

Holston's RESPONSE to Fires & Tornadoes

Holston Conference of The United Methodist Church • November 2016



A Letter from Bishop Dindy Taylor

My dear brothers and sisters:

Our hearts are heavy with concern for the communities of Sevier County and all of eastern Tennessee which has been so severely affected by wildfires -- as well as tornadoes that we're just hearing about early this morning in Marion, McMinn, and Polk Counties, and the Sequatchie Valley in Tennessee. It's such a tragedy, and we grieve so intensely because this is all happening in our own backyard. The photos and stories we see on the news and social media are people and places that we know and love.

We don't know about all the damage yet, but we have a connection that is open and working. It's wonderful that we have a church with so many pieces in place and generous people who are eager to help. It's already there. We don't have to create it. There are people who are trained to begin the aid and rebuilding process, and we are already working with TEMA and UMCOR. We will pull this off. We will help each other and help our neighbors recover and rebuild.

As we wait for more information about how we can best respond, we have already set up a wildfire fund and tornado fund that you may contribute to. If you live close to the conference office in Alcoa, we are collecting bottled



Moments after we posted a need for water, energy bars and eye drops for firefighters, Pete James and Mary Spralding from Carpenters Campground UMC delivered supplies to the Alcoa Conference Center.

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water, sports drinks, energy bars, eye drops, towels and wash clothes which are already being distributed to the firefighters and emergency personnel. We will continue to share information about how to help and what is happening.

In the meantime, we can pray with the psalmist. *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.”* We can ask God for help. We can spiritually surround the persons affected by the fire and tornado – and those involved in coming to their aid – with love and care, with God’s love and care.

Our hearts are broken for so much devastation. But in the midst of the grief, we know that God is there. He is always present. As the people of God, we will commit ourselves to be witnesses to the grace and healing love of Jesus Christ.

Contributions may be made at disasterresponse.holston.org for the wildfire and tornado relief or sent to Holston Conference designated for “wildfires” or “tornadoes.”

May God’s grace and peace sustain us all,

Mary Virginia Taylor
Resident Bishop Holston Annual Conference
November 30, 2016



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