News



People look over the damage to the Church of the Assumption following a March 3 tornado in Nashville, Tennessee. (CNS / Tennessee Register / Rick Musacchio)



by Dan Stockman

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The tornado that tore through Nashville, Tennessee, in the early hours of March 3, shredding buildings and uprooting trees, spared the St. Cecilia Motherhouse of the Nashville Dominicans.

Sister Anne Catherine, director of advancement on the Nashville campus of the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia, said that although the tornado's path of destruction was just a half-mile south of the 160-year-old motherhouse, there was no damage to the motherhouse or grounds.*

"We had not even one limb down on our property," she said.

The tornadoes that roared across Tennessee left at least 25 people dead. Dozens of people are still missing. Some homes were ripped down to their foundations.

The Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia's motherhouse* is without electricity, and power is not expected to be restored until next week at the earliest. The motherhouse has a generator to keep emergency lighting and refrigeration for food.

Sister Anne Catherine was out of town when the tornado hit. She said as she flew home, she was astounded to see from the air parts of the city seemingly untouched while other parts appeared to be leveled.

At least four parish churches were damaged, including the Church of the Assumption, the second-oldest church in Nashville, built in 1859. Once officials determine the church is structurally safe, she said, the sisters will clean it and take the vestments to the motherhouse to be hand-cleaned.

Volunteer efforts are being coordinated through Hands On Nashville, Sister Anne Catherine said, and the sisters will participate any way they can. On March 5, they took four carloads of lunches to displaced residents, volunteers, first responders and utility crews, she said.

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The sisters also took food that the Church of the Assumption had on hand and gave it to a Protestant church nearby that set up a food distribution system. Sisters are also going through affected neighborhoods to see what people need.

Sister Anne Catherine said an overwhelming number of friends across the nation have reached out to the sisters' community to make sure they were safe. She thanked everyone who has been praying for them.

Aside from no electricity, she said, life at the motherhouse continues on almost as normal. There is a vocation retreat this weekend that will take place even if the power has not been restored.

"They'll get a sense of the many ways in which poverty comes," Sister Anne Catherine said.

[Dan Stockman is national correspondent for Global Sisters Report. His email address is dstockman@ncronline.org. Follow him on Twitter or on Facebook.]

**This story has been updated to specify language about the motherhouse.*