drew and Charlene Brown (ironically sharing her name, though not related) agreed to be her sponsors. Drew met with her weekly to prepare her for confirmation.

Mrs. Brown wrote a letter to the bishop expressing why she wanted to be confirmed – a moving story of her faith journey and the movement of the Spirit in her life. It was apparent that the Spirit had been drawing Marta to a deeper YES.

On the Day of Pentecost, Marta was surrounded by three dozen neighbors and friends, church-folk and relatives. One cousin came from Chillicothe to be present and witness the event. Mrs. Joyce Starr of the St. Joseph City Council and Pastor James Foster of the Pentecostal prison ministry carried up the elements, representing the rest of Marta’s beloved friends from across her years in St. Joseph. The Spirit of God was poured out on the ecumenical gathering. Peoples of many ages and races and denominations and professions spoke the same language that day – the language of Amazing Grace and the unity of the Body of Christ.

The service was a witness to the Spirit who is always in our midst – and on this day, everyone recognized it. “This was so moving!” a neighbor said.

“You were right that we are one body, even though we are Baptist and AME and Pentecostal and Episcopal.”

“It was an honor to be here.”

“I really felt the Spirit’s presence in this place.”

“Strengthen, O Lord, your servant Marta...”

We were witnesses to the Spirit’s answer to this prayer: Yes, Marta. Yes, Christ Church. Yes, people of St. Joseph. Yes, West Missouri. YES, YES, YES!!

RIP & READ

A compilation of articles from the Episcopal News Service



South Sudan Episcopalians celebrate birth of their new nation

IN AN EXUBERANT THREE-AND-A-HALF HOUR service here July 10, South Sudanese Episcopalians celebrated the birth of their new nation, even as they looked towards the difficult future of their country. Church leaders were realistic about the size of the challenges facing South Sudan, officially recognized as the world's newest nation on July 9. South Sudan has a history of inter-tribal violence that has continued in the run-up to independence. South Sudan is at the bottom of the world's development tables, with pervasive poverty and disease. Many southerners rely on international food aid. The service featured speeches from some of the government ministers, members of parliament, tribal elders, and revolution leaders in attendance, many of whom are members of the cathedral congregation on a regular basis. All reiterated their desire for a stable future for South Sudan rooted in a Biblical vision of peace and justice.

— JESSE ZINK

DIOCESAN LINK

Since May, St. Paul's in Kansas City has offered a Sunday worship service for a congregation of about 50 Sudanese Christians, many of whom are Anglican. The service is conducted in their native language, Dinka. The church hosted a ceremony to celebrate South Sudan's independence. A feature on this congregation will appear in a later edition of Spirit.

Episcopal Youth Event empowers the next generation of Church leaders

FIFTEEN DIOCESAN YOUTH AND ADULTS WERE among the 1,100 people who took part in this year's Episcopal Youth Event on the campus of Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota. The event, June 23 to 25, featured the construction of a Habitat for Humanity house, which was blessed by Diocese of Minnesota Bishop Brian Prior and prayers written on the unfinished walls. More than 50 workshops were held, ranging from prayer and spirituality to effective Bible study to youth ministry and mission trip planning. Speakers included Church leaders, an Episcopal missionary and Episcopal Relief & Development's network coordinator. In the final plenary session, participants of the 2011 Episcopal Youth Event received one final call to mission. Explaining that lay persons, like bishops, priests and deacons, are "the ministers of the church" (Book of Common Prayer, page 855), Bonnie Anderson, president of the House of Deputies, invited participants to "jump into the waters of baptism."

— JOE BJORDAL

Episcopalians stand up for ethical behavior and justice in the financial world

FORTY YEARS AGO, THEN-EPISCOPAL Church Presiding Bishop John Hines appeared at a General Motors stockholders meeting to ask the company to quit doing business in South Africa because of that country's policy of apartheid. Today, the church continues to make its voice heard in company boardrooms and in legislative chambers on issues of financial ethics and economic justice. Episcopalians in several states are battling what they say are predatory lending practices that perpetuate poverty. Various dioceses and the wider church also support investment opportunities such as credit unions, which offer alternatives to payday lenders and foster community development. According to Rachel Anderson, director of faith outreach for the Center for Responsible Lending, a research policy and advocacy organization dedicated to preserving household wealth and eliminating abusive financial practices, predatory lending "is essentially any kind of lending that takes advantage of people, either for poor or lack of credit history, or limited financial knowledge, and charges rates that are higher really than would be necessary." Predatory-lending characteristics include excessively high fees and interest and balloon payments where borrowers typically cannot repay loans all at once and must refinance – "anything that triggers a cycle of debt," she said. With mortgages, abusive practices also include charging higher rates in some communities – such as among people of color – or requiring extra costs such as insurance that are unjustified by borrowers' risks, she said.

— SHARON SHERIDAN

PROFILE

Thomas Carpenter (St. Paul's, Clinton)



“The experience made my walk with Christ a lot more personal and a lot less formal.”

AT ST. PAUL'S IN CLINTON, EVERYONE MUST do their part.

The small rural parish can't afford a full-time priest, an accountant, a cleaning crew or a gardener. So its congregation wears all these hats, its youngest member, 20-year-old Thomas Carpenter, included.

Carpenter, who lives in Warsaw, a 30-minute drive from Clinton, has been a member of St. Paul's for seven years, introduced to the church by his grandmother. In 2008, he was confirmed there.

“I do all I can to help,” Carpenter says. “In many ways, the church is an extension of who I am. We're trying to get by, but it's tough.”

Carpenter's responsibilities at St. Paul's are many. He is a lay reader and member of its Bishop's Committee. Once a month, he leads Evening Prayer as part of a Wednesday rotation. He also assists in whatever cleaning or maintenance work is needed. But Carpenter isn't the type to exalt his churchly deeds.

“I don't know that I contribute as much as they do to my development as a Christian,” Carpenter says.

Outside of the church, Carpenter is an accomplished scholar. In mid-June, he participated in the Professional Business Leaders National Leadership Conference in Orlando, Florida, placing fourth in statistics and seventh in accounting principles. At the state level, Carpenter was elected treasurer, coming within two points of first place in accounting principles. In May, Carpenter completed his associate's degree from State Fair Community College in Sedalia, where he was awarded the Distinguished Associate of the Arts, Student of the Year Award. The award honored Carpenter's academic excellence along with his dedication to tutoring disadvantaged students in the Sedalia community in the fields of computers, business and math and his role in campus Christian fellowship, including his coordination of a weekly Bible study. He will attend Missouri State University in Springfield beginning this fall. He says he was accepted outright at both Missouri State and the University of Missouri in Columbia in high school. Instead of accruing debt, however, Carpenter opted for community college, which allowed him to save money as a down payment toward his bachelor's degree. He anticipates little, if any, debt upon graduating from Missouri State.

“I grew up on the higher end of lower class,” Carpenter says. “It taught me to be more fiscally responsible.”

Carpenter says the hallmark moment in his life was his confirmation process with St. Paul's now-retired vicar, the Rev. Rolf Leed.

“The experience made my walk with Christ a lot more personal and a lot less formal,” Carpenter says.

Leed taught Carpenter that there is always room for improvement in the Christian life. Knowing Carpenter's strength in math, Leed equated Christian living to a coordinate plane in which Jesus Christ is 0. One may get close to 0, but absolute 0 is unattainable. That doesn't mean one cannot strive to get near it, an infinite task.

“You must always try to further yourself, to push yourself closer to God,” Carpenter says.

– HUGH WELSH

Initially, Brian Jones (Grace Church, Carthage) was fearful about bringing the love of Jesus Christ to inmates. He saw them as hard-boiled, men with fixed insides in tough-to-crack shells – some tattooed with insignias glorifying hate or scars exemplifying a lifetime flirtation with peril. Jones speculated on the misdeeds committed, linking harsh appearances to harsher crimes.

IT WAS A Saturday morning, day two of the Kairos Prison Ministry weekend at the Nottoway Correctional Center in Burkeville, Virginia. Kairos members and prison participants were organized circularly into groups of nine, known as families, for a discussion intended to “open the door” to a reawakening. Jones was new to Kairos and not yet sold on its merits. He had just heard a black man in his late 50s, a former Black Panther, rage against the injustices of the prison system, how it held men of color in its crosshairs. He viewed Kairos as a torchbearer for a racially charged message. When a much younger man – white, bald headed, his skin a tapestry of neo-Nazi propaganda – stood to speak next, Jones expected a confrontation. The young man hadn’t said anything to anyone during the Kairos weekend. Jones remembers his words clearly: “I used to not be able to speak without stuttering unless I had my medication. By the power of the Holy Spirit, I speak to you in a normal voice. This morning, I accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and savior.” The black man arose and hugged him.

“I was hooked,” Jones says. Jones coordinated the ninth semi-annual Kairos Prison Ministry weekend May 12 to 15 at the Crossroads Correctional Center in Cameron, Mo. Jones oversaw 40 team members serving 33 prison participants. Kairos is relatively new to Missouri; in addition to Crossroads, it is established at the Potosi Correctional Center, which completed its second Kairos weekend in May. Jones – along with Grace Church’s rector, the Rev. Steve Wilson and Grace Church deacons Galen Snodgrass and Jeff Bell – are at the forefront of founding a Kairos ministry at the Chillicothe Correctional Center, a women’s

prison. In Virginia, where Jones spent most of his life, Kairos is installed at 11 institutions, including three women’s prisons. The Kairos ministry at the Greenville Correctional Center recently completed its 26th weekend. The recidivism rate, or likelihood of reincarceration upon release from prison (affecting one out of every two prisoners), is greatly diminished among Kairos participants. A formal study by the South Carolina Department of Corrections found that Kairos resulted in a drop in recidivism rates from 36 percent to 26 percent compared to their control group.

The mantra of Kairos Prison Ministry, a non-denomination Christian ministry spanning nine countries that emerged from the Cursillo Movement in 1976, is love and listen. All Kairos weekends are drawn from the same blueprint: during the three and a half day event, Kairos members teach an introductory course on Christianity through carefully coordinated talks, discussions, chapel meditations and music (Jones plays the bagpipes). On the final day, during the closing service that is open to the public, participants are welcome to speak about their experiences. Each month between weekend events, Kairos members spend a few hours

with participants, who are asked to assist with the next event, including mentoring newcomers.

“It’s not about command and control,” says Jones, who is known affectionately at Crossroads as the “cookie guy” for the thousands of cookies he regularly bakes and delivers to prison staff and prisoners, regardless of whether they are Kairos participants. “It’s about listening, about showing these men, some of whom have gone 20 or 30 years without so much as a letter, that you care about them.”

Imprisoned with Faith

Heart complications forced Brian Jones, Grace Church (Carthage), into an early retirement as an airline pilot. He found a heartfelt alternative in Kairos Prison Ministry, an international outreach seeking to build hope in a vulnerable population.
By Hugh Welsh



The ministry's title is taken from one of two Greek words for time, the other being "cronos." Whereas cronos refers to chronological time (hours, days, months, years), kairos refers to God's time – the in-between moments when miracles occur, such as the Virgin Mary's conception of Jesus Christ.

While three and a half days isn't long, especially when some men are faced with multi-year prison terms, the metamorphosis among participants is a constant, Jones says.

"It happens every time we go," Jones says. "I believe that every man there has known Christ's love at some point, though he may have been too young to remember it now."

During the closing service at Kairos #8 at Crossroads, a prisoner named Mike spoke of an early adoration for Christianity wrecked by life's darker obstacles. He grew apart from God, valuing life as a game pitting one man against all others. "I became a predator using and hurting people as I saw fit," Mike read. Until, God, "in His mercy," sent him to prison, a place unrelenting in its deprivation and cruelty. Mike tried to better himself by enrolling in various programs intent on reteaching compassion, but they all failed. At the end of the day, he was again behind bars, subject to the scourge of predation that constitutes prison life. Then, he found Kairos, which transplanted him from darkness "into the brightest of lights" through prayer, companionship and the understanding that "faith without action is not faith."



EPISCOPAL PRISON MINISTRY



The United States Penitentiary in Leavenworth, Kansas.

EIGHTEEN-YEAR-OLD RUSS HELDER, AN ACOLYTE at Grace and Holy Trinity Cathedral in Kansas City, believes the prison system isn't fixing anything – inmates live like rabid animals, snapping at each other's throats to survive, their captors apathetic to their emotional and spiritual welfare. The result: a prison system that reclaims one out of every two freed prisoners within three years.

"The 'us vs. them' argument is worsened by the prison system and its lack of common courtesy," Helder says. "We're normal, and they're criminal. You treat people as crooks, and they behave as crooks."

Recently, Helder's father was released from a five-year prison sentence. Helder learned that prison rules are dictated by the moods of the guards. Backtalk can result in a chair upside the head. Report the incident and expect all valuables confiscated. On one occasion, his father brought a bag of chips back to his cell from the mess hall and was reprimanded for it.

It is due in part to his father's experience that Helder founded Episcopal Prison Ministries at Grace and Holy Trinity Cathedral. Volunteers will visit the United States Penitentiary in Leavenworth once a month for about two hours, officiating over Evening Prayer. After the service, volunteers will have an opportunity to talk with inmates. Helder is in the process of gaining approval from prison administrators.

In the fall Helder, a graduate of Pembroke Hill High School, will attend Macalester College in St. Paul's, Minnesota, where he'll initiate his pathway to the priesthood. Last summer, Helder studied the philosophy of the mind at Stanford University and has an interest in interfaith relations.

"I see this prison ministry as an expression of the love required by all Christians," Helder says. "We shouldn't just love our own, or those not found guilty of a crime. These men need our love."

If you are interested in the prison ministry, contact Helder at shadwmster@gmail.com.

– HUGH WELSH

(Below): Southern Joplin on the evening of
May 22, following an EF-5 tornado.
(Opposite page): After the tornado, a double
rainbow was seen over Joplin. AP Photos





Healing Joplin

Ten days in New York City with his wife, Debi, had taken a toll on the Rev. Frank Sierra, rector at St. Philip's in Joplin. They arrived at their house at about 4 p.m., Sunday, May 22, promptly unpacking their luggage before settling to watch T.V. He was exhausted, banking on an early bedtime so he could be well rested for the workweek ahead. A tornado siren. Sierra, like a lot of Midwesterners, was accustomed to its drone: on the first Wednesday during peak tornado months and as a signifier of a funnel cloud, which may or may not produce a tornado. He ignored it. The siren stopped. And started again. "I told my wife this isn't going to go passed us," says Sierra, who collected his cat and crank weather radio and, alongside Debi, entered a downstairs closet. They heard high winds and nothing more.

BY HUGH WELSH
PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID ALBRIGHT AND HUGH WELSH

MANY JOPLIN RESIDENTS DIDN'T HEED THE SECOND WARNING, regarding it as a prompt to turn the television to the local network, KSNF. It's what Kathy Gray did. After all, it wasn't as dark or as silent as it's supposed to be before a tornado. The KSNF weatherman seemed a non-believer of a public report of a funnel cloud tracking east through southern Joplin. A tower camera fixed on the area of concern showed a rain-dense mass churning toward Joplin's heart. Flashes of light emanated from it. The weatherman called it lightning. Audio cut out for a few seconds, the tower camera an unflinching eye.

When the audio returned, the weatherman corrected himself. The pulses of light were fractured power lines and behind the veil of rain lurked a twister of monstrous proportion. "We do have a tornado on the ground. I'm telling you to take cover now. Please do not go outside to see this storm, folks. You can't see anything. It is rain wrapped. This is a dangerous, dangerous situation." Signals flickered blue and died.

Gray, a member of the Peace Lutheran Church reduced to splinters by the tornado, heard a noise through the patter of rain and pelt of hail. Something was coming: a thousand freight trains. She ripped the blanket from her bed and sprinted for the downstairs bathroom, where she crouched in the bathtub, the blanket swathing her head. Gray says in that instant she missed her husband, the casualty of a heart attack nine years ago. She says the traumatic event, so sudden and total, had embittered her. It was partly why she moved away from Springfield, where they were members of Christ Episcopal Church. As the tornado drew closer, the freight train sound changed to one of her house succumbing to 200-mile-per-hour winds. Moans, shrieks. Gray says it was like a "demon's voice." She prayed aloud, begging for mercy, pleading forgiveness. Overhead the house was lifting and shifting and drumming like a lunatic, Gray's ears popping so violently she pressed her palms against them to counteract the pressure. Still, she prayed, until she was sure it had passed. The tornado spared her but not her home on Indiana Avenue.

A FEW BLOCKS northeast of Gray's home is St. Louis Avenue, once a part of the Estes family farm. The Rev. Ted Estes' grandparents bought the land in the late 1920s, gradually parceling it off until all that was left was a small section. Estes' grandfather preserved the tract for family, dividing it into lots. When a tornado warning was issued for Jasper County, seven of Estes' family lived along St. Louis Avenue, including his mother, three aunts, an uncle, a sister and a niece.

Estes attempted to reach his mother by phone when he learned a tornado hit Joplin. It was to no avail. He got in his car and drove from his Carthage home to find her. The cause for worry increased the closer he got. Traffic into Joplin was at a standstill. Finally, a half mile away, he parked his car, grabbed a hammer and ran. The air was thick with natural gas – so dense, in fact, that smoking was hazardous for days to follow – and fiberglass: he itched from it until he showered later that night. Nothing moved. He noticed that monolithic trees resembled mangled fingers, street signs were hijacked, roads were like rivers of debris. Occasionally, he saw silhouettes of the walking wounded.

Estes missed the turn to St. Louis Avenue, not recognizing the house where he had grown up. It was like a ruin from a culture he could study but never know. He called after his mother, but got no answer. A look around the premises produced nothing. He saw a figure in a long black cape and hood.

"I thought it was Death walking the neighborhood," Estes says. It was his mother, who was wearing a costume she had made because her nightgown was



Photo by David Albright

drenched. He'll never forget her words: "It's only stuff, everybody's alive."

Due to the high water table and rocky soil, most homes in Joplin cannot have basements. Estes marks it a miracle so many people survived in halls, bathrooms and broom closets. Down the block, Estes' aunt and uncle's house had a basement. They were dining in it when a hailstorm passed overhead. Or so they thought. Both are hard of hearing and opposed to hearing aids. When Estes' uncle pried open the basement door, he found the front of his house missing. Estes says they are now more agreeable to hearing aids.

There was little relief in the days following the tornado: heat indexes hovered in the triple digits as a foot of rain fell. Thirty volunteers from Grace Church in Carthage spent a 10-hour day cleaning up Estes' mother's house, salvaging what they could, chainsawing the trees jutting from the house like spikes and sorting trash on the curb according to its appropriate heap.

"It was disorienting," Estes says. "A porcelain figurine would have not moved and a piece of furniture would

look like it had been through the wood chipper."

As they were working, a search and rescue team turned up the body of an elderly lady down the street, an image that quieted Estes' 17-year-old son.

"You go through life expecting everything to be safe," Estes says. "Such a display can be a powerful awakening."

Estes says all seven family members displaced by the tornado are accounted for.

"I have 37 first cousins, so if you get tired of somebody, you can rotate," Estes says. "Thankfully, no one is in a shelter."

ALL TOLD, THE EF-5 tornado killed 159 people, leaving nearly 7,000 homes uninhabitable along a swath 13 miles long and three-quarters of a mile wide in Joplin and Newton County, including those of 13 parishioners at St. Philip's and 10 at Grace Church, where a 14-year-old grandson of one parishioner suffered a broken neck and brain trauma when the parked pickup he was seated in was tossed by the

Remnants of St. Mary's Catholic Church, shown in the background, wrapped around a tree. Photo by Hugh Welsh



“Please do not go outside to see this storm, folks. You can’t see anything. It is rain wrapped. This is a dangerous, dangerous situation.”



Photo by Hugh Welsh

twister into Home Depot. He suffered no damage to his spinal cord and is “doing well,” according to the Rev. Steve Wilson, Grace Church’s rector. His was the only severe injury among either church’s congregation. Estes, Sierra and Wilson were a part of a committee of local laypersons and clergy appointed by Bishop Marty Field to draft a diocesan plan for Joplin’s recovery, which was approved by the Diocesan Council at their June meeting.

“The bishop has been very present in and around Joplin,” Estes says. “He listens and gets input directly from people down here.”

The plan:

- August 6 – A no-charge garage sale at St. Philip’s. Items will include back-to-school supplies, school clothing (new or gently used),

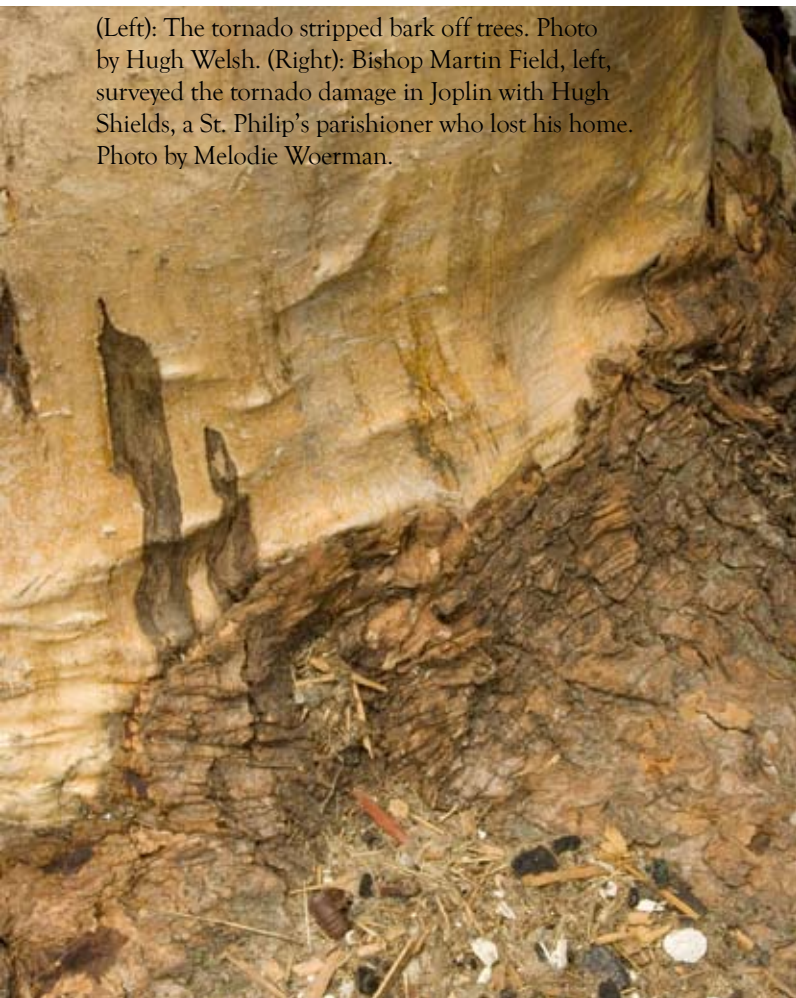
small appliances (toasters, toaster ovens, mixers, blenders), bed linens (all sizes), bath towels, washcloths, hand towels, cleaning/laundry supplies, lawn chairs, folding chairs, small tables and shelves. Items collected in the Kansas City area can be taken to St. Paul’s, 40th and Main in Kansas City, by 10 a.m. Saturday, July 30 for delivery to Joplin. In the Springfield area, items can be taken to Christ Church, 601 E. Walnut in Springfield, by Monday, August 1. Volunteers will be needed for all phases of the project. Full details, including volunteer information and supply lists for each grade level, are available under the link “Tornado Relief Efforts Update” on the diocesan Web site, www.diowestmo.org.

(Top and bottom): The Greenbriar Nursing Center, where 11 people were killed. Photos by Hugh Welsh





A row of duplexes reduced to rubble.
Photo by Hugh Welsh



(Left): The tornado stripped bark off trees. Photo by Hugh Welsh. (Right): Bishop Martin Field, left, surveyed the tornado damage in Joplin with Hugh Shields, a St. Philip's parishioner who lost his home. Photo by Melodie Woerman.



“You go through life expecting everything to be safe,” says the Rev. Ted Estes, rector at All Saints’ in Nevada. “Such a display can be a powerful awakening.”



A ribbon from the birthing center at St. John’s Medical Center entwined a bush a mile away. Photo by Hugh Welsh

- October 22 – A no-charge garage sale at St. Philip’s.
- November 19 – Field will bless the construction of a two-story duplex for Lafayette House, a crisis housing and support center for women and children affected by domestic violence. Domestic abuse is expected to climb steadily in Joplin over the next year as shock gives way to harsh reality. Prior to Field’s blessing, work teams will be needed to accomplish various construction projects such as hanging drywall and painting.
- Spring – “Releaf Joplin” efforts will begin with planting trees in a park near St. John’s Medical Center, which was dealt heavy damage by the tornado, and residential areas. The date of the project is yet to be determined.

More than \$90,000 has been donated to the diocese’s “Joplin Tornado Relief Fund,” which will bolster relief efforts in Joplin and Newton County. Contributions

can be sent to the diocesan office, P.O. Box 413227, Kansas City, MO 64141-3227. Please make checks payable to the Diocese of West Missouri with “Joplin Tornado Relief Fund” on the memo line.

SIERRA NEVER GOT that bedrest; he says he can’t slow his heartbeat. “I don’t know if I’m doing all I can,” Sierra says. “This is my first experience with this type of catastrophe.”

Sierra’s house was unaffected as was St. Philip’s. Yet the disaster scene is a vision he cannot shake: it lies between home and work, where he does all he can for the parishioners without homes. He bandages the spiritual and psychological scars. He listens. Some people try to return the favor: shortly after the tornado, Sierra fielded a call from a guy offering a construction crew for a small fee, citing his experience with Hurricane Katrina. Sierra politely told the man that reconstruction was not currently a need. The man

“I don’t know if I’m doing all I can,” says Frank Sierra, rector at St. Philip’s in Joplin. “This is my first experience with this type of catastrophe.”



The Rev. Frank Sierra, rector at St. Philip’s in Joplin. Photo by David Albright

promptly hung up.

“If somebody wants to help Frank, they should volunteer to cut his lawn,” says Wilson, who lives in Carthage. Wilson’s visits to Joplin and its “cosmological destruction” come at a cost: migraines.

“I don’t know how Frank does it,” Wilson says. “He lives in it.”

For several days after the tornado, Wilson could find little refuge at his Carthage home, a dozen or so miles from Joplin. Carthage’s emergency services poured every available resource into Joplin, the shriek of ambulances and fire trucks an all-night occurrence.

By Tuesday, Wilson knew the sounds meant body retrieval, not rescue.

Wilson hasn’t heard the tough questions yet. The ones that ask why. Why spare my life, and not my neighbor, my sister, my child?

Wilson says he became a priest to help people in their greatest time of need, which the Joplin tragedy

certainly qualifies. It isn’t easy.

He says there is no training, no guidebook on how to engage the guy who tunes his piano.

“What do you say to somebody who saw his newlywed wife and 1-year-old baby buried in the same coffin?” Wilson says. “I don’t know if there’s anybody in this area that doesn’t know somebody either seriously hurt or killed by the tornado.”

Sierra, Wilson and Estes put stock in stories: of a 14-year-old grandson who will walk again after the twister crumpled his pickup like tinfoil, snapping his neck; of Nehemiah, who channeled God in the stillness, “a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsook them not.”

Sierra tries to measure progress during his twice daily drives through the tornado’s path, whether it’s a block swept of debris or the raising of utility poles, like so many crosses.

In the Aftermath of an EF-5: An Essay on Life in Joplin

BY DEBI SIERRA
St. Philip's (Joplin)

How do we express our emotions each time we drive through the TORNADO'S path? The sadness that fills your entire being until it seems you can't hold anymore? The way it lays like an immense burden upon your heart? Upon your very soul?

I have not felt such heavy sorrow and grief for a long, long time. You want to turn away from it but you cannot . . . it lies all around you. You try closing your eyes but when you open them it is still there. Block after block, mile after mile of broken, shattered, and scattered homes, businesses, churches, schools, stores, apartments, and more. Trees stripped of leaves, branches, and even bark leaving only a skeleton standing with a few stronger and thicker limbs reaching up to the sky as if begging heaven to come down with comfort. Comfort for us all; victims, friends, families, all broken, all wounded by the overwhelming destruction the TORNADO left behind.

Birds flit from tree to tree looking for something familiar in the destroyed and changed landscape. Where have their nests gone? Where are their young? Squirrels, too, dart around, seeking for landmarks that no longer exist. And, still, people wander through the ravaged land, searching as well for the homes of families and/or friends, but nothing is familiar, not even to life-long Joplinites.

Places we thought we knew "like the back of our hands" are now strange and surreal. Questions become the order of the day, "What street is this?" "Where am I?" "Is that my house?" A city well laid out, orderly and easily navigated, becomes chaotic and confusing. All that was once familiar has been reduced to rubble with few walls left standing. A stark landscape of piles and piles of debris with barren trees standing like sentinels over a war torn land.

Drive through at night and its all morphed into eerie shapes and weird, indistinguishable shadows in the

country-side darkness. A Suburban drives 20th street, it's beam creating a small dimly lit path in the gloomy, indistinct dark that divides the bright lights of the city. Miles in the distance a small bluish glow reveals where electricity still flows through undamaged lines and poles.

At times our grief seems more than we can bear as we look upon our wounded, scarred hometown. But the begging of the trees, the cries of the land, the prayers of the people are answered. Heaven does, indeed, come down as volunteers continue to



arrive, workers keep on going, police putting in long days and longer nights, survivors work at putting their lives back together again, spiritual leaders find little time to rest as they minister to the overwhelming needs of the community, those whose homes were unaffected work tirelessly helping neighbors, family, friends, and new friends. There are no strangers in Joplin, Missouri, for we all are bound one to another through this great catastrophe. Dividing lines between towns disappear, differences lose their destructive power, as we all grieve

together and being the process of rebuilding and restoring.

Stories are told and retold every day. Tales of terror and sorrow, as well as miraculous stories, and all our lives are changed as we begin a new phase of life after the TORNADO. Time becomes divided into before and after.

So, even though each day we are reminded of how destructive and devastating this storm was, even though we may weep and our souls become heavy with grief, even though ahead of us lies the long and arduous road of healing our broken community; still we stand together, hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder and march forward towards healing and hope.

God bless Joplin. God bless us all.

Lessons from Hurricane Katrina

BY HUGH WELSH

The Rev. Stan Runnels, rector at St. Paul's in Kansas City, knew what to do when he heard an EF-5 tornado demolished a third of Joplin.

He picked up his phone and dialed Frs. Frank Sierra and Steve Wilson, rectors at St. Philip's in Joplin and Grace Church in nearby Carthage. He wanted to know what they needed; he would organize the collection and delivery.

"It's never wise to presume in these situations," Runnels says. He would know.

Before he was rector of St. Paul's, Runnels was rector at St. John's in Laurel, Mississippi, a town of 18,000 people 90 miles inland. A massive hurricane named Katrina was barreling through the Gulf of Mexico. Much of the coastline was evacuated in anticipation of a bulldozing storm surge.

To places like Laurel, where the county fairgrounds encamped 3,000 evacuees. It was supposed to be a severe thunderstorm bearing hail and gusts of strong winds.

"Typically, hurricanes immediately diminish in strength after making landfall," Runnels says. "But when they reach a certain size, they can generate their own power."

The hurricane didn't relent, hammering Laurel with sustained 120-mile-per-hour winds, torrential rains and micro-tornadoes. Seven hours later, it was over. What Runnels surveyed was appalling: his house had inflicted damages that would total \$60,000; his car was totaled; here and there, the tops of trees were scalped by twisters that darted from the storm like the tongues of serpents. Streetlights, homes, businesses were shoved over as if by a big bully. Unlike Joplin, where sometimes a street can separate a house unscathed from one reduced to rubble, Katrina was indiscriminate.

"There was no infrastructure," Runnels says. "No hospitals, no electricity for three and a half weeks."

This was the case for a swath measuring 430 miles wide spanning 120 miles inland.

Episcopal Relief & Development concluded its

volunteer work phase in the Hurricane Katrina impact zone a year ago – nearly five years after the event.

Runnels says the strongest emotion borne by the disaster was exhaustion – day after day, the same bleak reality.

"In this country, we're not accustomed to enduring hardship for a prolonged period of time," Runnels says. He recalls well-intentioned people withering from the sheer scale of the wreckage, no end in sight.

Runnels' liberator was his bicycle; most roads were impassable until 15 days after the storm. Onboard his bicycle, Runnels adopted the role of communicator, first in the neighborhood then citywide then countywide. He determined a need not only for canned food or bottled water but baby food, diapers, feminine hygiene products, medication and fruit. Runnels would drape five or



Hurricane Katrina damage in Laurel, Mississippi. Photo by Nicolas Britto

six bags of fruit across his handlebars and deliver them to work crews. On several occasions, he guided 18-wheelers to the fairgrounds, knowing the route not littered with downed trees and debris. Laurel, like many municipalities, had a secondary electrical

grid capable of powering a small area in the event of emergency. And St. John's was on the grid. Soon, through Runnels cooperation, the church doubled as a birthing center with 30 residents and a conduit of communication tying Laurel and Jones County to the outside world, which for days hadn't known Katrina's wrath had extended so far.

Runnels says St. John's became more than a place of worship a few days a week – it became a vital resource.

"I told Frank and Steve we're here for you," says Runnels, who has overseen three shipments of items to Joplin. "You tell us what you need and where you want it, and we'll provide you the resources to be the servant for your community."

Runnels wasn't sure if he could stomach a trip to Joplin. He feared a loss of control. Recounting his memories in Laurel was enough to redden his face.

Ultimately, he did make the trip.

ARTS



Paul Johnson (Christ Church, St. Joseph) wasn't there when a gunman entered Conception Abbey in June 2002 to claim the lives of two monks before taking his own. Still, he was plagued by guilt. What if the school term hadn't ended? What if Johnson happened upon the shooter before he opened fire? What if he wasn't sipping coffee at a café in Maryville during the tragedy?

"After the shooting, I had dreams," says Johnson, an English professor at Conception for more than 20 years, "dreams in which I was in the Basilica when he came. Sometimes, I'd tackle him and be the hero. Other times, I wouldn't. I would just watch."

Johnson's trust in God was already flagging. A year earlier, he had lost his brother, who was HIV positive. Johnson's brother was healthy, until a pancreatic infection. He died within days. Johnson's disenchantment with the Church had begun long before his brother's death: worship had little resonance - it was a chore.

Johnson's book *Murder and Redemption at a Benedictine Abbey*, available in print and as an e-book for Amazon Kindle, recalls the restoration of his faith, in part, through the unlikeliest of friendships: an Episcopalian English professor and Benedictine monks.

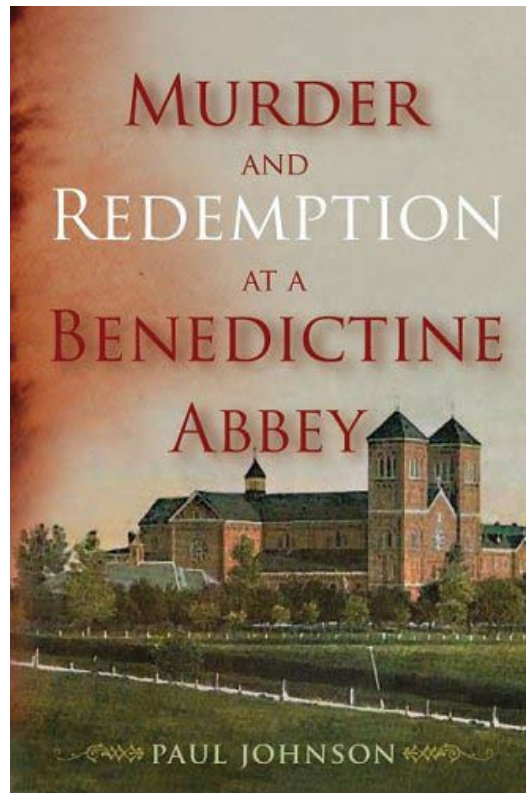
Johnson's book is a celebration of monastic

life - their counsel and methods were the remedy Johnson so desperately needed. Johnson observed that it is not enough for an aspiring monk to orally declare his wishes: he must knock at a door and wait three days for it to open. This in an age where immediate gratification is the norm. The monks also have a policy

towards strangers: welcome them without reservation. Then, the incident: two of their own shot dead, two more seriously injured. An undetermined motive. If what Johnson presupposes to be true - that the monks were targeted because they couldn't defend themselves - wouldn't and shouldn't they modify their habits to prevent a copycat crime? No. Johnson, however, never paints the monks as inhuman. Many were angry; some second guessed their destiny at Conception. The policy towards strangers, however, did not change. They abided by the words Jesus spoke to his disciples:

"I was a stranger, and you welcomed me."

The book doesn't follow a straightforward narrative but, rather, a meandering year-long course that opens with a chapter called "Signs," in which Johnson's affinity for signs - manifestations of "God's subtle voice" - is explained. To him, the rolling country accompanying his drive from Maryville to





Conception's basilica, where the shooter killed himself. Submitted photo.

Conception College is an unveiling of modern man's pretense, an oasis awash in prayer. One day, the bounty of green was narrowed to a sliver of asphalt bearing an object careening closer and closer, radiating white and flashing blue and red. A disturber of the peace: an ambulance.

Another chapter, "Crooked Lines," features Johnson's stay in the monastery four years prior to the shooting, the title borrowed from a saying by Fr. Hugh Tasch, a monk and theology professor at Conception. Tasch told Johnson "God draws straight with crooked lines" after witnessing him refuse the Eucharist by crossing himself, only for the priest to administer the wafer anyway. Johnson had felt estranged, unfit to receive the body of Christ the same as the monks.

"Passages" is an homage to the people who reconstituted Johnson's faith. An avid reader, Johnson doesn't minimize the role of literary giants such as Albert Camus and Fyodor Dostoevsky as well as William Least Heat-Moon whose *Blue Highways*, an ode to America's backroads, reminded him of the spirit of place. But it was the people in his life that were the true resuscitators.

It was in his wife's continual prayer, a charge by his friend Deacon Linda Yeager (St. Peter's, Kansas City) that Johnson wasn't trusting God, and a diagnosis by Bonnie Malone (a

DEBRIEFED

WHAT IS IT?

Murder and Redemption at a Benedictine Abbey

WHO WROTE IT?

Paul Johnson (Christ Church, St. Joseph)

IN A NUTSHELL

On the morning of June 10, 2002, the tranquility of Conception Abbey in Missouri was shattered when a troubled man named Robert Lloyd Jeffress quietly walked in and shot four Benedictine monks, killing two and injuring two more, before turning his weapon on himself. No motive was ever given for this senseless act. Paul Johnson was a professor at the abbey seminary who had lost his faith in the wake of his younger brother's sudden death in 2001. In *Murder and Redemption at a Benedictine Abbey*, he describes how the Benedictine faith community responded to the horrible tragedy, how it affected his own spiritual journey, and how healing and faith were ultimately restored, both in the larger community to which he belonged, and in his own heart.

spiritual director who is associate rector at Calvary Church in Memphis) that Johnson was experiencing the Dark Night of the Soul.

Perhaps it is the monks to whom Johnson owes his greatest debt. Upon arriving at the murder scene, Johnson noticed a division between the body bags: the shooter apart from the monks. Fr. Gregory Polan, then president-rector of the college, intervened. He insisted the bodies be transported together, saying "we are not separated in death." In his book, Johnson calls Polan, "an indelible image of Benedictine grace and peace." In his homily for the deceased men, Polan said that when "brutal deeds are enacted, it calls for heroic and radical forgiveness." Later, when Johnson openly questioned the existence of God, Fr. Patrick Caveglia didn't cower nor offer up proof to defy Johnson's testimony; his eyes locked Johnson's and he advised him not to dissociate himself from practitioners of the faith: "God will speak to you through these people." At the book's end, Johnson admits that while he may not be entirely resolved of doubt, he knows where he can always find God. "Not in our self-centered, super-sized, throwaway culture," but in a Benedictine abbey.

— HUGH WELSH



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