Video and photos of the earthquakes and tsunami in Japan in March were mind-boggling. I was talking to Sgt. Jeff Gibson of our local National Guard unit about another story at that time, and I had to ask—theirs being an engineer battalion, after all—how in the world does anyone start to clean up that destruction and debris? How does anyone begin to rebuild their homes, their lives?

Last week, the scenes were repeated on our own soil, with the destruction wreaked throughout the South from a massive tornado outbreak. Now, we watched videos and photos of unbelievable devastation—miles wide and hundreds of miles long. And, now, there were also friends and family involved. And, again, how does anyone start to clean that up—rebuild homes and lives?

We hear about the assistance pouring in from neighboring communities and states. We want to help. When I see a couple standing in front of a pile of debris that was once their home, I want to come over and help them pick through it to save whatever can be saved. I want to bring them anything they can use to restore normalcy to their lives.

The best thing we can do is help from a distance. Regardless of what one thinks about the efficiency of the Red Cross, it is still the one organization that can mobilize and provide needed products and assistance in a minute. FEMA—well, one can hope it's gotten its act together and will come through for our friends and families in Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia.

Our church group decided we could help by contacting our synod to find out if any "sister" churches in hard-hit communities needed help, and then "adopt" them. Hopefully, we'll be able to contribute directly, and effectively.

Following Katrina, a lot of service groups organized mission projects for the specific purpose of rebuilding or repairing houses, churches, schools and community centers. It's an ongoing effort in Louisiana, and, now, there will be an even bigger need for our help—dollar by dollar, board by board. From near or far, let's help these folks get their lives back.

--Marian Volek