

Transformed



June 2023

A newsletter of TMS Global



In January a tornado tore through Selma, Alabama, causing extensive damage. Even months after the storm hit, some homes remain unlivable.

Whatever storms may come

TMS Global cross-cultural witnesses serve community in the aftermath of a tornado and beyond.

On January 12, 2023, a tornado tore through Selma, Alabama. The nearly half-mile wide twister left significant damage including collapsed homes and uprooted trees. Amazingly, there was no loss of life in the city. Even months after the tornado hit, some homes remain unlivable.

A team of TMS Global cross-cultural witnesses (CCWs) live in Selma where they serve the community year-round. In the aftermath of the storm, they shifted their focus to tornado recovery as well.

Normally, Jennifer Ford spends her time mentoring youth in Selma. She coaches a Girls on the Run program, teaches kids how to garden, and substitute teaches at an elementary school. Jennifer was at the school when the tornado hit.

“I thank God for knowing Him because I was able to calm one of my students during the storm,” Jennifer says. “One student asked me to stay with her. I held her and rocked her because she was so distraught. I put on the song “Way Maker” while we were sitting there and prayed and asked God

Read more of this story, pg. 2

to give her peace and comfort. I prayed for God to calm her and let the storm pass over us.”

Helping in the aftermath

The storm did pass over Selma without any loss of life, which left Jennifer in awe of God. But there was lots of damage. Many homes became unlivable. Trees and branches were scattered everywhere. Immediately, Jennifer and her teammates Nes and Kelli Vaval and William and Morgan O’Neal looked for ways to help. Nes and William grabbed their chainsaws and began clearing fallen trees in their neighborhood. Then they moved to the hard-hit area of east Selma.

Meanwhile, Jennifer, Kelli, and Morgan baked cookies and began handing them out to people. In the days that followed they passed out meals and supplies as well.

After the tornado hit, there were several relief organizations in town. Everyone wanted to know where Jennifer, Kelli, Morgan, and their families were from.

“We would tell them we were from Selma, and immediately they would have a shocked look on their faces,” Kelli says.

A historic city struggles today

That shock could be because Selma is a place where people visit, but don’t necessarily stick around to help. The town is probably best known for the role it played during the civil rights movement in the 1960s. The Selma marches, organized to protest the blocking of African Americans’ right to vote, eventually led to the passing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Kelli says though Selma is a historically important city, the town is struggling today.

“When you visit, you may be surprised at what the town looks like,” Kelli says. “You would think maybe that because they had that monumental moment in the 1960s, that Selma might be a town

that’s thriving and has fully been integrated, but it just doesn’t look like that here. There’s still a lot of separation and our downtown looks deserted and not thriving.”

A wake-up call

Nes Vaval says the storm was a wake-up call for the city. Everyone in Selma was impacted in some way.

“The tornado basically ripped Selma open and leveled it in the sense that we can’t hide anymore,” Nes says. “We have to deal with a lot of things. We have to deal with the decaying of our city. And the Lord is ready for us to do that. And He’s going to keep being patient. But I think it’s time for us to turn and repent.”

The Selma team’s mission is to walk in unity, to heal the trauma of oppression and blindness

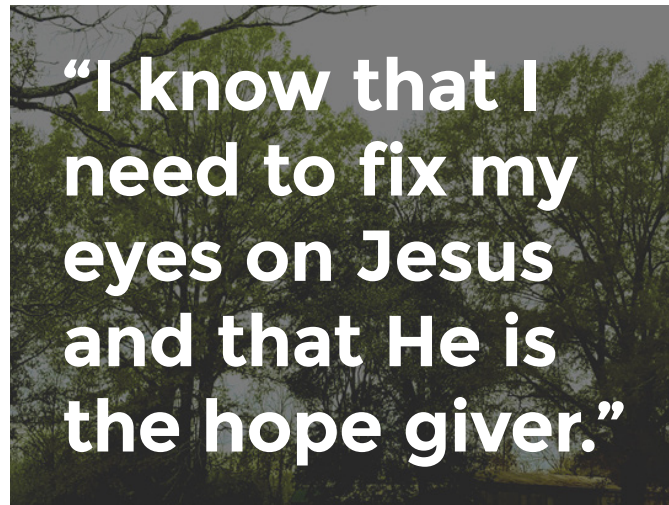
through faith in Jesus for abundant life. The tornado has connected them with a small group of people who share that vision.

“We’re just praying and hoping that we can move the needle forward. We can rebuild.” Nes says.

Fixing eyes on Jesus

In the weeks after the tornado hit, Kelli says there were moments where it was hard to be hopeful. Recovery is complicated in Selma. There are people still sleeping in cars in a vacant lot because there aren’t any extra houses or many affordable hotels. There are still houses overlaid with fallen trees or tarps covering their roofs.

But Kelli notes, “I’ve had so many conversations with people whose houses are in way worse shape than mine. Some a total loss. And they are still saying God is good and that they have hope. It’s helpful for me too, that a community of believers has come together and said, ‘I know that I need to fix my eyes on Jesus and that He is the hope giver, not the circumstances of what the neighborhood





After the storm passed William O'Neal (L) and Nes Vaval (R) began helping to repair homes, while other teammates passed out food and supplies. Teammate Kelli Vaval notes, "We wanted to tell people, 'we see you, we're praying for you, God loves you, and we're so grateful that He protected you through this.'"

looks like or what people's houses look like.' It's affirmation that God is really our only hope. Our hope is not in material possessions. Our hope is not in our houses or cars or anything else. It's only in God. And I'm grateful for that because a tornado can take it all away in 10 seconds," Kelli says.

Members of the TMS Global Selma team see God at work in the city. They continue to visit people they met during the initial tornado recovery and distribute relief items as well. They say they're in the community for the long haul and are focused on long-term rebuilding.

By Jenifer Jones

For the long haul

This issue of *Transformed* is about a team of cross-cultural witnesses helping to rebuild Selma, Alabama after a storm. But it's about much more. It's about a famous town with enormous needs and a small, racially diverse band of workers who moved in for the long haul.

These, your TMS Global cross-cultural witnesses, have become a catalyst for change. They are bringing together community leaders and pastors to pray and collaborate. They are building relationships with young people, dreaming of a new generation who will choose to follow Jesus and become spiritual and political leaders for the redemption of Selma. In other words, this is a story of TMS Global workers with a passion to reach their community for Jesus.

Thank you for your investment in training, mobilizing, and serving TMS Global cross-cultural witnesses all over the world. They are pouring into their communities—offering Christ for the redemption of their cities, towns, and villages. What a privilege to serve in ministry with you!



Max Wilkins

Max Wilkins
President & CEO

TRAIN, MOBILIZE, and SERVE cross-cultural workers around the world!



It is your support that enables our cross-cultural workers to live and serve in communities around the world, sharing the love and message of Jesus with their neighbors.

Please make a gift today to help us TRAIN, MOBILIZE, and SERVE more cross-cultural workers to share the gospel and equip local churches to reach out in mission locally, regionally, and internationally.

Thank you for your support! Because of your generosity, people have been introduced to the good news of Jesus and their lives have been transformed by His love.



Automate your giving!

Automated monthly giving simplifies the process for you, helps us count on you, and increases the efficiency of the kingdom work we are doing.

It's a win-win-win.

tms-global.org/give

3 EASY WAYS YOU CAN GIVE NOW!



GIVE ONLINE:

Make an immediate impact by giving securely on our website at **tms-global.org/give**



GIVE BY MAIL:

Return your gift to the P.O. address below.



GIVE BY TELEPHONE:

You can also give your gift by calling **800.478.8963**.



TMS Global | P.O. Box 936559 | Atlanta, GA 31193-6559