

## Stronger Together: Four Years into the Long Road of Recovery

In a recent conversation with Robert Craig, TWK's Disaster Response Coordinator, I was amazed to learn just how large an impact our Annual Conference's disaster work has had on our region's recovery. He shared that, in Graves County, 877 households were served by the TWK Long-Term Recovery Committee (LTR). "We only have two construction cases left in Graves County and those will be finished in the next few months." He went on to share that the Weakley County LTR finished up 25 construction cases in the last year. Craig was quick to add, "We are still doing Recovery through UMCOR and Conference Disaster Response efforts. Both exhibit the beauty of the United Methodist Connection." Another beauty of the UM Connection has resulted in the Feland Ministry Center for TWK Disaster Recovery efforts that will live on as a testament to the power of The Connection.

Two days after the December 10 storm United Methodist Churches throughout the country gathered for Sunday worship, many praying for our region, especially since two UMC churches in our Annual Conference, Dresden First UMC and Mayfield First UMC, had been lost in the storm.

One pastor, Rev. Debbie Harrison, in rural Arkansas stood in the pulpit that Sunday and said, "We are going to build a building to help that area recover." Pastor Debbie had been particularly struck by the devastation of towns and churches. That is when I got the call from Debbie's daughter, Shani Harrison. Shani and I had been seminary students together and have remained close friends despite being in ministry far from each other for the last 30 years.

Shani called to let me know that her mom and the congregation she served wanted to build a building. In the aftermath of a large-scale disaster, it is hard to respond to all the overpouring of support. Numerous requests and calls came in along with thousands of donated items. Some call it the 'storm' after the *storm*. But something in Debbie's confidence nudged me to think that this was a vital step for the TWK Conference.

A few weeks later Debbie, along with two church members Will and Tiffany Feland, travelled to Western Kentucky to meet with Robert and me. Debbie shared that the church was having a catfish fundraiser to start raising funds and thanks to the Feland's building company all the building materials were going to be donated. I asked Debbie at the time how it happened that she would make such a bold statement after a disaster and while being so far away. In her solid preacher's voice she said, "The Holy Spirit told me that was what we were going to do!"

On October 21, 2025, the Feland Ministry Center was dedicated as a ministry partnership between TWK Disaster Recovery and Reelfoot Rural Ministries (RRM), a covenant entity of the TWK. Debbie was unable to make the trip this time, but Will and Tiffany Feland were present along with RRM Board members and friends to dedicate and pray for this new resource for Disaster Recovery. In the end, the building effort became a collaboration of several friends throughout the connection, but it was Debbie's faithful hearing of the Spirit that began what is now a recovery resource that can house vital supplies like Disaster Cleaning Kits, Hygiene Kits, Household items, furniture, and building supplies—all necessary when responding to needs that occur when disaster hits our area.



Left to right: Nancy Johnston Varden and Debbie Harrison

Needs arose in February 2025 when flooding hit Obion County, TN and again in April 2025 when additional flooding and another tornado hit Obion, Dyer, and McNairy Counties. In the midst of those disasters just a few weeks apart, 880 cleaning kits and over 1000 household items were distributed to those recovering. As Robert Craig likes to remind us all, “Your Conference is still doing Recovery!” And thanks to Debbie Harrison who listened to the Spirit we are able to better respond when disaster comes.

Nancy E. Johnston Varden  
District Superintendent





