



The West Virginia Floods of 2016

What the PCUSA is doing to make a difference.

On June 23, 2016, a phenomenon known as “train” flooding – which involves thunderstorms lining up over the same location like the cars of a freight train - hit West Virginia and nearby parts of Virginia.

Before it stopped the region had received eight to 10 inches of water in mere hours. A federal disaster was declared in twelve of the hardest-hit counties, while a state of emergency was declared in 44 of the state’s 55 counties due to the floods. Numerous lives were lost, and over 20,000 homes damaged or destroyed.

Within 48 hours our first Presbyterian Disaster team was in Charleston and the second landed just 24 hours later. These six surveyed the damage, contacted churches, talked to mayors, police chiefs, council members, walked the streets of tiny devastated towns knocking on doors, listening to the stories of the people affected and reported it all. They shared their findings with the presbytery and with the key leaders who are continuing to use their wisdom and guidance to serve and support the flood survivors.

The Presbytery of WV has chosen two primary ways to participate in the flood response and recovery. First, in concert with the WV council of churches, 8 pastoral care centers have been opened and are working. Two of these centers have been run by the Presbytery, one in White Sulphur Spring and one in Rainelle. There pastors, educators and other church and mental health professionals of various denominations have gathered for prayer then hit the streets to canvas the area, to listen to the stories, to pray and support survivors. They connect people to the help they need and assist as the people they encounter try to grasp the radical change made to their community and their individual lives.

The second avenue the Presbytery of WV relies on to address the needs of the people is through the long-term recovery arm of the Presbytery: WVMAW.org. WV Mission of Advocacy and Work Camps has been up and running for ten years, working to support people who have been affected by the devastation of natural disasters and the difficult issues of poverty and joblessness. WVMAW has been mucking out homes, stabilizing structures and walking with individuals who have no other support. They have been working hard to make available more volunteer housing in affected areas and to schedule work crews and leadership for those crews well into next year.

Flood Response: What to do to help now....

1. Pray. It is our first and best response. God is amazing!
2. Give money. While it is satisfying to buy products to send and to see a big truck full of items pull out of the parking lot on its way to survivors... it is hard to manage when it gets where it is going. We also need to support and not undercut the local economy. The Kroger's in Rainelle is the only grocery store in town and because of the free supplies given out in the building next door they are struggling. We need to purchase from local merchants what survivors need so that when they are back to normal there are still local businesses to support.
3. Instead... try printing photos of commonly needed supplies and putting them with a price tag on a bulletin board. Let members pick them off the board and "pay" for them in their donation.
4. Gather a group of caring adults to come to Rainelle and White Sulphur Spring on Saturday, August 6th. We will be canvassing both towns to make sure we have been in contact with all who might be in need. We will gather promptly at 9:00 AM for instructions and prayer and will then go out to walk the town and listen to stories and check in on current needs. We will have lunch on our own and then regather at 5:00 for sharing and prayer. We will conclude at 6:00 PM. If you have a group or just one or two please email Barbara Chalfant at missions@wvpresbytery.org for further instructions. We are inviting youth to come with their parents.
5. Call WVMAW and set up a time to bring a work crew to WV to work on clean-up and rebuilding homes. Email Joan Stewart at joanandtim.stewart@gmail.com or call her at (304)846-2294.
6. Volunteer to help with long-term recovery. We need people who are good fundraisers, organizers, care managers, planners, lawyers, social workers, paperwork managers, and workers.
7. We have a significant need for building inspectors. If you know of a retired building inspector, or a currently working inspector who can come for a week or two to help please contact Barbara Chalfant at Missions@wvpresbytery.org



Build a Bridge!

Last year, in four flooding events, 300 private bridges were destroyed. Because insurance for private bridges is unavailable in WV none were insured. In response WV VOAD (West Virginia Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster) began a pilot bridge building project. With the hard work of the Mennonites, Adventists, Southern Baptists, the Presbyterian Church USA and others we have built 18 bridges with volunteer labor, cutting the cost in half. But after the flooding at the end of June 2016 we now have 400 more bridges out, stranding families and making it impossible to quickly respond to medical emergencies. The average cost of a bridge built by volunteers is 13,000.

You can build all or part of one of our 700 bridges. Donate, volunteer and pray for the families who wait to be reconnected to the world. Become a "Bridge Builder."

**For flood updates and progress reports please check the wvpresbytery.org front page.
Or request to be added to the WVPresbytery.org mailing list for flood updates.**