

# PRESBYTERIAN DISASTER ASSISTANCE OUT OF CHAOS, HOPE

## GULF COAST TEAM ORIENTATION MANUAL 2010

A photograph of a man wearing a blue t-shirt with 'PRESBYTERIAN DISASTER ASSISTANCE' printed on it, a black cap with 'WASHINGTON' on it, and glasses. He is smiling and working on a wooden structure, possibly a table or bench, in a workshop or construction site. The background shows wooden framing.

Serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

*1 Peter 4:10b*

Photo: Galtberg Presbyterian Church, Maryland

 **PRESBYTERIAN  
DISASTER ASSISTANCE**  
**OUT OF CHAOS, HOPE**

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance enables congregations and mission partners of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to witness to the healing love of Christ through caring for communities affected by crises and catastrophic events.

PDA IS A ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING MINISTRY • WWW.PCUSA.ORG/PDA • PDA@pcusa.org • (888) 728-7228 x5839

Email questions to [pdacallcenter@pcusa.org](mailto:pdacallcenter@pcusa.org) or call toll free 866-732-6121

## The Mission; the work

The mission work out of the Villages is rebuilding homes, families and hope after the four devastating hurricanes that have struck in the past four years. The rebuilding work is centered around the areas where most of the homeowners in need are located. As of the fall of 2009 we have a backlog of from two to five years work on homes that will have gone through case management to assure we are helping those truly in need.

Skills needed are basic home repair from putting up sheetrock and cabinets to painting. While we focus on helping the homeowner, it is all of us who are blessed by the work.

## Volunteer Villages; your mission home

The Volunteer Villages are guided by a spirit of Christ-like cooperation between congregations, presbyteries, the General Assembly Council staff, and the volunteer teams. While designed for use by registered PCUSA teams, the Villages are available to house registered volunteer teams from other denominations, faith traditions, partner organizations, colleges and civic groups.

Village Housing Facilities on the Gulf Coast:

- **New Orleans, LA** (Olive Tree)
  - Site is located about 1 hour east of New Orleans airport.
  - Dorm type housing on former church grounds
- **Houma, LA** (Good Earth Village)
  - Site is located about 1 hour west of New Orleans airport.
  - Pod\* type housing
- **Lake Charles, LA**
  - Site is located 1 ½ hours West of Baton Rouge, LA.
  - Housing is dormitory-style inside a church building.
- **Texas City, TX**
  - Site is located 1 hour south east of Houston Hobby airport.
  - Housing is dormitory-style trailers on church grounds.
- **Port Neches, TX**
  - Site is located about 1 ½ hours east of Houston Hobby airport
  - Pod\* type housing

\*Pods are 2-10 person hard corrugated polypropylene pods with cots. There may be a few permanent structures.

All housing includes:

- Shower facilities
- Quality toilet facilities
- Kitchen
- Dining area
- Sinks
- Cooling and heating
- Gathering area for groups
- Parking space
- Washer and dryer

*"Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interest of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave..."*  
Philippians 2:4-7

## Staff

Each Village has a Village Manager. Most Villages also have a worksite assignment Manager. Long-term volunteers (2-6 months) fill these positions. There is other long-term PDA support staff living on the Gulf Coast. Any of these individuals can answer questions you may have about the Village, the work, PDA's response, or what to do in the area for some 'kick back' time.

Staff members manage the Village according to established PDA policies, and it is important to recognize their role in enforcing these policies. They are also responsible for making your experience in the Gulf as meaningful and comfortable as possible, so feel free to speak with them about any problems or concerns.

## Teams

- Most teams make a one week commitment.
- **Teams do not work on Saturday or Sunday.**
- Teams register in advance with the PDA Call Center in Little Rock, Arkansas, (866-732-6121) and receive their Village assignment. The Call Center will need information for contacting the team leader, the trip dates, and the approximate number of team members before scheduling.
- Each team must have a team leader who will liaise with the Call Center staff, the Village Manager, the worksite assignment Manager, and the onsite construction supervisor.
- Work assignments are usually given on Monday morning.
- **Teams pay \$20.00 per night, per person.** This helps offset the operating costs of the Village, including providing all food and lodging for all of the volunteers on your team. (Please note: there is no reduced fee if meals are skipped as food is purchase long before arrival.)
- **Teams are comprised of three or more individuals and are grouped together with other teams at each rebuild location to provide the skills needed at that site.**

Who can be a member of a team?

- Members of any faith
- Individuals aged 16 and up
- People in good physical condition
- Anyone with an open and flexible attitude
- Anyone willing and able to help with the reconstruction of homes and lives.

Who should not volunteer in a PDA Village?

- Anyone under the age of 16
- People with serious health problems or who are sensitive to heat



## Team Leader Responsibilities

- Before arrival
  - The Team Leader should review with all team members materials sent from the Call Center, the Village Manager and the work site partner.
  - Gather questions from your team to be answered by the Call Center or Village Manager.
  - Keep the Call Center aware of team number changes.
  - Contact the Village Manager apprising him/her of any special conditions/restrictions concerning the team or team members.
  - Advise the Village Manager of the team's arrival time.
  - Return the Volunteer Team Skills Assessment Form to the Call Center ([pdacallcenter@sbcglobal.net](mailto:pdacallcenter@sbcglobal.net)) 4 weeks prior to your arrival in the Village. It will then be forwarded to the Village Manager.
  
- Upon arrival
  - Meet and greet the Village Manager.
  - Turn in *legible and completed* **General Release Indemnification Agreement and Authorization for Medical Treatment** forms for each team member. Be sure these forms have been signed and witnessed.
  - Submit payment for the team
    - \$20 per team member per night (\$20 X number of team members X nights at the Village)
    - Check should be made out to Presbyterian Disaster Assistance or PDA
  - Provide cell phone contact numbers to the Village Manager and/or worksite assignment Manager.
  - Home assignments are usually discussed the first work day of arrival.

## Village guidelines

- Work with Village Manager to arrange the day-to-day activities of the team
- Keep the Village Manager up to date on fluctuations in team numbers, logistics problems, or other items needing attention
- Ensure that every team member has safety equipment appropriate for the jobs they are doing (masks, gloves, first aid kits, etc.)
- Remind every team member to return tools and equipment at the end of the day to its proper place and to bring attention to any repairs or replacements needed
- Complete an Incident Report form if there is an injury among the team members, or any incident of theft or altercation
- The Team Leader is responsible for the conduct and effectiveness of the team while they are in the Volunteer Village and at the work sight. Any difficulties arising with an individual from a team will be referred to their Team Leader

- Please leave unnecessary valuables at home and plan to keep personal valuables with you or locked in vehicles. While there will be someone at the Volunteer Villages *much of the time*, there will be no way to secure items.
- Quiet time starts at 10PM and lights out at midnight. Volunteers need to be sensitive to the community and to realize their own and others' need for rest.
- Smoking is allowed only in designated areas, and smokers are expected to use the ashtrays provided.
- **Never** unplug anything in order to charge your electronic equipment. – that plug may be keeping hundreds of dollars of meat frozen, or your shower water hot! Ask the Village Manager or use a car charger.
- PDA has a zero tolerance policy on sexual harassment or physical violence. No alcohol, drugs or other illegal substances are allowed in the Villages. Any behavior deemed inappropriate by the Village Manager will be cause for the volunteer to be sent home at the team's expense.

## Shared Responsibilities

Teams will most likely be sharing the Village with other teams from around the country. This is a community and the teams share the responsibility for keeping the Village functioning and tidy. Teams will rotate village responsibilities and the team leader will assign members of each team to complete them. Everyone should expect to participate in some of these tasks throughout the week:

- Plan and cook meals for the entire Village
- Clean kitchen
- Clean hand washing stations, showers and toilets
- Pickup around the grounds and empty trash cans
- Straighten meeting areas and supply tent
- Maintain equipment
- Build or repair structures at the Village
- Lead the Village community evening reflection time (devotions)

*"We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us."*  
Romans 12:6

## Reflections

PDA strives to create a community within each Village that is steeped in the Christian traditions of giving and reflection. Time is set aside for reflections every evening. This allows team members to process their experiences in the Gulf, as well as to contemplate the spiritual context of what, for many, is a life-changing experience. If team members choose not to or have a conflict because of devotion material, they can, at Village Manager's discretion participate in reflections of day's activities and what personal value was achieved. Participation in any type of after-work activities is optional with team leader's knowledge.

## The Work

PDA works closely with recovery committees in each community. PDA also works closely with the local Presbyteries (the regional body of the Presbyterian Church) in ascertaining the needs and the response in the local communities. In many cases, a local partner organization is responsible for obtaining the work assignments the volunteers do in the community, overseeing that work and working with PDA to obtain building supplies.

Depending on the site, the type of work volunteer teams are engaged in will vary. Most sites are in the rebuilding phase, while a very few are still gutting houses and removing debris. Other assignments may consist of cutting trees or obtaining building materials. In all cases, PDA and its partners make every attempt to prioritize families receiving assistance according to the following criteria:

*“No one has ever seen God. But if we love one another, God lives in us.”  
John 4:12*

- Must have a family income less than 80% of recommended HUD area income guidelines
- Must be primary residence (not rental or second home)
- Must have registered with FEMA
- Must have contributed insurance payout, if any, toward some of the costs of rebuilding
- Elderly, handicapped or other special needs cases receive higher priority

Under no circumstances does PDA discriminate amongst aid recipients on the basis of race or religion.

## Oversight

In most cases, assessments of the homes will be done by one of PDA's partner's work alliances which vary by Village location. From that point, the Worksite Assignment Manager generates a work order, and each job is then matched to an incoming team's Skills Assessment form. Every attempt is made to ensure that the required materials are onsite by the team's arrival time, and that the job is matched to the team's skills but, at times, flexibility is required to take work on a home in order needed, which may not exactly match volunteer's skill level.

After the job is explained to the team, teams **may** be supervised onsite either by the Construction Supervisor, the Work Site Assignment Manager, or an experienced member of the team. Because we work on many homes at the same time this person may not be there all of the time.

## Safety

While PDA, our partners and the team leaders will make every attempt to ensure that safety procedures are followed on the worksites, it is ultimately up to each team member to look out for his or her own safety. Teams will be provided with a map to the nearest medical facilities in case of an accident on the worksite. Outlined below are some guidelines to follow:

- It is highly recommended but not essential that **steel-toed boots or shoes with a steel shank** be worn on worksites. **Absolutely no flip-flops are allowed on worksites or while working with mowers, weed whackers or other power equipment. Leather shoes are highly recommended over running type shoes**
- Wear good work gloves
- Wear safety glasses around power tools, insulation or overhead painting
- Be mindful of sharp objects—nails, strips of metal, screws, hinges etc
- Wear respirator masks (provided by PDA) in moldy and dusty conditions
- Do not lift objects that are too heavy for you

- Take a break once per hour to get out of the sun
- Bring sun screen and insect repellent
- Wear a hat during prolonged sun exposure
- Clean all cuts and scrapes **immediately**
- Fill out an incident report whenever an injury occurs, and give it to the Village Manager
- Drink plenty of water!!
- Drink plenty of water!!
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## Sensitivity

It's hard to predict what the emotional reactions of such a devastating disaster may be on the survivors. People who have lost their homes, their possessions, their livelihoods, their neighborhoods, their friends, their families, may react with a muted awareness, and their sense of security and well-being may be seriously disturbed. Many survivors will want to talk, and they will need to tell of their experiences. We need to listen without judgment and without interjecting our own tales of "disaster." It is OK to react with our own emotions – to cry with those affected. **Listening is helping**, so please be ready to listen with open hearts.

It is important to realize that disaster survivors may be unable to make simple decisions regarding themselves, their recovery and their personal property. These survivors may become dependent upon volunteers. Be careful about giving advice. It is best to gently direct survivors to disaster officials, who are better trained to help. Understand that some survivors are unable to help with clean up and repair because they are physically and emotionally exhausted.

Volunteer workers must respect all personal information obtained from disaster survivors. Ask permission before taking photos. Do not accept any gifts or cash from survivors.

**Above all, do not hand out cash to survivors!** See below for appropriate giving avenues.

## ABOVE AND BEYOND SERVICE

Travel costs and the time of volunteers are a tremendous contribution. Teams ask us about other ways to assist with the hurricane recovery work. Many of the homes that are being restored have been funded. However, there continue to be homeowners who lack sufficient funding to complete the work. Donations are accepted and appreciated, but are *in no way expected*.

Groups that want to provide support beyond hands on work can do so by:

- Purchasing Lowe's or Home Depot gift cards to be used on building sites or at the Village.
- Making a monetary donation to PDA, our local partner organizations, or another organization working on the disaster
- Purchasing tools, equipment or building supplies to be used at the Villages – ask the Village Manager or Worksite Assignment Manager what is needed
- Volunteering to assist at one of the Villages for two months or more

- Spreading the word about your trip to your community when you return home
- Recruiting volunteers to come as members on a team or as a long-term volunteer in the future!



## Evacuation

As thousands of volunteers plan to make their way here during the summer, it is necessary that a plan be in place to ensure their safety and the safety of our staff in the event of another hurricane.

PDA has an evacuation procedure for each Village that will be followed in the event of a hurricane or severe tropical storm. Teams on the ground may be asked to assist in the evacuation of the Village, or be sent home if the environment is deemed unsafe.

Priority Number One for the Village Managers is the safety of all volunteers at each Village. At the time of evacuation, volunteers will be ordered to follow evacuation procedures. PDA will assume no responsibility or liability for any volunteer who willfully refuses to evacuate as ordered.

In addition, incoming teams may be advised to postpone their trips due to dangerous weather conditions. For this reason, **it is important that groups flying into the Gulf consider purchasing travel insurance.** This will allow groups to recoup the cost of their trip or reschedule at minimal (or no) cost.

Team leaders should stay abreast of current weather information prior to the date of the group's trip. If any tropical weather system (depression, storm, or hurricane) is approaching the Gulf of Mexico at that time, team leaders should call the Village Manager to seek guidance.

## Self Care

You will be entering a disaster zone of a magnitude that is hard to imagine from seeing it on TV or in photographs. Seeing this type of devastation has a different emotional impact from any other mission you may have been on. In essence, you may experience it as a **traumatic event**. The sense of tragic loss can be powerful, and the scale can be overwhelming.

It is very common, in fact, quite normal, for people to experience emotional aftershocks or stress reactions after experiencing a traumatic event. Sometimes the stress reactions appear immediately after the traumatic event, or they may appear a few hours or a few days later. In some cases, weeks or months may pass before the stress reactions reoccur. The signs and symptoms of a stress reaction may last a few days, a few weeks or a few months.

## PDA RESPONSE to HURRICANES

**Presbyterian Disaster Assistance** became active on several fronts starting in September 2005:

- Organizing — Supporting Presbyteries in organizing their own response and planning for long-term recovery.

- Shelter — Training and supporting churches that have agreed to become short and long-term shelters for evacuees.
- Work Site Staging — Setting up, and initially running, staging sites for recovery operations with the support of Norwegian Church Aid. PDA worked with the American Baptist Church to direct volunteer teams to our National Call Center to register and to use our worksite staging areas while in the area.
- Care to the Caregivers — Long term pastoral and spiritual care for pastors and church leaders, as well as training for those who will do spiritual care in the community, was developed in the presbyteries affected.
- Organizing PDA to support all of these activities —the PDA National Call Center set up at Ferncliff Camp in Little Rock, AR.
- Water and Sanitation – Working with the Norwegian Church Aid, PDA coordinated the importation from Norway of site engineering technology and expertise for advanced water purification.

## **Presbyterian Disaster Assistance**

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance enables congregations and mission partners of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) to witness to the healing love of Christ through caring for communities adversely affected by crisis and catastrophic events.

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) is the emergency and refugee program of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. Its core budget including staff and administrative costs is funded through the One Great Hour of Sharing, and its program work additionally funded through designated gifts.

### **Presbyterian Disaster Assistance:**

- Focuses on the long term recovery of disaster impacted communities
- Provides training and disaster preparedness for presbyteries and synods
- Works collaboratively with church partners and members of the ACT Alliance (Action by Churches Together) internationally, and nationally with other faith based responders
- Connects partners locally and internationally with key organizations active in the response — United Nations, NVOAD (National Voluntary Agencies Active in Disaster), World Food Program, Red Cross, FEMA and others
- Manages a number of specialized volunteer teams to work nationally and internationally providing consultation, program design and training
- Cooperates with Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services in providing service structure for asylum seekers in the United States
- Cooperates with Church World Service in the resettlement of refugees to the United States