

Volunteers help flood-ravaged Minot

Two days before the Minot flood hit, Gretchen Stenehjem and her colleagues at First International Bank & Trust in Watford City heard the warning. She responded by pulling together a crew from Watford City and staff from other branches who went to Minot to clear out contents of a sister bank located near the river.

“The Minot bank had been sandbagged and protected with an 18-foot clay dike, but as we know, the flood was way higher than predicted,” Gretchen says. “It broke the dike and the bank was destroyed.”

When the water receded a few weeks later, Gretchen was horrified by what she saw:

“The bank as well as other businesses and the homes in the area were

devastated. There was no electricity, no water and no sewer service. The bank had to be bulldozed.”

She returned several times to Minot to help fellow employees who were distraught by their flood-damaged homes.

“One Sunday morning after that when I was a scripture reader in church, I got on my soap box and urged the congregation to go to Minot to help,” Gretchen recalls. “That very afternoon, Bishop Narum came to our church for an ordination and the congregation heard again about the situation in Minot. He told them, ‘We are God’s people and they need us there.’”

Gretchen and her group contacted Lutheran Disaster Response, a program of Lutheran Social Services of ND, and they were assigned to the home of an elderly couple.

“It had been a darling house, but it was a disaster inside and out,” she recalls. “There was black mold everywhere. We had to take it down to the studs.”

Gretchen encourages others to volunteer and says she has found Lutheran Disaster Response adept at finding a job suitable to each person’s particular skills and stamina.

“It’s a wonderful experience,” Gretchen says. “The homeowners tell you how the volunteers bring back the hope that they lost.”

Fargo team to Minot

Over coffee in Pastor Steve Berntson’s office at Messiah

Lutheran Church in Fargo, the pastor and two fellow flood volunteers reminisce about their experiences in Minot.

“When you think back, what you did most weekends doesn’t really stand out in your memory,” Pastor Steve says. “But we will remember that weekend

we spent volunteering in Minot.”

Pastor Steve along with congregation

hope returns

President Barry Argabright and member Jeff Rasmussen were recalling the Friday in August that they drove to Minot in Barry’s RV along with two other volunteers—church member Brady Vick and Barry’s daughter Chelsi, a student at Concordia College in Moorhead, MN.

The congregation pitched in to raise enough money for the trip plus a sizable donation for flood relief. It took only a few weeks after contacting Lutheran Disaster Response for the volunteers to be ready to hit the road.

The family had lived in the home the volunteers were assigned to only a few years and had many years left on the mortgage. The basement was filled with muck and the couple and two teenagers were living in a pop-up camper in a friend’s driveway while waiting to get into a FEMA trailer.

“The family worked right alongside us, and we gutted the main floor in two days,” Barry says. “When we got there, the dad was distraught and depressed. But by the end of the weekend, it was gratifying to see the improvement in his attitude just from our being there to help.”

Pastor Steve adds, “Anyone who feels called to help, I’d urge you to go to Minot. You are so needed.” ☺



Volunteers from Messiah Lutheran Church in Fargo take time to worship at the home of Zona Vick, Barry Argabright’s mother, the weekend they worked in Minot.