**PRESBYTERIAN DISASTER ASSISTANCE TEAM, MAUI, HAWAII MAY 23 to 30, 2026**










Disasters happen everywhere…. Even in Paradise! Our 17 member PDA Hawaii Team returned yesterday from serving in Maui, working to rebuild, replant and bring hope out of the chaos of the Lahaina and Kula fires. We stayed at the beautiful Po'Okela PDA host site, graced by the hospitality of The Rev Dr. Kimberley Fong and her husband Gary.

The Po'Okela Church was the staging area for survivors to receive all they needed at a tented free thrift shop. The church received donations from all over the country including a box car from Ireland. The Thrift shop is still operating on Wednesdays. The church has a sanctuary equipped with cots that are a cross between a lazy boy chair and a first-class airline seat, our host pastor is a pilot! The church provided a Hawaiian Welcome dinner our first evening.

Our team from five Presbyterian Churches representing four Presbyteries were blessed to serve with five different organizations. Our first task was assembling two outdoor shower structures for the Po' Okela Host site as well as using pickaxes and shovels to dig, level and place sand and paver stones to create a foundation for the showers. Pastor Kimberley is also building an outdoor Sauna to raise the bar on the hospitality of a host site!

The island of Maui is committed to "build back better," including tearing out the plethora of invasive plant species and replacing the trees and plants with native species. We learned that historically, it took over 10,000 years for a new species to become established in the islands. Currently, 20 new species arrive unwanted each year and the beautiful birds and native plants are threatened. We practiced, "malama" which in the Hawaiian language means stewardship, "to care for and protect." On the day of the Lahaina fire, there were also devastating fires in the upcountry of Kula, destroying homes and acres of forests. The fires in Kula burned for five weeks. We served with Malama Kula under the direction of Executive Director Kyle Ellison weeding and planting native plants and trees. A highlight was planting and weeding the home of 85-year-old Tom, a fire survivor, who spoiled our team by serving fresh pineapple! Yum!

On Tuesday, our team volunteered with the Kula Community Watershed Alliance, founded in the aftermath of the 2023 fires to support the long-term recovery and resilience for Kula's watershed through Community-led ecological restoration, neighborhood scale wildfire mitigation and collaborative stewardship. Working in the greenhouses we potted tiny native plants and then planted them in the reserve. One of the staff members told our team that we did a month's worth of work in one day! Our team rocked!

On Wednesday, our team divided to serve at two different organizations: Kipuku Ohuwalu and Habitat for Humanity in Lahaina. Kipuku Ohuwalu mission is to cultivate cultural and environmental connectivity for all. We pulled invasive species and planted while chanting beautiful Hawaiian chants.

Our team members at Habitat painted one home gifted to a family that survived the flames while another group tackled the extremely complicated directions and assembled kitchen cabinets. We served all week painting, doing cabinetry and cutting and putting in the baseboards. It was an honor to work side by side with Lacy, who will live in the home when it is completed. We also met the future owners of the second home, who escaped the fires with their ten-year-old son and 4- year- old niece- the fires were coming so fast and furious that as they drove away through the flames, they witnessed their home burning.

Across the street, the Construction workers were placing the final beam on Hawaii's first ever mass timber house, a zero-emission bunk house that the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance donated $165,000.00 to help build. The bunk house will house volunteers, including PDA teams in Lahaina when it is finished.

After a morning completing projects, our PDA team donned the red Habitat for Humanity T-Shirts and construction helmets and made the news, participating in the bunk house press conference with the Mayor of Maui, and donors from Boise Cascade, Woodwork Architectural Firm and the representatives from Habitat on all the islands of Hawaii.

As you drive to Lahaina there is a long memorial fence with large posters of all those who lost their lives in the fire. Our team walked the fence line, quiet, thoughtful, honoring all those who couldn't escape. Our team was one who knew disasters. One member watched from her New York Office as the tower fell, losing countless friends; another lost her family home in Altadena. Many were evacuated in the fires that raced across the Sonoma hillsides. Perhaps this was the greatest gift of our team- knowing, understanding the suffering and showing up to rebuild, to bring hope and being able to truly say, "We know and we are here."

On the flight home there was a man seated across the aisle in a Lahaina T shirt. Jeanie shared that our team had volunteered. He told her it was the first time he had been back since the fire took the lives of so many of his friends. That was when he started sobbing. Your never know when there will be a window to minister, to love, to show the compassion of Jesus. Maybe that is what Isaiah meant when he cried, "Here I am Lord, send me."

The team has expressed their sincere gratitude for the opportunity to serve in Hawaii. We served with open hearts and in loving community.

This trip was sponsored by **SOULutions Ministries** and organized by Nancy Disher.
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