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# Joplin Stained Glass Theater To Return

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*Special to the ShowMe Times  
From Baptist Press*

JOPLIN, Mo. (BP)--The cast and crew of the musical "I Remember Mama" had just finished their final performance when the killer EF-5 tornado ripped through Joplin, Mo.

Two people were killed and others sustained serious injuries when the May 22 tornado destroyed the theater and much of the Missouri community.

But in the wake of the tragedy, theater personnel said they felt a call from God to continue sharing the Gospel and strengthening believers through plays and musicals.

Though each Stained Glass Theatre is autonomous, there is a network of related theaters throughout Missouri started by a professor at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar.

Tammy Aggus, director of the Joplin theater's next scheduled production, was helping strike down the set when the tornado hit. She told Baptist Press the experience was "just chaos."

"One of the guys ... came running from the front doors of the theater yelling at us that we were still in the theater that we 'need to get downstairs now,'" Aggus recounted. "But the staircase is really narrow, and I ended up between the stage and the first row of seats just on the floor there.

"We dropped where we were because the front doors were blowing real hard. The windows started breaking out in the theater. It was just chaos. So I hit the floor, covered my head and prayed."

After approximately 20 seconds, the tornado subsided and Aggus surveyed the damage. Though she had only cuts and scrapes and a sore back, she saw a friend near her having trouble breathing and began trying to help others. One of her main goals was to calm the teenagers and children in the basement who had been in the cast.

"We got out of the building as quickly as we could because it was never a real sturdy building to start with," she said. "So we weren't sure how well it was going to hold together after being damaged like that."

The two dead were Sally Moulton, a cast member, and Randy Mell, a longtime theater patron and season ticket holder, Aggus said.

"When you do a show, you're with these people almost constantly ... for six weeks, and you always get really close," she said. "And now it's just even more. I was really glad I could be there for the kids because I'm really close to a lot of them. Most of them were there without their parents."

As a board member of the theater, Aggus said she anticipates conversations in the future about whether to rebuild.

Steven Jenkins, administrative director of the Stained Glass Theatre in Ozark, Mo., who has been involved with the Joplin theater in the past, recapped the extent of the damage.

"The entire top floor is gone. It's wiped clean. The floor of the top floor is in the basement. So getting the children out was fairly difficult," Jenkins told BP. "And of the four basement walls, I understand that at least one is still standing. That's about it."

Because rent for the 200-seat building was only \$600 per month, Jenkins said finding another suitable building at an affordable price will be difficult. None of the building's contents were insured.

"My personal belief -- and I believe it's the general feeling of everyone involved with Stained Glass -- is that we're God-driven and God-ordained," Jenkins said. "God meant for us to have a theater in Joplin. I don't feel anything that tells me that that's no longer the case. So I believe they will continue."

As part of the theater's commitment to Christian values, all actors commit to church attendance and sign a pledge not to do anything in public that will tarnish the organization's reputation. Typically, shows begin or end with prayer, and productions aim at helping people grow as Christians, Jenkins said.

"When you're doing God's will, our enemy doesn't like it," he said. "And attacks of the enemy have been continuous since the beginning of that ministry. And like Christ's crucifixion, I think the enemy thinks he's finally won. But I don't believe God works that way. I believe victory will come out of this tragedy because we can't let the enemy win."

Aggus requested prayer for the Stained Glass Theatre family "as they recover physically and emotionally."

***Photo Above: Stained Glass Theatre in Joplin, Mo, destroyed in the May 22 tornado, had shared the Gospel and strengthened local believers through plays and musicals. Cast member Sally Moulton and longtime patron Randy Mell were killed in the building.***

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