



Inside This Issue

Responding to Holiday
Disasters 2015 **1**

Letter from the Director **2**

Where We Worked in 2015 **3**

Across North America,
Volunteers Respond **4**

In Memory **5**

Prayer Guide **5**

Hope like Job, Recovering in
New Jersey **6**

Building Estimating in Saipan **7**

DRS Sunday 2016 **8**

Responding to Holiday Disasters 2015

The year 2015 ended with a bang. Two very powerful tornadoes hit the U.S. during Christmas week.

On December 26, an EF4 tornado hit Garland, Texas, just north of Dallas, damaging more than 600 homes. A few days earlier, an EF3 tornado battered northern Mississippi and left a 100-mile path of destruction through the state.

Winter storm Goliath was the deadliest weather event in the U.S. in 2015. It extended into 2016 and included two severe tornadoes that dropped more than two feet of wet snow, ice, and freezing rain on towns from New Mexico to Illinois.

St. Louis, Missouri, took some of the most damaging precipitation. The heavy rain caused the Mississippi River to crest at 15 feet above flood stage. The resulting swell of water pushed out to the Mississippi's distributary

streams, and homes and towns in the path of massive flooding from 16 breached levees were evacuated.

Regional Managers from World Renew Disaster Response Services (DRS) organized a response with officials and other responders and have been in Texas, Mississippi, Illinois, and Missouri assessing the damage and offering assistance.

Please continue to keep the people and communities that were affected by winter storm Goliath in your prayers, and consider making a financial donation to assist survivors with your gift to *North American Disasters 2016*. World Renew DRS is making plans to respond to the homeowners and the communities affected, offering unmet needs assessments, capacity-building training, reconstruction services, and other requested activities.



Ron Willett, director of World Renew Disaster Response Services.

Letter from the Director

Greetings in the mighty name of Jesus Christ!

I hope that you are in good health and that you and your family are experiencing God's blessings this New Year. I greatly appreciate your continued support and prayers for World Renew Disaster Response Services and **THANK YOU!** for all that you do to help those who are in need.

In recent disasters, such as the severe flooding that occurred last fall in South Carolina and Texas, DRS volunteers have been offering their assistance to those in need — mucking out homes, spraying for mold, removing debris, tarping roofs, organizing and mentoring local recovery committees, sending unmet needs assessment teams, setting up long-term reconstruction sites and . . . showing God's love to disaster survivors. I am so very **THANKFUL!** to each of you who give your time, skills, and financial gifts to help people in places that have been devastated by flooding and tornadoes. Thank you for the caring and loving presence you bring to this ministry.

Sunday, March 6, 2016, is DRS Sunday in participating churches in the US. The Synod of the Christian Reformed Church designates the first Sunday in March as a World Renew offering date for DRS, but churches of many other denominations — Reformed, Presbyterian, United Reformed, and non-denominational churches — also participate in this giving opportunity. We have created all-new, free materials for your congregation to use in 2016, including a bulletin cover and insert, a poster, and an offering-length DVD. You can find these resources at worldrenew.net/drs for download or order.

Will you talk with the leaders of your church about inviting those you worship with to support DRS on World Renew DRS Sunday? If March 6 doesn't work, feel free to find another Sunday in 2016 to celebrate World Renew DRS together. If a DRS-themed adult education class is preferable, an introductory Power Point presentation is also available for that use.

The wonderful generosity of church members and congregations like yours goes a long way towards providing DRS with the resources needed to assist people when they are affected by a disaster. Please encourage your church to participate by helping to plan or promote DRS Sunday, and schedule an offering to support this ministry in 2016. And of course, wear your green DRS shirt to church that day.

May God continue to bless each and every one of you as you display God's love and compassion among those who He calls us to serve.

Joyfully in Christ, for God is good!

Ron Willett, Director
World Renew Disaster Response Services

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.

Where We Worked in 2015

As we reflect on 2015, we are thankful for the grace of God who allowed us to respond to disasters in communities across the U.S. and Canada, helping families return home and sharing the love of Christ with them. Thank you to all of you who make this work possible.



Across North America, DRS Volunteers Respond

DRS-Managed Reconstruction Sites

The reconstruction site in **Ocean County, New Jersey**, is closed for a winter break and reopens on March 12, 2016. DRS conducted another unmet needs assessment among Sandy survivors because the Long-Term Recovery Group (LTRG) we partner with felt that many people still needed help. The results of the assessment were returned to the LTRG, and our teams will begin working on homes in March.



Once again, Regional Project Managers (RPMs) Rick and Bonnie Wiersma were asked to help out in **Washington, North Carolina**, where the LTRG identified several homes that still needed work. We opened a “mini-site” for six weeks in the fall of 2015 to meet this need. Thank you to Bill and Corry Kuyvenhoven for filling the role of construction supervisor.

When the site in **Pensacola, Florida**, reopened in January 2016, Project Managers Don and Gert Vos felt there was enough work to last thru mid-March, and we estimate closing the site at that time. We are grateful for each volunteer who is working in Pensacola.

We are happy to share that we are opening a new site in **San Marcos, Texas!** Teams will begin work in mid-March in response to May and October 2015 flooding.

Unmet Needs Assessment

Texas was hit by tornadoes and flooding more than once in 2015. DRS sent several unmet needs assessment teams to help with the recovery from these disasters.

- In September, Walt and Carol Ackerman led an unmet needs assessment team in **San Marcos, Texas**, after severe storms hit there in May 2015. The area received another huge storm in October 2015, and some of the same homes flooded a second time. World Renew DRS completed a second assessment in January 2016 with a team led by Denny and Judy Stoel.
- A team also led by Denny and Judy Stoel worked in **Houston, Texas**, in November. Walk-in centers were scattered throughout the city, and the team put on a lot of miles as a result.
- Bruce and Christine de Boer led a team in **Corpus Christi, Texas**, in November. They completed a surprising 379 surveys — much more than the LTRG anticipated. Bruce and Christine are following up with the LTRG to assure that people’s needs are met.
- In January, Yogi and Liya Haasdyk led a team that conducted assessments across **Hidalgo, Willacy, and Cameron counties, Texas**, also in response to the May and October 2015 storms.

Wildfires cause immense damage in **California** last year. In January 2016, Harry and Phyllis Kuipers led a team in **Lake County**, and Herm and Joan Fransen led a team in **Calaveras County**.

Homeowners in **Iroquois County, Illinois**, experienced major flooding in July 2015. Rich and Pat Grasman



led a volunteer team in contacting residents during an assessment in October 2015.

In the beginning of 2016, several more communities requested needs assessments. These projects are being organized and teams assembled.

Building Estimators

In October, the island of **Saipan**, a U.S. commonwealth located 120 miles north east of Guam, was hit by a typhoon that caused major wind and rain damage. The American Red Cross asked World Renew DRS to provide building estimators in the recovery. Soon, three couples were on their way to Saipan. They completed more than 100 estimates in two weeks’ time. All of World Renew DRS’s expenses were covered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the American Red Cross.

Building estimators will be in **San Marcos, Texas**, early this spring, in response to 2015 flooding.

Organizational Capacity-Building

RPMs Carrie and Len Blauwkamp have been responding to the storms that hit **Texas** throughout 2015. Carrie and Len are involved with several LTRGs and are making visits to the most affected areas.

RPMs Eric and Nancy Johnson are active with LTRGs in **South**

Carolina where many villages, towns, and cities requested help with organizational capacity-building after Hurricane Joaquin in October 2015. The Johnsons are meeting with LTRGs to provide training and information about setting up a long-term recovery plan, doing needs assessments, and opening a reconstruction site.

All RPMs stay in touch with the communities, the LTRGs, and the emergency managers in their areas, especially when storms, flooding, and tornadoes occur. They keep up with conference calls, correspondence, emails, and attend meetings with other organizers and responders. We thank our RPMs for the ongoing work they do in their regions and ask that you pray for them throughout this year.

Group Mission Trips

Many churches and schools are planning and participating in mission trips this year. This winter and spring, hundreds of volunteers from ages 14 to 75 will be serving in **California, Florida, New Jersey, Missouri, Michigan, South Carolina, and elsewhere.**

Rapid Response

In early February 2016, a team spent two weeks in **Eureka, Missouri**, after January flooding. A team of eight volunteers spent two weeks in **Sumter, South Carolina**, in October 2015. The team helped 17 families clean up their flooded homes after Hurricane Joaquin soaked the region.

Hybrid Site in West Virginia

In Mingo County, West Virginia, a large percentage of the population lives along small winding roads that are placed alongside creek beds.



Often, the creek is between the road and the house.

Historic rains caused many small creeks in West Virginia to become raging rivers in 2015.

Hundreds of houses and mobile homes were flooded. And hundreds of private-access bridges were washed away, cutting off medically fragile people isolating vulnerable people from access to roadways.

In partnership with West Virginia Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, DRS is focusing on repairing homes in West Virginia from January to April 2016. Our partners are spearheading an effort to rebuild homeowner's private bridges, so that they will not be affected by the next major storm. DRS volunteers may assist in the bridge project, but our primary focus is repairing homes.

The Mingo County project is considered a "hybrid" site because it merges aspects of a DRS-managed reconstruction site with the group mission trip program. DRS facilitators are our primary contacts with the local recovery group, and they coordinate the work of volunteers. Individuals and couples who volunteer for two plus weeks, as well as church groups volunteering for one week, are providing much-needed home repairs.



In Memory

We remember the following DRS volunteers who passed into glory in 2015.

Dennis Roosendaal
 Art Terpstra
 Dave Gabrielse
 Jack Geschiere
 Jack Admiraal
 Rhoda Van Lopik
 Bill Smit
 Nicholas Keegstra
 Ray Dedman
 Mae Versluys
 Joanne Wierstra
 Joe De Weerd
 Emily Brummel
 Pieter Van Veen
 Bernice Frens
 James Sjoerdsma
 John Batts
 Howard Claus
 Bill DePeuter

Please keep all of our volunteers in your prayers as they work for those who were devastated by a disaster.

Praying Through 2016 Together

Please pray with us through the year. Find a weekly prayer guide at <http://bitly.com/PrayDRS2016>.

Hope like Job, Recovering in New Jersey

“After four years of staying with extended family, this couple can finally move back home,” said DRS volunteer Ann Evan as the repairs on Steve and Theresa’s home were completed.

When Hurricane Irene flooded their New Jersey home in 2011, Steve and Teresa were forced to move out. Then a year later, Hurricane Sandy flooded their unlivable house again, this time destroying all of their household possessions. Although the water was gone, the remaining moisture in the structure and walls began to cause mold and mildew to grow. Neither their insurance claim nor other assistance requests resulted in the funds they needed to rebuild.

“It wasn’t until World Renew DRS starting working on Steve and Theresa’s house that they felt some hope,” Ann said.

A Future With Hope, World Renew’s partner in Ocean County, New Jersey, identified Steve and Theresa’s needs and assigned the repairs to World Renew. DRS volunteers began work on their home in September 2015, and in the next three months they replaced the flooring and drywall, renovated the kitchen, and shingled the roof.

“One evening, we invited Steve and Theresa to have dinner with our team,” Ann said. “Our devotions that evening were about Job, how he lost everything including his earthly possessions and his entire family, yet he steadfastly trusted in the Lord. Steve and Theresa took the opportunity to share more of their story with us.”

The couple said that their 13-year-old son, Ryan, passed away after a battle with childhood cancer. Steve and Theresa had experienced every parent’s nightmare, and their grief was visible. Steve memorialized their heart-wrenching loss with a tattoo that said, “Only God knows why.”



Steve and Theresa (center) with World Renew DRS volunteers.

“Despite losing their son and their home, Steve and Theresa told us that they still have hope that can only come from the Lord,” Ann said. “We were moved by their testimony and thankful for the opportunity to help them get back home.”

World Renew volunteers completed the repairs on Steve and Theresa’s home in December 2015, just in time for Christmas.

Angels in Texas



“I was just sitting here praying because I didn’t know what to do about my situation. And then you called! You are like an angel!”

—Texas disaster survivor

DRS Unmet Needs Assessment volunteers in Corpus Christi, Texas, November 2015.

Building Estimating in Saipan

Did you know that there is a U.S. commonwealth in the western Pacific Ocean about 120 miles north of Guam? It is Saipan, the second largest of the Mariana Islands, a 66-square-mile strip of land that about 50,000 Americans call home.

In August 2015, Typhoon Soudelor hit Saipan and caused immense damage. The American Red Cross, with a grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, requested assistance from World Renew DRS. Our building estimators were asked to meet with homeowners to assess the cost of repairing their homes.

In November 2015, six World Renew DRS volunteers flew to Saipan to complete the two-week assignment. Volunteers Rich and Phyl Grevenstuk share the vignettes below.

“Fred lost everything in the typhoon,” Phyl said. “All that was left of his small home were the four walls and a tent that one of the recovery groups gave him. When we first met him, Fred didn’t see a way out of his situation. But when we visited him later, Fred told us that some of his friends had agreed to help him put a roof on his house. Just before we left, the new roof was complete, and Fred had a brighter outlook on life because he saw that people cared about him.

“Another family of seven was living in four rooms of their damaged home, and their situation was dire. When we visited, we found a mother and daughter, both elderly, sitting on a bed in one of the rooms. One woman was an amputee and both women were blind. The family was caring for them the best they could. Their lives were further complicated by the lack of a functioning bathroom. It had no roof and was continually flooded by broken pipes.



The typhoon left many homes in ruin.



Saipan residents make do with what is left of their belongings.

We requested immediate help, and the family received assistance to address their emergency needs.

“We met a man named Morgan at church on Sunday. We followed him as he rode his bike to his home in the jungle. Morgan had arranged mattresses for walls, curtains around his bed, created an outside kitchen, and lived with a dirt floor. He asked us for a few pieces of tin (without holes) to use as a roof to keep his bed dry. He also owned a few ducks and roosters, and he offered us a duck. He was so generous with the few possessions he had. It was a humbling experience.

“In Saipan, there was a wonderful recovery group working on getting people’s needs met. We found that

people were ingenious in using whatever they could find to fix their homes. We took picture after picture of the devastation, and each photo was connected to a person who was, in turn, connected to our hearts. I feel like we only scratched the surface of needs caused by Typhoon Soudelor.”

World Renew DRS volunteers completed 112 construction estimates in Saipan. The local recovery group used the estimates to create a basis for the cost of recovery. In addition to providing excellent hard data, the Grevenstuks, along with Lee and Sue Mys, and Gary and Bev Van Noort, made connections of the heart. Listening, understanding, and valuing people as image bearers of God is part of the recovery process.

One news report in the *Saipan Tribune* quotes local recovery director, Jenny Hegland, who said, “We really need to understand what the needs are and who we are trying to serve. . . . We are taking the 112 estimates by World Renew and looking at them as a subset that is representative of the entire need” (www.saipantribune.com, 12/11/15).

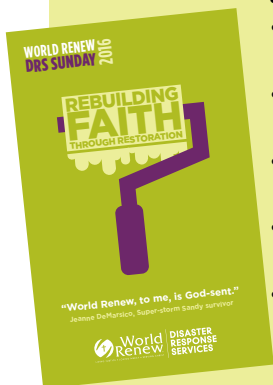


Save the Date! DRS Sunday 2016

Who: You and your church

What: Invite your church to learn more and to support World Renew DRS.

- Show the new video, *Rebuilding Faith Through Restoration*.
- Use the 2016 DRS Sunday bulletin inserts or covers and poster.
- Wear your green shirt to church on DRS Sunday.
- Share your personal experience volunteering with DRS.
- Take an offering designated for DRS.



When: March 6, 2016, is a World Renew offering date for DRS, but if that day doesn't work, pick another Sunday in 2016 that works better for your congregation! You can order the all-new, free materials listed above by email at sales@faithaliveresources.com, by calling 800-333-8300 to order by phone, or by going to worldrenew.net/drs to order online.

Why: Financial donations from churches are essential to the ministry of World Renew DRS. Your offerings and support make positive changes possible in the lives of disaster survivors in the U.S. and Canada. You can help people around North America get their homes back and provide them with encouragement in Christ.

"World Renew, to me, is God-sent," said Jeanne DeMarsico, a super-storm Sandy survivor.

Visit worldrenew.net/drssunday to watch the video and order your free materials today!

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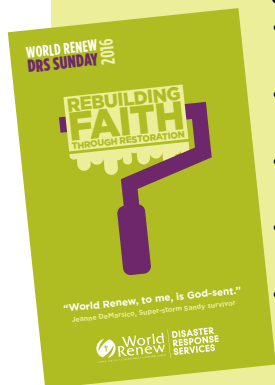
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