

DISASTER RESPONSE COMMITTEE

Disasters are always unpredictable. They are different sizes and of different scope. Often they hit us without warning. Disasters intrude into our lives with a force of destruction, and even death. In the context of hurt, debris, and dismay, we know that the people of God - the faith community and the United Methodist connection - must put forth every effort to empower those who are affected by disasters. Impacted communities, families, and churches must be helped to move toward recovery. Volunteers in Mission and Disaster Response Committees of the United Methodist Church connection must be united in their organizational structures to offer greater effectiveness in responding to disasters.

On **February 8-10, 2007 at Mt. Sequoyah in Fayetteville, Arkansas**, the United Methodist Committee on Relief, Disaster Response Coordinators, and the United Methodist Volunteers in Mission accepted a covenant to unite and to organize for effective service. The belief and the intent is that we are strengthening the United Methodist Connection in disaster preparedness and recovery.

There is now a document called "Protocol for UMCOR/UMVIM Collaboration". In regards to a united disaster response, the organizational structure for the Relief Stage of response is given in the document as follows: "The consistent use of ERT (Early Response Teams) formed by UMVIM, as well as the addition of an UMVIM presence with UMCOR in the early assessment and guidance process will bring an improved and united presence to the disaster response. Therefore, UMCOR proposes to work with the jurisdictional UMVIM coordinators to create a team from each jurisdiction that can work with annual conferences to set up the volunteer management system following disasters. This Jurisdictional Disaster Volunteer Management Team (JDVMT) will be included in the consulting team that UMCOR creates after being invited, by the area Bishop, to assist. The structure also notes that the Conference Disaster Response Committee will be the overseer of the overall disaster response efforts". This protocol indeed clarifies the roles played by both UMCOR and UMVIM in the early days of a disaster. The collaboration will indeed strengthen the United Methodist Connection in Disaster Preparedness. The crowning point of this gathering was the covenant signing ceremony. All individuals at this conference signed the collaboration covenant to demonstrate a faith commitment to work together under the agreed collaboration document.

Uniting for an effective response in disaster was demonstrated during the **South Carolina Conference Disaster Response Winter Workshop and Training held February 22-24, 2007 at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina**. South Carolina Conference Disaster Response Chair, Lee C. Bines, and UMVIM Chair, Tony Rowell reflected a consensus of the newly established protocol for UMCOR/UMVIM collaboration. During this conference, it was emphasized that each District Coordinator must give direct leadership if recovery is to happen in any district. It was also emphasized that the District Coordinator must work in concert with the Conference Disaster Response Committee, District Superintendent, local pastors, Volunteers in Mission, and local response groups in order to effectively assist in recovery efforts. The District Coordinators who were present gave a seven-step summary plan of recovery for their district. It was agreed that such plans would be shared with District Superintendents and District Disaster Councils. The seven steps will be most essential in assisting impacted areas in recovery after disasters.

The S.C. Conference Disaster Response Committee is also in the process of updating the Conference Disaster Response Plan. More information will be forthcoming as the revised plan is materialized.

Profound appreciation is expressed to Tom Hazelwood, Director of the General United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) Emergency Services, who spent quality time at the winter training in Myrtle Beach. We also thank all District Superintendents who encouraged their District Coordinators to attend this most urgent gathering. Gratitude is equally extended to Pat Goss and Eddie Carson from the United Methodist Relief Center in Mount Pleasant, S.C. Their input and insight was most valuable as the committee planned for future involvement in disaster relief. The Reverend Charles Douglass, UMCOR consultant from the Kentucky Conference was most relevant and empowering in his presentations as our resource leader. I also personally extend special appreciation to the Reverend Willie Teague and his staff for support and assistance in the planning of the winter conference.

As the Committee on Disaster Response continues its work throughout the coming year, we remind all persons within the connection to give generously to the *One Great Hour of Sharing* Offering in March of each year. This offering is so urgent as it is used during the initial stages of relief following disasters. Further, Disaster Response Committee Chairpersons are asked to mark **August 30, 2007** and **February 21-23, 2008** on your calendars. These are the dates of our next two scheduled meetings and training. If the need arises, however, we will meet as often as necessary.

Preparing to respond to a disaster is an unending operation. We must, and will continue in our preparation efforts. Uniting is the only way to give an effective response. We thank God for giving us the insight and the courage to work together. An effective response will indeed be the result.

Lee C. Bines, Chairperson