

# TORNADO HITS INDIANA

AREA CALVARY CHAPELS RESPOND WITH THE HEART OF GOD

story by Christmas McGaughey, photos by Geraldine Wilkins

Evansville, Indiana



*A team visiting from Horizon Christian Fellowship of Indianapolis searches for tornado victim Larry Welch's belongings at Eastbrook Mobile Home Park in Evansville, IN.*



*Calvary Chapel volunteers put up a temporary fence around Kevin Snyder's backyard swimming pool.*

Sucking victims through roofs and windows, the area's deadliest tornado in decades killed 22 people and injured more than 200 others on its terrifying 42-mile run through Kentucky and southern Indiana. But survivors in storm-torn Evansville, IN, testified that God saved their lives from the 20-mile path of destruction. Area Calvary Chapels banded together to offer spiritual support and help, the only group allowed into the mobile home park where 18 residents died. Striking like a living nightmare around 2 a.m., the tornado gave little time to take cover. A survivor whose home was one of 100 others smashed to bits at the Eastbrook Mobile Home Park, Larry Welch told local Calvary Pastor Darrick Hayden his story.

### Survivors Share

"It was bad," Larry said, his voice faltering. "It was bad." He'd been watching TV in his room and keeping an eye on weather reports when suddenly he heard things hitting the side of the mobile home. Howling winds prompted him to get his 71-year-old mother. "He was yanking on the door to open it, but it wouldn't budge; and then the roof was ripped off, and he went out the roof," said his brother, Scott Welch. "It threw him a block and a half, and Mom went out the window." It took Scott and his wife two hours to find his mother and brother, whom they presumed dead amid the rubble full of bodies. Though their trailer was thrown

nearly 50 yards, both residents survived with non-life threatening injuries.

Darrick, who pastors New Beginnings Christian Fellowship in rural Evansville, offered long-term support. "We want to walk with you guys through this. You're not alone," he told them. Putting his arm around Scott, he prayed with the two brothers, then asked them what specific items they wanted most to find. A team visiting from Horizon Christian Fellowship of Indianapolis combed through glass, wood and mangled furniture.

"Now, Scott calls me to talk. The Lord made a connection there, built a relationship,"

**"He was yanking on the door to open it, but it wouldn't budge; and then the roof was ripped off, and he went out the roof."**

Scott Welch



*Resident Andy Scheessele, right, and volunteer Brandon Grayson recover photos blown on a roof top.*

Evansville, Indiana



*A volunteer searches for Larry Welch's wallet and strong box—items he specifically requested.*

Darrick said later. "We didn't realize how important that window of opportunity was. We were the only team allowed to go in; they came and bulldozed everything right after that."

Another woman, Sherry Southgate, said God protected her family when debris began flying and their SUV started bouncing up and down. "We could hear it, like a freight train coming," she said. She covered her son in the floorboard and prayed. "I was praying as loud as I could, 'Keep us safe, Lord! Keep us safe!'" An elderly woman from the trailer park told Pastor Chuck Hedges of inner-city CC Evansville that the Holy Spirit helped

her dig her way out of debris though she was severely injured.

A few miles away, several brick homes had been ripped apart. The Calvary team hoisted and hacked a large tree from a roof while neighbor Kevin Snyder watched. He'd been standing in the kitchen, unaware of the tornado, when the 200-mph wind wrenched off the outer brick wall and slammed him against an interior wall so hard he left two holes in the Sheetrock. Crawling from the rubble in the dark, he heard a young girl screaming for her daddy. "I thought it was a bomb," he said. "It really felt like the end of the world." In his backyard lay the floor of

the house behind him, split neatly down the middle by a tree.

The bewildered and bereft tornado victims hold a special place in Darrick Hayden's heart because Evansville is his hometown. After he accepted Christ at CC Evansville, he went to study at Calvary Chapel Bible College in Twin Peaks, CA. At the school, he met his wife, Jennifer—from CC Vista—and returned to the Midwest to minister. Just as the tornado victims know God miraculously saved their lives, so the Haydens know God has miraculously built His church—breaking bondage into freedom and multiplying a handful for a multitude.



*Pastor Darrick Hayden teaches the Word where he used to party as a youth.*

*The auditorium that once held rock concerts now has sounds of worship.*

“That was a big lesson for me, a very big lesson: not to go to man but to God, because God is our provider.”

Pastor Darrick Hayden

Twenty years ago, Darrick was a teenager partying at Camp Kramer by the lake. Now he's the pastor of the camp-turned-church. “There was not a bigger party spot in this whole area,” he said. Shaking his head with a smile, he added: “It used to be a place of bondage, and now it's used to set people free.” He is still amazed how the Lord gave them the million-dollar property when they had only \$500 in the bank. God also taught Darrick some lessons about waiting in faith.

*My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him.*

Psalm 62:5

### Wrestling and Waiting

Starting in 1997 as a college ministry, the group soon became a home fellowship church with several families. They relocated to a hotel conference room and finally to an old movie/video shop on the main drag in Evansville. Swelling to 150 people, the church outgrew the store and the lease ended. “The whole experience was like when the children of Israel left Egypt and the Lord parted the Red Sea,” Darrick said. “We had to get out of there, and we had no place to go.” With a small group of mature believers from his church, he visited the 25-acre camp and found that it

was already equipped with what he'd hoped to build one day—water slides, an outdoor amphitheater, a large auditorium and a lake suitable for swimming and fishing. While it perfectly suited his long-term vision for a Bible college/community outreach center, the price was a bit beyond his comprehension—\$1 million.

His first surprise came when the owner, who ran the camp as a family business for nearly 25 years, offered it to New Beginnings for \$460,000 with a down payment of \$100,000. Darrick felt the Lord leading him to step out in faith and share with the congregation that God would provide the



*Darrick welcomes college students after the service. The church holds a weekly Bible study at the University of Southern Indiana.*

money. “It was like God telling Moses to go toward the Red Sea.” He obeyed; then the owner cut the down payment in half and accepted \$500 to hold the lake property for a month.

Waiting for the Lord to provide was “a real wrestling match,” Darrick said. First, he asked a wealthy friend for the money, but the man tried to buy the property for his own ministry. “That was a big lesson for me, a very big lesson: not to go to man but to God, because God is our provider,” Darrick said. He approached other people about subdividing and selling part of the land. “But then the Lord convicted me; I had to

go back and tell them I was sorry—it wasn't for sale.”

The one-month deadline came, Darrick said, and “I was literally in the church pacing and praying: ‘Lord, why are You doing this to me?’” Then the Lord prompted Mike Miller, a Christian businessman who had planted CC Evansville nearly 30 years ago, to come to the church and give Darrick the down payment money. “He said the Lord had given him a vision for this place years ago,” Darrick said. “It was then I realized it wasn't about me. It was the Lord's vision, the Lord's work.” Now, nearly 200 families attend New Beginnings Christian Fellowship.

### A Day to Remember

The camp became New Beginnings Christian Fellowship in June of 2000. Five years later, New Beginnings welcomed the community for a “Free Day at Camp Kramer” four weeks in a row. “We didn't really advertise it; the news media just grabbed it up,” Darrick said. Word spread through newspaper and radio, and hundreds of tri-State residents flocked to the church grounds. Darrick wanted to build relationships first and then share the Gospel. After church on the first Sunday, they welcomed attendees and served free food. The next week, they talked to individuals and handed out tracts. The



*Large farms, like this one near the church, dot the rural Evansville landscape.*



*From the lobby doorway, one can also see grazing cows and quiet pastures.*



*Kramer's Lake, behind the church, was once used for recreation only, but is now used to baptize believers.*



*Darrick's mother, Mary Hayden, is hugged by her granddaughters Brooke Hayden, 8, left, and Haley Schutz, 10, after service on Sunday.*

final Sunday, Darrick addressed the crowd by the lake and gave an invitation to receive Christ and be baptized. "We were expecting maybe four or five people to respond," he said. "But the Holy Spirit was just moving, and nearly 50 people came up—broken and repentant. And when they came out of the water, they had this amazing joy on their faces. It was one of the best days of my life." Darrick's wife, Jennifer, recalled: "It was overwhelming. I thought, 'Lord, You are at work.' It's not about us; it's about the work of the Spirit. He's the One who brings the harvest and draws all men unto Himself."

**Growing in the Word**

Darrick has challenged his congregation to read through the entire Bible together in 2006, because it is God's Word that transforms people's lives. Christopher Boze, 19, said God's Word and spiritual encouragement have changed his life. "Before, I was into a lot of bad things. As a child, I was always taught about Christ but never had a walk with Him," he said. "Coming here has helped me learn what that means. Any time you need to talk to someone here at the church, they'll make time to listen and give you biblical direction." Now he spends evenings reading the Bible and praying with his parents, who also attend. Jay Turpin, 17, said his family life has improved from hearing verse-by-verse Bible teaching.

Darrick hopes to start a Bible college on the grounds—all in God's time. "He's proven He wants to be Lord of it all. He's the leader, and I'm the follower," Darrick said. "It's not by our might or power but by His Spirit."

**"We were expecting maybe four or five people to respond. But the Holy Spirit was just moving, and nearly 50 people came up—broken and repentant."**

**Darrick Hayden**

**New Beginnings  
Christian Fellowship**  
11420 Middle Mt.  
Vernon Rd.  
Evansville, IN 47712  
812-985-5288  
[nbcf@nbcfcampus.org](mailto:nbcf@nbcfcampus.org)  
[www.nbcfcampus.org](http://www.nbcfcampus.org)



*Children abound at the church; here, youth study the Bible.*



*Believers fellowship and encourage one another after service.*



*Believers of all ages worship the Lord in song.*



*Mike and Carol Smith greet believers arriving for worship.*