

From Mitchell Knapp, Omaha, NE, Des Moines, IA, Watertown and Sioux Falls, SD...

Dateline South Dakota:

The storm that hit the entire state of South Dakota early this week has been devastating and is being termed a natural disaster. It's not on the same level as a hurricane, but is having a major impact on people's lives and incomes, just the same. All of our members are affected, and most, being in the country, have sustained a major impact on their daily lives. We have been able to contact most of the brethren and know of no injuries, or life threatening emergencies, but major inconvenience and extra expense is the norm. Snow, unlike flooding, happens every year, and we're used to it, but this is an unusually nasty storm. Two of our elders are right in the midst of the aftermath—in the eastern end of the state. I thought others might be interested in excerpts from messages I've received from them. I'm sending it with their permission and took out the personal names and info.

From Harlan and Janice Spieker, Willow Lake, SD, Wednesday, November 30, 2005:

“Will give you an update on our blizzard/ice storm situation. We are without electricity, phone and cell phone. I can communicate with e-mail because we are on satellite. We are generating our power with generators. [A brother] has a gas stove for cooking and is heating with a fireplace. Power went out on Sunday night and looks now like it will be several days until it can be restored. We are running the tractors 24/7 and [our son] was able to get diesel fuel yesterday in Willow Lake...they couldn't pump any fuel but had some on the farm delivery truck and he got that! We got the cattle home from the cornstalks because all of the wires for the electric fence went down...can feed and pump water because of the generators. I think that the town of Huron has gotten back on power.

“This morning the governor gave a report, after taking a helicopter tour yesterday. The National Guard is helping with coordination...8000 plus power poles are down— maybe up to 10,000, and miles of line are affected. 50,000 meter customers were out (has now been restored down to only 29,000 meters), 19 of the states 29 distribution plants are still out. 800 utility specialists are working (200 from other states). They have been bringing in many big generators from neighboring states. Ten semi loads of poles are coming from Canada. At one time 60+ shelters were set up for people to go to. The last that I heard, a generator was on the way to Willow Lake.

“Snow is coming into the southern part of the state today, which they don't need, as the Mitchell area had 20 inches from this first storm. The lines that are up are still covered with ice, so you know what wind does to that. Tonight the temps are supposed to drop into the 0-10 degree range. We are so comfortable with our standby running all of the time (the only time that the house doesn't have power is when Harlan moves the tractor, etc down to the feeding area). Well, guess this is enough for now as this message is getting long....We are OK, but there's lots of extra efforts for Harlan to keep things going! Janice”

From Ken and Diane Skorseth, Gary, SD, Tuesday, November 29, 2005:

“The Storm began for us on Sunday, Nov 27, with drizzle and rain all day. By Monday morning, an inch of clear, extremely heavy ice coated everything. Virtually all of Deuel County, including all the towns, lost power at the same hour when 50 to 60 mile an hour wind gusts hit us. The 10 to 15 inches of snow that was supposed to come last night didn't happen. It looks like maybe four inches here. So things are looking up. They are still advising absolutely no travel this morning, so I'm not sure when I will be able to get to work.

“Also, I need to help get the neighbor's cows fed and watered. Water is a real issue since we are still out of power up here and the well pumps and stock fountain heaters aren't working. We haven't figured out yet to get water to those cattle. Dianne and I have a well that flows 24 hrs a day, but don't have a large tank to haul the water to his place. This fellow is gone to a national rodeo event. Another neighbor and I are doing his chores.

It's easy when things are normal. Not so easy now.

"I think all of our brethren are doing fine. [A member, who lives a few miles away] told me last night a lot of the power lines are down up in that community. My brother told me there are miles of line down in the Toronto and Astoria areas. It really is a disaster. However, I would be quick to point out Dianne and I are doing fine. Have a good day."

From Ken the next day, Wednesday, November 30, 2005:

"Hi again. We got power again in the middle of the night and it has stayed on this time. However, I hear radio alerts that we should be prepared for intermittent outages as the crews continue to work on the lines. [A member in town] called this morning and offered his small generator since they never were without power except for a very short time, and now it looks like the temps will stay cold enough that ice isn't much of a risk. We don't need it and I told him to call [the same member, who lives a few miles away] as they feel they will be without power for some time. [A family 10 miles east in Minnesota] are without power, but are doing ok. We haven't been able to reach [a members northwest of here] since all the phones seem to be out in that area. In fact, it's very hard to find a mile of east/west road that doesn't have lines down!

"[Our daughter and son-in-law, two hours to the west] are without power and had a incredible amount of snow. They finally got their hands on a generator late yesterday. Their only source of heat until then was a stove with four burners for cooking. We have little contact with them because phone service is intermittent. [Members three hours to the west] never were without power, but have nearly 20 inches of snow now!! One week after weaning calves - not good! I think [seven members in Brookings] either never were without power, or were for just a short time. Dad has been without power since very early Monday, but has a good backup propane wall heater and Astoria has been able to maintain water pressure so toilets work, etc. That's about all we know. Stay in touch and take care."

From Janice, Friday morning, December 2, 2005

"Hi to everyone....Just a little update from the Spiekers....We are doing OK with extra efforts!! Temp was down to 15 degrees below 0 last night and that adds more stress to everything outside. We have telephone service (most of the time!) but still use the e-mail for most of our communication.

Want to let you know that we will not be in Sabbath services tomorrow (no song leader or pianist)...Willow Lake may be on generator by tomorrow but it is still going to be awhile before we are online. We need to keep the tractors and generators going with temps like this....and it is too risky to leave the place with that much equipment going unsupervised...need to run the equipment around the clock to keep waterers, etc., from freezing...[our son] is still disconnecting his tractor/generator and going to neighbors to help pump water and feed on a temporary basis.

Were able to get more diesel fuel yesterday from [the town of] Clark (Willow Lake is out). Still can't pump fuel but they are using the farm delivery trucks for diesel. Hope that we miss the snow that they are predicting now for Friday PM.

We are very comfortable as far as household...but cold for the guys working outside with equipment and cattle. Have a good Sabbath and keep in touch.....e-mail is still the most dependable (so glad to have the satellite!!) Janice"

So, the drama continues. The roads are covered with about an inch of clear ice. More snow is falling, with high wind predicted, as winter slams into these two mainly rural churches.

Mitchell Knapp