



May 16, 2007

Dear Brothers and Sisters in service to Christ's Church,  
(Sent to all Presbytery and Synod Executives with copies to Stated Clerk)

The last two weeks have seen an extraordinary period of natural disasters and human caused tragedies. Within the space of less than 14 days four tornadoes, flooding in New York and New Jersey, the shooting in Blacksburg, Virginia and a mine collapse in Maryland have affected no less than 9 Presbyteries in 4 Synods. That is 5% of our Presbyteries and 25% of our Synods in a very short span of time. Add to that the more than a dozen Presbyteries with active recovery operations in an additional 4 Synods and that means over 10% of our Middle Governing bodies have been confronted with overwhelming events in the last 18 months.

The purpose of this note is to give clear, simple instructions about how to immediately access resources from Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. In the last few responses there has been some confusion about how to ask for assistance and what to expect when you do ask, so here is something short and to the point that you can print out and carry with you.

**BEFORE a Disaster Strikes:**

Send the Cellphone number of the Presbytery Executive to  
[jrobinso@ctr.pcusa.org](mailto:jrobinso@ctr.pcusa.org) and [bsnyder@ctr.pcusa.org](mailto:bsnyder@ctr.pcusa.org).

There is a better than 70% chance that a disaster will strike after hours or on weekends when the Presbytery Office is closed. If PDA has the cellphone number of the Executive it makes contacting the Presbytery much easier.

**WHEN Disaster Strikes:**

1. Take care of yourself. Get to a safe place. If you are injured or 'out of action' you can't lead and you can't communicate the needs of the Presbytery.
2. Call for Help. If you are in the middle of the destruction, call your local responding agencies, 911 or the American Red Cross. THEN call John Robinson, Associate for Disaster Response in the US at **540-539-3233** or email him at [jrobinso@ctr.pcusa.org](mailto:jrobinso@ctr.pcusa.org). He carries a backup phone when he is on the road: 502-609-7353. In the event that Groupwise is not working, you can reach John by email at [jrobinson2@verizon.net](mailto:jrobinson2@verizon.net).
3. Ask for Emergency Funding. \$10,000 in immediate assistance is available to the Presbytery to assist with responding to the disaster. In order to access this

funding the Middle Governing Body Executive needs to send the following information:

**a. The nature of the event and a brief description**, such as ‘A strong tornado ripped through the town of Mineral Springs, AR on July 17, 2006 leaving a path of destruction through the business and residential areas of the town.’

**b. An initial assessment of damage**: ‘An undetermined number of homes were damaged; but the Red Cross is estimating that 500 families are displaced by the storm and will not be able to return home for the foreseeable future.’

**c. The Presbytery’s response**. ‘The Presbytery Disaster Response team is being gathered outside the affected area and is organizing a team to enter the affected area tomorrow morning. Their leaders is John Doe and can be reached at his cell xxx-yyy-zzzz’ or perhaps, The Presbytery, having no disaster team, is contacting Pastors in the affected areas to determine the extent of damage and how the Presbytery might help.’

**d. The Assessment of Need**. Tell something about the scale of need: number of families affected needing shelter, specific needs not provided by others such as tarps, plastic sheeting, clean out buckets, etc. If there are churches affected, be sure to include any special needs they might have.

**e. Make a specific request for the \$10,000**. PDA needs this for the auditors as an authorization to spend funds.

**f. Send this email to:**

[jrobinso@ctr.pcusa.org](mailto:jrobinso@ctr.pcusa.org) (will give the authorization) AND

[bsnyder@ctr.pcusa.org](mailto:bsnyder@ctr.pcusa.org) (processes the fund transfer) AND

[pburdine@ctr.pcusa.org](mailto:pburdine@ctr.pcusa.org) (communicates the needs to the church).

**g. PDA can wire the funds directly into the Presbytery account IF we have:**

the Bank Name and Location

the Bank Routing Number

the Name on the Account

the Account Number

4. In addition to funds, PDA has a volunteer team of 41 members, the PDA National Response Team, who can respond to the Presbytery to support the work of the Presbytery and provide valuable assistance in assessment, communication and connecting the Presbytery to partner agencies and other denominations. These persons are trained to respond in chaotic situations and are flexible in providing assistance. They come to stand with the Presbytery and represent the connectional church to pastors, congregations and Presbytery leadership in a time of loss. They can be deployed quickly. John Robinson deploys these volunteers and may speak with you about sending a team in your initial call.
5. PDA will send you reporting guidelines with your first support funding. In smaller disaster, where the expectation is that less than \$100,000 will be provided and the recovery time will be less than 2 years, the financial requirements are less rigorous than for larger disasters. In either case PDA expects to be informed of the use of funds, the numbers of persons assisted and the numbers of volunteers involved in the recovery. It is easier to begin tracking this information from the beginning. If you do not have the services of a full time bookkeeper or accountant it is recommended that you begin now to plan for how you would do both programmatic and financial accounting should a disaster occur.

6. PDA provides limited funding for damaged churches. When a church is damaged more than a building is affected. The whole community suffers from the lack of worship space, facilities to use in relief and recovery, as well as the emotional and spiritual effects of loss of ones faith center. Presbyteries may ask for up to \$10,000 per damaged church. These funds may be used for making repairs or replacing equipment not covered by insurance, or it may be used for renting worship space while the sanctuary is repaired. These are funds intended to help with continuing the ministry of the church.
7. PDA also supports long-term recovery including tools, equipment and even T-shirts for volunteers. Once the initial shock has worn off and the community is organizing for the long-term recovery the Presbytery may submit a request for assistance in funding the long-term recovery of the community. PDA can discuss planning for this in the days following the disaster's first strike. PDA encourages ecumenical and interfaith collaboration in long term recovery. Not only does a single cooperative recovery ministry better serve survivors; but also the recovery organization can be a better steward of available resources.
8. PDA can assist in connecting the Presbytery to other resources as well...but this is enough for this email and will help you prepare for those vital first few hours after a disaster.

All of the above is in a more condensed form in an attachment that you can print out and save...hopefully not ever to be used.

Grace and Peace,

(Rev.) John A. Robinson, Jr.  
Associate for Disaster Response in the U.S.



# PRESBYTERIAN DISASTER ASSISTANCE

**OUT OF CHAOS, HOPE.**

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  - c. **The Presbytery's response.**
  - d. **The Assessment of Need.**
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