



Remembering with thanksgiving

Union marks first anniversary of the Feb. 5 tornado

A remarkable recovery from tornado damage left the Union University community thankful -- both for God's providence and for those who helped the university in many different ways during the past year.

A special service at the Carl Perkins Civic Center in Jackson was designed for both expressions of thanksgiving.

The event, titled "Remembering February 5: An Evening of Thanksgiving," included a moment of silence at 7:02 p.m., the precise time the tornado touched down on campus one year earlier.

"It was one of the darkest nights in Union history, but there have been so many good days since," said Union University President David S. Dockery. "We've learned that God can take actions that seem so bad to us and use them for redemptive good."

The event featured a dinner and a worship service with a 250-voice community choir, 30-piece orchestra, Scripture readings and a new video chronicling Union's progress in the past 12 months.

About 1,700 attended the service, in which scores of people were identified who helped with Union's recovery and rebuilding: firefighters and rescue workers, civic

leaders, members of the media, healthcare providers, churches, contractors, parents, alumni, faculty, staff, trustees and other volunteers who gave of their time and resources to get the university to where it is today.

More than 5,000 volunteers worked on the campus in the year after the tornado, and more than 8,000 donors contributed more than \$17 million to the relief and rebuilding efforts.

"From the bottom of our hearts, we want you to know of our deep, deep gratitude," Dockery said.

But the renewal and restoration hasn't just taken place to the physical campus, Dockery said. It has taken place in the lives of Union students, faculty, staff and trustees as well.

"One of the big things for me has been understanding what God's presence really looks like in my life," said Courtney Bragg, a junior from Birmingham, Ala. "There are times, I think, in everybody's life when we don't necessarily understand what God's doing in the circumstances. We don't understand how he's working or where he is. But we know that he's there."



Dr. Dockery prays as a moment of silence was observed as the clock tower chimed at 7:02 p.m. February 5, 2009 marking the one year anniversary of the EF-4 tornado that hit the Union Campus causing more than \$40 million in damages.

Bragg said the past year has helped her to believe even more strongly in the promises of Scripture, and has made her realize that it's important to choose to believe that God is real and present, even when his hand can't always be seen.

For Kevin Furniss, a senior from Bartlett, Tenn., the last year has given him a renewed appreciation for life. Furniss was trapped for three hours in a collapsed building after the tornado strike and at times thought he was going to die.

But since then, he's worked in a summer camp, and gone on mission trips to Honduras and Kenya.

"It has really shown that it wasn't just protection that night, but it was a plan for the rest of my life, that God is still in control and has a future and a plan for me," Furniss said. ☛