

Conference Disaster Coordinator Report To the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference

May 1, 2018

"United in Spirit, and inspired by God's grace, we love all, welcome all, and seek justice for all."

--The Mission Statement of the United Church of Christ 2016

"Responding to the call of our Christ-centered faith, UCC Disaster Ministries supports holistic community recovery, worldwide, by engaging supporters, volunteers and partners to focus on preparedness, emergency relief and long-term recovery."

--Mission State of UCC Disaster Ministries

"Keeping Jesus and the gospel at the heart of everything we do, by 2020 we will create an ethos of expectation, experimentation and transformation."

--Conference Objectives, from PSEC VISION

2020

Since November 2016 it has been my pleasure to serve as the Conference Disaster Coordinator. In that role I oversee the Conference's work of preparedness, response, and long-term recovery as it serves as a messenger of hope, help and transformation to congregations and communities impacted by catastrophic events. Since October 2017 I have been actively involved in working with the agencies who are serving the unmet needs of the evacuees from Puerto Rico who had to leave due to Hurricane Maria and now call southeast Pennsylvania home.

Many of our churches have stepped up to assist in this work as well. It has been my privilege to work with many of our churches who actively carry out the ministry through work camps and other service projects, preparedness projects within local churches and communities, educating our members on why we should be prepared, and working in our communities as relevant partners to create more resilient places for people to live. Churches have completed the Church World Service kits and several of our churches have served as drop-off sites. I give thanks and celebrate the ministry of our churches and members.

In March the Conference Consistory approved our membership in the Greater Philadelphia Long Term Recovery Committee, whose purpose is to help residents of Puerto Rico who've relocated to the Philadelphia area (whether temporarily or permanently) as a result of Hurricane Maria. Other areas of the Conference are also discovering how they can help as well. Most of our communities will not be establishing recovery committees, but the needs still are present. The families who have evacuated face significant challenges, including but not limited to:

- adequate and affordable housing
- employment opportunities
- language translation
- help navigating the FEMA assistance process
- replacement of lost items
- emotional and spiritual support

The UCC national Disaster Ministries has supplied a grant to our Conference to help provide housing and basic needs on a temporary basis. Other agencies and religious organizations are also helping. We are an active partner in the Southeast PA Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster which continues to coordinate the resources and knowledge of various faith-based, non-profit, governmental, business, and other community-focused agencies and organizations. These services are provided regardless of race, creed, color, gender, sexual orientation, disability or religious preference.

There are many ways that churches and individuals can be involved with the on-going work that is before us. Here are only a few suggestions:

- Financially – Contributions can be sent to the Conference, marked "DASC" (which means Disaster Assistance Services Center) or online, indicating that it is a special gift for DASC.
- If you have members who are Spanish speakers organize an ESL class at your church.
- Adopt a family and help them get settled into the community.

- If the church owns or has access to vacant housing, make it available for rental by the evacuees. Housing is an ongoing need. However, I will warn you that many of the evacuees are looking to stay in places where they are comfortable.
- Sponsor a concert or some other event to raise money for this ministry and to raise public awareness.
- Help to sponsor a Camp Noah program in our community. This is a program to assist children who have been traumatized by the hurricane and/or being uprooted from their home. It is very much like a week-long Bible school experience. It has been vetted and used all over the country. If it is coming to your community they will need volunteers to serve in Camp Noah to do all the things that a typical VBS needs. Spanish language skills are helpful.
- If you love to tell stories and interact with people, learn more about this ministry and become a part of a team of people who can spread the message of the need and ways in which churches and individuals can help. I would be very happy to help you get started.

I continue to be passionate and excited about this ministry. There are many creative projects happening in our churches. I want to know more about them. Send your stories and pictures to kjones275@comcast.net. We want to let others know of what we are doing.

I want to say a big “Thank You” is the Conference staff for all their support and help. I want to thank Brea especially for her work on the webpage. If you have not visited there, be sure to check it out. There are always new things up on the page.

Stop by and see the Disaster Ministry display at the Spring Meeting. We will be there – with some guests and some other surprises. You might even win a prize.

I am always willing to come to your church to talk about this ministry or to help you plan a mission trip or to build your church’s preparedness plan. The work goes on. Please contact me about how your church can be safe and secure, as well as helping the PA Southeast Conference “create an ethos of expectation, experimentation and transformation.” (PSEC VISION 2020)

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