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Churches and DRS Together

“I think that after the flood there were more people willing to reach out to help others and work together than ever before,” said Pastor J.J. Wicke. “The October 2015 flood was unlike anything anyone had ever seen. Some people lost everything.”

Wicke also said that there is beauty that can come from a hardship: disasters like the floods in Texas have a way of connecting people together to help each other, often in ways that only the Lord can orchestrate.

Wicke is the pastor of the First United Methodist Church in Weslaco, Texas, which is housing World Renew Disaster Response Services (DRS) volunteers while they serve the community with flood recovery and rebuilding.

“In January 2016, our church made a commitment to use one of our buildings for mission housing as the

Lord sees fit. Two weeks later, World Renew DRS contacted us to see if we would consider housing volunteers,” said Wicke. “The timing was perfect. Of course we said yes.”

World Renew DRS is committed to serving flood survivors in Weslaco and the Rio Grande Valley from September 2016 to May 2017. DRS volunteers from across the United States and Canada are repairing the flood-damaged homes there every week.

“World Renew DRS volunteers clearly have a heart for serving others. When they are here, they don’t just work on homes, they talk about God and truly care about the people they are here to serve,” said Wicke. “Some of the DRS volunteers volunteer at our monthly food pantry on Saturday — their day off.”



Robert Laarman
Director, World Renew
DRS

Letter from the Director

Dear Friends:

I am writing this letter to you as we prepare for Christmas although you will not read it until well into the New Year. During this time, we remember the glory of God coming to be among us in a dirty barn stall surrounded by animals. It was difficult for many to imagine that God was with them covered with the smell and dirt of this “baby nursery.”

Our DRS volunteers find people whose homes are smelly, dirty, and damaged by natural disasters. Although baby Jesus may not have lived in those homes, people created in the image of God do live there. This reflection may seem tarnished by their current circumstances, but the image of God remains.

We often recognize the image of God in ways that are not physical. Volunteers talk excitedly about the love, faith, peace, and hope that is revealed in people who are caught in dire circumstances. We learn and are inspired by the ways that God is revealed in people who are passing through difficult situations.

As we work towards being God’s hands and feet among disaster survivors, let’s also continue to be inspired by how God works in and through them. Together we can shine the love of God across the world.

Serving Christ by serving others with you,

Bob Laarman
 Director, World Renew DRS

World Renew Disaster Response Services’ Mission is:

To show God’s love and bring hope to disaster-impacted communities in North America by restoring the homes and lives of those who are most vulnerable,

To help communities build their capacity to prepare for and recover from disasters, and,

To provide opportunities for Christians to honor the Lord by using their time, talents, and financial resources in service to others.

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A new team of World Renew DRS volunteers arrives in Weslaco every three weeks, and the congregation hosts a potluck to welcome the volunteers and encourage them as they start working there.

The World Renew DRS home repair work will eventually come to an end, but First UMC will continue to use the space that World Renew DRS has improved while staying there to serve their community with emergency and mission-type housing.

By partnering with churches and organizations like the First UMC in Weslaco, World Renew DRS can continue its mission. Whether they are sharing space, giving donations, offering prayers, or volunteering, these organizations testify that they care about their community and their neighbors who have been affected by a disaster.

World Renew DRS gives heartfelt thanks to all of the churches and organizations with whom we share a common mission. Thank you for your partnership and God bless your ministry.

A Snapshot of Green Shirts 2016



Top row of photos above, L-R

- Ocean County, New Jersey
- Saipan
- Fort McMurray, Alberta

Center row of photos, L-R

- Century, Florida
- Faith Fellowship CRC from Fairview, Alberta, serves in Yosemite, California.
- Youth from Delmar, Pennsylvania, serve in Highland Park, New Jersey

Bottom row of photos, L-R

- Tangipahoa, Louisiana
- Franklinton, Louisiana
- Webster County, West Virginia

Where We worked in 2016

Thank you to everyone who made working in these communities possible.

AB, Fort McMurray	NC, Windsor
CA, Calaveras County	Nebraska
CA, Lake County	NJ, Monmouth County
CA, Yosemite	NJ, Ocean County
FL, Century	NJ, Union Beach
FL, Pasco County	Oklahoma
FL, Pensacola	Saipan
IL, Brookport	SC, Florence
IL, Watseka	SC, Various Counties
IN, South Bend	TX, Corpus Christi
LA, Livingston Parish	TX, Austin
LA, Tangipahoa Parish	TX, Hidalgo, Willacy, and Cameron counties
LA, Washington Parish	TX, Jasper, Newton, and Orange counties
MI, Detroit	TX, Rio Grande Valley
MI, Grandville and Wyoming	TX, San Marcos
MO, Cape Girardeau	TX, Waller County
MO, Eureka	WA, Okanogan County
MO, Joplin	WV, Mingo County
MO, St. Louis	WV, Webster County
MS, Holly Springs	WV, Greenbrier
MS, Tippah and Benton Counties	
MS, Washington County	

Across North America, DRS Volunteers Respond



Reconstruction Sites

DRS-managed reconstruction sites are back in full swing after closing down for several weeks in December and January. In **Saipan**, we were reminded to stay flexible and trust the Lord when we learned we needed to find new volunteer housing. The Lord opened doors, new housing was appropriated, and the work is still going strong. It is very hot in Saipan, so the teams are taking it easy to accommodate the temperatures. Thank you to everyone who has and will travel across the globe to serve in this response. Thank you to Ric and Dee Scott, Bill and Corry Kuyvenhoven, and Harv and Verla Klaver for each spending more than six weeks in the role of site leader.

Volunteers are working hard at DRS-managed sites in **Texas**, in San Marcos and Rio Grande Valley.

Bob, director of DRS, spent time at both of these sites in November and was impressed not only with the contributions of the volunteers, but also the congregations that are hosting the work teams. Housing a group of volunteers on a week-in, week-out basis is no small commitment, and we are thankful that the Lord has led these churches to partner with DRS in serving their communities.

DRS volunteers are responding to wildfires in Calaveras County, **California**, by working on new builds. There is no shortage of work! The campground where volunteers are lodged is working out well. The site is nearby several churches that support the work DRS is doing there, and there is a unique opportunity for local, day-long volunteers to work with the team to get a taste of what it's like

Sheila, Sylvia, and Michelle work in Rio Grande Valley, Texas.

to volunteer at one of our sites. We hope they love it and sign up for a three-week assignment!

The DRS response to a 2016 tornado in Century, **Florida**, is continuing. Local TV stations have done a number of news segments and interviews with our work team members there. The volunteers shared stories about the home rebuilding needs that remain after the tornado hit in spring of 2016. One homeowner said, "It was like Christmas when I got my new roof!"

Needs Assessments

In October, Bruce and Christine de Boer led a needs assessment in Fort McMurray, **Alberta**, that helped the local recovery group determine which residents needed



assistance to recover from historic wildfires that occurred in May 2016. Even in their heartache, the hope of Christ was evident. The information collected from the needs assessment is essential to the local recovery group, World Renew, and other partnering organizations as we continue to make plans for reconstruction.

After **Louisiana** experienced incredible flooding in April and August 2016, World Renew DRS sent several teams to conduct needs assessments. Jerry and Nancy Brouwer led a team in Tangipahoa Parish in October. In January, Walt and Carol Ackerman led a team in Livingston Parish, and Denny and

More than 1,400 surveys were taken in Livingston Parish, Louisiana! Extra volunteers were sent to provide additional support. The team (pictured) always had a line of families waiting to meet with them, averaging completion of more than 130 surveys a day.

Judy Stoel led another team in St. Tammany Parish.

In November, Ben and Char Dykema led an assessment team in Waller County, **Texas**, in response to flooding in the spring of 2016.

Rapid Response

In October, Hurricane Matthew raked across Haiti and the eastern U.S. **North Carolina** was hit particularly hard by torrential rain and flooding. DRS was contacted immediately by our long-time partners, and we quickly deployed Rapid Response teams to do clean up. The first team served in Windsor and the second team worked in Tarboro, North Carolina. Volunteers came from Michigan, New York, Florida, and Ontario. Thanks to all who served, and special thanks to Marc Faasse and Lois Hecksel for their leadership.

A remnant of Hurricane Matthew traveled as far north as **Nova Scotia** where it caused extensive flooding along the coast. Many thanks to

Dirk and Margaret VanOord for recruiting two teams, one from New Brunswick and the other from Prince Edward Island, that traveled to Sydney, Nova Scotia, to do clean up with World Renew partner, Samaritan's Purse.

Group Mission Trips

Groups of all types, ages, and sizes are making significant contributions to the ministry of DRS by responding to disasters in more than a dozen locations where they are cleaning up flooded homes and rebuilding houses.

This winter, several DRS group volunteers are concentrating their efforts in **West Virginia** and **South Carolina**. Some groups are taking on whole-house projects in West Virginia while others are working on an intensive, short-term reconstruction site in Sumter, South Carolina. Thanks to Rob and Sharon Schelling and Bruce and Marcia Fallis for providing leadership and continuity in this effort.

Hope Shines in Fort McMurray

“A young mother stopped by a World Renew walk-in center in Fort McMurray, Alberta, to meet with World Renew Disaster Response Services (DRS) volunteers. Her family lost their home and all of their possessions in a wildfire last May.”

“The family is struggling but they are also turning to God for strength and direction in their lives,” said Barb Bracko, a World Renew DRS volunteer in Fort McMurray. “Sometimes a tragedy can become a stepping stone to greater faith.”

Barb and other World Renew DRS volunteers met with the young mother and many other Fort McMurray residents in October and November 2016 after wildfires destroyed roughly 2,400 structures and 1.5 million acres of land in Alberta the previous May.

Barb said that she saw the hope of Christ shining through the ashes many times in Fort McMurray.

“One of the striking features about the population of Fort McMurray is its diversity. There are people from every continent who settled there to find work in what has been called ‘Canada’s boom town.’ With such great diversity, discord between ethnic and religious groups could grow quickly. But after the fire forced the entire city to evacuate, people were even more unified than before. They say, ‘We don’t shake hands in Fort McMurray. We hug.’ These residents are an example for all of Canada and other countries that are welcoming home some of the 65 million refugees, or one in every 113 people, in the world today. In times of need, we are all called to ‘love our neighbors as ourselves’ (Matt 22:39).

“Another couple who came to the World Renew walk-in center was struggling to start their life over after the fire



A home that was destroyed by a wildfire in May 2016.

destroyed their home. When our team followed up with them a few days later, the husband said that he and his wife prayed with our volunteers who interviewed them. It was then that he realized that ‘This is what I’m missing. I have forgotten about God.’ The man has been meeting with his pastor since then. We may forget about God, but He never forgets about us. ‘I will never forget you. See, upon the palms of my hands I have written your name.’” (Is 49:15-16)

The World Renew DRS needs assessments connect disaster survivors to recovery resources in their own communities and are a key step in the reconstruction process, identifying individuals and families who need home repair services.

Today, plans are underway for reconstruction in Fort McMurray as DRS Regional Managers work together with Mennonite Disaster Services and local officials; there are still many details to be worked out before work can begin. Your continued prayers are welcome. Pray for the planning process as well as for the individuals and families not yet recovered after last year’s fires. Pray that the hope of Christ continues to be strongly felt as recovery plans progress.

Blanket Exercise at DRS

Teams of Native peoples and other North Americans from Canada and the United States developed an activity called “the blanket exercise.” There are both American and Canadian versions of this awareness-building activity, which Synod 2015 called “a practical, powerful, experiential way to understand Native peoples’ history in the Canadian and American contexts” (crcna.org/blanket-exercise).



In December DRS staff, volunteers, and other participants completed the blanket exercise and many of the participants found it startling. During a time of debriefing, one group member

said, “This was by no means a pleasant experience, but it was an important and eye-opening one.” Another participant said, “It’s disheartening that U.S. history doesn’t give an accurate picture of what really happened to the Native American people and culture.” Participating in the blanket exercise is part of the ongoing efforts of DRS to expand cultural awareness among our staff and volunteers.

New in the Office: Meet Diana!



Becky (r) trains Diana in her new position.

We are happy to introduce you to Diana Marquez, our new volunteer program manager. Diana, who took over the position after Becky Purdom retired last year, wishes to share the following thoughts with you.

“Hello to all of our amazing DRS volunteers. I am very excited to be taking over for Becky Purdom, and I look forward to partnering with you in ministry and service.

I am amazed at the commitment and dedication to building God’s kingdom exemplified by our DRS volunteers. I am humbled to be part of the DRS team, and I look to the leading of the Holy Spirit during this time of transition. I appreciate the gracious welcome and encouragement I have received from the staff and volunteers who have walked with me during the

World Renew Around the World

Reaching out in Aleppo

“Final message — people are dying since last night. I am very surprised I am tweeting right now and still alive. . . . I am very sad no one is helping us in this world, no one is evacuating me and my daughter. Goodbye.”

These are the haunting words of a Syrian mother living in eastern Aleppo. In December, Syrians in Aleppo were using Twitter and other social media tools to cry out to the world that abandoned them. Since then, reports of unimaginable suffering there have emerged in the media and online.

In Syria, this is neither the first offensive by one combatant group over another, nor the last. For

years, attacks like December’s massacre have killed, wounded, or trapped thousands of civilians. In the violence, mothers and fathers, and sons and daughters, shared their desperate, bone-chilling pleas for the world to hear.

World Renew is committed to respond to the enormous needs of the people in Aleppo. We are working with local church partners that are already on the ground to reach out to families who are most affected by the crisis. The most immediate needs are food, water and blankets.

You can learn more and help those in need at worldrenew.net/syria.

last few weeks. Your contagious energy and enthusiasm for the ministry of serving those in need nourishes my spirit. The anticipation of meeting and knowing you all offers me so much to look forward to!”



In Memory

We would like to remember the following volunteers that passed on to Glory in 2016.

Cor Vander Vinne
John Van Lenten
Virgil Dykstra
Jared Poortinga
Herman Kaldeway
Wilma DuBois
Harriet Mast
Lloyd Osterink
Marvin Wynalda
Glenn Haan
Arie De Klerk
Marilyn Stroo
Bernard Potgeter
Robert Oakes
Tom Hoogboom
Robert Strabbing
Ralph Wiersma
Winnie Klop
Betty Mosher
Hennie Docter
Elaine Pasma
Jan Huizinga
Shirley Sjoerdsma
Henry Zwaanstra

If you know of a World Renew DRS volunteer who passed away in 2016 that is not on these lists, please let us know so we can recognize them in an upcoming issue of the Spotlight.



What Happens Under Blue Skies?

When a natural disaster hits, dark clouds are looming and the need is obvious. But what about when skies are blue? Maybe you've asked yourself:

Yes.
Yes.
YES!

Do people really still need help when the weather is nice?

As a church family, your donations to and volunteer efforts with World Renew Disaster Response Services (DRS) truly make a difference. Your efforts help those who, without your support, may have been forgotten and left hopeless.

Is there work to be done when the sun is shining?

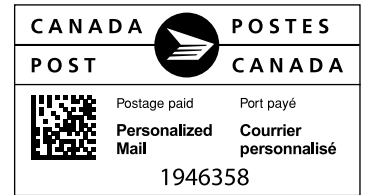
Learn more about getting involved at worldrenew.net/drssunday.

Are donations needed even if there hasn't been a disaster recently?

Hold a DRS Sunday this year! Visit worldrenew.net/drssunday for a new video and more information.



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