

SPECIAL ISSUE

Caring for our neighbors



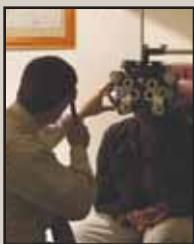
Theology of disaster response ministry

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Anatomy of a disaster

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Churches aim for changing lives

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What happens before and after a disaster can make all the difference for the affected families. See the info graphic on page 4 which provides a simple outline of how volunteers can best help and general steps in disaster recovery. [See DISASTER, page 4A]

Hunger alliance seeks ministry partners for Cooking Matters

BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

Arkansas families at risk of facing food insecurity have a new option for fighting hunger in their own households. Cooking Matters has arrived.

Through a six-week course, Cooking Matters provides education on nutrition and cooking techniques for all ages. The program also includes Shopping Matters, a hands-on experience with shopping for low-cost ingredients that offer high nutritional value.

The Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, an umbrella organization

for the six Feeding America food banks and almost 300 pantries across the state, is the state's lead partner for Cooking Matters, a program of the national non-profit Share Our Strength.

While the course itself is new this year, it's part of the Arkansas No Kid Hungry campaign launched in 2010 by the Alliance and Share Our Strength. Other partners include the Arkansas Department of Human Services, the governor's office and the Department of Education.

"We're looking for people who want to be engaged in this around the state," says Kathy Webb,

[See COOKING, page 6A]



Participants in a Cooking Matters demonstration class at First UMC Little Rock practice their knife skills. Pictured, from left: Joy Rockenbach of the Arkansas Coalition for Obesity Prevention; Rosemary Withers of the Arkansas Health Department; and Jeff Quick, director of the Food Bank of North Central Arkansas. The Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance is rolling out Cooking Matters statewide, and churches are ideal partners.

COURTESY PHOTO

The reality of hunger in Arkansas, and the real ways we can help

BY STEPHEN COPLEY
Special Contributor

It is hard for many to believe that people in Arkansas go hungry. That is because we often think of “the hungry” as pictures on television. And in our daily experience, we don’t encounter those situations.

In reality, many today in Arkansas do go hungry. Other language to describe the situation is to be “food insecure”—that is, they don’t know where their next meal is coming from, and the quality of that meal may be lacking. And, it’s very likely that the person going without food is a young person whose body is still developing, and who is in school trying to learn. To be hungry in those situations can be devastating.



Stephen Copley

It is hard for many to believe that in the United States many go hungry. We seem to have access to so much food, yet hunger occurs at an ever increasing rate.

How it happens

There are many causes for people being hungry. Here’s just one example of how it happens: If you work a job at minimum wage (\$7.25 an hour), you make roughly \$15,000 a year. Paying about \$300 a month for your family a place to live means you have already spent \$3,600 a year. Then you have to make choices about food, medicine, clothing and the transportation required to go to work.

People will choose to purchase food, but the quality and the amount will suffer. As a direct result of those choices, proper nutrition will suffer. And, as the days leading up to the next paycheck occur, food may be put on hold so the family can make it to payday. And an illness or a vehicle that breaks down will force the family to further cut back on its grocery bill.

We see the situation becoming more complex today, with nearly 8 percent of Arkansans without jobs. Unemployment puts more and more individuals and families at risk of being food insecure. And, in many cases, weeks are becoming months as they struggle to find work. Even with unemployment insurance, the bills continue to mount. This is why we have seen the use of our food pantries increase to the point that they face dwindling supplies of food.

The Arkansas Conference Hunger Task Force is working with United Methodist congregations to try to alleviate the situation. We also continue to work with the agencies that distribute food.

What we can do

We encourage each United Methodist congregation in the Conference to be engaged in their community, making sure that people have access to food. That may mean a church has a food pantry. It may mean that the church works with other churches in the community to develop a food pantry. Many of our churches are already engaged in food pantry ministries. Many have developed backpack programs to help feed kids in local schools. Churches can adopt entire schools through the Food For Kids program of the Arkansas Rice Depot.

We also encourage the development of community gardens, where the fresh produce is distributed to people in need of food. We are looking at ways to develop classes in local churches to teach how to preserve fresh produce. And in our work with the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, we encourage churches to take part in the Cooking Matters program, which teaches people who get fresh produce the best ways to cook it.

Church members statewide can assist in a gleaning program done in conjunction with local farmers.

Gleaning the fields—that is, gathering produce left behind after a commercial vendor’s harvest—brings more fresh produce to the local food banks to be distributed to those in need.

Yes, hunger is a problem in Arkansas—but members of local churches can be involved in assisting those who are hungry in so many ways. They can volunteer their time at the local food pantry to help sort and distribute food. They can work in a community garden. They can teach others how to cook, dry, freeze and can fresh produce.

They can volunteer and at one of the major gleaning events where the produce is brought in from the field.

Christ has called us to remember those who are hungry and to give them food. There are many opportunities in the Conference and in the local church to assist.

The Rev. Copley serves as chair of the Conference Hunger Task Force. To learn more about the opportunities he mentions, contact him at scopley438@gmail.com or see the resources listed on page 6A.

‘Yes, hunger is a problem in Arkansas—but members of local churches can be involved in assisting those who are hungry in so many ways.’



EDITOR’S CORNER

BY AMY FORBUS

Too chicken to go about our business?

As I compile this special issue focused on caring for our neighbors, I’m surrounded by rhetoric that accomplishes nothing of the sort.

I have hope that by the time this issue of the paper arrives, society won’t be so focused on reacting to the beliefs of a purveyor of chicken sandwiches. (How will future generations see this dust-up? Does it mark a turning point in human history? Will they laugh about it? Or will they even notice?)

But regardless of our opinions on the topic—whether we couch it as a free speech issue or a civil rights issue or a moral issue—I don’t believe using social media platforms to proclaim, debate or defend our views will lead us to a solution. In fact, it may distract us from faithful dialogue and lasting solutions.

We have work to do that’s more crucial than deciding whether to support or boycott one business establishment. We have people to feed and clothe and teach and serve and heal. We have lives to transform in the name of Jesus Christ—the lives of others and, while we’re at it, our own lives as well.

An image now making its way around Facebook depicts a crowd of people waiting in line outside a Chick-Fil-A. Emblazoned across it are these words:

“You’d never see that many Christians lined up to help at a food bank or a homeless shelter. And that’s something Jesus actually said to do.”

Taking a side in the War on Chicken just isn’t going to cut it.

In this issue, you’ll find some in-depth ways to care for your neighbors. Disaster response ministry will place you in the midst of chaos and pain to be a force for order and healing. When you teach people to shop for nutritious foods and prepare them in healthful, delicious ways, your work will plant the seeds of transformation for entire households and communities.

Even if you don’t have medical training, you can volunteer to provide other kinds of help at a free medical clinic. You may not be an attorney, but at a legal clinic, you can guide someone to the resources they need when they’re facing problems that affect their livelihood and their family’s security.

Choose your job: Help a victim of a wildfire sort through the charred remains of their house. Mentor a person making the challenging transition from living on the street to gaining a permanent address. Share the journey of someone enduring senseless physical or emotional pain.

And when they ask why you do it, tell them about the God who loves us all, who craves relationship with each of us more than we could ever crave a fast-food meal.

Offer them Christ.

To reach me, send an email to amforbus@arumc.org.



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Submission Deadlines

Issue Date	Submission Deadline
Sept. 7	Aug. 22
Oct. 5	Sept. 18
Nov. 2	Oct. 17

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Replenish**



Be sure to recycle your copy of the *Arkansas United Methodist* when you’re finished reading it (or share it with a friend).

Why respond? The Bible tells us so

A theological understanding of disaster response ministry

BY JANICE AND BYRON MANN
Special Contributors

“The power of nature can bring humanity to its knees in despair leaving little to cling to, to hope for. We bring hope—helping people hold to the everlasting truths of our faith; God’s promises never to abandon us. In Christ, our despair is nailed to the cross and overcome. In Him we have everything we need.”

—from “*Meeting God in the Ruins: Devotions for Disaster Volunteers*,” published by Lutheran Disaster Response

Bad things happen, but God is not absent. He’s right beside us.

God instills in us a passion for this work we call disaster response. He creates in us compassion for those who hurt because a disaster has brought pain, trouble and desperation. We are called to respond with care, in love, as instruments of hope and help. We remind folks they’re not alone and offer a vision of normality and order in a place and time of overwhelming chaos.

When we provide help following a disaster, we do so with a foundation of biblical teaching supporting our efforts.

Luke 10:30-37, the story of the good Samaritan, serves as a reminder to all who call themselves followers of Christ that when strangers lie wounded, each of us is called to respond. That response may mean we have to set aside our personal agenda and embrace inconvenience to offer care.

In **Mark 8:35**, Jesus tells us that if we give up our lives for his sake and for the sake of the Good News,

our lives will be saved. The work is not easy, but we have opportunities to love and serve and share our God-given gifts.

Through God’s help and provision, and with a little sacrifice of our comfort and time, we can make a difference. Somehow God fashions us into ministers and what we do into ministry—a ministry of care that leads to spiritual, emotional and physical recovery. Shall we do as Isaiah did in **Isaiah 6:8** when he heard God calling and answer with “Here I am, Lord. Send me”?

In **John 13:3-17**, Jesus sets an example by washing the disciples’ feet and shows that we are intended to serve one another. When we recognize a need or hear a call for help, God sends us to serve—to follow the way of Jesus.

Matthew 20:28 tells us that even Jesus came not to be served, but to serve others. Later, in **Matthew 25:40**, he says if we serve one of the least of these, we are serving him.

Blessings amid disaster

By serving, we are not just helping and trying to make a difference. It’s more than that. Christ-like service helps us become the person God created us to be. Not only do we help others, but we also put ourselves in touch with God’s mission for our lives.

The usual outcome: enormous blessings for those who are trying to bless others.

Those blessings come in many forms...

...from watching as someone tediously helps and tends to the

needs of church family and responders, only to realize later that he is in pain from an injury sustained while climbing his way over debris that surrounds his own home.

...from seeing a pastor’s deep care and concern for her congregation as she sheds mixed tears of sorrow and joy for loss and survival.

...in receiving a note of thanks and gratitude for a team that has traveled many miles to offer help.

...from witnessing God’s work in bringing a whole community together to rebuild a home.

...in seeing God open doors for ministry to someone who wonders what kind of God would send someone to help them.

And the list goes on. We are allowed to experience God’s grace and mercy through our efforts.

Romans 5:1-5 tells us that because of our faith in what Christ has done for us, we are given undeserved privilege and that we can rejoice when we run into problems and trials. God uses those challenges to help shape us into vessels he can use. God created depth and strength of human spirit so we have the power to adapt and survive. God created a fearsome world, but gave us love and grace so that we not only survive, but thrive.

Why we must be ready

We recognize the potential for disaster that exists within the borders of our Conference: floods, wind storms, ice storms, fires, earthquakes. It’s never a matter of *if* disaster will strike but *when*... so we prepare.

Have you ever found yourself having to scramble for answers after a disaster has occurred? Those involved in disaster response ministry realize that the failure to plan often leads well-intentioned Christians to delay, complicate and confuse recovery efforts.

When we operate impulsively—with no preplanning, training, or coordination—rather than with an understanding of how disaster response works, we may duplicate aid to some people while others are overlooked. Worse yet, we may inflict additional harm; improper response is a terrible thing to force upon those whose lives are already damaged.

addresses these concerns.

Additional harm also happens when untrained volunteers don’t understand how to appropriately care for survivors’ spiritual and emotional needs. During this time of destruction and loss, spirits are fragile. As United Methodists in disaster response, we strive to follow the first of John Wesley’s General Rules: “Do no harm.”

Spiritual care is primarily a ministry of presence. Those who have just been severely traumatized are most vulnerable to further harm from well-intentioned Christians imposing their beliefs on them. We follow the Points of Consensus of the National Voluntary Organizations

Training opportunities Oct. 1-4

To learn about the upcoming Disaster Response

Academy and how it can benefit your ability to

respond when disaster strikes, see page 7A.

Additional harm most often happens when untrained volunteers don’t understand the law, insurance assessment and other procedures. Without training, well-intentioned volunteers can imperil a survivor’s eligibility for financial assistance from insurance and the government. Without training, hasty repairs can even jeopardize a survivor’s health. The Conference Disaster Response Committee offers Early Response Team (ERT) training, which

Active in Disaster (NVOAD) as guidelines for spiritual care during disaster. Spiritual and Emotional Care training is offered to help us assure that we “do no harm.”

We have moral and legal reasons to be prepared. If we take seriously our ministry to relieve suffering, then planning becomes a priority. As Christians, we must do all we can to prevent further suffering of already hurting people.

When disaster strikes, it is local churches that provide the first response to their communities. Connecting Neighbors training is offered to help local churches plan and prepare, so when the time comes, they are ready to respond appropriately in their communities.

And we do all of this to ensure we provide a caring Christian presence in the aftermath of disaster.

The Rev. and Mrs. Mann serve as co-coordinators of disaster response for the Arkansas Conference. To reach them, send an email to disaster@arumc.org.

The Rev. Byron Mann cleans out a flood-damaged home in Nashville, Tenn., to prevent mold growth during the time between disaster and rebuilding. In 2010, a team of trained individuals representing several Arkansas local churches responded to the Nashville area’s call for Early Response Teams.



Janice Mann, right, helps connect a client with the resources she needs following the April 2011 Garland County storm that damaged her home.

COURTESY PHOTOS

ANATOMY OF A DISASTER



DISASTER STRIKES

EMERGENCY STAGE —at onset of disaster until area secured and safe; can last days/weeks as needed

- **What:** Search, rescue, put out fires, secure buildings, utilities, provide medical care
- **Who:** Trained civil authorities - the professionals—fire, law enforcement, EMTs, National Guard, etc.

FOLLOWED BY

RELIEF STAGE—emergency assistance for immediate needs, set up mass care (shelter, food water hygiene) needs & damage assessments, secure supplies, Disaster Assistance Center, volunteers/donation management, spiritual/emotional care

- **Who:** Trained with background checks, badges civilian workers who provide specific functions and have been invited by the affected community. Small teams, self-sufficient/sustaining.

Not Trained? — Hold off until you are trained or join a team involved in the recovery phase

What happens before and after a disaster can make all the difference for the affected families. This info graphic provides a simple outline of how volunteers can best help and general steps in disaster recovery.

BEFORE THE DISASTER HAPPENS

Be prepared - get your training, background check & badge.

Types of Training:

- Basic Disaster Response
- Early Response Training
- Connecting Neighbors
- Advanced Training
- Volunteer in Mission

What Else?

- Plan—local church & district
- Train
- Practice
- Secure (resources, supplies, partners, sites, volunteers)



Other ways you can help

- Ham Radio Operators
- Volunteer to serve on your district disaster response committee. (See district coordinator's contact information opposite page.)
- Relief-supply kits help provide care for the most vulnerable people during times of crisis. See the list of available kits at www.umcor.org/UMCOR/Relief-Supplies



RECOVERY

- **When:** Relief efforts are complete and at the invitation of community. Typically 10x duration of relief stage
- **What:** Long term recovery committees formed, case management, repair/rebuild, provide unmet needs assistance.
- **Who:** Teams invited by affected community, teams with trained leaders, large teams with trained leaders and individuals willing to help others. Teams may rely on the community for support—housing, food, etc.

FOLLOW-UP & EVALUATION

- **When:** When things are “normal”
- **What:** Assess response, efforts to avoid or reduce life and property risks of future disasters.
- **Who:** Department and agency leaders, non-government representatives, key private sector representatives.

Where does the \$\$ come from to help in disaster response and recovery?

- **General Administrative Fund**— monies collected in times of non-disaster. Used for general administrative expenses, materials and equipment used for/with disaster relief in general, disaster training.
- **Reserve Fund**—monies collected by the annual conference during the disaster.
- **Designated Advance Special**
- **Church-wide Appeal**—rare and used for disasters of large magnitude (think Katrina or 2008 Sri Lanka Tsunami)
- **United Methodist Committee on Relief**



Conference & District Disaster Response Coordinators

Conference Disaster Response Coordinators

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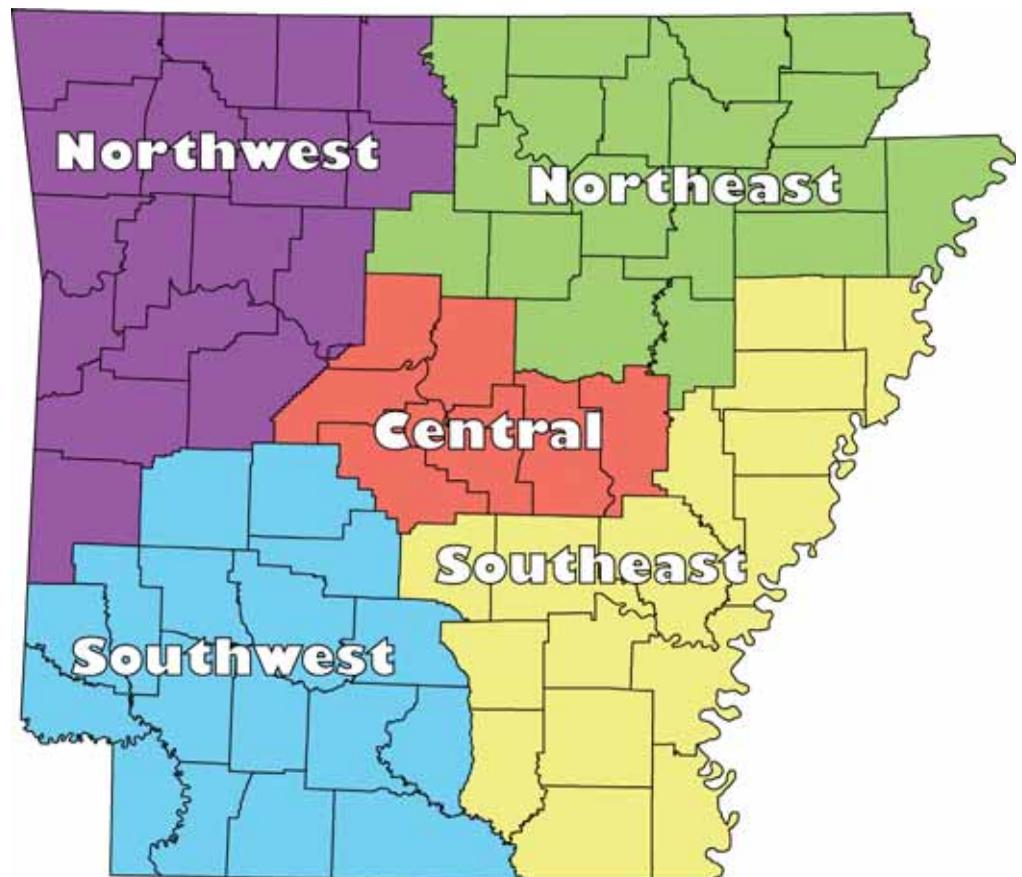
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Cooking (continued from page 1A)

executive director of the Hunger Relief Alliance and a former restaurateur. Webb is an active member of First United Methodist Church Little Rock, which in June hosted the first central Arkansas-area training.

And there's a larger United Methodist connection, too: At a meeting earlier this year, the Conference's Hunger Task Force endorsed Cooking Matters as a program it believes can have a sustained positive impact on the battle against hunger.

"What we agreed to do that day was to help churches that are doing [community] gardening to continue that and take it forward, and then get engaged in Cooking Matters," Webb said. "So you've already got this focus in your mind, and you're thinking about nutrition and fresh food, then you add this as a component to it."

Basics and benefits

Cooking Matters provides participants with a cookbook full of easy, low-cost, nutritious recipes. But it's about far more than a cookbook.

"We teach basic knife skills, we teach food safety skills, there's a big nutrition piece," Webb says. Every class is staffed by a volunteer chef as well as a volunteer from a nutrition-related field.

Webb, a chef herself, will be leading some of the classes, which are participatory.

"It's not like I stand up and cook a meal and tell you how to do it; we all stand there and we cook this meal together," she said. "And then you get groceries and recipes to take home, and you cook it at home."

She says that everything she has cooked lately has come from the Cooking Matters cookbook—at home, at a recent open house

showcasing the new program and at the Alliance's last board meeting.

"If we're going to be rolling out this program, I think we need to know what the food tastes like," she says. "I wanted to make sure that it was really good. And it was great."

When the first Cooking Matters class hosted by the Northwest Arkansas Food Bank held its graduation in May, the director there told Webb that many of the participants were surprised to find they had lost weight during the six-week course.

"Not everybody has yet made that correlation between obesity and lack of good nutrition, because calories are cheap," said Webb.

When they do make the connection, though, many families find that with proper nutrition comes better overall health: Illness decreases throughout the household, and children make fewer trips to the school nurse.

Webb shares a success story from the class that graduated recently from the Arkansas Foodbank's offering of Cooking Matters: "As I was leaving the graduation, I overheard a woman talking to the nutrition volunteer. She showed her how her pants were being held up with a string, because they were too loose. She was very proud of herself, and said she was doing this for herself and her child. Her graduation from the class was a big deal for her family."

How churches can help

While the Alliance has begun implementing Cooking Matters among its current partners such as food banks and the Arkansas Commission for Obesity Prevention (ARCOP), they also hope to involve faith communities.

Churches with full commercial kitchens already have an ideal

education space for the program to use. In addition, a congregation might look into providing childcare and transportation to remove other common barriers that potential students may encounter.

But first, learning about the basics of the program and the available grant funding will provide a good foundation for individuals or churches interested in helping. Visit cookingmatters.org to find those details, as well as a link to information on the Shopping Matters component of the program.

A commercial kitchen isn't necessary, though, for a church's involvement. The program needs volunteers to help with the classes or the Shopping Matters grocery store tours, as well. And because the program is available in both English and Spanish, the Alliance is seeking those who are bilingual and willing to be trained for leadership.

"We have targets of how many people we want to get through the classes," Webb says. "We hope to get 4,000 people through Shopping Matters by the end of the year, and 8,000 within a full year."

Representatives from the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance are available to speak to Sunday school classes, United Methodist Women and United Methodist Men's groups, church councils or other groups considering involvement in Cooking Matters, Shopping Matters or both. Call Webb or Ashley Wright at the Alliance, 501-399-9999, or send an email to kwebb@arhungeralliance.org. The Alliance schedules training sessions as new potential partners are available.

Kids who participated in the first Cooking Matters class at the Arkansas Foodbank make healthy mini-pizzas during their graduation night session.



Participants in the central Arkansas training session for Shopping Matters learn about unit pricing, which will help them maximize grocery dollars for nutritious, lower cost foods.

COURTESY PHOTOS



Chris Love, program director for the Arkansas Community Foundation, and Phyllis Haynes, CEO of the Arkansas Foodbank, help out during graduation night of the first Cooking Matters class hosted by the Arkansas Foodbank.



Resources recommended by the Arkansas Conference Hunger Task Force

Arkansas Foodbank Network

www.arkansasfoodbank.org
4301 West 65th Street
Little Rock, AR 72209
501-565-8121

Provides food for local food pantries.

Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance

www.arhungeralliance.com
1400 W. Markham Street
Suite 304
Little Rock, AR 72201
501-399-9999

Information on gleaning, educational programs like Cooking Matters, summer feeding program.

Arkansas Rice Depot

www.ricedepot.org
3801 W. 65th Street
Little Rock, AR 72209
501-565-8855

Administers the Food For Kids backpack program and food for local pantries.

Bread for the World

www.bread.org
425 3rd Street, SW
Suite 1200
Washington, D.C. 20024
202-822-7323

Provides a public witness on hunger issues.

University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service

www.uaex.edu
2301 S. University Avenue
Little Rock, AR 72204
501-671-2000

Shares information on community gardens, offers classes on cooking and food preservation.

Disaster Response Academy set for Oct. 1-4 at Mount Sequoyah

The South Central Jurisdiction's Disaster Response Academy, scheduled for Oct. 1-4, will be held at Mount Sequoyah Retreat and Conference Center in Fayetteville. This event makes the training available to many more people than can be accommodated by the United Methodist Committee on Relief training held each November in Baldwin, La. It also makes it more convenient for United Methodists in Arkansas who want to learn how they can serve their neighbors following a disaster.

The academy includes a choice of four tracks, allowing participants to choose the level that will give them the greatest benefit:

- **Basics of Disaster Response** is geared toward those just beginning this type of work, and is a prerequisite for some of the other tracks;
- **Connecting Neighbors Training** addresses the faith community's responsibility in disaster readiness and response, and suggests tools to meet individual and community needs;
- **Early Response Team (ERT) Leadership** prepares those wishing to become instructors for volunteer ERT training

within their United Methodist Conference.

- **The Advanced Track** is available for the participant who has been serving as a conference disaster response representative, has already taken the Basic Track and is seeking additional or advanced training.

Annual conference and district disaster response coordinators should receive this type of training at least once a quadrennium. For details about the various tracks, registration, and housing and meals, visit scjdra2012.eventbrite.com.

Arkansans who attend should notify the Rev. Byron and Janice Mann at disaster@arumc.org so that attendees' capabilities can be added to the database of trained disaster response workers and resources.

Some tracks at the Disaster Response Academy require a recommendation from the trainee's home Conference. To obtain a recommendation, contact the Manns at disaster@arumc.org.

Because preparation is essential, any church or individual interested in training, volunteering, donating or otherwise assisting in disaster response should contact the Manns *before* a disaster strikes.

Spotlight on Disaster Response Academy Track 2: Connecting Neighbors

Shortly after a series of tornadoes spiraled through Indiana, Kentucky, and Tennessee in late February 2012, United Methodist conference disaster response personnel reported to the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) that they had already begun to assess damages in areas hard hit by the severe weather. This was good news for the Rev. Tom Hazelwood, U.S. disaster response executive for UMCOR, because it meant that UMCOR's work to prepare local churches for disaster is paying off.

"The United Methodist Church's first response to disaster rests with the people in the local church," said Hazelwood. **"It always begins and always ends with neighbors helping neighbors."**

When a disaster strikes, the local church provides the first response. The visible presence of the church is an essential and effective ministry that brings God's hope and healing to people in times of crisis.

A church prepared for disaster ministry has taken steps to safeguard the people and property of the church and is prepared to respond to the suffering of their neighbors in a time of crisis. **UMCOR's Connecting Neighbors Leadership Training is a one-day, local church disaster-readiness program designed to equip volunteer trainers with the information and tools they need to help guide the church as it prepares to respond to disaster in the community.** Those persons willing and able to prepare their church community for this ministry are encouraged to participate in this program.

Attendees learn how to identify types of disasters likely to impact the community, assess the immediate needs of their neighbors and the church's resources to meet those needs, connect the church to outside resources and to the community's emergency plans, develop a system of communication, and much more.

After participating in a recent Connecting Neighbors workshop, Anne Harvell of Minnesota said, **"I get it now! UMCOR is about Response-Ability."** Harvell's play on the word "responsibility" captures the essence of UMCOR's US Disaster Response program. UMCOR gives United Methodists the ability to respond to emergencies and help untold numbers of people get assistance when they have nowhere else to turn.

Be able to respond so you can say: "I am trained. I am ready. Lean on me."

—the United Methodist Committee on Relief

Basics of Disaster Response is a prerequisite for Connecting Neighbors training, and is offered as Track 1 at this same event. Register at scjdra2012.eventbrite.com.

Food For Kids mission projects benefit VBS participants' peers



COURTESY PHOTO

First United Methodist Church Arkadelphia, left, held its "Operation Overboard" Vacation Bible School June 4-8, with 182 kids and adults attending. The VBS mission project was to raise money for the Arkansas Rice Depot's Food For Kids backpack program. They collected over \$2,400, which is enough to supply food-filled backpacks to an entire school for the coming academic year.

At St. James UMC Little Rock's VBS, the 456 participating

students and more than 170 youth and adult helpers collected 1,195 pounds of nonperishable food and raised \$2,074.44 for the Food For Kids program. Shown at right during the Thursday evening VBS celebration are, from left, Kaylea Hutson, director of children's ministry; Marcia Dunbar, director of evangelism; Rice Depot vice president Lauren Frost McElroy, receiving the check; Liz Robinson, director of middle school youth ministry; senior pastor the Rev. Siegfried Johnson; and executive pastor

the Rev. Blake Bradford.

Food For Kids provides new backpacks, stocked with kid-friendly foods, to participating schools throughout Arkansas. Each school distributes the backpacks to students who display educational, physical or emotional problems at school due to hunger at home. Food For Kids' formula has proven so successful that organizations in at least 40 states have used it as a model for their own programs.



PHOTO BY DEBBIE KELLY

Life-changing help seeks to make long-term difference

Sometimes the best and most important things we can do to help our neighbors involve meeting immediate needs: providing a hot meal, a cup of cold water, a coat or some clothing. Other times, the needs aren't so simple.

When an individual faces multiple obstacles in life, a single act of mercy provides only temporary relief. The ministries below demonstrate the ways some Arkansas churches aim for providing help that doesn't just brighten a day, but that changes a life.

Helping families get on their feet

Stafford Waller, left, Emmie Thomas and Steve Stafford help prepare the interior of Christopher's House for its first residents. Stafford is the son of Chris Waller, in whose memory Christopher's House is named.



PHOTO BY JESSICA RITCHIE

A ministry of First UMC Springdale, Christopher's House seeks to provide long-term help to families who need temporary housing assistance. Its opening was featured in the Jan. 6 issue of the *Arkansas United Methodist*; since then, its first resident family has been working on a plan with the church's partner in this project, 7 Hills Homeless Center. As a result, the family of eight who had lost their house to a fire is now preparing to move to a permanent home of their own.

"Christopher's House is a one-family-at-a-time ministry, but we seek to make lasting changes in their lives," said the Rev. David Freeman, the church's executive pastor. And it seems that the church may soon find a way around that one-family limitation: "We're in the initial stages of Christopher's House Two—identifying property," he added.

Providing medical care and counseling

With the help of volunteers and other churches from throughout central Arkansas, the small congregation of Oak Forest UMC Little Rock has transformed itself into a one-stop health care center for the working poor.

Medical professionals offer their services for free in the church's medical, dental and vision clinics serve some of Little Rock's uninsured and most vulnerable residents. The congregation, which has an average worship attendance of 70, this fall will open a counseling and social-work center to complete its health care ministry. Mission teams helped prepare all summer by building a wheelchair ramp, painting and delivering furniture.

"The wonderful thing about our ministry is that you can really show people the way out of their problem," said Dr. Russ Breshears, Oak Forest's pastor. "Here's the food, the medical services, and now we can offer counseling services and social work. But most importantly, all our efforts are offered in the name of Christ, the One who heals us and saves us."

Each clinic has a biblically fitting name. The medical clinic goes by the name Shepherd's Hope; the vision clinic is called Bart's Place after the blind man Bartimaeus, whose sight was restored by Jesus;



Dr. Ted Penick administers vision testing to Wynona Morgan, the first patient at Bart's Place, the vision clinic housed at Oak Forest UMC Little Rock.

AUM FILE PHOTO BY AMY FORBUS



This home across the street from Oak Forest UMC is being transformed into Barnabas House, a counseling and social-work center to serve uninsured and otherwise vulnerable residents of the community.

COURTESY PHOTO

Offering legal aid resources for immigrants

After recognizing a need in their neighborhood, members of St. Luke UMC Little Rock recently helped set up a legal aid clinic for immigrants. Their initial training session for volunteers is shown at right.

"People don't want to break the law," said Dr. Candace Barron, the church's pastor. "They want to be productive citizens of wherever they might reside."

One of the legal aid clinic's goals is to help families find ways to stay together. Barron cites as an example one of her teenage daughter's friends, whose father is a legal resident of the U.S., but whose mother cannot obtain a visa even for a short-term visit with her immediate family.

"Jesus calls us to reach out and embrace our neighbors," Barron said. "We are not called to just embrace those who look like us, speak like or even act like us. We are called to love our neighbors as ourselves."



St. Luke UMC Little Rock on May 18 hosted a training session led by Justice for Our Neighbors as part of the preparation process for opening a legal aid clinic.

PHOTO BY ANNA SWAIM

and the counseling center will be known as Barnabas House.

"Barnabas' means 'encourager,'" Breshears said. "He was one of Paul's missionary partners who went out and helped spread the Gospel. As a church ministry, we always want to offer the light of Christ, and being the hands and feet of Christ is what we are called to do."

The congregation is raising money to pay off the property where Barnabas House is located, at 25th Street and South Tyler across the street from the church building. So far, they have raised \$27,500 of the \$70,000 needed.

"It's really outrageous for a church of our size and limited resources to cast such a large vision, but we serve a God of abundance, and we are part of a United Methodist connection that helps us be in ministry right here," Breshears said.

As the fundraising continues, Breshears is busy searching for

licensed social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, licensed counselors and retired ministers interested in volunteering their services. Other help is also needed to answer phones and greet clients, or other jobs such as providing meals for volunteers or helping with landscaping.

The counseling clinic will be open on Thursday evenings; on Monday evenings, graduate students from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock department of social work will be in class at Barnabas House and will serve individuals and families as part of their internship program.

Last year Oak Forest's clinics provided more than 2,500 doctor visits, 300 pairs of eyeglasses, and dental services to more than 400 individuals.

For more information on how to volunteer or be a partner in this ministry, call Breshears at the church office, 501-663-9407.