

May, 2019 Report of Presbytery Disaster Response Task Force (PDRTF)

Requests for funds to be used for the recovery and resilience of communities adversely impacted by the Thomas Fire, Montecito Debris Flows and Borderline Bar & Grill Shooting have slowed. That being said, work towards recovery and resilience continues, and we are at the ready to provide additional support as new needs arise. The Long Term Recovery Committees of both Ventura and Santa Barbara counties are even now receiving new requests for assistance from survivors who are overwhelmed by the enormity of their needs. In March and April, task force disbursements went to the following events:

Rev. Matt Elam and Monte Vista Pres provided nourishment for both the body and soul of shooting survivors at Dinners for Twelve. These survivors have found a safe and nurturing environment at Monte Vista Pres, where they discover respite and fellowship.

Christian activist and author Shane Claiborne was a rousing success during his Beating Guns Tour, advocating for nonviolence at Emmanuel Pres in Thousand Oaks. Rev. David Anderson worked with local organizations to make this happen in response to the Borderline Bar & Grill shooting.

Rev. Dr. Kate Wiebe and Rev. Marvel Hitson continue to provide counseling and resources to clergy and other community members in regards to the shooting and debris flows.

Of particular note is a “Resolution Honoring The Community Wellness Team As the Second District Commission For Women Service Award Recipient” signed by the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors. I have asked Presbytery Stated Clerk Sandy Thoits to present the signed resolution to Presbytery Council and to share this at May’s Presbytery meeting. The Community Wellness Team is a subcommittee of the Thomas Fire and Montecito Debris Flows Long Term Recovery Group that is chaired by Suzanne Grimmese, a member of St. Andrew’s Pres, and co-chaired by Rev. Dr. Kate Wiebe of First Pres Santa Barbara. Marvel and I are also members of this team. I am attaching a summary review of the Community Wellness Team’s work during the past year, and am grateful to this Presbytery Disaster Response Task Force for thoughtfully approving previous disbursements of funds that assisted organizations representing the Community Wellness Team, including ICTG (Institute for Collective Trauma and Growth), HOPE 805 and others.

Rev. Jim Kirk, PC(USA)’s Associate for National Disaster Response and manager of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, has initiated a conversation with Synod Executive/Stated Clerk Mark Hong and with leadership of Santa Barbara, Pacific and San Fernando Presbyteries regarding a tri-presbytery collaboration in long term recovery. As we move forward and communicate amongst the presbyteries, I am convicted of our connectional and relational ministries, modeled yet again via recent correspondence from Rev. Ted Brant, who informed the PDRTF that First Pres Oxnard has a successful ministry providing T-shirts to the needy in the community. This task force, in turn, shared this information with others throughout the presbytery, with the potential of expanding this ministry to the homeless!

In Christ’s service,
Rev. Suzanne Malloy, Chair

Community Wellness Team

Supporting Community Wellness in Response to the Thomas Fire and 1/9 Debris Flow

The Community Wellness Team was established in December of 2017 in response to the impact of the Thomas Fire in Santa Barbara County. The Community Wellness Team is a collaboration of many local agencies working together to support the wellness of our community in response to the Thomas Fire and 1/9 Debris Flow in Santa Barbara County. This collaboration assures coordinated, comprehensive and accessible mental health, spiritual and emotional wellness resources uniquely designed for the impact of our recent disasters.

Led by the Santa Barbara County Department of Behavioral Wellness, this team comprises a coordinated continuum of services available to meet the needs of individuals impacted by the collective and individual trauma experienced in our county. The team is comprised of 13 local agencies working together. Services provided by the Community Wellness Team include immediate crisis response; short and long term grief, trauma and bereavement counseling for children and adults in an individual or group format; school support; spiritual care; critical incident stress debriefings and counseling for first responders or other impacted entities; and groups offered through the intensive outpatient program at Cottage Hospital designed for this response.

Immediate crisis response supports have a wide range of activity. Field support was provided with re-population of community members returning to damaged or destroyed homes. A unique call line was staffed by a counselor after the Thomas Fire where residents could call to learn if their home had been identified as destroyed. The Community Wellness Team also supported staffing of the public information line call center, counseling support line, support at the Family Assistance Center established to aid families looking for loved ones after the 1/9 Debris Flow, counseling at the Local Assistance Center and presently at the Montecito Center. Counselors and Sheriff jointly supported residents when shuttled for supported visits of their property to the high risk debris flow areas during the period in which community was not permitted to enter this area.

The Community Wellness Team is led by the Santa Barbara County Department of Behavioral Wellness and Co-Chaired by the Institute for Collective Trauma and Growth. The Community Wellness Team has assumed the role of one of the sub-committees under the Community Long Term Recovery Group. The Community Long Term Recovery Group is a network of faith-based, business and other organizations and agencies that are providing a coordinated recovery effort to the Thomas Fire and 1/9 Debris Flow.

Contacts made by the Community Wellness Team are tracked by each organization involved. As of 6 months following the disasters, over 10,000 mental health contacts had been made within