Grace to you, and peace from Hattiesburg, Mississippi. On Sunday February 10, 2013, a powerful tornado (winds up to 170 mph) ripped through Lamar and Forrest County, demolishing 600+ homes, churches, and businesses, and damaging hundreds of others. Many people have reached out and asked “How can I help?” Here’s one way. Feel free to share this with friends.

Here are some pictures showing the extent of the devastation wrought by the tornado:

http://s118.beta.photobucket.com/user/wesbrooks1/library/Westminster%20Presbyterian%20Tornado%20Damage%202-11-2013

http://s118.beta.photobucket.com/user/wesbrooks1/library/Westminster%20Presbyterian%20Church%202-10-2013

First, the good news: miraculously, no one was killed or badly injured! Thanks be to God!

**Worship:** Our friends at Parkway Heights United Methodist Church have taken us in. We went to their Ash Wednesday service which was very moving, and we use their sanctuary on Wednesday evenings (at 6 pm) and Sunday mornings (at 9:30). They have a lovely facility and our Sunday School classes meet at 11:00 am while they are in worship. We are very happy to be their guests, and they are treating us like family. This is a great blessing!

**Office Space:** Kay is “officing” at Owens Business Machines. Getting copies made is not a problem! Tommy has an office at Parkway Heights. I am mobile (Silverado and cell phone work for me). Hopefully we will all be reunited eventually, but for now, this is working fine.

**Our Much-Loved Kilgen Organ:** The day after the storm we dismantled and protected the pipes. Our organ builders (David and Susan Finch) believe the organ will be fine after some repairs. Miraculously, the roof over the upper chambers kept wind and rain at bay.

**Parking:** Won’t be a problem now. We’ll have plenty of room for parking because our three outbuildings got smushed and will be removed.

**Codes:** The windows, bathrooms, and electrical service in our building will be brought up to code.
Now for some of the challenges we are facing:

**Outbuildings**: The McCaa House (college and youth ministries), Jones House (Presbytery Office and Share/Care), and the Wright House (Christian Women’s Job Corp) were destroyed by wind and pine trees. They will be demolished when the asbestos in the Wright House is abated. This is a big loss for us, but fully covered by insurance.

**Insurance**: we have insurance with a good company and a good agent. However, the devastation was horrific, and they have not yet determined the structural integrity of the building. It is too early to know how much it will cost us to repair and rebuild. We are hopeful.

**Re-Building Fund**: Before the tornado, we had plans to expand our facilities. Our building fund will now become a RE-building fund!

**Grief and Loss**: Seeing our once proud building so deeply wounded is painful, especially for our senior members and children, who don’t understand what this means. One of my seminary professors used to remind us, “The earth is not our home.” So true. Our citizenship is in heaven. That’s easy to forget. This tornado brought this home dramatically. If you can find us on Face Book, you can see pictures of our prayer service in the bombed out sanctuary. Very healing.

**Next Steps**: Assess damage. Adjust loss. Hire architects. Rebuild. When we get our building situation squared away, we will turn our attention and energies toward the community. There are hundreds of uninsured and underserved people in Hattiesburg who will need help for the next 3+ years. Several of our members helped establish a Volunteer Center in Hattiesburg which will welcome groups coming to re-roof and restore homes. Some of these homes are located in a floodplain, which means they can’t be torn down and rebuilt, but they can be “repaired.” Some of them need extensive repairs.

Katrina taught us to accept help when it’s offered. You can contribute by sending checks payable to:

Westminster Relief Fund
BancorpSouth c/o Debbie Hudson
124 Hardy Street
Hattiesburg, MS, 39401.

You can also contribute online by going to our website at [www.wpchattiesburg.com](http://www.wpchattiesburg.com) and clicking the “Online Giving” tab. Please remember us in your prayers. We are battered but not defeated. Your love, prayers, and support lift our spirits!

Blessings in Christ,

Steve Ramp