



# A NEW VISION WITH HOPE

The West Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church

**We're still here  
for YOU.**

**RESPONDING WITH LOVE  
FOR AS LONG AS IT TAKES.**



Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.  
**The people of the United Methodist Church**



# #wvumcflood16

Rev. Jack Lipphardt  
Disaster Response Director

*The thunderstorms that swept across West Virginia on June 23, 2016, produced what experts have labeled a thousand-year flood.*



*After flood waters recede, Clendenin, W.Va.*

More than 20 percent of the state's 55 counties were affected, four critically.



*White Sulphur Springs, W.Va.*

*Photo By: Greenbrier Photography*



*Clendenin United Methodist parsonage and church*

Known dead are 23 people. Another dozen people died indirectly as a result of the flood.

More than 1,400 homes were destroyed and more than 2,300 had substantial damage. A total of 1,200 businesses asked the Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA, for assistance.

Normally small, idyllic streams that wind through the beautiful West Virginia hills quickly raged, flooding areas that never before had high water.





“These areas typically now have populations that are older and often poorer,” Tomblin wrote. “Many of the flood-impacted regions were outside the flood plain and, as a result, most victims were without flood insurance.”

According to a report by then-Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin, 1,300 sites on state roads were washed out and 123 bridges were damaged with 15 destroyed. Many privately owned bridges connecting homes to roads also were washed away.

As Tomblin pointed out in a letter to President Barack Obama, “Most of the areas devastated by these floods were towns and communities that had been reliant on coal. That industry’s downturn has left most of them with no capacity to build back on their own.



FEMA said the disaster was “harder and more severe” than most because of its geographical breadth as well as the number of previously distressed communities that were impacted.





# #wvumcflood16 continued

Sixteen United Methodist churches were damaged: twelve heavily, one destroyed. Three parsonages were impacted: one heavily. Communities are struggling to survive and showing some remarkable spirit.



*Brawley Chapel, Clendenin, W.Va.*

*Photo By: Mike DuBose, UMNS*

## Where We Have Been

Immediately after the flood West Virginia Resident Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball assigned her assistant, JF Lacaria, to devote his time fully to assessing the flood and developing a response plan. The bishop recognized the need for full-time disaster response direction and asked me to take on this task.

The conference and the United Methodist Committee on Relief, UMCOR, were on the ground immediately after the catastrophe. In the pages to follow, you will read how relief supplies have been distributed with the help of the relief supply network and the New Vision Depot, the West Virginia Conference's warehouse and disaster response hub.

You will also read how churches have served as relief stations and emergency shelters and partnered with organizations to stage supplies. There are stories about ecumenical early response teams helping with initial clean-up, muck-out, feeding stations, and other emergency relief. And you'll read about spiritual care.

We have partnered with Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster, VOAD, where our United Methodist presence and our connection to UMCOR place great trust and responsibility on our shoulders. Many of the

early response folks have gone. As usual and expected, we and UMCOR are here for the long haul.

## Where We Are

We are now transitioning through immediate and intermediate response toward long-term recovery. Our team is in place with a disaster response director, two case managers, and two on-site construction coordinators. If we can find funding, we need two more case managers and at least one more construction supervisor.



*Beverly Schol, Director of GNJ, A Future with Hope, Andrea Wren-Hardin and Jack Lipphardt*

UMCOR's case management training prepared us well to assess needs and help families prepare their recovery plans. Also, a regional director and case manager from the Greater New Jersey Conference's response to Hurricane Sandy spent a couple of days teaching us long-term recovery lessons they have learned.

Numerous work teams have helped with early response, and now a slow but steady stream of work teams are in rehabilitation and new construction activity. We anticipate (hope!) this activity will increase in the spring and summer of 2017.

Several churches were already equipped to host work teams, and several more are coming on line as they add restrooms and showers and upgrade kitchen facilities. Two significantly damaged churches have found new energy by serving as prominent players in their communities' responses with one already adding showers and hosting work teams and the other preparing to host teams soon.

Each county has a Long Term Recovery Group to which we relate with three hats:

- 1) We are the United Methodist presence in recovery planning efforts;
- 2) Our case managers interact with United Way organizations, the American Red Cross, and other partners to stretch our dollars or address needs that are beyond our capacity; and
- 3) We add resources to the work of others to assure collaborative and effective help as people move toward the “new normal.”

### Where We Are Going

We anticipate that detailed case-management activity will help 120 families over a two-year period. We expect direct on-site construction activity will assist 200 to 250 families with home rehabilitation or new construction, including those in our case management.

We expect indirect construction activity with resources for materials and supplies to support other work teams and in collaboration with ecumenical partners will reach an additional 150 to 200 homes.

*Naturally, we need substantial contributions and funding to address current needs, and being optimistic, to address more than we currently are confident in projecting.*

We have identified priority cases to include people who are elderly, disabled, isolated and poor, and children with single parents.

*Moving forward, we need work teams and substantial funds for construction materials and supplies and occasional skilled labor. We hope a majority of teams will come for a week and bring skilled carpenters, electricians, plumbers and drywall finishers.*

We are projecting a need of \$2 million. Most will be spent on home construction materials. We are in a two-year commitment although FEMA and UMCOR recognize that we will need to be present for four or five years.

We are most grateful to congregations, work teams, and individual donors who have become important partners with us as we do the hard work of recovery.

## An Unusual Weather Event

The weather over a large swath of West Virginia was unusual on June 23, 2016, according to National Weather Service Meteorologist David Marsalek.

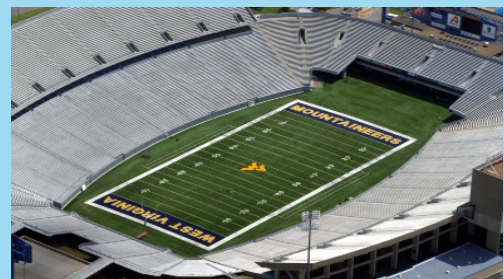
“There were four separate rounds of thunderstorms with heavy rain within 12 to 18 hours,” Marsalek said. “The storms were ‘training’ — moving over the same region in a short period of time.”

### Heavy Rainfall

A U.S. Army Corps of Engineers precipitation gage recorded 7.12 inches of rain near Clendenin, W.Va., on June 23. A gage at White Sulphur Springs recorded 8.3 inches of rain.

It’s unusual for rain to fall on the entire length of a major stream but that happened on both the Elk and Gauley rivers. “With rugged topography that has steep mountains and shallow streams, the rain quickly filled tributaries and basins and sent catastrophic amounts of water into the rivers,” Marsalek said.

Immediately following the storms, the Summersville Dam on the Gauley River was discharging 15,000 cubic feet of water per second. At that rate, the discharge would fill 60,000-seat Mountaineer Field every 36 minutes.



The Elk River at Queen Shoals, W.Va., crested at 33.37 feet, breaking the all-time flood record set in 1888. The Gauley at Camden-on-Gauley crested at 29.75 feet, breaking the previous record set in 1932.

In September the West Virginia Legislature appropriated \$85 million for flood relief. The state has estimated that \$340 million is needed for housing, economic development and public infrastructure. As of Dec. 20, the Federal Emergency Management Agency had approved a total of \$41.9 million in assistance for 4,942 individuals and, as of Dec. 16, the agency had approved \$52.8 million for public assistance.



# Hope - and heartbreak, too

*By Rev. Shari Stilgenbauer*

June 23, 2016, started like any other rainy day. I was working in my office finishing up for the day. I stayed a little longer than usual waiting for the rain to let up; at about 2:30 I decided it wasn't going to quit and I headed for my home in Ronceverte, W.Va., which is about 20 minutes from the Emmanuel United Methodist Church in White Sulphur Springs. As I was leaving I noticed that the rain drops were bigger than normal. It seemed like it was going to be a good evening to be at home. While driving through White Sulphur Springs and past

He said I couldn't because there was water everywhere. I insisted I would try.

My husband David, also a United Methodist pastor, and I headed to White Sulphur Springs so we could be in the community to help in whatever way we could. We drove through Lewisburg and got on Interstate 64. Harts Run, at the bottom of the White Sulphur Springs exit ramp, had already flooded and we could not drive through it. We got back on the interstate. As we drove we could see water everywhere in White Sulphur Springs. We found that another interstate ramp had been partially washed away. We turned around and headed back to see if we could get into White Sulphur Springs another way. From the interstate we saw the devastation and felt completely helpless. I could not get there to help.

I stayed in contact with Mark via cell phones. Mark and others welcomed about 20 people and about 10 pets into Emmanuel UMC to stay that night and for several more after that.

The hardest part for me was not being able to get back into White Sulphur Springs to help those in the community that God has

sent me to serve. I was at a loss of what to do. I'd had disaster response and spiritual care training, but I could not get to my people. It was not easy to go back home and wait, not knowing who was safe or who wasn't. A lot of praying was going on that evening. It wasn't until late in the morning of the next day that I was able to get into town to help.

In the days following, Emmanuel UMC served as a distribution center for flood clean-up and a place of hope, rest, and refuge for the people of White Sulphur Springs.



*White Sulphur Springs, W.Va.  
Photo By: Mike DuBose, UMNS*

the Greenbrier Resort, I noticed there was a lot of water running down the hillsides and streets. I guessed it was because it had rained all day. I didn't give it much more thought.

I arrived home at about 3 o'clock and began fixing dinner, preparing for my evening in. Mark Gillespie, a member of Emmanuel, called at 3:30. He said the water was forcing people, including his family, from their residences. Without hesitation we agreed to open the church for families and their pets who needed a dry, safe place. I told Mark I would get back to White Sulphur Springs as quickly as possible.



*Volunteers sorting donations at Emmanuel UMC*

People came from everywhere to help those in need, to be an ear to hear their stories, a shoulder for people to cry on, and a hope that they were not in this alone.

About a week and a half after the flood, a volunteer shared with us that the Phillips family's little girl was still missing and they had no way for rescuers to contact them with information. I asked to meet with them to determine how we could help. Within an hour James and Becky Phillips arrived at Emmanuel to share their story.

In addition to their daughter Mykala, the Phillips' have two sons at home and a son in the Marine Corps. After introductions were made and condolences shared, Mr. Phillips told me of their ordeal. Mr. Phillips and his children were at home on June 23. There had been some chaos about whether to stay in the house or head for higher ground. After a 911 operator told them it would be safer to stay put because of downed power lines, they chose to stay at the house. As the water began to get closer Mr. Phillips and the children tied themselves together with electrical cords so that they could stay together better.

The water came crashing in as Mr. Phillips and the children were making an escape through a window. They somehow made it to a house at the end of their street where they hung on to the porch for a long time. As rocks and debris rushed towards them, Mr. Phillips would turn himself towards the debris to protect the children from it. Mr. Phillips sustained several broken ribs and the loss of most of his teeth from the beating of the debris. In the midst of all of this, he and his children were hanging on to each other the best they could.

Tragically, Mr. Phillips' little girl, Mykala, was pulled away from their human chain and lost in the rushing waters.

The Phillips lost their home, their possessions, and their little girl. The family was given a cell phone so that they could stay in touch with the search-and-rescue efforts to find Mykala.

I met with Mr. and Mrs. Phillips a second time several weeks later. Mykala had not been found but crews were still looking. Mr. and Mrs. Phillips and their youngest son had come into the distribution center looking for some clothing and other items. Mykala's little brother found a pair of rubber boots. He said to his mother, "We should get these for Mykala. She will need these when we find her." My heart broke thinking, "It has been so long." Mrs. Phillips chuckled and said, "Those won't fit her. Her feet are bigger than mine." Again my heart broke. That was the last interaction I had with Mr. and Mrs. Phillips.

Mykala was found Aug. 10 — 48 days after the flood — and was buried Aug. 14. She was 14 years old.



*Mykala Phillips tribute, White Sulphur Springs  
Photo By: Sam Owens, Charleston Gazette-Mail*

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# Words are often inadequate for *times* such as *these*

*By Rev. Melissa Shortridge, Greenbrier District Superintendent*

I remember looking out the front door of my home in Lewisburg on June 23 and seeing the water streaming down Washington Street, not realizing that a short nine miles away the water was roaring down the streets leaving a path of destruction in my hometown, White Sulphur Springs.

Unbelievable pictures began to appear on Facebook as people helplessly watched in disbelief. The following day, the reactions to the incomprehensible damage and loss were varied. Many got busy doing anything in an effort to help. Others were walking around in shock and confusion wondering where to begin. Many who had moved away made calls home wanting to know where and what to send to help. Trucks full of supplies arrived to be unloaded, things were sorted and organized, vehicles were packed with the immediate items needed to begin the clean-up, food trucks moved into town, and churches opened their doors offering shelter and food. All good and necessary things.

But it wasn't until I visited a friend, whose daughter had been stranded for hours on a roof top to escape the rushing waters, that I realized the damage went far beyond material things. Many people had been stranded in trees, attics, and vehicles fearing for their lives until rescuers were able to reach them. The level of emotions the rushing waters left in their wake was just as inconceivable as the property damage.

As I walked the streets and talked with people I had known most of my life, my heart broke. How do you start over when you have lost everything? Where do you even begin? What do you say as you stand looking at all their worldly possessions piled at the curb waiting to be hauled to the landfill?

In the days that followed, when the sky would cloud up and the rain would start, a sense of fear would begin to well up. Could it happen again? Our community not only mourned the loss of homes and possessions but we also mourned the loss of loved ones swept away by the raging waters. Each day, rescue and then recovery teams searched for those still missing.

On August 10, 48 days after the flood, the body of 14-year-old Mykala Phillips, the last of the missing, was

found six miles from her home. The property damage was astronomical but the emotional damage also took a great toll.

Some asked, where was God? How could God allow this to happen? There were many questions with no clear answers. It soon became clear to me that words are often inadequate for times such as these. It was more important to listen, to be patient amid their frustrations, to lend a helping hand, and to just be with them and let them know they were not alone in their pain and struggles. Many silent as well as audible prayers were shared, hugs were given, and comforting words of encouragement were spoken. God's presence was made evident in the outpouring of support from thousands who came to the aid of those hurting in White Sulphur Springs.

Now, a few are in newly built houses, some are back in their homes with varying degrees of repair and many are still displaced, renting or living with friends or family. Others have left the area. All are trying to find a new normal.

The holidays were especially hard as folks were reminded of what once was, the lost keepsake ornaments and decorations washed away, familiar traditions skipped this year, those no longer here.

The thousand-year flash flood in White Sulphur Springs is old news for many, but for those who are still living through it, it's still very real. The wounds and scars are still visible. I pray the people of my home town will not be forgotten as they continue to recover. There is still much work to be done.



*Melissa Shortridge leads a visit of downtown business, White Sulphur Springs*



# *Love* comes through many different avenues

By Rev. Scott Ferguson

What a blessing it is to experience the power of God at work in the midst of tragedy and disaster! This is something I continue to experience since the flood waters ravaged our Clendenin, W.Va., community.

I learned that even though one's home may have been spared, those that live here still felt the impact of the flood as much as anyone else. I learned that people are resilient and are willing to put their boots on and go to work. I learned that love comes through many different avenues.

A few days following the flood, I was pulling things out of our house and helping coordinate work team assignments. While I was walking down the street a gentleman caught my attention and said, "Excuse me, can you tell me where I can find the United Methodist pastor?"

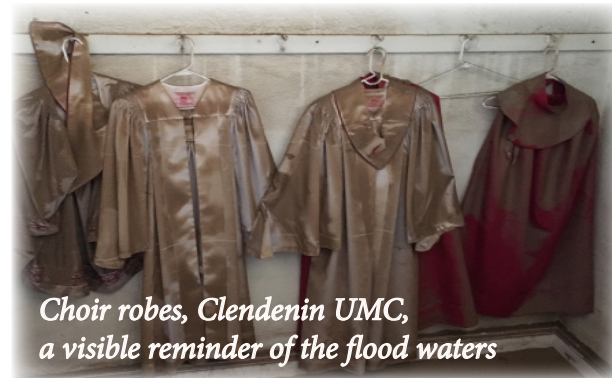
My response was, "You're looking at him." I probably didn't look much like a pastor with my boots, blue jeans, cut-off T-shirt and mud from head to toe.



*Rev. Scott Ferguson talks about flood damage with Bishop Steiner Ball*

The man explained to me that he was from the Nashville United Methodist Church in North Carolina and he had 37 youth and adults who would like to set up in our picnic shelter and help us clean the debris out of the church. Not only did they help us, but they helped numerous others throughout the area. I experienced our

United Methodist connection at work first hand. On another occasion, I shared a testimony with our church about the prison work team that had been helping clean up. One of our members stood up and praised the Lord for them as well. She explained that while they were loading debris from her home into dump trucks, one of the inmates came up to her and said, "Ma'am, I believe this belongs to you." He had found a piece of her jewelry in the garbage, cleaned it up, and handed it back to her. This man had compassion upon a person that had lost everything, and it became a gesture of kindness that was powerful to the one who received his gift. He blessed her with more than just some of her jewelry, he gave her love and kindness.



*Choir robes, Clendenin UMC, a visible reminder of the flood waters*

The grace of God has been bountiful. We are very thankful for the role you have played in helping us get back on our feet.

May the Lord bless you!

*Rev. Scott Ferguson is pastor of the Clendenin Charge and may be reached at [sfergus23@yahoo.com](mailto:sfergus23@yahoo.com).*



# Reflections on the flood

By Rev. Jonathan Dierdorff

As a pastor I expected to face trials and tribulations at various times in ministry. I expected there to be ups and downs, and I expected to walk through deep waters with parishioners as they experienced personal crises. But I never anticipated walking through deep waters with entire communities devastated by a flood.

Shortly after the flood I was compelled to offer a message of hope that I had personally internalized as a pastoral leader: “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12: 9, New Revised Standard Version). My focus was on “sufficient grace,” as opposed to “abundant grace.”



*Melissa Shortridge, Bishop Sandra, UMCOR's Cathy Earl and Jonathan Dierdorff walk the Rainelle UMC property.*

When we think of abundant grace, perhaps we think of the poem “Footprints in the Sand,” when there are only two footprints because we are being carried. I suggested that with sufficient grace there are three footprints — to illustrate when God leads us along as we limp. Undoubtedly, most of us prefer abundant grace. But sufficient grace reminds us that God does not simply remove us from the flood waters, but calls us into an extravagant partnership that allows us, in the words of the late theologian Henri Nouwen, to serve as wounded healers. Needless to say, it has been an incredibly

humbling experience and has been formative to my practice of ministry.

I am very proud of both of the congregations I serve: Bascom United Methodist Church in Rupert, W.Va., and Rainelle United Methodist Church in Rainelle, W.Va. For the first two weeks after the flood, the Bascom church functioned as a completely lay-led rescue shelter, housing and feeding as many as 20 individuals, in addition to feeding dozens of response workers. Additionally, through donations received from outside sources, Bascom was able to distribute \$17,000 worth of building materials and household items to individuals and families in the community of Rupert. Others within the church worked tirelessly collecting donations, managing the needs of people in the community, and setting up places in town to distribute cleaning supplies, toiletries, clothing, heaters, furniture and other items.

Within a few days of the flood the Rainelle church opened as the first distribution center in that area. Many members and constituents were personally affected by the flood, losing their homes and businesses, but others stepped up to help unload countless trucks, trailers, and cars filled with cleaning supplies, food, and toiletries.

Shortly after the flood the Rainelle church decided to partner with the United Methodist West Virginia Conference and the United Methodist Committee on Relief to house volunteers and work teams that would be coming into the community to do early response and long-term recovery. We designated the top floor of the church building as a sleeping area and the trustees and members of our congregation built two bathrooms equipped with showers.



While the bathrooms were being built, we were blessed by the Greater New Jersey Conference, which loaned us a very nice shower trailer that we parked at the back of our building. The shower trailer allowed us to begin housing groups within three weeks after the flood. It also allowed members and persons in the community to come shower and do laundry.

In addition to overseeing all that was happening (including the rehabilitation of our fellowship hall which had approximately nine inches of water after the flood), my focus was coordinating work teams, helping assign them to projects in the community, and finding them funding and building supplies.

Like Bascom, the Rainelle church received many donations from outside sources, adding up to almost \$50,000. Our church's niche in the recovery process was mainly purchasing sheetrock, and in several instances, insulation, sub flooring, and paint. We took applications from dozens of individuals and families in our community, and helped flood victims by providing the quantity they requested. As a measure of good stewardship and also evangelistic opportunity, we assigned members of our congregation to work as case managers to measure the property after the application was turned in, and to make sure the flooded area had been treated properly for mold and other contaminants.

I continue to receive phone calls, text messages, emails, and Facebook messages on a daily basis from groups that want to come and serve or provide donations, in addition to conference leaders and colleagues checking in, case managers requesting more information, and relief agencies asking if we can help families and individuals. The work is not over, but we are thankful for the help, resources, and sufficient grace that have gotten us this far.

*Rev. Jonathan Dierdorff is the pastor of Meadow River Charge and may be reached at [jonathan.wvumc@gmail.com](mailto:jonathan.wvumc@gmail.com).*



# Forging ahead to a *new day*

By Rev. Melissa Shortridge



*Melissa Shortridge with a White Sulphur Springs home owner, and former youth group member.*

White Sulphur Springs is a town of about 2,500 people nestled in the Allegheny mountains. Many think of wealth when they think of White Sulphur Springs because it is the home of the world-famous Greenbrier Resort. They picture the large white-pillared front entrance of the resort or the beautiful homes and golf courses that line both sides of Route 60 as you drive into town. But the reality is, almost 30 percent of the folks live in poverty.

A drive through Main Street shows empty store fronts. There are few employment options. Most of the residents are blue-collar workers employed by the resort, many seasonally. Others drive to work at a papermill 21 miles away in Covington, Va. They are hardworking, honest, independent people. A large portion of the residents are retired. Most of the youth leave to find employment elsewhere.

The neighborhoods affected by the flood were made up of modest homes. Many of the residents were retired. Their wage-earning days are over, yet they found themselves with little or nothing left. Thousands of dollars have been poured into the community but I am amazed at how many empty homes are still in the hardest-hit neighborhoods. I suspect many will need to be torn down. There are several vacant lots with sunken areas where foundations once supported homes and families. I wonder if the neighborhoods or the town, for that matter, will ever recover.

Emmanuel United Methodist church is located one block off Main Street and has had its share of struggles over the last several years. In many ways it was in survival mode and had become inward focused. But the day after the flood that all changed! The doors were opened, overnight shelter was provided, needed supplies arrived and church volunteers worked day and night to help those hurting and in need. Many thousands of dollars have been distributed for flood relief and the church has truly been the body of Christ to their community. They are now housing work teams coming to help with the rebuilding.

Even those not living in flooded neighborhoods have found themselves adversely impacted. Several businesses were closed for a period for clean-up and repairs and some have not yet reopened. If it weren't for the help of friends, family and neighbors, as well as good-hearted strangers, many residents of White Sulphur Springs would still be homeless. Numerous volunteers and church groups have come to help yet many more are still needed.

The beauty of living in a small town is that everyone is your neighbor. People have rallied together and pitched in to help one another. "Neighbors helping neighbors" became the motto. A group from Alvon United Methodist Church called "The Grumpy Old Men" have worked on several homes in the area. Many folks were too proud to ask for help, but strangers showed up and asked what needed to be done.

The hope is to rebuild White Sulphur Springs better than ever but the reality is many will never fully recover. But the hardworking folks of White Sulphur Springs, with the help of friends, neighbors, and good-hearted strangers, will forge ahead to a new day. Thanks be to God!

Rev. Melissa Shortridge may be reached at [melissashortridge@gmail.com](mailto:melissashortridge@gmail.com).



# Better Together

Cathy Earl, UMCOR Executive Secretary US Disaster Response was on site in West Virginia for three days in early July. Cathy provides ongoing advice and support to the WV UMC Disaster Response team. UMCOR grants in the excess of \$310,000 have allowed the West Virginia Conference to hire a director of recovery, 2 case managers and 2 construction supervisors. Additional grant money is expected which will allow the West Virginia Conference to help people return to their homes and communities.



*Sue Lowther and UMCOR's Cathy Earl*



Mike DuBose, photographer with the United Methodist News Service, was on the ground in West Virginia within 4 days of the June 23rd flood. Mike toured the disaster area with Asst. to the Bishop, JF Lacaria, capturing photos of the region. These photos are being used in West Virginia as well as across the United Methodist connection to tell our story of hope.



West Virginia's twelve Career Technical Education centers built 15 tiny homes for flood victims. The students built the homes from the ground up in a program that gives students life long learning experiences in building trades as well as generosity. The West Virginia Conference is providing the funding to place the homes and hook up utilities with grants of up to \$5,000 per home.

The United Methodist Foundation of West Virginia is providing a grant in the amount of \$300,000 for long-term recovery of our West Virginia Conference churches damaged by the floods of 2016. Clendenin United Methodist Church received a portion for the recovery of their fellowship hall.

Photographed (ltoR) Jack Lipphardt, Jeff Taylor, JF Lacaria and Scott Ferguson at Clendenin United Methodist Church.



# Flood-damaged church buildings are in various stages of repair

By JF Lacaria (Editor's Note: This update was prepared in mid-December 2016)

- At Emmanuel UMC in White Sulphur Springs a mold problem has been corrected and drywall replacement and painting are underway. New carpet has been installed in hallways following the wear and tear they experienced while the church was used as a distribution center. Corrections are beginning to be made to the exterior drainage system to help protect the church from future flooding.
- Clendenin UMC has made a complete recovery at the parsonage. At the church, major damage to electricity, HVAC, mold mitigation, and the removal of all basement interior walls including replacing interior load-bearing walls with new steel structure has been completed. The walls are being reestablished in the basement. New bathrooms with showers are planned so the church can house work teams. Complete replacement of the kitchen is beginning.
- Rainelle UMC are able to use all parts of their building, but the basement floor covering still needs to be installed. The lower walls and base cabinets in the kitchen need replaced and minor repairs are needed. Rainelle has installed showers on an upper floor so the church can house work teams in the future recovery of the community.
- Bethel UMC is located in Camden-on-Gauley, where the Gauley River crossed the highway, climbed the hill and entered the sanctuary. The sanctuary is being rebuilt with new floor, new walls and insulation, HVAC, electrical service and carpet. The church worships and serves the community out of the fellowship hall, which was just high enough to escape damage.
- Fenwick UMC, in the low lands west of Richwood, lost their basement and kitchen. They need to begin all the work to restore Sunday School rooms, kitchen, cabinets and appliances, bathroom and fellowship hall. They have lots of work still before them. Some external supports that hold up the altar extension have been replaced.
- The basement level of Barton UMC, in Webster Springs, Greenbrier District, was completely filled with water. All repairs have been completed and the church is using all of its building again. They need to replace all of the educational materials that were lost in the flood — a need that will be met with a gift from the United Methodist Foundation of West Virginia, Inc.
- Rolling Hills UMC, near the Amma Exit of Interstate 79, reports that all is back to normal, having installed a new floor in the sanctuary.
- Wallback UMC has a new hardwood floor in place in their sanctuary. The structure under this floor is also new and/or reinforced. They have some minor restoration still to do.
- Burkes Chapel, at Kings Shoal on the Elk River, just ¼ mile from the bridge that has been decommissioned for the time being, near Bomont, has replaced their sanctuary floor with a new poured floor, and they are completing minor repairs to their church.
- Alderson UMC reports that all their needed repairs are complete and they are worshipping and meeting in all the church facilities, living in their new normal.
- Repairs from the flood have been made at McClung UMC. The furnace, located outside the church in a furnace room, has been replaced and elevated to protect it from future flooding. The church planned to host the charge-wide Christmas service and was excited that everyone would be coming there for the service.
- Follansbee UMC, Northern District, was flooded in July, less than 30 days after the June rains in the south. They have restored their basement area but need to rebuild their kitchen. Long-term recovery is working with the church trustees to install a temporary kitchen in the basement so they can take up their ministries again. In the meantime, they are working with the Northern District Board of Church Location and Building to explore building a fellowship hall with kitchen on property next to the church but away from the path of future flooding.

*West Virginia Resident Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball has assigned her assistant, JF Lacaria, to devote his time fully to assessing the flood and developing a response plan. He can be reached at [JLacaria@wvumc.org](mailto:JLacaria@wvumc.org).*



# A letter of thanks from *Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball*

Dear Friends and members of the West Virginia Conference,

On June 23, 2016, storms brought terrible floods to much of West Virginia. Twenty-three people lost their lives. More than 1,400 homes were destroyed and more than 2,300 had substantial damage. A total of 1,200 businesses asked the Federal Emergency Management Agency for assistance.

I praise God for your response to this catastrophic event! Your prayers, work teams, and financial gifts of \$1.4 million have made and continue to make a difference. Your love is being felt by families who thought they had lost everything – and then they experienced and received the help and hope they needed because of your generosity.

Your prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness continue to be greatly needed by the areas affected by the floods. The West Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church is at the center of leadership in this recovery process. We are partnering with the United Methodist Committee on Relief, UMCOR; the West Virginia Council of Churches; and other agencies and recovery organizations to help make sure that every single one of God's beloved children get help in the process of being restored to wholeness and resurrected to a life where they have what they need, not only to survive, but to experience joy.

Please know that our work is not yet complete. Hundreds of people still need our help to recover and to claim new life. I pray that you may be able and willing to continue to be the healing, reconciling, loving, life-giving and life-changing presence of Christ for the people of West Virginia and the world.

Peace,

Sandra Steiner Ball  
Resident Bishop, West Virginia Conference



# Depot plays key role in disaster response

By Rev. Dan Lowther and Rev. Sue Lowther

New Vision Depot is one of the newest additions to the West Virginia Annual Conference's Disaster Response Ministries.

Since we were elected the conference's disaster response co-coordinators in 2008, we have held a vision to have a substantial building to house disaster response supplies and equipment. Having this complex would keep much-needed supplies at the ready in the event of a disaster and provide a central location to dispatch much-needed help to disaster survivors. One central location would also help provide accountability to donors.

In June 2015, John Zilinski, director of the Raleigh County Office of Emergency Management, and Mark Wilson, the office's deputy director, approached the West Virginia Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, VOAD, about some property the office had acquired in Beaver, W.Va. John and Mark had a dream: that the property would become a regional disaster response center for Southern West Virginia. They invited West Virginia VOAD member agencies to become a part of that vision. (Member agencies include the United Methodist Committee on Relief, UMCOR). Following this presentation we expressed interest in establishing a warehouse on the property.



In October 2015 we toured the property with JF Lacaria, assistant to West Virginia Resident Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball, and Joe Kenaston, superintendent of the Southern District of the West Virginia Annual Conference, and began negotiations to occupy a 6,000-square-foot building. This was the birth of New Vision Depot.

In July 2016 we were appointed to churches in the Wyoming County, West Virginia, area and appointed directors of the depot. All of this occurred in God's time as the flooding came on June 23, 2016.

The New Vision Depot became vital during flood relief efforts. The days following the flooding many volunteers from the Southern District gave greatly of their time, energy, and resources to get the depot up and operational. Flood buckets were inspected and assembled. Health kits were readied. A total of 2,500 flood buckets and 2,000 health kits were delivered from the depot to survivors in the early days following the flood. Goods came into the depot from all over the West Virginia Conference, as well as from Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, Alabama, Ohio and other states. These goods were sorted, inventoried, packaged, and sent out to the affected areas.



The New Vision Depot continues to assist with the recovery from this historic flood and is preparing for future disasters. We need your continued support to keep this vital tool in operation. You can help by donating your prayers, time and monies. Volunteer groups are welcome to come and prepare supplies. Money is needed to maintain the cost of operation; Prayers are needed for guidance, strength and endurance. Thank you.

Rev. Dan Lowther and Rev. Sue Lowther are Directors at the New Vision Depot and may be reached at [dclowther@gmail.com](mailto:dclowther@gmail.com) or [wsuelowther@gmail.com](mailto:wsuelowther@gmail.com).



# A little church with a *big heart*

*By Rev. David Stilgenbauer*

From the first church I ever served I have heard and even said, “Everything is made for the big church. There is nothing we can do. We are a small church.” That is until I had the privilege of serving Elizabeth Chapel (average worship attendance: 36) on the Ronceverte Charge in the Greenbrier District of West Virginia. From the first time I set foot in this church I knew there was something different. Let me share with you the heart and passion I have seen in serving Elizabeth Chapel.

First, you need to know the church, like so many others that are small rural churches, is beautiful. The church sets on a hill with rolling mountains all around. Many times I have stood in the parking lot and admired the beauty of the setting.



*Elizabeth Chapel UMC*

But the true beauty can be seen on the inside. It is not the carpet or big fancy lights or even the stained glass windows — it is the people. They have a heart for mission and ministry. This little country church hosts a clothing giveaway twice a month. This is made possible because the church is willing to go wherever necessary to gather clothing and other supplies. People have gone as far as Mechanicsburg, Pa., (309 miles from Ronceverte) and Boone, N.C. (181 miles away). The church has sent folks on mission trips to Haiti as well as other Volunteers in Mission trips. Oh and lest I forget, they pay 100 percent of their apportionments. This is a church that is always looking for ways to be active in ministry.

I am sure you can tell this is a healthy and vital church. But it was not until the June flooding that I fully understood how deeply this church cares about being faithful to the Gospel message. The first week after the

flood the discussion began: “What can we do to help?” After much discussion, the decision was made to make a \$10,000 donation to the conference to aid in flood recovery. As the pastor of this small country church I must say it was a great joy, not because of the amount of the donation, rather because it was the church. I did not even have to ask. It was the church that came up with the idea and the amount.

So, if you are worshiping in a small country church or serving a small country church and have heard that “everything is for the big church,” don’t let that stop you. A church is not defined by how many people are sitting in the pews or how many programs it has up and running. A church, to me at least, is defined by how it is making disciples of Jesus Christ. I know not all small churches have the ability to make a large donation for anything even if they want to. But, if I have learned

anything from serving at Elizabeth Chapel, it is not to let numbers tell you what you can do. Let God lead you in what you are called to do.

In conclusion, I am honored to be the pastor at both Elizabeth Chapel and Trinity in Ronceverte, WV. I will never look at a small church the same again. It is not the size of the church that matters. It is the God that we serve. In other words, it is about keeping the main thing the main thing. Never let “the System” tell you what you can and cannot do. Every church, big or small, can be a church with a big heart.

*Rev. David Stilgenbauer, Ronceverte Charge, may be reached at [revdaves@yahoo.com](mailto:revdaves@yahoo.com).*

# A pastor's *perspective*

By Rev. Rick Brown

*Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me, for in you I take refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed. Psalm 57:1*

Many lives were forever changed in June when flood waters swept through Greenbrier County and much of the state of West Virginia.

I am no stranger to floods. I've lived a lifetime in West Virginia — including southern West Virginia, where I witnessed the destruction unleashed by massive amounts of water and mud as they tore through homes and lives during the 1972 Buffalo Creek flood (that disaster, caused by a coal waste dam collapse, killed 125 people, injured 1,000 and demolished or partially destroyed 17 communities). Those memories rose quickly in my mind as I waded through mud in 2016, having witnessed the blank stares on many faces years before. It is still a vivid event in my childhood to have witnessed so many friends and neighbors lose all they had in the blink of an eye. The pain, the tears, the agony of saying goodbye is just as real today as it was 45 years ago.

Twenty three people lost their lives in the June 2016 floods and our communities were sent reeling from the pain. As I told the congregation at Lewisburg United Methodist Church the following Sunday morning, “We can only be knocked down as far as our knees.” The Spirit of God took charge and I witnessed the power of the Holy Spirit move mightily in the minds and hearts of both the victims and those called to action. The Lewisburg church (annual operating budget: \$560,000) responded immediately that morning with a \$15,000 offering to minister to those affected. The cumulative total has since grown to more than \$60,000.

While Lewisburg was mostly spared from devastating floods, the folks at Lewisburg United Methodist Church stepped up, shovels in hand, to offer assistance in the midst of the destruction that had occurred a few

miles away. By Friday, June 25, we were assembling a work crew to help people get back on their feet. Supplies and funds poured in from all over the country. People that had been long removed from Greenbrier County were generous to their hometown.

**“Surely the presence of God was in this place as God’s love was revealed with shovels and hammers.”**

The work team from Lewisburg United Methodist Church mucked out a total of about twenty-five houses, one funeral home and one church in White Sulphur Springs, Caldwell, and Rainelle over the next month. With every shovel of mud, I could see the presence of God’s Grace lifting people out of their despair. When possible, we identified home owners and offered prayers as they watched their life’s possessions torn apart and placed in the streets.

In the earliest days we were on the scene before agencies that organize help had arrived to identify particular jobs. We went to acquaintances of church members where the members knew help was needed. As time passed the operation became more organized.



*Lewisburg UMC work team  
Photo by: Greenbrier Photography*



Thankfully, before the flooding occurred the West Virginia Annual Conference leadership had nearly completed the New Vision Depot, the conference's warehouse and disaster response hub in Beaver, W.Va. A big thank you to West Virginia Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball, Rev. Dan Lowther, Rev. Sue Lowther, Rev. Dave Stilgenbauer, Rev. Shari Stilgenbauer, JF Lacaria (assistant to Bishop Steiner Ball) and many more pastors and staff around our conference. In nearly 25 years of ministry in the United Methodist Church, I have never experienced the "Blessed Connection" as was present during this time of distress.



*Photo by: Greenbrier Photography*

The people called Methodists reached out from all over the country with their prayers and support. Work teams arrived, sleeves rolled up, tools in hand, ready to work. One of the most awe-inspiring parts of the story was the connection I felt around our own conference. My pastor colleagues around the state were reaching out with love, prayers and their support. The glory of God was marvelously experienced as we worked together, reaching out to hurting people. Thank You Jesus!

We were sent to a house on Greenbrier Street in Rainelle. This home had been vacant since the widow's death in 2015 but the house had not been emptied of its contents. Two grown children were mourning not only their mother's death but the destruction of many things of sentimental value, including family photographs.

Jeannie Wyatt, who operates a professional photography company with her husband, gathered photos from the home and offered to restore them and get them back to the family. The family was so appreciative of this opportunity to have their memories restored.

The Wyatt family — members of the Lewisburg United Methodist Church — donated their time and talents and ended up restoring thousands of pictures for Greenbrier County families that lost so much. On the same street, I noticed what had been a beautiful ranch-style home with furniture stacked up on the street. This home was owned by a 92-year-old couple. The man said, "I watched a lifetime of work and accumulation destroyed in a few minutes." His grown daughter was visibly upset as she witnessed her childhood memories destroyed. The elderly couple did not plan on rebuilding or returning to Rainelle to live.

There are many more heart-wrenching stories like those above. The late radio broadcaster Paul Harvey used to say, "The only difference between a tragedy and an opportunity is your point of view." Or as the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8:28:

**"And we know that in all things  
God works for the good of those  
who love him, who have been called  
according to his purpose."**

This tragedy was clearly an opportunity for the love and grace of God to shine forth in the midst of the destruction. And brightly the light of God did shine and continues to shine as ministry and work continues to this day helping people get back to normal.

*Rev. Rick Brown is pastor of the Lewisburg Charge and may be reached at [rbrown9888@aol.com](mailto:rbrown9888@aol.com).*

# *Spiritual care* for people facing a new reality

By Rev. Cheryl George

When the flood waters began to recede, a group of people began the important work of emergency spiritual care for people who were facing a new reality.

Rev. Jeff Allen, executive director of the West Virginia Council of Churches, along with Rev. Amy Shanholtzer, the West Virginia United Methodist Conference's director of evangelism and congregational development, began the task of bringing people who were trained in spiritual care to the places where it was needed.

There were "first in" teams who made themselves available and made sure people had things they needed in the immediate short-term. Others worked with agencies to provide door-to-door needs surveys. Jim and Heather Rogers of Capon Bridge, W.Va., in the Potomac Highlands District, were among those who spent time in the Elkview/Clendenin and Richwood areas.

Jim, who is a layperson, and Heather, a certified lay minister appointed to the Mathias, W.Va., Charge in the Potomac Highlands District, accepted the call immediately. They spent nearly three weeks in the areas. It was a life-changing adventure for them. They had not had any previous experience in disaster work or mass casualty. It was eye-opening. Their ventures took them to remote areas of Clay County where people had put trash cans in the road to mark sink holes that had opened because of erosion caused by the flood. They worked out of the call center at Mt. Tabor United Methodist Church in Elkview where Janet Kelly, Catholic Charities' West Virginia disaster relief director, was receiving requests and dispatching people to meet those needs. They were sent to help people who were in immediate emotional distress and used the connection to get help for a lady who was feeling suicidal.

One of the things that Jim and Heather noticed was the difference in the areas where they worked. In the Clendenin and Elkview area, it seemed like everyone was coming together to help each other. But Richwood felt disjointed and there were many suffering with frustration and misunderstandings involving the Federal Emergency Management Agency and other programs. Richwood was already suffering due to high unemployment and the drug problems that are ravaging our state. The scale of the disaster created an even larger depression in the community. People had even greater worries after the flood. Spiritual care was as an important a need as food and water.

Jim and Heather met many people whose stories were sad and overwhelming. In some cases their task was to just listen to the story — spiritual care involves a great deal of listening and spending time to hear the pain and distress of others. In some cases their task was to provide a means to get help.



*Heather and Jim Rogers*

One afternoon the Rogers spoke for two hours with a disabled man who lived through a horrific ordeal. The man and his wife had

driven their van as far up a hill as they could, only to sit and watch the flood waters swirl around their home. The man wondered out loud, "Why is God keeping me here?" As he and his wife struggled to recover, he needed someone to pray with him, to hear his pain, and to share hope with him.



Before the Rogers left home, some people gave them money to be used to help people in whatever way was needed. They had tried to spend the money at a local home improvement store before they left but a customer gave a donation that covered their purchases. During their their work they stopped at one of the Red Cross shelters and found that pillows were needed. Jim and Heather went to Charleston and purchased as many pillows as their money would buy and brought them back to the shelter. The money that came from their hometown provided pillows to people who had so little. Because of their Spiritual Care Team work, they were able to help provide for this need.

The Rogers viewed this as a life-changing experience. The physical and emotional toll on the people of the communities as well as all those in service was great. There were some who were on a continuous cycle of work and the Rogers were able to listen, pray and offer support. At Mt. Tabor, they slept in a classroom with other care workers, including Therapy Dogs International dogs. The service dogs were absorbing the emotional pain of the people of the community and at night the dogs were exhausted and crying. Their spiritual care work was important and consuming. Heather and Jim were able to help provide a safe place for the workers and dogs to unwind and to laugh.

While working in Richwood, Ruth Ann Elliott, a member of the Jordan Chapel United Methodist Church in Canvas, offered her mother's house for Spiritual Care Team members to stay. This became an important retreat for the team as members could get a good night's sleep, a shower, and time away from the disaster to recharge for the next day's work.

When asked what they would tell others who volunteer as Spiritual Care Team members, the Rogers encouraged volunteers to be ready for the hard times. They felt like they were more blessed than the blessing that they were to others. They said: "Be prepared to change. You can never be prepared no matter how much book learning you have had. Always be prepared for the unexpected. Nothing could have prepared us for the emotional toll. You may think you are prepared but until you get hands on you are not and each situation is different."

For the Rogers the toughest part was leaving! They wanted to continue to help.

The West Virginia Spiritual Care Team is a joint effort of the West Virginia Council of Churches. For more information on training and volunteering, visit the Council of Churches website at <http://www.wvcc.org/disaster-response.html>.

*Rev. Cheryl George is the pastor of The Aurora Charge and may be reached at [pastorcheryl@frontier.com](mailto:pastorcheryl@frontier.com).*



*Heather Rogers and Evelina met this summer at a local fast food restaurant where Evelina, a sweet, spit-fire of a woman was waiting to find out if the home she and her husband (whom she lost 14 years ago) built will be torn down. Evelina's home was undermined by water pouring down the mountain during the June 23rd flood.*

# The need was critical, the response was *overwhelming*

By Fred and Scarlett Kellerman

Unbelievable! That was the reaction as heavy rain continued for the third day in Greenbrier County and the water began to reach flood level. Wellspring of Greenbrier, Inc., a nonprofit established to assist the working poor, homeless and others living on the edge in Greenbrier County, W.Va., was hosting a work team from New Jersey. They were getting worried, with good cause! As the rain continued it became evident that our area was experiencing a catastrophic event in what experts have labeled “a thousand-year flood.”

The Wellspring Center in Rupert, W.Va. — a safe day-haven where basic needs are met — became a shelter for 16 people for two days. Roads were blocked in all directions and the obvious questions were 1) When are we going to be rescued, and 2) How much damage is our area facing? The answers to these questions came rather quickly: We escaped after two days and the area was decimated beyond belief!

Wellspring continues to provide assistance to those affected, many of whom were struggling before the flood. With such demand for help, particularly from those who lost everything, the need for outside provisions was critical — and the response was overwhelming. Volunteers with food, clothes, building materials and, most importantly, labor, came from all over the country. Of course, all of this takes money . . . and wow, did the money ever come.

Fortunately, the reputation of Wellspring, having assisted the poor and disadvantaged for over 12 years, made it a natural target for those wishing to donate funds to be used in flood recovery efforts.

One example of outside generosity came from a large law firm in San Diego, Calif., which chose to remain anonymous. This firm had past business dealings in West Virginia and felt the need to respond to the circumstances. After several calls, the firm sent a corporate check to Wellspring for flood relief. The check was more than double the amount of any single donation ever previously received by Wellspring. It was simply astounding! Since that time, there have been several

donations in excess of five figures, all given to assist the flood victims.

Working to tear out contaminated materials and to clean and reconstruct houses has resulted in some of the most meaningful work ever performed by the Wellspring volunteers.

We have determined that the average cost to reconstruct a flood-damaged house is

slightly in excess of \$5,000. This figure seems low but when considering that most of the houses are small and reconstructed with volunteer labor, the cost of reconstruction is in line.

Additionally, Wellspring has been blessed by being able to utilize existing programs to assist families and individuals in returning to their renovated homes. Furniture, appliances, bedding, bath and kitchen ware, toiletries and household goods of every description have been provided. The Wellspring Center has also served many families with much-needed clothing, both summer and winter wear.



*Scarlett Kellerman shares vision of Wellspring Ministries with Bishop Sandra.*



As the flooded areas recover physically and environmentally, Wellspring continues, as it has since 2004, to serve those who suffer both mentally and spiritually, endeavoring to assist all who are traumatized by events beyond their control. The prayer room is always open and Jesus is always present.

Wellspring's volunteers are loyal, talented, and devoted with the interest of the "Beloved Community" (those living in poverty, those disenfranchised, the disabled and the working poor of Greenbrier County) first in their hearts. Jesus asked us to feed the poor and so we do, serving over 1,000 meals per month.

Most of the food is prepared and packaged at the Lewisburg United Methodist Church and other area churches, then distributed at the Wellspring Center. The center is usually buzzing with events, from children in the play and activity area to people doing their laundry to people visiting.

In addition, classes like "Eating Right and Staying Fit" are frequently taught by the West Virginia University Extension Service. One class, titled "Stress Less," has been especially welcome in the aftermath of the flood. The volunteer office staff takes over 100 calls and welcomes more than 200 strangers and friends a month with refreshments and help. The standard questions are,

"What is your need?" "What is your plan?" and "How can we help?" Our goal is to send everyone out with a prayer, a plan, and a lot of hope in their hearts!



*Pausing for a moment: Cathy Earl, UMCOR, Dan Lowther, Fred Kellerman, JF Lacaria, Bishop Sandra and Scarlett Kellerman*

We recognize that Greenbrier County, as well as the other affected areas, will be in long- term recovery for years to come. With this in mind, Wellspring stands ready to offer whatever assistance is needed to bring some degree of normalcy back to the lives of our neighbors. May God's mercy be with us all.

*Fred and Scarlett Kellerman, directors of The Wellspring Center, may be reached at [wellspring@suddenlinkmail](mailto:wellspring@suddenlinkmail).*



*Wellspring Ministries, Rupert, W.Va.*

"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink... truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these.... you did it to me.  
Matthew 25:35-40

# Too *tough* to be kept down by a flood

*By Jim Justice*

*(Editor's Note: Jim Justice, the owner of The Greenbrier Resort, was elected Governor of West Virginia in November 2016).*

Nothing can compare to the 1,000-year flood that ripped through our state last June taking lives and destroying homes in its wake. It left a giant scar on West Virginia; one that we must never forget.

Seeing the destruction was heartbreaking, but West Virginians are a resilient people. We are just too tough to be kept down by a flood. I saw neighbors helping one another clean up immediately after the water retreated. Folks with almost nothing left were giving what little they had to help others get back on their feet.

Many people have patted me on the back after the flood to say thanks for opening up The Greenbrier to hundreds of people impacted by the flood. I did exactly what I should have done; what any of us would have done. That's just who we are as West Virginians. We take care of one another. I don't deserve any special credit.

I'm proud of the fact that The Greenbrier was able to provide warm beds, hot meals, and cold showers to people who were forced from their homes by the flood. As the hot water came back on, our amazing staff was able to give swimming lessons to the kids and show movies in the theater. It was the very least we could do.

Our state lost good people in the flood, and we must continue to pray for the families who tragically lost loved ones.

Ronnie Scott lives in White Sulphur Springs and keeps the clock at every one of the home basketball games I coach. He's an unassuming guy who never asks for anything. As the water

started rising, Ronnie told his wife to take the car to high ground and he would take the kids to safety. The car got to high ground but the wife went back in the house. She called Ronnie on her cell phone and told him that she was trapped inside the house. The water kept rising. Ronnie kept trying to make his way back to the house to help his wife. All of a sudden she smells natural gas. The next thing Ronnie hears is an explosion. His wife was blown through the roof, and 70 percent of her body was burned. Sadly we lost her a few days later.

That story and many others will stick with me forever. Since the flood, he's been working on rebuilding his life. He's back running the game clock at Greenbrier East High School. Our charity, Neighbors Loving Neighbors, has stepped up to build new homes that were washed away. I'm proud we were able to help Ronnie and grateful that so many organizations have been involved in the recovery effort.



*Ronnie Scott (left) and Jim Justice (right)*



Helping kids is a big part of who I am. Neighbors Loving Neighbors was able to restore the Big Red Gym in Richwood. Fixing that gym allowed both high school basketball teams to practice and play games in the community. Without the gymnasium, Richwood players would have been forced to drive a long distance to Summersville for practices and games. It's a small step, but an important step to bringing back that community.

Looking forward, we must stay focused on rebuilding the areas of our state ravaged by the flood. We've got to do what we can to help all of our neighbors get their lives back as much as possible. For many West Virginians hit by the flood, things will never be the same.

West Virginia is lucky to have church groups and other religious organizations ready to step up when disaster strikes. From the bottom of my heart, I want to thank the West Virginia United Methodist Conference for all they've done for the flood recovery.

I've been blessed in my life, and I feel a responsibility to give back. Each of us can do something for others. Even just a friendly smile or a warm meal goes a long way.

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***Ribbon-cutting ceremony for Big Red Gym in Richwood, W.Va.***



*These young women are part of a Mennonite Disaster Service work team from West Virginia, Ohio and Pennsylvania.*

*Dan Lowther, UMCOR's Cathy Earl, Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball, and Greenbrier District Superintendent Melissa Shortridge paused to share stories and gave thanks for ecumenical partnerships.*

*White Sulphur Springs, W.Va.*

# Giving and Receiving

By Rev. Karen Tate

The main building of Bethel United Methodist Church, which stands on the main street of Camden-on-Gauley, W.Va. sustained significant damage in the Thursday, June 23 flood.

Water filled the small basement and reached two feet high in the sanctuary, damaging floors and walls, tipping over pews, flooding baseboard heaters and electrical outlets, and leaving behind a uniform coating of brown mud.

The attached fellowship hall was miraculously spared any harm, and the church quickly started gathering items to help the residents. By Friday evening the first donations of clothing and bottled water were ready, and early Saturday the congregation opened the hall to begin giving what they had to the neighbors.

Word spread quickly that Bethel was a distribution center and donations started to pour in. Food, water, toiletries, cleaning supplies, and other essentials were received, sorted, and distributed from that small 28-foot by 20-foot fellowship hall. At the same time, work teams stripped ruined paneling, pew cushions, insulation, heaters, and other damaged items from the sanctuary, and started removing the thick coating of mud from the floor.

Several Bethel members had damaged or destroyed houses. Yet they did all they could to help their community. Other volunteers came from Trinity United Methodist Church in Cowen, W.Va., and St. Luke's in Craigsville, W.Va., to help sort and distribute supplies. Trinity members were particularly adept at rounding up much-needed can openers, larger sizes of diapers, and new socks and underwear. Flood buckets soon arrived from the New Vision Depot, the conference's warehouse and disaster response hub.

A van unexpectedly showed up from a hotel in Pennsylvania with much-desired sheets, towels and washcloths (the van driver told us they had to donate or dispose of any linens with even a small stain on them). More assistance came from Summersville Memorial UMC and the Summersville Cooperative Parish.

Bethel's kitchen saw considerable use. The refrigerator was well stocked with cold bottled water for thirsty relief workers and residents. After the Red Cross left the area, an assortment of town leaders and church groups, working in that little kitchen, patched together another week's worth of hot meals for the community and the work teams.

In the midst of the flood relief, Bethel resumed Sunday services in that same fellowship hall, using salvaged and donated Bibles and hymnals. The summer lunch program, started for Camden area children before the flood, continued with barely a hitch, despite the fact that the program coordinator was temporarily housed about 24 miles away.



Bethel UMC  
Rev. Karen Tate

More than one person, after the flood, said that the fellowship hall was spared for a reason. Perhaps that is so. It is clear that the Lord enabled Bethel to make the best use of the undamaged space it still had. The church remained strong in mission and ministry, drawing on the faith and work of the congregation and the power of our Methodist connection.

The hectic weeks of flood relief have transitioned into the long years of recovery and there is still some restoration work to finish in Bethel's sanctuary. Yet there is no doubt, in Camden on Gauley, that Bethel UMC is alive and fruitful in the Lord's work. May it continue!

Rev. Karen Tate, Camden/Cowen/Halo Charge, may be reached at [ktate86@hotmail.com](mailto:ktate86@hotmail.com).



# An awesome display of *love and grace*

*By Rev. Stewart Cottrell*

Our church family has experienced grace in so many ways since the June floods. God's grace was present from the very moment I drove to Clay, W.Va.

**The fact that the members of the Wallback United Methodist Church still had church under their outside shelter the very first Sunday after the flood showed their dedication.**

When we arrived at Wallback that Sunday afternoon the family of a Baptist pastor in Gassaway, W.Va., was cleaning mud out of the church.

Numerous groups helped repair the church at Rolling Hills so we could have services again, including missionary groups that helped replace drywall.



One of the biggest examples of grace came from the West Virginia Conference and John Jarrett of Jarrett Construction Services, Charleston, W.Va. John and JF Lacaria, assistant to West Virginia Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball, led a group of about 50 people from John's company and JF's home church, Cross Lanes United Methodist. They came on a Saturday and

worked all day taking up the floor at Wallback United Methodist Church. It was awesome to see the love and grace shown through all the hard work those folk showed to their fellow brothers and sisters in Clay County. It took several Saturdays, but now there is a brand new floor at Wallback and our church looks better than it did before the flood.

I'd also like to mention the outpouring of financial help to the churches. Here's what a couple of neighborhood kids did to show grace: A day or so after the flood they had a lemonade stand and gave all of the money they made to the Wallback United Methodist Church. What a blessing and a show of grace that was.



The conference and district were a big help, as well. And the Humphreys Foundation, an entity administered by the Midland South District of the West Virginia Conference, donated \$4,000 to each church.

*Rev. Stewart Cottrell is pastor of the Mountain Charge and may be reached at [stewcottrell40@gmail.com](mailto:stewcottrell40@gmail.com).*

# Richwood rebuilding

By Rev. Dr. Jay P. Cook

The June 2016 flood changed many communities in West Virginia including Richwood. I want to first give thanks to the West Virginia United Methodist Conference and the United Methodist Committee on Relief, UMCOR. Without the immediate response from the United Methodist Church the heading above would not be “rebuilding” but “recovering.”

I have witnessed the assistance of work teams from United Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian churches and others too numerous to recall. Volunteers from The House of the Carpenter, Inc., (a conference Advance Special mission project in Wheeling, W.Va., 217 miles from Richwood) were here immediately to assist in the cleanup efforts; special thanks to Executive Director Rev. Dr. Michael Linger and his teams.

Richwood was struggling economically before the flood. Foodland, the community’s only supermarket, had already left town. Dollar General, one of the few remaining businesses that sold groceries, was flooded. So were the middle and high schools.



*Bishop Sandra surveys damage with Jay Cook*

Also hit by the flood was the Richwood Pantry, a community organization mobilized to alleviate suffering and break the cycles of poverty in eastern Nicholas County by providing food, clothing and emergency shelter to area residents. There are approximately 425 households in a database for the pantry and a newly begun Farmers Market. Before the flood the pantry assisted a little over 200 people a week with food, clothing and/or a hot meal at lunchtime. Freezers, refrigerators, food and clothing were all destroyed in the flood.

Following the flood, the immediate food needs of the community were met by donations. But once we were no longer considered a disaster area those supplies were not as readily available.

The city of Richwood has stepped back from distributing food to emphasize getting families and individuals back into their homes or into new facilities. So the pantry has taken over the distribution of food. The Pantry served 131 households on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving; those households served 352 individuals.

The Richwood Pantry has physically moved from the Cherry River Plaza to 44 East Main St. as a partner of the non-profit Nicholas County Empowerment Corp., which owns the building. The pantry and farmers market will eventually rent more than 3,000 square feet of space in this facility. Most importantly, the facility is located out of the flood plain.

The pantry is temporarily using part of the building that will eventually become offices.

**The Pantry is expected to move into another area in the building. There is a great deal of work to be done to prepare the space for the pantry’s permanent home.**

When the building is totally refurbished multiple services will be offered, including the pantry, the farmer’s market, a daycare center and a Red Cross emergency shelter.

We have had teams ranging from Boy Scouts to teams that have been headed up by United Methodist Pastors Randy Vincent from the Fairmont, W.Va., area and Joe Shreve of Weston, W.Va. We still need teams to come and work on the pantry.

Rev. Dr. Jay Cook, Faith-Macedonia Charge, may be reached at [drjayp@frontier.com](mailto:drjayp@frontier.com).



# The best way to make *disciples*

By Rev. Jack Lipphardt

I flunked retirement.

Frequently I am asked why, after six weeks, I would answer a call of my bishop to take on the task of directing our conference response to the June flood disaster.

First ( please don't tell anyone!), I am an obedient person, having a vow of itineracy which extends into my entry into the retired relationship: "Yes, Ma'am, Bishop!" I don't say that glibly but as a serious response to my calling. More significantly, though, it is a matter of discipleship. "Follow me," Jesus says.

Throughout my life, I have remembered a profound comment made by my grandmother: "The best way to make disciples is to be one." I also recall learning from a high school Sunday school lesson series on the Wesleys that Father John observed that "there is no holiness but social holiness."

From my parents, I learned the values associated with observing the needs of others and, without fanfare, doing what they could to respond, often bringing others along by their quiet witness.

Much as I want to take comfort in the thought that Jesus wants to enter my heart — that he stands at the door and knocks — I am persuaded, as retired North Alabama Conference Bishop Will Willimon says, that "We don't take Jesus anywhere; he takes us." Jesus may be standing and knocking at my door, or at the door of my heart, but more than coming in, he is calling me to come out and to go with him. It is a theological framework for the life of discipleship.



"Follow me," he says.

It was tempting to kick back in retirement and take on a number of tasks at the home we built and to finish a number of projects that will need now to wait. Jesus, of course, is welcome in my home, but when I look for him, I find him heading outside, waving me out.

"Follow me," he says.

He is in the work and ministry of the United Methodist Committee on Relief, UMCOR, and the West Virginia United Methodist Conference's disaster response.

He is in elderly folk whose homes were destroyed in Amma and Nallen, W.Va.

He is in children in Rainelle and Camden-on-Gauley who clutch in fear to their mothers when it begins to rain.

He is in children with a single parent in Clay who lost not only their home but also the source of income when the business employing their mother was impacted.

He is in disabled persons from Richwood and Clendenin who were living in residential facilities that were destroyed, requiring their harrowing rescue and unsettling relocation.

He is in the Howard's Creek neighborhood of White Sulphur Springs where massive destruction took place, killing five of the twenty-three people who perished in the flooded region.

Jesus is "out there" saying, "Follow me." That is my motive for what I do. May I invite you to understand "discipleship" as following Jesus wherever he is? And, maybe, others will see our witness and make decisions to follow also.

Rev. Jack Lipphardt may be reached at [jwlipphardt@aol.com](mailto:jwlipphardt@aol.com).

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*The Mission of the Communications  
Ministry Team is to engage and  
empower people and the connection to  
share the good news of Jesus Christ.*

### Conference Communications Team:

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\*Brad Bennett, MonValley

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Judy Pysell, Greenbrier

Ken Peters, Little Kanawha

Carl Tribett, Northern

Dusty Merrill, MonValley

George Hohmann, Midland South

\*At Large

*Maps provided by the  
West Virginia Geological Survey*

# The recovery is not finished and neither are we.

*"We received this donation in our offering plate Sunday.  
Charleston, South Carolina, received generous gifts from UMCs  
all across the nation. So, some of us want to 'pay it forward' and  
help our brothers and sisters in West Virginia."*

*"Heard from a West Virginia parishioner that the [United]  
Methodist Church relief committee was a good place  
to send donations."*

*"Please accept this donation from the children who attended our  
Vacation Bible School in July. The children wanted to help the  
children who were affected by the floods."*

The West Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church is blessed with an overwhelming outpouring of God's grace and generosity from brothers and sisters everywhere. There are donations from small businesses to big banks, local foundations to insurance companies. People contribute remembering places where they grew up. Graduates of West Virginia Wesleyan and West Virginia University give. Churches that had experienced flooding are moved to shower us with prayers and contributions for our recovery. Vacation Bible Schools, Sunday Schools, congregations and conferences, each touched by the immeasurable love of Christ, are moved to respond to places of human suffering.

When you make a donation, all of it is used for flood recovery. Your contribution combines with money we have received from the United Methodist Committee on Relief and partnerships we have formed with local foundations to become a greater blessing to those in need.

Your donation can be made through the West Virginia Annual Conference #935 for this special offering. Checks payable to the W.Va. Conference Treasurer may be sent to P.O. Box 2469, Charleston, WV 25329. ONLINE gifts can be made through the United Methodist Foundation of W.Va. at [UMFWV.org](http://UMFWV.org). Select the online giving portal and fill in "United Methodist Disaster Response #935" to complete your gift.

We are deeply grateful for and blessed by every one of your gifts.

We will continue to partner with you for as long as it takes to rebuild our communities, in both body and spirit.



# Restoring HOPE with your HELP

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I will support WVUMC flood recovery efforts with my prayers.

\_\_\_\_\_ I will support WVUMC flood recovery efforts with a financial gift.

\_\_\_\_\_ \$5/month for a year

\_\_\_\_\_ \$25/month for a year

\_\_\_\_\_ per month for a year

\_\_\_\_\_ one time gift

Your financial gifts may be given electronically. Go to the United Methodist Foundation of WV, Inc. website - [umfwv.org](http://umfwv.org) - click on 'ways to give' and open the giving portal. There you will see WV Disaster #935. 100% of every gift goes directly to help people in need. Thank you!

\_\_\_\_\_ I will support WVUMC flood recovery efforts as a volunteer. I am willing to serve:

\_\_\_\_\_ Spring 2017    \_\_\_\_\_ Summer 2017    \_\_\_\_\_ Fall 2017    \_\_\_\_\_ Spring 2018    \_\_\_\_\_ Summer 2018

\_\_\_\_\_ I have served as a volunteer in the West Virginia flood areas and I am willing to share my testimony.

To fill this form out electronically go to [wvumc.org/disaster-reponse](http://wvumc.org/disaster-reponse).  
Your response will be sent directly to our Disaster Response Director Jack Lipphardt,  
or mail to:

WVUMC Disaster Response  
Attn: Jack Lipphardt  
PO Box 2313  
Charleston, WV 25328

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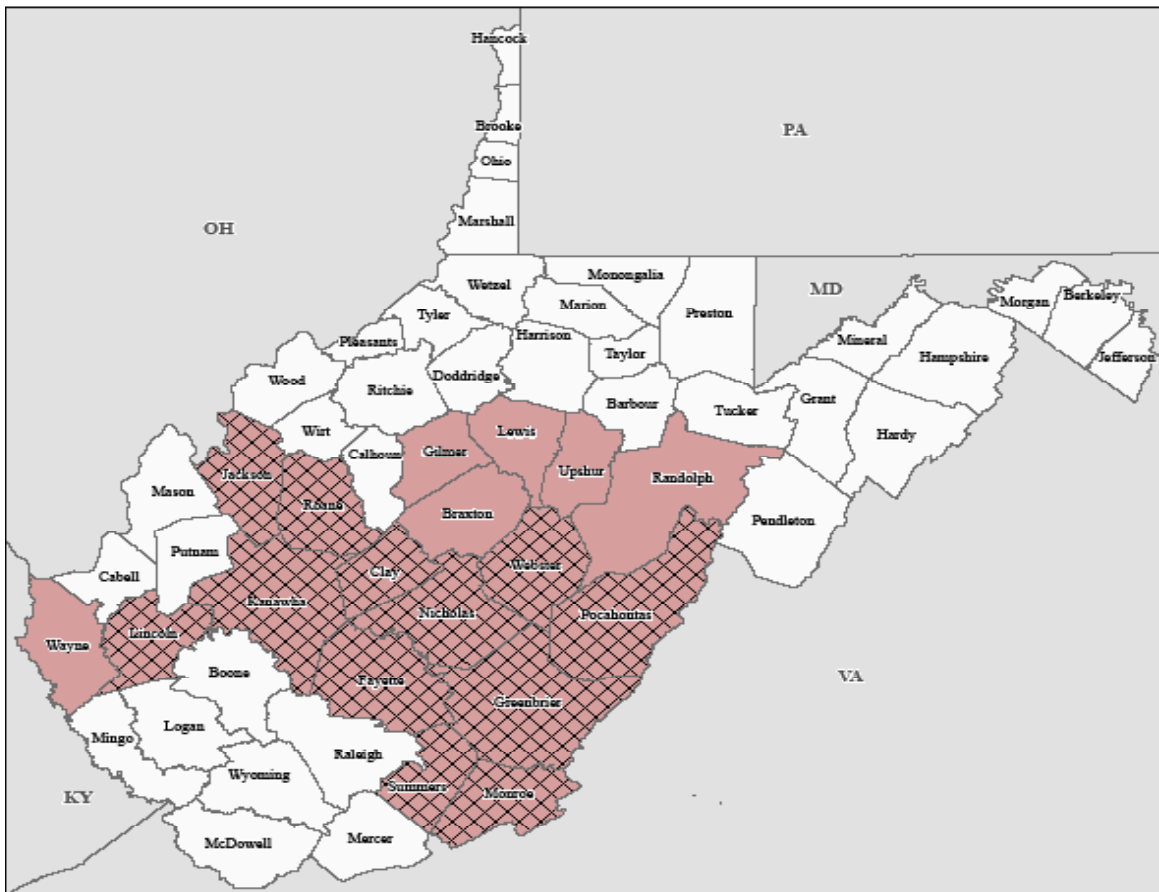


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### **FEMA-4273-DR, West Virginia Disaster Declaration as of 07/13/2016**



*Eighteen of West Virginia's 55 counties were affected by the June 23 flood. Hash marks signify the 12 counties designated eligible for individual and public assistance; colored areas signify the 6 counties designated eligible for public assistance.*