

The storms of August 9

by Donald Wood

(Pastor, Fruitport Congregational UCC)

Our community was hit hard on an otherwise peaceful Sunday evening, August 9, 2009. The television meteorologists called them "straight-line winds," with gusts up to 70 miles per hour. But I — like many of you — am a make-believe meteorologist, and I say that we were visited by a tornado, or a series of mini-twisters. I base this amateurish opinion on the randomness of the destruction, the positioning of the trees that were knocked down, etc. It didn't seem like the destruction we had about ten years ago, when "straight-line winds" swept through our area and did widespread, but pretty identical-looking and consistent damage.

Our community was devastated, especially for the first two or three days. Many homes were destroyed, and of course, along with them, many dreams were dashed. Without power, phones, or (in many cases) water; families were angry, frustrated, despondent. Waiting for insurance companies to return phone calls, not to mention waiting for adjusters to arrive on the scene, became a pastime for many of our area residents that bordered on a new "sport" or game, one in which said residents would much rather have avoided. And, of course, our food was spoiling and was being discarded.

As believing Christians and loved children of God, we always try to look for the "silver linings" in situations like this. Not to discount or make light of the trauma that many went through, and are *still* going through, there are indeed some bright spots shining through the gloom and destruction.

First and foremost, of course, in our community there were no fatalities, nor even any serious injuries. For that we can be most thankful. There was also a very noticeable "sense of community" in evidence. Neighbors who might not communicate too much on a regular basis, were suddenly going around their neighborhoods, chain saw and rake in hand, giving assistance to others. Communication among people was refreshing, unusual, almost previously unheard-of. Friendships were started, or re-kindled. Crises bring a community together like nothing else, except maybe a local school football championship, or the death of a long-time civic leader.

Second, the things lost were just that — things. Granted, these "things" might represent a lifetime of hard work and they might represent significant financial loss, insurance companies notwithstanding. But they are still just things — things that can be replaced and things that are not really ours to begin with. Material wealth is a loan to us from God. It pales in comparison to the things that are of far greater value: Relationships with others, and, especially, our relationship with our heavenly Father.

The apostle Paul, in his letter to the church of Philippi, wrote this: "I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:11-13, NIV).

Many of us wonder why a loving God would allow something like this to happen to our little community. Is He testing us? Have we been unfaithful and thus are being punished? Is He angry with us? Is it okay for us to be angry with Him?

There are no quick and easy answers to these questions. People who flee from God because they feel He has deserted them, need to be reminded that it is in times of distress when we need Him the most, just as we need the support and love of our neighbors, friends, and families. God has not abandoned us. Again, not to make light of the disastrous results of the storm in the lives of some of our people, in the overall scheme of things, this is a minor bump in the road of life. We've made it through rough times before. Besides the winds of ten years ago, we recall the tragedy and heartbreak of 9-11-01.

We are a nation built on resiliency, strength and perseverance, and our little community mirrors these attributes. With God's continuing grace and love, we will get through this situation, also. God is good all the time!•



A familiar sight since the August 9 storm, Consumers Energy workers restoring power to the area.

Storm brings problems

Story and photos by Harry and Heidi Wojahn

The devastating windstorm of August 9 caused damage, power-outages and expense for many area residents.

Since the storm hit, we have seen many people out working to rebuild and help others. The true character of our community was displayed as volunteers, clean-up crews, road workers and power officials came forward to restore our area. Family, neighbors, friends and even perfect strangers showed their concern for others in the rebuilding and recovery efforts.



The corner of Bridge and Third will never be quite the same, having lost 41 trees.



The remains of this tree are a good example of the power of the August 9 storm.



Successful block party held

(Submitted by Abundant Life Pentecostal Tabernacle)

Abundant Life Pentecostal Tabernacle in Cloverville hosted its 2nd annual block party blessing the community event on Saturday, August 30 at 2 p.m.

The event was held on the church property at 3445 Dangle Road, sponsored by the LIFE group. A total of 75 visitors registered for free gifts and giveaways as they braved intermittent rain showers and gusty winds. The weather did little to dampen the spirits of the church members and guests, however, especially the children. Special games were set up for the children, along with free hot dogs, punch, popcorn, and cotton candy.

The block party was highlighted by the presentation of Wal-Mart and Wesco gift cards, school supplies, backpacks, toys, sporting goods, restaurant gift certificates, and more.

The church also hosted a similar event at Rowan Park in Muskegon Heights on August 15. At that event, 188 people registered for the prizes.

The congregation at Abundant Life is excited to be a part of this life-changing event that witnessed 24 baptisms in the last two weeks. To God be the glory! Pastor Ron Prather and the congregation wish to thank all the local businesses and the city of Muskegon Heights for their generous donations which made this community event a great success.

The church meets at 10 a.m. for Sunday school and worship; Sunday evenings at 6 p.m.; and Wednesday word/worship at 7:30 p.m.

All are welcome to Abundant Life!•

Do you find yourself sitting idle in church and doing nothing?

(Submitted by Axiom Press)

Where Do I Serve You, Lord? is the title of a new book by Shirley (Wahl) Stahl. The former Muskegon area resident, the author of the book, encourages believers to use their gifts and talents to build the church and serve the needs of the entire body.

The church is described in the Bible as Christ's body. Each part of the body plays a special role. No part can be ignored and no part eliminated. Everyone is important for the body to be used the way God has intended.

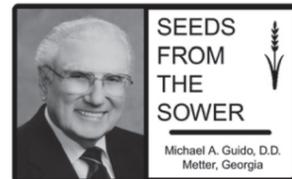
This book is written for the Christian who is confident of his or her salvation, but ineffectively sits in a church doing nothing about spreading the Gospel, showing little spiritual life, and having a compromised concept of what it means to be a servant. This person is unfortunately incapable of "doing" because he does not realize it is Christ in him who will do the work. He finds himself being a member of the team but not engaged on the playing field.

After reading *Where Do I Serve You, Lord?* the reader will see that Christ's most effective servants are really just ordinary people. Stahl affirms that you may have experienced failure or unbelief preventing you from pursuing serving the Lord. However, she reveals how many have made choices to change their situations; ultimately opening the door to walk closer to Him, to grow in knowledge, and to actively serve Him in their personal lives and in the church.

The author is currently scheduling speaking engagements and would love to visit in churches and other Christian groups in the area.

If you would like additional information or have questions, please contact her at (616) 765-3339; or (616) 557-2333 or email nash@tm.net.•

These pictures from the early 1940's were brought in by Jane Baxter Hansen. Evidently we had quite a storm when many of the mature trees were destroyed in Pomona Park about 70 years ago.



Years ago Bill wanted to become a profession ball player. He was offered a contract to catch for the best team in the world, but his father wouldn't let him.

"I'll leave home," he said. But the next day he damaged his throwing arm, and there was nothing to do but become a lawyer.

Bill considered himself a failure. But he worked hard and became the Chief Justice of the United States, and later our 26th President.

His name? William Howard Taft.

Disappointed by an accident? Trust God and you'll triumph. The Bible says, "All things work together for good to them that love God."