

# TEXAS RECOVERS

HURRICANE HARVEY RESPONSE

**The damage,  
the stories, and  
our plan to get  
Texans back on  
their feet.**

Photo by Sydnie Mares

**TXRecovers.org**





# 800,000 HOMES FLOODED IN TEXAS.<sup>1</sup>



Bishop Scott Jones stands in the floodwaters near a neighborhood in Memorial in Houston, where boat rescues were a common sight along the flooded streets. Photo by Shannon Martin.

Dear friends,

On August 26, 2017 Hurricane Harvey stalled over Texas bringing tremendous flooding to much of our state. The result was more rain and destruction than anyone has ever seen in Texas. It surpassed 51 inches in Cedar Bayou and was even greater east of there.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) estimates that Hurricane Harvey damaged over 800,000 homes and that over 1 million cars were flooded. More significantly, more than 80 people lost their lives in the storm. It is estimated that the cost of this hurricane will be over \$180 billion in damages. It is also estimated that it will take Texas more than three years to rebuild and recover from this catastrophic flooding.

I want to thank you for your immediate response to Texas Recovers. To date, we have raised over \$1 million dollars to aid recovery and to rebuild homes. In addition, the Greater Houston Community Foundation has endorsed the work of Texas Recovers by granting

us \$500,000 toward our rebuilding efforts. Your prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness have already made an immeasurable difference in the lives of hurricane victims across Southeast Texas. Because of you, many families have returned to safe, secure homes and their working lives. But we still have much to do.

Many of you have already helped us by volunteering. Thank you for rolling up your sleeves and taking on the hard work of repairing homes. However, to accomplish our goal of rebuilding flood victims' lives, we need additional funding. Please consider making a gift to Texas Recovers—it will make a difference to so many still in need. With volunteer teams on the ground and many homes already being restored, we United Methodists are the hands, feet, and face of Jesus Christ to our neighbors in need. Thank you for your faithful witness and your generous hearts!

Grace and Peace,

Bishop Scott J. Jones

**TEXAS  
RECOVERS**  
TXRecovers.org

## THE DAMAGE

It was the slow movement of the storm from August 26-30 that led to catastrophic flooding in southeast Texas.

At **117 hours**, Harvey was the longest hurricane to hit Texas and still be a named storm after landfall.<sup>2</sup>

**200 MILLION**

CUBIC YARDS OF DEBRIS CREATED<sup>3</sup>

**19 TRILLION**

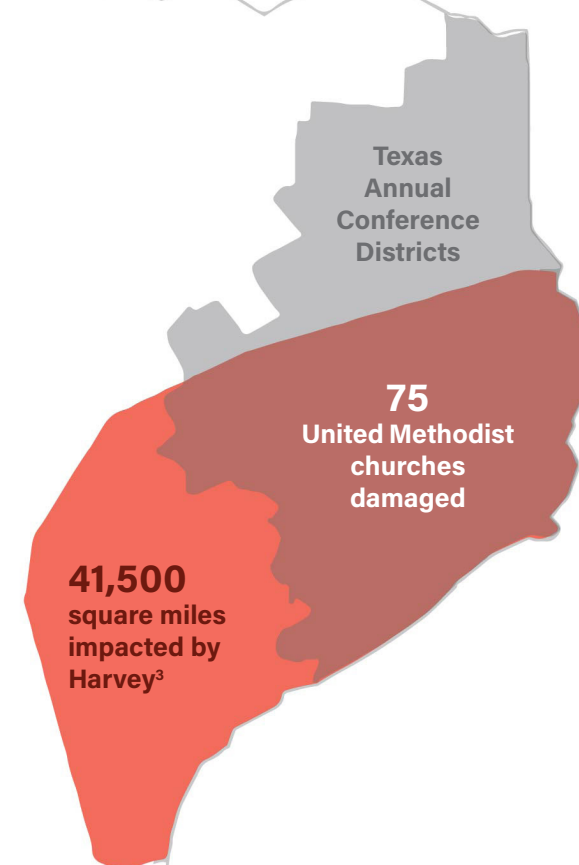
GALLONS OF RAIN WATER FELL ON AREAS OF TEXAS<sup>1</sup>

**122,331**

PEOPLE RESCUED BY FIRST RESPONDERS<sup>4</sup>

**\$200 BILLION**

IN DAMAGE<sup>4</sup>



**“We have never seen anything like this. All the reservoirs and bayous hit record flood levels including the Addicks, Barker, Lake Conroe, Lake Houston, Lake Livingston and Dam B.”**

— Rev. Scott Moore,  
Director of the Center for Missional Excellence



A mother holds her daughter at Lake Houston United Methodist Church at an outdoor worship service where the entire church was flooded. Photo by Kathleen Barry, United Methodist News Service (UMNS).

<sup>1</sup> According to FEMA. <sup>2</sup> Colorado State University tropical scientist Dr. Phil Klotzbach. <sup>3</sup> As reported by Texas Governor Gregg Abbott. <sup>4</sup> According to the National Hurricane Center.







# The United Methodist Church is in it for the long haul

## TRAGEDY UNFOLDS IN TEXAS

By Bruce Tomaso

Hurricane Harvey's still here. It will be with Texans for years to come.

Long gone, of course, are the harrowing winds, blinding rains, and relentless flooding that killed more than 80 people and made Harvey by far the costliest hurricane in history.

What's not gone is the pain Harvey brought.

What's not gone is the determination of United Methodists in Texas to help soothe that pain.

"We're committed to being the hands and feet of Christ wherever we're needed," Bishop Scott Jones of the Texas Conference assured a UMC congregation in Matagorda, Texas, on Sept. 3, 2017, just days after Harvey struck the Gulf Coast.

The bishop added: "We're going to be in this for the long haul."

That will mean spending the next three years – at least – helping Harvey's Texas victims recover and rebuild, said the Rev. Scott Moore, director of the Texas Conference's Center for Missional Excellence.

According to the National Hurricane Center, Harvey caused nearly \$200

billion in damage—almost twice that of the previous record-holder, Katrina, which inundated New Orleans in 2005. Harvey's force was felt in Texas, Louisiana, Belize, Nicaragua, and Honduras; but by far the worst of it came from widespread flooding in and around Houston and Beaumont.

*Harvey caused nearly \$200 billion in damage—almost twice that of the previous record-holder, Katrina, which inundated New Orleans in 2005.*

From the day the storm struck, Moore said, Texas Methodists have been providing spiritual and physical comfort to those in need.

He said 30,000 volunteers from Texas UMC congregations—along with hundreds from out of state—found ways to practice servant leadership. They rescued people stranded by rising waters. They found places for families to sleep and clothes for children to wear. They cooked meals, collected donations, distributed water and

emergency supplies.

They prayed with and for those whose lives had been upended.

The focus now, Moore said, is on rebuilding homes. In the greater Houston area alone, state officials estimate, Harvey damaged or destroyed more than 134,500 residences, including houses, apartments and mobile homes.

Those wishing to help the Center for Missional Excellence should consider giving money or volunteering to work on a construction team, Moore said.

"We need money to buy construction supplies," he said. "And we need anybody who can help us work on homes. You don't need any special construction skills. We can show you what to do."

"Of course, if you already know what to do, well, that's even better."

For details on volunteering or making a donation, visit [TXRecovers.org](http://TXRecovers.org)

Sandy McCall looks through her furniture and flooded possessions on the street outside her home in Orange, Texas. Photo by Kathleen Barry, UMNS.





# ENLISTING TECH, BOATS FOR HOUSTON RESCUE EFFORTS

By Mary Jacobs

The pleas were heartrending, made by frightened people stranded by Hurricane Harvey, as rising floodwaters ravaged the Houston and Beaumont area.

“Elderly taking in water rapidly. Waist deep. Please assist.” – 77-year-old man.

“Please help me and my 4-month-old, are in the attic.” – 24-year-old man.

“Dialysis patient. Last dialyzed last Wednesday.” – 85-year-old woman.

But help was on the way, thanks to the efforts of three young men, two of them lifelong members of Chapelwood United Methodist Church in Houston.

When flooding began on Saturday night, Aug. 26, Matthew Marchetti witnessed the chaos and confusion as he helped with rescue efforts. Houston’s 911 system was completely overwhelmed; volunteer rescuers were arriving but had no way to quickly locate victims.

So Marchetti enlisted fellow Chapelwood member Oliver Carter. The two men share office space; Marchetti owns a tech business and Carter, a real estate business. Despite intermittent power and water leaks in the office, they quickly came up with a design for a web app, Crowdsource Rescue. Nate Larson, a friend in Dallas, tackled the coding.

The app works like Uber for disaster victims — locating people who needed rescue on a map, and connecting them with volunteer rescuers.

Flood victims entered their information — location, phone, the number of people in the home and their ages, pets and medical needs. Those reported as being in imminent danger appeared as red pins on the map. Once rescued, they were marked as “safe.”

At the bottom of the site’s home page, there’s a passage from the Psalms: “Rescue me from the floods, do not let

me sink; deliver me from those who harm me, from the deep waters. Do not let the floodwaters engulf me or the depths swallow me up ... answer me quickly, for I am in trouble.”

By 6 a.m. the next day, the app was up and running. A few hours later, the Cajun Navy, an informal network of boat owners volunteering with rescue efforts, posted the site on its Facebook page.

“That’s when the site blew up,” Carter said.

“I just lost it,” said Marchetti. “I just cried for five minutes ... I realized we’re actually going to save some people with this.”

“Elderly taking in water rapidly. Waist deep. Please assist.”

Carter and Marchetti worked round the clock to keep the site up and running and to help dispatch rescuers. Friends and other church members pitched in by bringing food to keep them going and calling residents listed on the site to update their status. By Wednesday night, Aug. 30, the site had more than 1 million hits.

In addition to the Cajun Navy, Marchetti and Carter also dispatched another fleet — affectionately dubbed the “Chapelwood Navy.”

Although Chapelwood United Methodist sustained little damage, the building is located in one of Houston’s hardest-hit neighborhoods.

On Monday morning, Aug. 28, floodwaters stranded one of the church’s families in their home. First responders were too overwhelmed to respond, so the Rev. John Stephens, Chapelwood’s senior pastor, and a few other church members took a boat out to retrieve the family.

“People started coming out of the woodwork,” he said. “We took about 25 people out that first morning. We’d go into a neighborhood to rescue one person, and end up running across multiple families needing help, so we’d go back to get them, too.”

More members and more boats joined the boat ministry — by Wednesday, Aug. 30, some 30-40 men and five boats were deployed. The rescue operation proved tricky and unpredictable. Many of those rescued were elderly, unable to walk, or reluctant to leave, even though in clear danger. In some places, the water was too shallow and boats would bottom out; in others, it was up to Stephens’ shoulders. He’s 6-foot-3.

“We knew it was going to be bad,” Stephens said. “Well, it’s worse.”

By Thursday night, Aug. 31, the waters began to recede. Marchetti and Oliver — who’d slept only about seven hours since Saturday — could finally break for showers and a meal. All told, the site had handled over 8,000 rescue requests, allowing 911 to focus on critical cases.

“I have this constant, overwhelming feeling of gratitude for how much people have been coming together,” Marchetti said.

Since Hurricane Harvey, Marchetti and his team have used Crowdsource Rescue to aid victims of Hurricane Irma, Maria, as well as victims of the Mexico City earthquake. In the span of just a few months, the platform helped connect more than 12,000 volunteers to rescue more than 35,000 people.



(Left) Matthew Marchetti, a member of Chapelwood United Methodist Church in Houston, looks at three computer screens as he works to locate people who need rescuing during Hurricane Harvey.

(Above) Members of Chapelwood UMC call residents listed on the Crowdsource Rescue app to update their rescue status.





Church members worship outdoors at Lake Houston United Methodist Church, Huffman, Texas due to flood damage from Hurricane Harvey. Photo by Kathleen Barry, UMNS.

# STRENGTH, COURAGE, FAITH

By Sherri Gragg

As Hurricane Harvey roared toward Lake Houston UMC the church's senior pastor, Frank Coats, was glued to his phone in California where he was visiting family. From thousands of miles away, he sat helplessly as water crept up the foundation of his home. Then just when it seemed the parsonage of Lake Houston UMC would be spared, he received the first pictures of his church. The news was heartbreaking. Overnight, Lake Houston UMC had embraced its name. No longer did the church rise from the center of a large field. It was now an island in the middle of a lake. A short time later, Youth Pastor Ken Burns texted Coats an update, "There are fish in our parking lot!" he said.

The church had suffered breathtaking losses. There were two to three inches of water throughout all buildings

including both worship centers, a sanctuary built in 1962 and a contemporary worship center. Since the church did not have flood insurance, the pastor and trustees are working to formulate a plan to cover the astronomical cost of restoration and rebuilding. The final price tag could rise as high as \$400,000. It will take years of fundraising and construction before Lake Houston UMC is whole again.

Coats has been encouraged, however, by the way he has seen God's faithfulness during the cleanup phase. Volunteers have donated both funds, and hours of backbreaking labor to help Lake Houston UMC "muck and gut" their facility. One work day accomplished the equivalent of \$96,000 worth of contracted demolition. Thanks to the efforts of so many selfless volunteers, the church is now

able to use their stripped down contemporary worship center for Sunday services as well as a variety of other ministries.

The first Sunday after the flooding, the only option for worship was the recently drained parking lot. When the time for the service drew near, members arrived with lawn chairs in their hands, and gratitude in their hearts. As worship began, 84-year-old Rose's dog, Daisy, curled up at her feet. Rose and Daisy were among those thankful to have escaped the flooding with their lives. As the waters rose at a terrifying pace, they had depended upon boat rescue to escape their home. As Rose and the rest of the congregation sang praises and shed tears, they shared a bit of laughter too. When Coats rose to address them, he wore a fish patterned shirt in honor of their

recently departed "guests."

The next Sunday, Lake Houston UMC returned to the parking lot for worship. This time, they brought along their pianist. Members of the church stood with umbrellas to shield her eyes from the sun so that she could see the music to play. When the congregation hushed for a time of prayer, Coats encouraged them to call out whatever was heaviest on their hearts.

"Florida!" they said.

As Hurricane Irma placed Florida in her crosshairs, Harvey's survivors were covering the state in prayer. Coats could not have been prouder of his congregation. "The people of Lake Houston UMC are what makes it all possible," he said, "It is their strength, their courage...their faith."



The Rev. Frank Coats preaches at the morning service outside the sanctuary of Lake Houston United Methodist Church in Huffman, Texas. The church in Texas was damaged by high water from Hurricane Harvey. Photo by Kathleen Barry, UMNS.





# A LILY PAD OF REFUGE

By Sherri Gragg

A child carries her possessions toward the Bear Creek rescue boat.

As flood waters covered the Bear Creek community, intentionally diverse Bear Creek UMC became a “lily pad” of shelter and hope for their neighbors in need.

## A FOUNDATION OF DIVERSITY AND UNITY

Bear Creek UMC was established in 1977, and quickly became one of the fastest growing churches in the Houston area. The church soon reached an average weekly attendance of over 1,100 people.

But in the early 2000’s, growth began slowing dramatically. At the same time, the Bear Creek neighborhood demographic was undergoing huge changes as the once predominantly white community gave way to far greater diversity. When Rev. Leo Tyler arrived at the church in July of this past year, he found that Bear Creek did not reflect the ethnic or generational diversity of the community just outside its doors. It was important to Tyler to change that, and the church was ready.

Today, Bear Creek UMC has thrown open their doors to welcome their diverse neighborhood, and merged with the Spanish speaking church that was previously sharing their facility.

“I tell my congregation that we are going to show people how to live in unity. We worship and serve together. We love each other. If you attend our church, you will have people of all ages and colors praying for you and serving you communion,” said Tyler.

## LOVING AND SERVING A COMMUNITY IN CRISIS

As Bear Creek UMC joins hands to love their community in the wake of Hurricane Harvey, they are building on this foundation of unity. Tyler sees God at work.

“Through the way our church is leading this community in service and love in this moment, God is

demonstrating unity. It is the opposite of what is happening in our nation,” he said.

Bear Creek UMC’s service and love had never been more desperately needed. The church, which is on higher ground than much of the neighborhood, was not equipped to be an official shelter but members knew they could provide a critical emergency stopover for their neighbors as they fled the rising waters- a place to charge cell phones, shower off, and dry out as they awaited transportation to a more permanent shelter. Church members served long hours in Bear Creek UMC’s “lily pad” of safety handing out towels, petting dogs, reading to frightened children, calling local shelters, and pouring countless cups of coffee.

## RESCUING THE STRANDED AS THE WATERS RISE

Then, on Tuesday, the Addicks Reservoir was released and the situation became even more dire. As Tyler spoke to staff member Barbara Goddard, he realized that she and her husband, Darell, were in need of immediate rescue. When church members neared the Goddard’s street, they were stunned. Residents were perched on rooftops. A mother who had just given birth needed rescue. Elderly residents were trapped in the rising water as well.

They were all waiting for an emergency system that was so overloaded that it could not possibly reach them.

The water was so high that the Humvee Bear Creek UMC volunteers were driving could not reach the victims. Soon they returned with a boat, and began rescuing those who were trapped.

By Tuesday evening, Barbara and Darell Goddard were safe in the home of friends. “It is very frightening,” Barbara said. “You can’t imagine until

you have gone through it. It was dry when we first got up that morning, and within half an hour the water began seeping through the floor.”

## DRAWING THEIR NEIGHBORS CLOSER TO GOD

As Bear Creek UMC looks forward to the moment when Hurricane Harvey’s flood waters recede for good, they are also eagerly awaiting their next season of service to their community.

“We are waiting to see what our next opportunity will be,” Tyler said. “Our vision is to draw closer to God and invite others to draw closer to Him as well. If that is serving people a bottle of water, if it is providing this “lily pad” of temporary shelter, whatever it is, if it brings them closer to God, we are fulfilling our purpose.”



After a Humvee was unable to reach residents, Bear Creek UMC returned with a boat.



Displaced residents find comfort in Bear Creek UMC.



# AN OUTPOST OF GOD'S KINGDOM

By Sherri Gragg

Cedar Bayou UMC was...beautiful.

The sanctuary was adorned with chandeliers and stained glass windows. Rows of pews in heavy dark wood flanked each side of the space; the seats were padded in scarlet. At the front of the church, silver organ pipes rose toward a large stained glass window which cast jewel tones of light onto the sanctuary below.

When the leadership of Cedar Bayou UMC realized they were in Harvey's path, they knew that they were at risk of the church taking on a couple of inches of water. The church had flooded before. After Hurricane Ike, it took \$1million to repair the damages. After the costly restoration, trustees purchased the maximum flood coverage available to ensure Cedar Bayou was protected from ever suffering such devastating loss again. They could have never dreamed that Harvey would fill their beautiful sanctuary with three feet of water less than a decade later.

When Associate Pastor Karen Tyler entered the sanctuary to survey Harvey's destruction, she was thankful to be alone to process the sight. "I stood in the back and cried," she said, "but immediately behind that grief was, 'God, I know you have a plan in all of this.'" It was a faith and resolve shared by her congregation. Once the water receded to only ankle deep, the church leadership allowed their members inside to clean. For the next

two days, men, women, children and teens arrived to care for their beloved church. The volunteers included a 94-year-old World War II Double Ace. The veteran hero, once honored at the White House by President Obama, was determined to defend his church home

*"On that first Sunday back, we had grown men weeping because even though their hearts wanted to build on that same spot, they knew we had to go to higher ground..."*

from the muck and grime of Harvey.

Cedar Bayou will rise again, but things will never be the same. Two hurricanes in ten years was just too much. Senior Pastor John Newsome and his team know it is time to build elsewhere. "On that first Sunday back, we had grown men weeping because even though their hearts wanted to build on that same spot, they knew we had to go to higher ground," he said.

As much as the people of Cedar Bayou will grieve the loss of their church

home, their drive to rebuild is less about their own comfort than it is about getting back to ministering to Baytown's most marginalized and vulnerable citizens. "There are a lot of people in our community who are functionally homeless," Tyler said, "They are living in garages and sheds without any refrigeration or running water." The church provides a regular feeding ministry to 100 to 150 of these homeless neighbors, a ministry that has been hindered by the loss of their kitchen facilities. Their toiletry ministry, which supplies homeless and needy families with personal items such as soap, toothpaste, and diapers has struggled, but not ceased despite the church's devastation.

Cedar Bayou UMC pours its heart, soul, and resources into Baytown. Perhaps, if they had held back those resources for a rainy day, they would have had more funds to rebuild. Instead, they trusted God's word to be true that the only safe treasures we have are those invested in His kingdom, not our own. Cedar Bayou UMC is turning to God now, asking Him to provide so that they can keep serving those in his Kingdom who are "the least of these."

"Part of our idea of serving is we help people see what the kingdom of God is like when we show mercy," said, "We want to be that outpost of God's kingdom in Baytown. Our community really needs that."



Volunteers removed the waterlogged pews from the sanctuary with chainsaws and stacked them up outside the front entrance. Photo by Shannon Martin.



# WHITE CAPS IN THE WATER

By Sherri Gragg

When Senior Pastor Johnnie Simpson arrived at Faith Dickinson UMC to check on his church Saturday morning, August 26th, he was pleased to see how well it had fared during the storm. The damage seemed limited to a few large tree branches littering the property. “Looks like we are having church tomorrow,” he thought as he was dragging a few fallen limbs to the side of the road.

Then it began to rain again.

Assistant Pastor Diedra Walters remembers awakening the following morning at 2:00 a.m. to the sound of the hurricane raging outside her home. The next morning, the roads were impassable. She and Simpson began reaching out to their members and found that many of them had water coming into their homes. “It was very traumatizing to say the least,” Walters said, “We felt helpless because we couldn’t get to them. The roads looked like lakes. I saw white caps in the water.”

The next time Simpson saw his church it was in disarray. There was extensive damage to the walls and carpet, and furniture lay toppled by the force of the rising water. A dirty smudge along the wall revealed the water had

risen inside the building to a height of almost two feet.

The days since Hurricane Harvey have been physically exhausting for Simpson. Not only is he working to help Faith Dickinson UMC on the road to restoration, but has also labored alongside 11 families in his church as they mucked and gutted their homes, and rehung drywall. Whenever Simpson has had a few moments away from the physical demands of the crisis, he has been tackling the challenge of how to fund restoration when his church did not carry flood insurance; they had been told they didn’t need it.

The road to normalcy promises to be a difficult one for Faith Dickinson UMC. Church leaders estimate the cost of needed repairs will soar to almost \$100,000. Simpson is searching for grants and donations to help offset the tremendous financial burden. Church members have also been giving sacrificially, as well as reaching out to friends and family to join the effort. It is a tremendous burden for a community that was already suffering from widespread poverty before Hurricane Harvey.

Weeks after the flood waters receded,

Simpson was still learning about additional families in need. Ten thousand of the eighteen thousand residents in his community have been displaced. In some cases, entire apartment complexes have been vacated. “People are still trying to survive day to day,” Simpson said. “Even though our building flooded, we are still using the church as a distribution center to hand out supplies to the community.”

Faith Dickinson UMC is deeply grateful for the support they have received from around the country. One donor contributed folding chairs to replace the lost pews. A Baptist church in Georgia has made two trips to Faith Dickinson UMC with charter buses filled with essential supplies such as toilet paper, bottled water, and towels. The abundance of their gift allowed Faith Dickinson UMC to not only meet the immediate needs of their suffering members, but share those resources with their community. The outpouring of love from other believers encourages the

church to remain strong. “It is devastating when you have labored and worked for things and it is gone in an instant,” Walters said, “It was amazing how people cared for us when they didn’t even know our names. I am so thankful, because it helps us make it through times like these.”

*“It was amazing how people cared for us when they didn’t even know our names. I am so thankful, because it helps us make it through times like these.”*



Volunteers from Temple United Methodist Church pitch in to help muck and gut the church after Hurricane Harvey flooded their facility. Photos from Facebook.

## A MISSION UNCHANGED

By Sherri Gragg

Canoe paddles dipped into the floodwaters of Port Arthur, Texas, beating out a new rhythm for a world gone completely out of sync. Lost were the orderly lines of Temple UMC’s parking lot. The concrete curbs, and carefully tended landscaping were cloaked underneath a strange new sea.

At last, the canoes carrying the trustees of Temple UMC bumped against the side door of the church where they had, only days before, greeted friends and neighbors. Now with heavy hearts and whispered prayers, they sloshed through murky water, pulled open the church doors, and made their way inside.

There was water everywhere. Not one room of Temple UMC’s 42,000 square foot facility had been spared from the flooding.

A few days later when Associate Pastor Sadie Brink arrived at the church from her own flooded home, she found the church drained and the hearts of her congregation broken.

“The thing that got me was not the building itself but the looks on the members’ faces,” she said. “This had been their home for decades.”

The congregation is working hard to restore their church home by investing hours in planning for the future, and participating in work days in which they ripped out drywall, sodden carpet, and ruined furniture. They have also been busy reaching out to friends and neighbors to offer any assistance they can, all while many of them are faced with the loss of their own homes. As many as 60 families from Temple UMC had water in either their homes or businesses.

“The scope of work, from having the church damaged, and members’ homes and businesses flooded...that combination is pretty overwhelming,” said Senior Pastor Guy Williams.

Until thousands of dollars of repairs and rebuilding take place, the displaced congregation will remain scattered throughout various host

sites in their community for worship. Sunday morning services are now held in the auditorium of a local school, while the children’s Sunday school programs fill the cafeteria. The youth of Temple UMC have been turning their hearts to God beneath the trees of a local park.

The devastation of Temple UMC’s building has also had a ripple effect in the entire community. The building was not only a place of worship, but the hub of vital ministries including a day school and Meals on Wheels. The church leadership has urgently prioritized restoration of the areas of their building that serve those ministries.

The first Sunday after the flood, Temple UMC met in a local athletic facility. When the time for worship arrived, members began filling the space, many of them in the same clothes and shoes they were wearing when they fled as their homes during the flooding. Together they worshipped, prayed, and took communion.

Williams then encouraged his congregation to remember that though they had lost their church home, their mission had not changed. God was still calling them to be a place where people could experience His presence. He then

urged them to find solace in a God who never changes as they struggle to cope with a world in which everything familiar has been swept away. “It was not God’s will to have us flood out,” he said “but there is a will of God in everything that happens.”

*Not one room of Temple UMC’s 42,000 square foot facility had been spared from the flooding.*



Teams from Faith Dickinson UMC remove carpet and panelling from their sanctuary and offices. Photos from Facebook.



# A GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES

By Sherri Gragg

The Saturday before Hurricane Harvey arrived in Dickinson, Texas, Senior Pastor John Matkin walked through his local grocery store to the sound of carts rattling, cash registers beeping, and neighbors chatting. One week later, he stood in the sanctuary of First Dickinson UMC listening to the roar of chainsaws as they ripped flood-sodden pews from the floor.

“It was strange that cutting out the pews, so that we could bring in chairs to worship the next morning, would give us a sense of accomplishment,” Matkin said, “but we wanted the congregation to know we are still here.”

Sunday morning, sunlight filtered through the church’s beautiful stained glass windows to fall upon a gutted sanctuary where rows of folding chairs replaced the lost pews. The bare walls and subflooring felt familiar to the congregation because many of them had lost their own homes. As families trickled in that morning, their focus was less on the physical loss of their building than each other. They wanted to know how their fellow church members had fared during the flood.

“It is a wonderful, resilient congregation,” Matkin said, “It is built into their DNA.”

In 1900, the Galveston Hurricane roared into Texas. When the punishing winds and rains of America’s deadliest natural disaster finally stilled, survivors emerged to find their world shattered. When the founding members of First

Dickinson UMC arrived at the church which they had completed only 15 years before, they found it in ruins. It would have been easy to give up in that moment. Undoubtedly, many of them had suffered crushing personal losses as well. Instead, they stubbornly refused to be defeated. They simply picked up the remnants of their church and used them to build another one.

One hundred and seventeen years later their descendants are determined to go forward as well, but the journey ahead of them is far from easy. Although First Dickinson UMC had the maximum amount of flood insurance they could buy, the final settlement will fall hundreds of thousands of dollars below the restoration costs.

First Dickinson UMC is eager to be whole again so that they can be a refuge for their congregation, 40 percent of whom were flooded. While some of the members have been able to begin the process of rebuilding, others remain in a painful state of displacement as they wait on their insurance settlements to be finalized. It is difficult for Matkin to see his people suffer, but he has been encouraged by the way church members have reached out to each other. Some families have

opened their homes for those who needed a place to stay. Others have done their fellow members laundry so that they could have clean, dry clothes to wear.

The church’s losses have also impacted their entire community. For decades, First Dickinson UMC has offered the gift of hospitality to various organizations serving everyone from preschoolers to senior citizens. Until the church is restored, those groups will have to meet elsewhere.

On All Saints Day, Matkin looked out upon his congregation and opened his Bible to Hebrews chapter 12 in which the writer of Hebrews challenges believers to persevere when discouragement and weariness threaten to stop them from running the race before them. After all, he told them, we never run alone. All of the saints who have gone before us are cheering us on.

As the congregation of First Dickinson UMC rebuilds they will lean heavily on the certainty that their founders are cheering their efforts. Then, strengthened by the example of those who have gone before them, they will pick up the pieces of First Dickinson UMC... and build something new.

*First Dickinson UMC is eager to be whole again so that they can be a refuge for their congregation, 40 percent of whom were flooded.*



Flood waters engulfed the pews of First United Methodist Dickinson after Hurricane Harvey flooded their sanctuary. The church is currently worshipping with bare walls and subflooring.

## MORE THAN A HOUSE OF WORSHIP

By Sherri Gragg

It is difficult to find Martha Godfrey in the public records of the mid 1800’s. Slaves like Martha were simply listed as a number, age, and race. They were rarely afforded the dignity of seeing their names in ink.

But Martha’s name was not lost to history. Today, more than a century later, her name is engraved in stone on a monument in her honor. Martha’s life began as a slave, but ended as a freewoman and landowner. It was from her 161 acre holdings that she donated the land for St. Paul’s Double Bayou UMC. There along the banks of Double Bayou, newly liberated slaves built a house of worship and established a cemetery named in Martha’s honor. The lovely white clapboard building became the treasured center of the entire community. For decades upon decades, it bore witness to births, baptisms, and marriages. The church’s tones sounded out a mournful call each time one of Martha’s descendants, neighbors and friends were laid to rest in the cemetery bearing her name.

Then...Hurricane Harvey.

On Saturday night, August 26th, the water rose with such force that it shifted the little church off of its foundation, toppled headstones in the cemetery, and lifted concrete vaults out of the ground. Once the flood receded, Rev. Mary Shotlow and her family were the first members to enter the church.

“The pews had crumbled,” Shotlow said, “and the floor was buckled down the middle and sides because the water pushed the walls in. The waterline was at least halfway up the door. In the back of the church, it was at six feet. You can imagine the force of the water if concrete vaults

come out of the ground.”

Shotlow knew the sight would be devastating to the members of St. Paul’s, so she and her family pitched in to clear the interior of the church themselves before the congregation had a chance to see it. Once the members of St. Paul’s arrived, many of them descendants of Martha Godfrey, they found a century and a half of memories and history reduced to piles of debris on the side of the road.

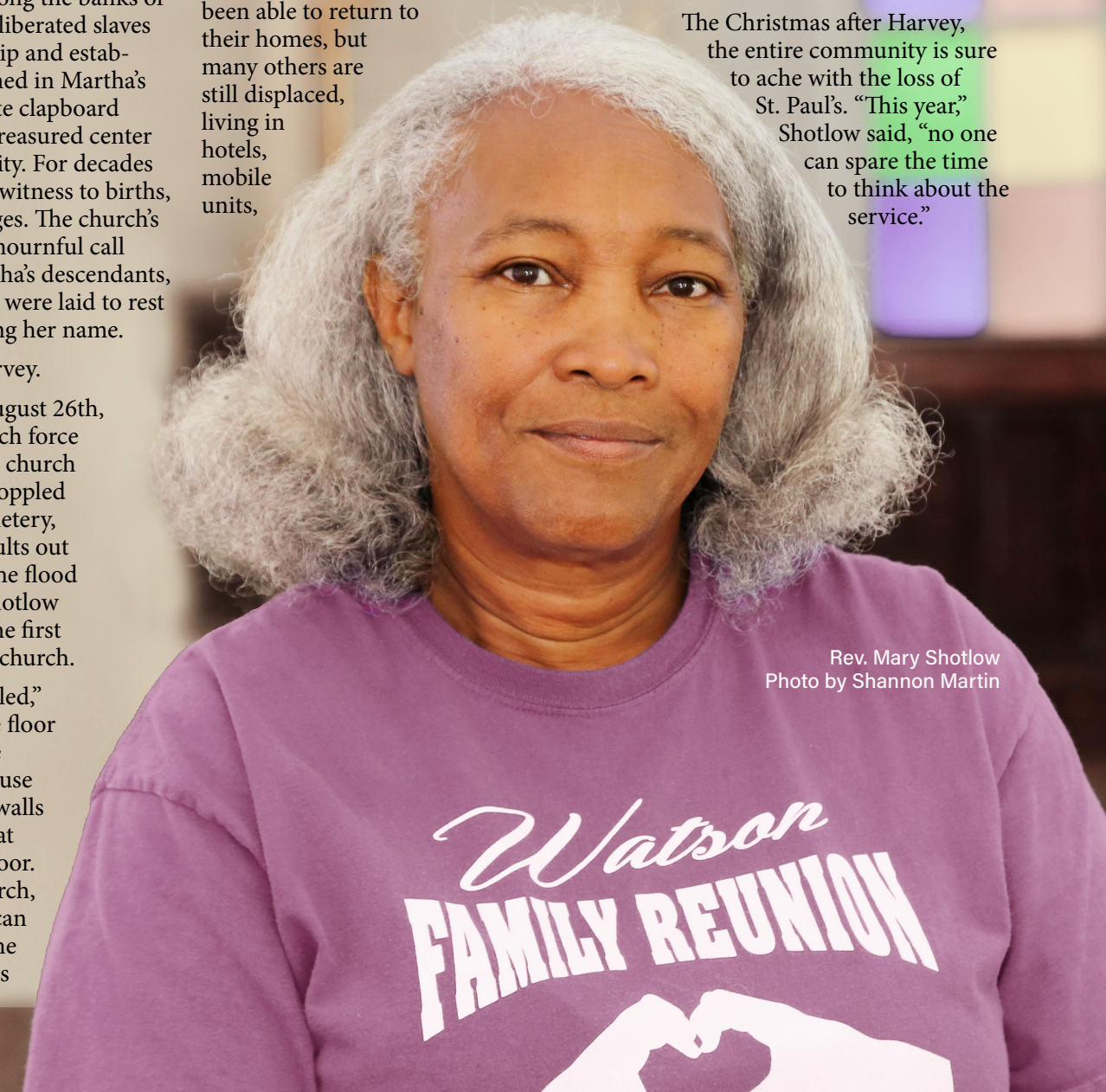
Recovery for St. Paul’s has been agonizingly slow due to the unavailability of funds, skilled contractors, and the fact that so many of its members have suffered crushing personal losses. While some communities impacted by Hurricane Harvey have taken significant steps toward restoration, many of the members of St. Paul’s Double Bayou remain in shock. Some have been able to return to their homes, but many others are still displaced, living in hotels, mobile units,

or whatever they can find.

“Some of our families are in homes they have made out of storage buildings on their properties,” Shotlow said, “because some of their valuables are still in their homes, and they want to stay nearby to protect them.”

Capturing the essence of the meaning of a church like St. Paul’s is not an easy task. It is more than a house of worship, or even a center of desperately needed ministries. For the community of Double Bayou, St. Paul’s is...home, the place where everyone returns when a loved one has been lost, or there is a joyful occasion to celebrate. The St. Paul’s Christmas service is the community highlight of the year. On that most holy of nights, the church opens its doors wide to receive everyone. On Christmas Night, Double Bayou returns home.

The Christmas after Harvey, the entire community is sure to ache with the loss of St. Paul’s. “This year,” Shotlow said, “no one can spare the time to think about the service.”



Rev. Mary Shotlow  
Photo by Shannon Martin



*This storm has been an equal opportunity destroyer, so we as a community should, as we have, respond in a unified fashion. Hopefully, and prayerfully, not leaving anyone behind.*

— Pastor Kirbyjon Caldwell,  
Windsor Village UMC



## FINDING JOY IN SORROW

By Sherri Gragg

The members of Bellaire UMC have been devastated by the floodwaters of Hurricane Harvey, but that has not stopped them from doing all they can to comfort and help each other.

### A FLOOD LIKE NO OTHER

Associate Pastor Jim Love has lived in Houston for 20 years, and he has seen his share of flooding in Bellaire. Just three years ago his parsonage flooded, so when Hurricane Harvey roared toward Houston, Love put all of his furniture up on six-inch blocks. He was sure it would be more than enough to keep his furnishings from getting wet.

As he fled his home with a few precious keepsakes in his arms on the Saturday night after Harvey hit, the last thing he stopped to do was measure the water line. The flood waters in his home were twenty-five inches deep.

“Usually storms only hit isolated sections of the city,” Love said. “This one hit the entire city and sat on top. People were trying to get in to help us, but they couldn’t because the river was flooding on one side, and the reservoirs were overflowing on the other side.”

Saturday evening as Love and his family sheltered at their next-door neighbor’s house, which had been built to withstand a thousand-year flood, he observed the eerie devastation all around him. Everywhere he looked, he saw water. Insects began climbing up the trees to safety. Next door at his home, a stray cat was asleep under the gables of the roof. All creatures, it seemed, were moving to higher ground.

### LOVING AND SERVING EACH OTHER

Once the flood waters receded, church members ventured out to help one another begin cleaning out their homes. They comforted each other. Put on pots of coffee. Lead Pastor Seann Duffin created online sign-up sheets where members could request help, or offer to give it. Church members who owned Airbnb rentals offered shelter to those who were displaced. Even months after the flood, some of those homes continue to provide shelter for those who lost everything.

Pastor Love finds tremendous comfort in the way his church has come together in selfless service under the most difficult of circumstances. He shares the story of one member of his church family, a man who reached out to offer what little he had with those in need.

“This guy was incarcerated for a long time. Now he is getting his life back on track. Bellaire, where the church is and where most of our members live, is an upscale area. This gentleman lives in a boarding house across town. When he heard about the flood, he contacted us. He said, ‘Come. It is dry here. I talked to my landlady. She said she wanted to house any of you who needed it.’”

“And it fills my heart with joy,” Love said, “because God’s love knows no bounds.”





Photo by Brant Mills



Photo by Shannon Martin

# THREE YEARS, THREE RECOVERY CENTERS

By Bruce Tomaso

By the thousands, United Methodists in Texas have reached out to help the victims of Hurricane Harvey. They know that with their prayers, gifts and deeds, they've done a lot.

And they know there's a lot still to do.

Rebuilding after a natural disaster takes years. Relief groups say it can be a challenge to sustain momentum over such a long time, particularly once the public's interest, sympathy and generosity are -- understandably -- drawn to other, newer disasters.

The Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church is prepared to meet that challenge, thanks to a \$1 Million grant from the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR).

**Shortly after Harvey struck, the Texas Conference's Center for Missional Excellence used the grant money to open three regional relief centers in southeast Texas, where the hurricane's wrath was fiercest.**

One center is in Houston, one is in Beaumont, and one is in Lake Jackson, covering coastal counties to Houston's south.

Each center is staffed by a project coordinator who oversees the Conference's hurricane relief initiatives -- notably, its effort to enlist and deploy teams of construction volunteers to rebuild homes destroyed by the hurricane.

With the help of the UMCOR grant, the centers are prepared to stay open for the next three years, said the Rev. Scott Moore, director of missional excellence for the Texas Conference.

"Three years is a long time," Scott said. "Or it seems like a long time, until you realize how much there is to do."

By the time the centers opened, he said, 90 volunteer construction teams had already signed up to work on rebuilding homes. He plans to sign up many more.

As the Texas Conference website says, "We will continue to work side-by-side with survivors until they're back on their feet."



## PEOPLE STILL NEED HELP

**Hurricane Harvey affected over 800,000 homes.\*** Many of these families, particularly low-income families, still need significant home repairs to get back on their feet. With your help, we will continue repairing homes at no cost to homeowners.

Your donation will provide one home owner the ability to replace essentials such as floors, doors, and walls.

**Interior doors:** \$500

**Walls for a house:** \$4,500

**Floors for a house:** \$5,000

**Floors, Doors and Walls:** \$10,000

## CHURCHES STILL NEED HELP

Texas Conference churches pastors and their flocks came out in droves to help others when the flood waters rose, but many of their churches and homes were also damaged.

"Days after the hurricane, it was not unusual to hear about 2-10 feet of water in many of our churches," says Bishop Scott Jones. "Now it is time to give back to those churches who served tirelessly in the first days of recovery."

The Texas Conference has over 70 churches with storm related damage. Repairs range from non-insured destruction such as roof damage, uprooted trees to electrical damage and blown down fences.

There are also a number of churches that sustained critical flood damage. These churches have all mucked and gutted their facilities, but many are still in need of partners to help them with funding for complete rebuilding. Our goal is to completely rebuild all our flooded churches.

**Restore-A-Church:** \$10,000-\$20,000

**Rebuild-A-Church:** \$100,000-\$500,000

Or make a **one-time donation** of \$500

**Make your donation at [TXRecovers.org](https://TXRecovers.org)**

\*According to FEMA



A Kingwood home is mucked and gutted.  
Photo by Sydnie Mares.



A Texas Annual Conference team prays  
with a Houston homeowner after working  
on her home. Photo by Sydnie Mares.





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To learn more about Hurricane Harvey  
recovery, to volunteer, or give, visit

**TXRecovers.org**

Photo by Sydnie Mares



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