

How the Milwaukee Presbytery Can Help Those Affected by Disasters

Bucket lists are full of many things, and for me, one was to assist individuals after disaster as a Spiritual Care volunteer with the American Red Cross. Now that I have retired, I finally have the time to devote to this volunteer opportunity, and check it off my bucket list. I recently completed training to become a Disaster Action Team (DAT) volunteer – one that responds to local disasters like home fires and flooding – and I continue to take every opportunity to learn about the many ways I can be of assistance as a volunteer.

As a DAT volunteer, I recently attended a learning session that focused on the opportunities within mass care, those events where many people from a single incident need our help. I learned how an initial mass care response can support such disaster incidents as the one that occurred in Bayside, Wisconsin, when a multi-family fire destroyed more than 60 units and displaced more than 140 people, including many children.

A large portion of providing mass care is connected with the ability to bring safe shelter option for those displaced. For that fire in Bayside, a church partner in the community was a blessing as a mass care shelter location. Finding shelter partners ahead of a disaster is critically important, and an area where I believe Milwaukee Presbytery could play an invaluable role in caring for our neighbors in crisis.

The American Red Cross – Southeast Wisconsin Chapter continues to search for quality temporary shelter sites to meet the immediate needs of those affected by disasters. It is my hope that Presbyterian Churches in the Milwaukee Presbytery will consider being a temporary shelter site.

Here are a few features of a Red Cross shelter:

- On average, a temporary disaster shelter operates from 1-to-5 days.
- The temporary disaster shelter will be operated and supervised by American Red Cross' staff and volunteers at all times.
- The temporary disaster shelter must have a large area for rest/sleep, such as a gym. Amenities such as a kitchen, showers, etc. are needed at the shelter site as well.
- The Red Cross will provide all food, supplies and materials to operate the shelter.
- Pre- and post-shelter surveys will be completed to ensure the space is left in same condition it was found.

Your decision to provide temporary shelter to someone in need is a powerful way to give back to our community. If you're interested in ways your church could serve as a temporary disaster shelter – as others across the country already do – please reach out for a conversation with one of our disaster team leaders:

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Blessings,
Catherine Neal