

Dear friends in the Penn West Conference,

Recently I traveled to Puerto Rico as the new Penn West Conference Disaster Coordinator for the annual gathering of the United Church of Christ's Disaster Ministry. I learned about the UCC's role in disaster recovery work and discovered that there is a lot of work to do. The United Church of Christ has found that in every disaster there are unmet needs; that is where we step in. While some organizations and denominations have specialties for responding to natural and human-caused disasters, the UCC focuses on long term recovery and walks alongside communities as they rebuild and find their new normal. Sadly, long term recovery work is where there is the most need in disasters and is often the most overlooked and underfunded. Through our connections with partners and our available resources we do the best we can with what we have. The sad part (not surprising though) is that disasters disproportionately affect minorities, the marginalized, and folks with limited resources. In short, the UCC is doing justice work even after disasters happen. But our help to our neighbors should not always be reactionary because we have the ability to help communities prepare for when disasters hit. Preparing for a disaster is not a regular thought for most of us but making plans before a storm occurs can greatly mitigate the impacts of a disaster.

So what does a Conference Disaster Coordinator(CDC) do? Well, for one, I am here to help if/when a disaster were to occur in the Penn West Conference. I have recently joined groups that will allow me to be connected with the proper people when disasters occur. Also, I am a resource to you all if you would like to help when a disaster occurs within our country and abroad. I will be organizing work groups that will travel to areas to help in recovery efforts and I would gladly point folks in the right direction when they want to offer resources to places in recovery.

Over the next few months I would like to build a network of folks within the Penn West Conference that are interested in hearing news about disaster ministry in the UCC and may be willing to share with their church, family, and friends about opportunities to support our neighbors in their times of need. If you would like to be connected, please fill out the survey I created - <https://forms.gle/GceqCZmWApNFq45U9> Also, if you or your church has done work in disaster zones or helped after a disaster (as in donations of money, clean-up buckets, etc.) please let me know in the above form.

Lastly, if you would like me to speak at your church regarding Disaster Ministry in the UCC please contact me and we can schedule a time. There is a lot to cover but I can focus on preparedness or the response to disasters. I have seen the effects of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico and did work (along with others from St. Paul's in Chicora and St. Paul's in Knox) in Daytona Beach after Hurricane Matthew and am willing to share my experiences. Thank you for all that you do in your various settings and I'm grateful to be involved with you in the work of helping folks rebuild and recover from whatever disaster we may face.

*Thanks and peace!
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