



## NATIONAL DISASTER RESPONSE MANUAL

### HISTORY

In 1976, the American Baptist Churches USA Domestic Disaster Response Network was formally established to provide a systematic response to disasters in the U.S. and Puerto Rico. The lack of a coordinated response by the denomination to the devastation unleashed by a tornado on Xenia, Ohio, in April 1974, demonstrated the need for a denomination-wide response system. Within a few months a systematic approach was drafted, though it took some time to secure the requisite input and approvals from the entities and individuals who would participate.

In the Nov. 4, 1976 issue of *The American Baptist*, General Secretary Robert Campbell announced the system's operational readiness in an open letter to all American Baptist congregations. In the letter Dr. Campbell announced a new office of Domestic Disaster Response, within the Parish Witness Program of National Ministries, to coordinate denominational response to national disasters. Region executive ministers would serve as Domestic Disaster Response officers for their regions.

At the same time, the American Baptist World Relief Committee agreed to provide financial assistance from One Great Hour of Sharing Offering funds to meet the immediate needs of those affected by such disasters. The World Relief Committee consists of seven voting members elected by the General Board of American Baptist Churches USA (two each from the Boards of National and International Ministries and one from the Board of Educational Ministries) and two non-voting staff members (one each from National and International Ministries). The World Relief officer serves as staff to the committee.

### THE PROCESS

As the successor to the Domestic Disaster Response Office, the Direct Human Services' office of National Disaster Response (in the Biblical Justice Ministry Center of National Ministries), is designated as the key contact in the denomination when a disaster strikes in the U.S. or Puerto Rico. In conjunction with

the World Relief officer, this office processes requests for One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) disaster funds and forwards requests for volunteer assistance to the directors of National Ministries' offices of Volunteers In Mission and American Baptist Men's Ministries.

The National Disaster Response office is also the primary contact with the Church World Service Emergency Response Office in New York City and its affiliated U.S. regional and local disaster consultants in coordinating American Baptist participation in ecumenical response to national disasters.

Within 36 hours of a disaster in the U.S. or Puerto Rico, the National Disaster Response office contacts the appropriate American Baptist region office(s) for an initial assessment of the disaster's effect on American Baptist property and persons. If possible, a determination is made of the immediate need for OGHS emergency disaster funds and volunteer work crews. Requests for volunteers are forwarded to the directors of Volunteers In Mission and Men's Ministries, who subsequently contact the appropriate region executive minister or his/her designee.

The initial amount sent from OGHS *undesignated* disaster funds varies depending upon several factors, including the current status of OGHS funds; the severity of the disaster; and the number of previous disasters requiring funds. The National Disaster Response office also contacts the Church World Service Emergency Response Office to receive additional information on the disaster and to determine whether an ecumenical response is contemplated. Participation in ecumenical efforts, however, is always secondary to the need for direct American Baptist response.

If no specific American Baptist response is required—and after consultation with the appropriate American Baptist region office and the World Relief officer—disaster funds may be directed to a Church World Service (CWS) ecumenical disaster effort. Funds usually are sent directly to the CWS Emergency Response Office in response to a specific appeal. These appeals must be approved by the Emergency Response Office executive committee, which is the policy-making body composed of representatives from participating denominations. National Ministries' director of National Disaster Response is the appointed American Baptist representative on the committee.

## **FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

The major source of financial assistance for disasters are *undesignated* funds raised annually through the One Great Hour of Sharing Offering. When a disaster strikes in the U.S. or Puerto Rico, the World Relief Committee releases these *undesignated* funds to National Ministries with the primary focus being emergency relief, refugee work and disaster rehabilitation, and the “...first consideration for aid ...to be in areas and communities related to the Baptist family.” With the exception of a portion of the World Relief officer’s budget, OGHS funds may not be used for administrative expenses.

American Baptist-affiliated churches and individuals may *designate* OGHS contributions for a specific disaster. The amount of *designated* contributions that are received fluctuates greatly depending upon several factors, including the severity of the disaster, and the scale and scope of media coverage. *Designated* funds are distributed in accordance with World Relief Committee policy and used for the specific disaster or area cited by the contributor.

## **THE PRINCIPALS IN THE NETWORK**

- Region executive ministers who serve as the primary disaster officers for their particular regions.
- National Ministries’ director of National Disaster Response. Depending on the nature of a disaster, the director coordinates the denomination’s response with the other principals.
- World Relief officer in International Ministries who is ultimately accountable to the World Relief Committee for all expenditures of OGHS funds, including those available for disaster response in the U.S. and Puerto Rico.
- National Ministries’ directors of Volunteers In Mission and Men’s Ministries who have established networks of trained and untrained volunteers with varying skills who are willing to assist in disaster recovery. In certain regions, ABMen also have well-equipped trailers with a cadre of volunteers who can be activated for disaster response within the regions and, in some cases, adjacent regions.
- Church World Service Emergency Response Office in New York City and, on occasion, the 90 regional and state ERO-affiliated disaster resource consultants or disaster response specialists throughout the U.S. These persons are endorsed by their denominations and active in ecumenical response to national disasters.
- Church of the Brethren Disaster Child Care program, an ecumenical program in which American Baptist Churches USA is a partner, trains volunteers to provide child care at disaster sites in the U.S.

## **WHAT TO DO WHEN A DISASTER AFFECTS AN AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCH AND/OR MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION**

1. After a preliminary assessment of damages and initial needs, the pastor contacts the region executive minister or his/her designee to request immediate financial or other assistance.
2. The region executive minister then contacts National Ministries' director of National Disaster Response with a request for immediate emergency funds. Though the goal is to fully fund all requests, the total amount of *undesignated* OGHS emergency funds available in a given year are limited and may be inadequate to address the long-range needs related to a particular disaster. If additional *designated* OGHS contributions are received, they are disbursed by the director of National Disaster Response upon consultation with the related American Baptist region office.
3. Requests for volunteers by pastors, congregational members and representatives of American Baptist-related organizations also should be channeled through the appropriate region office which in turn will contact the director of National Disaster Response. Though the National Disaster Response director is the key National Ministries contact for domestic disasters, the subsequent deployment of ABMen volunteers (and/or trailers) or Volunteers In Mission volunteers to a region will be coordinated with the region office by the respective directors of Men's Ministries or Volunteers In Mission.
4. If a region office or local church is participating in or desires to participate in an interfaith disaster response effort and wishes to have OGHS disaster funds used toward the effort, the request should be made through the National Disaster Response office.

### **Resources**

#### Brochures:

“Rebuilding Together: American Baptist National Disaster Response Network”  
National Ministries, American Baptist Churches USA - 800-ABC-3USA, ext. 2426

“Disaster Response: How You Can Make a Difference”  
Church World Service Emergency Response Program - 212-870-3151

## **Web Sites**

Church World Service Emergency Response Program -[www.bruno.nccusa.org/CWS/emre](http://www.bruno.nccusa.org/CWS/emre)

Disaster News Network - [www.disasterresponse.net](http://www.disasterresponse.net)

Sponsored by participating denominations in Church World Service Emergency Response - includes news on U.S. disaster response and volunteer opportunities nationwide

For further information, contact

National Disaster Response, National Ministries

at 800-222-3872, ext. 2450 or 610-768-2450

or [diane.giova@abc-usa.org](mailto:diane.giova@abc-usa.org)

or visit National Ministries on the Web at [www.nationalministries.org](http://www.nationalministries.org)