



PASTOR BOB RIETH

## **April 2nd UPDATE: MFI Media Support Team at the OSO Mudslide – Notes from Pastor Bob**

Sometimes the need for MFI's Media Support Team happens in our own backyard. That is the case with the disastrous mudslide about 50 miles north of Seattle, between Arlington and Darrington, Washington. On Saturday morning, March 22, about 10:30, with families beginning their weekends together, the ground began to slide away under a whole mountainside community, slamming and twisting everything along with it. Cutting a mile-wide swath, the force of the slide twisted cars, demolished buildings and buried everything under 40 to 70 feet of mud. A few were rescued during the first few hours. Several of those are still in intensive care in hospitals in Seattle. *Families were torn apart.* A four year old boy was pulled from the wreckage but his father and two siblings didn't make it out. The mother had been away so is now reunited with her son. One grandmother was minding a four month old baby while the mother ran to Costco to pick up baby supplies but the slide took the grandmother and the baby. There are so many stories of loss and horror.

The news people covering this story have been deeply touched by the steadfastness and strength in this small rural community. Even with so much turmoil and loss the people are bravely working in the slide area and taking care of survivors.

I have had the opportunity of meeting, visiting with and even praying with some of the news people. They have been very open with me and very appreciative that we are there for them. I have been asked a number of times to explain why we are here and expressing their appreciation for our efforts. Today, I've been invited to accompany the CBS News staff to the restricted mudslide site. I will send email updates tomorrow as I can.



Officials told us that the mud on the back nearest to the mountain is over 70 feet deep. They were thankful that for the most part that when the mud came down it pushed everything forward so most of the homes and people were pushed to the front where the mud would be 20 to 40 feet deep. Emergency personnel use hand tools to carefully scrape away layers of mud to search carefully for victims. It is very dangerous for both the responders and the search dogs.

It had been raining most every day which causes the mud to be like slurry. After about a week the sun came out which makes it easier to dig in the contaminated mud and debris.

Officials figure that the populated area destroyed was about 640 acres. Thirty-nine homes were completely destroyed and another dozen severely damaged. They figure that they would have to

move about one million truck loads of dirt to clean up the slide area. One million is such a difficult number to comprehend.

When they dig it is almost like an archeological dig. First they scrap a small amount of dirt off the top, and then they go back with forks, rakes and shovels to go over the new surface. When nothing is found they take another layer of dirt off. When something is found they sift it to make sure of what is there. When victims or body parts are found they have a moment of silence and respectfully package things to be sent to the MEs office for processing. Only after the body has been identified is the information released to the family and then to the press.

**By day eleven the death toll stands at twenty-nine who have been identified with seven who have not yet been identified and up to twenty more missing or unknown.**



On Sunday morning I went to a church service at the OSO Chapel. All of you would have been thankful for that service. The pastor is a Godly man. It was a well prepared message about how God allows suffering, but at the end He is with us. He will give us His peace and hope. He allowed members of the audience to share their experiences since the slide. They were very deeply moving situations as individuals shared how God had touched them during the past week. One mother shared how thankful she was, in spite of the loss. Through it her teenage daughter had come to accept Jesus Christ as her Savior. I do not think there was a dry eye in the room.

The pastor used an expression during the service that has become a theme thought: 'We are down, but we are not out.' They have lost their cars, homes, the land on which they lived, their clothing, memories - virtually everything they own, and yet there was a sense of hope and even joy in that chapel.

I am thankful that I have been able to encourage the pastor and volunteers as well as the media and to be a part of this community.

People have responded to this tragedy in an amazing way both financially and by sending volunteers and chaplains. But just as we have seen in other places, the news people covering this story are basically ignored and even resented. Yet it is because of their great coverage that the public has learned about this and have been able to respond so generously. The news people are surprised that the MFI Team Chaplains have come to be there for them and to bring them coffee and snacks.



We are thankful that we are able to be available to them and to show them that we care.

Please continue to pray for the people of OSO as well as the news people who are working here and those of us here to minister to them.

Thank you for your prayers, your concern and your financial support to make it possible for MFI to be available in times like these.

In His love  
Pastor Bob

**“Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love.”  
Lamentation 3:32**