



## Disaster Ministries Team Report To the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference

April 15, 2019



*"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

*"To see 5 cities or towns being positively affected by the presence of a UCC congregation as measured by the quality of life standards (i.e. education, housing/homelessness, crime reduction, employment opportunities, health/wellness) of those communities."*

--Conference Objectives, from PSEC VISION 2020

Our Conference Minister, Bill Worley, recently wrote that "the church is the only organization in the world that exists solely for people who are not (yet) members." Those of us who serve as part of the PSEC Disaster Ministry Team celebrate and give thanks that we have the privilege to serve these "net yet members" on behalf of the Conference and the whole of the United Church of Christ. The current team members are: Rev. Karl Jones, Conference Disaster Coordinator; Mr. Joe Sciandra, Associate Conference Disaster Coordinators; Mr. Ray Riegel; and Rev. Maureen Duffy-Guy. Together we 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.

In June 2018 Karl also became the Conference Disaster Coordinator for Penn Northeast Conference. We have been trying to organize a joint Disaster Ministry Team. We have held one joint meeting, with another one scheduled prior to the PSEC Spring Meeting. Come by our display at the Spring Meeting to discover more about how you can be involved in this work with PNEC.

The first joint project between the two conferences has been putting together two mission rebuild trips to Puerto Rico that will be completed this spring. The trips are being led by Rev. Gilberto Garcia-Rodriguez, Associate Conference Minister of PNEC. Response to this effort has been exciting!

In January the Conference received a grant from UCC Disaster Ministries, which was intended to be used for the final phase of providing housing for the evacuees from Puerto Rico. The grant of \$6,650 was provided to those working with housing the evacuees in the Reading and Philadelphia areas. More traditional social service agencies will be taking over the work with these our new "net yet members." Former team member, Rhonda Matlack, did outstanding work with jump-starting the Emotional and Spiritual Needs Committee of the Greater Philadelphia Long Term Recovery Committee.

Of major impact this past year has been our work with our "net yet members" who survived the flooding of 2018. This has been particularly true for Schuylkill and Berks counties. Team members, Joe Sciandra, Rev. Maureen Duffy-Guy, Ray Riegel, and Rev. Karl Jones, have been very active. The Schuylkill Association has established a Disaster Fund, for which they have raised \$22,000. In addition, the national UCC Disaster Ministries provided a grant of \$10,000, much of which has been used to provide heating systems, hot water heaters, and case management for the survivors. The Association has named Rev. Walter Breiner, Rev. Mike Klahr, and Mr. Ray Riegel as the trustees of the fund.

The success we have had in Schuylkill would not be possible without the support of our ecumenical and community partners. Talented and caring representatives of the Lutheran, United Methodist, Evangelical Congregational, Mennonite, Presbyterian, and Southern Baptist churches have all been a part of the recovery effort. The county and state Emergency Managers, as well as an AmeriCorps Team and a FEMA Corp Team have been a great help. Trinity United Church of Christ, Tower City, has made their parsonage available for volunteers to stay while they are working in the area.

Our churches are involved with many activities as they relate to disaster ministries. Some of our churches are participating in church preparedness programs. Many of our churches are putting together clean-up buckets and hygiene kits. The national UCC DM has extended the offer to help churches pay for these kits. Information is available at [www.UCC.org/disaster](http://www.UCC.org/disaster). However, the PSEC needs to find a depot to receive these kits for pick up.

Karl and Joe attended the UCC Disaster Ministries annual Conference Disaster Coordinators' Gathering in Puerto Rico, April 2 – 5. At that meeting they made a presentation on the ongoing work of recovery in Schuylkill Association. Karl also presented to a Church World Service Conference on our work with the evacuees from Puerto Rico.

Karl and Joe also attended the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster Conference in May. Karl was re-elected as the vice-chair of the Community Preparedness Committee of NVOAD. He will also be presenting to the Mountain West VOAD Conference, April 28 to May 1.

All of the team members are always ready to respond to requests for programs and a speaker. Please send your requests to [kjones275@comcast.net](mailto:kjones275@comcast.net).

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 Schuylkill Association Disaster Fund, c/o Rev. Maureen Duffy-Guy, 618 Arlington Street, Tamaqua, PA 18252.
- 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.
- Sponsor a concert or some other event to raise money for this ministry and to raise public awareness.
- Help to sponsor the Camp Noah program that is coming to Philadelphia in August. 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. Volunteers are needed. Spanish language skills are helpful. Contact Karl for more information.
- Organize a Rebuild Mission Trip to one of the sites listed on the UCC webpage or to one of the PA counties needing assistance. Contact Karl to get started.
- Join our Team!.

We give thanks for all the passionate and creative projects that our churches are doing with and for our “net yet members.” We want to know more about them. Send your stories and pictures to [kjones275@comcast.net](mailto:kjones275@comcast.net).

We want to say a big “Thank You” to the Conference staff for all their support and help. They keep our news coming out to you. They keep our information on the webpage relevant.

Stop by and see the Disaster Ministry display at the Spring Meeting. We will be there!! We look forward to greeting you and speaking with you. Come and play our video game to discover how you can be better prepared for disaster.

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