



# Rio Texas

response & recovery →

An UMCOR Partner Agency  
**UMCOR**  
United Methodist Committee on Relief



Learn more at:  
[riotexasresponse.org](http://riotexasresponse.org)

Hurricane Harvey first struck the Texas Gulf Coast on the evening of August 25 impacted fourteen counties in the Coastal Bend and Crossroads Districts of the Rio Texas Conference. The fierce wind completely destroyed many homes. Many more lost roofs in the initial hours and were further damaged by the rain which persisted for several days. As the storm continued, river flooding added to the number of families driven from their homes. Over 118,000 FEMA registrations were recorded in the affected counties in the Conference.

Even before the storm made landfall, the Conference Disaster Response Committee (CDRC) initiated conference calls with Conference and local leadership to obtain situation reports and determine appropriate response. Early Response Teams (ERT) were deployed as soon as local officials permitted entry. More than 2,000 cleaning kits were shipped to numerous impacted communities. In addition to 47 ERT teams from Rio Texas, 61 teams came from other conferences across the country. More than 200 individuals responded as part of an ERT. Multiple training opportunities were provided, allowing 365 individuals to be ERT certified and 40 chainsaw-safety certified. Many churches in the impacted area stepped up during this period. First UMC Victoria and First UMC Corpus Christi provided housing for volunteers and served as centers for ERT deployment.

Planning for long term recovery began even as the turmoil of response and cleanup continued. This involved hiring key leadership, hosting the continued flow of ERT and recovery teams, and asking churches to deploy repair and rebuild teams.

Key leaders for the recovery began in November 2017. Case managers and construction supervisors were later added as funding became available. Recovery Director Nikki Leaverton and Recovery Asset Manager Vicki McCuiston were onboard later that month. Nikki previously served as Director of Case Management for the Central Texas Conference, most notably following the explosion in the city of West. Vicki was the Executive Director of the Barnabas Connection in Wimberley and led the recovery efforts there following the 2015 Blanco River floods.



Volunteer Villages were established at First UMC Sinton and First UMC Victoria, each able to house approximately 60 volunteers. Cathedral Oaks and FUMC La Grange also stepped forward to provide limited housing support for the La Grange and Columbus areas. The Conference Volunteer in Missions Committee is supporting efforts to organize recovery teams. They have been actively training UMVIM team leaders and assisting with the team recruitment effort. Between December 26, 2017 and the end of April 2018, 29 teams with over 300 volunteers have assisted in the recovery effort, a third from the Rio Texas Conference. All volunteer housing is coordinated through the [riotexasresponse.org](http://riotexasresponse.org) website.

Funding is critical to both the response and recovery phases of the disaster. Over \$1.5 million was initially received from Rio Texas churches, individuals, the Texas Methodist Foundation, Methodist Healthcare Ministries and others. UMCOR contributed nearly \$6 million and was instrumental in obtaining an additional \$4.2 million from FEMA to provide Case Management. This historic fundraising is only a fraction of the amount needed to assist even the most vulnerable families in their recovery.

Effective long-term recovery starts with effective case management and the Conference has been at the forefront. With UMCOR funding and training, the Conference provided case management starting December 2017 at First UMC Aransas Pass and First UMC Victoria. They will be staffed with 23 case managers and two case management supervisors.

Much has been accomplished since the eye of Hurricane Harvey passed over First UMC Rockport during the night of August 25. Unfortunately, the accomplishments pale in comparison to the amount that remains to be done. Monetary gifts are vital. The Conference is actively scheduling recovery and rebuilding teams. We anticipate needing your support with mission teams for at least the next two-to-three years. Volunteer for recovery at [riotexasresponse.org](http://riotexasresponse.org). Begin preparing your team for deployment to impacted mission fields.

Make your donation payable to:  
Rio Texas Conference Disaster Response  
16400 Huebner Road  
San Antonio, Texas 78248



# HARVEY ERT RESPONSE

## BY THE NUMBERS

# 417

## CLIENTS SERVED



# 16,592

## HOURS WORKED



# 155

## ROOFS TARPED



# 113

## SITES CLEARED BY CHAINSAW TEAMS



For assistance, please have Hurricane Harvey Survivors call:

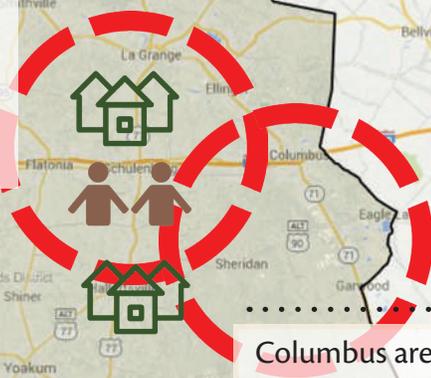
**Coastal Bend:** Aransas, Nueces, Refugio, and San Patricio counties:

**361-857-3164**

**Crossroads:** Victoria, Calhoun, Dewitt, Gonzales, Lavaca, Karnes, Goliad, Fayette, Colorado, and Caldwell counties:

**361-851-7401**

Fayette County Long Term Recovery Group offers case management currently and through the incoming DCMP. Short-term housing is available for volunteers.



Columbus area is responding to 175 flooded homes through ministerial alliance relationships. Case management will be available through the incoming DCMP. Short-term housing is available for volunteers.

Victoria County Long Term Recovery Group works with case management teams from St, Vincent de Paul and Rio Texas. Rio Texas case management services 10 counties regionally through the DCMP.



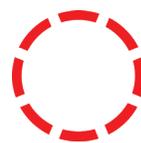
Rio Texas offers case management and an internal unmet needs table to provide services to areas where no formal long-term recovery exist.



Coastal Bend Long Term Recovery Group is focusing on 6 affected counties. Rio Texas case management services 4 counties regionally through DCMP.



**Rio Texas  
Volunteer Village**



**Areas served by case  
management offices.**



**Case Management  
Office**

# Be the Reason Someone Believes

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LAURA BRAY

At any given moment, Heather Linville could juggle a request for repair on a faulty toilet in the church gym, a status update on an incoming work team, a payment inquiry from the church's food provider, a notification of an incoming supplies shipment...or a myriad of other topics; all at once. Heather wears a lot of hats at First UMC Victoria.

Nominally, Heather serves as the Business Manager for FUMC Victoria, takes care of the church's financial matters and facility maintenance. But sit down with her for just a few minutes, and you quickly learn that she does much more.

"She's the church host to incoming VIM and ERT disaster recovery teams at FUMC Victoria making sure they get settled in well," said Vicki McCuistion, Disaster Recovery Asset Manager for the Rio Texas Conference. "But locally, she plays many roles."

Her organizational skills show in her office space. A long work table in front of her desk holds carefully labeled baskets of disaster recovery projects in various stages of completion. Above it, a whiteboard lists dates for incoming VIM teams and where they're coming from. A rolling cart holds notebooks and contact information that she takes home every evening, so she can answer questions during off-hours. It's a far cry from the "piles on the floor" approach she started when I first met her not long after Hurricane Harvey hit.



During the storm, Heather and her family (who live in nearby Cuero) evacuated to Liberty Hill. She recalled, "The first day I came back to the church, I just burst into tears. There was just so much destruction." When she returned to work, she asked the Conference office about how the church could help, "and the next thing we knew, we were the central hub for storm response for a 60-65 mile radius."

"For the first several weeks, I was just trying to figure out how to do things right. The scope was massive, and no one was prepared. We had a lot of help from the Conference office and experienced disaster response coordinators, such as Jim Street from the Capital District."

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"By this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"—Acts 20:35 (NIV)



Heather Linville of FUMC Victoria and Clay Womack of the North Texas Conference discuss ongoing projects.

Heather oversees the Volunteer Village at FUMC Victoria, supports the ERT teams, serves as the Unmet Needs committee chair for the local Long Term Recovery Group and also serves as a board member. In the months since the storm, FUMC Victoria (with support from the Rio Texas Conference) upgraded the Volunteer Village to add bunk beds and showers. The portable shower unit, with four showers and two washers/dryers, is on loan from the Cal-Pac Conference (out of Ontario, CA, 1400 miles away). After their initial visit last fall, they returned home, fitted out the trailer, and brought it back to FUMC Victoria.

“We’re also working out agreements with area gyms so we can use their showers,” said Heather.

“Right now, we can accommodate 62 volunteers,” she said. “During the summer, we plan to host more volunteers in our day school facility just across the street.”

Heather evaluates pending ERT jobs and decides how best to deploy incoming teams that have ERT members. She makes sure to have a clear work plan. “Incoming teams want us to be ready and have work for them to do right away. The worst thing we can do is make them wait,” she said. All long-term rebuilding and repair work is supervised by the Rio Texas Conference construction staff.

Nine months after the storm, the amount of ERT work (including roof tarping and drywall removing) is staggering.

“I have more than 50 ERT jobs still awaiting completion.”

Many elderly residents have yet to return to their homes. Crews will often return to reattach the loose roof tarp after evenings of strong winds or rain. Interior repair work can’t begin until the roof is secured from the weather.

**Read the rest of this story and learn more about recovery efforts at [riotexasresponse.org](http://riotexasresponse.org)**

# Where to Send the Hands and Feet of Christ

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LAURA BRAY

You've read about work teams, Volunteer Villages, rebuilding lives that Hurricane Harvey rent asunder last August. How do we know who needs our help? Where do we send the hands and feet of Christ? While each of these thousands of cases is unique, the process itself follows an established pattern. To demonstrate how survivors move through the recovery and case management process, meet "Barbara," a fictional (but typical) survivor of Harvey, from anywhere in the Rio Texas Conference.

Barbara heard about our local case management office from a friend whose home also suffered extensive damage. A single mother with two school-aged kids, she works full-time and in the aftermath of the storm struggles to get by. She wanted to handle the home repairs herself, but she is just too overwhelmed and doesn't know where or how to start. Barbara doesn't normally ask for much outside assistance because she's strong and independent. But if resources are out there and available, she owes it to her kids to check into it. So she leaves a voicemail at the case management office.

That voicemail generates an email to a disaster case management supervisor, who assigns the case to "Sue" (a fictional but typical case manager). Sue contacts Barbara to set up an intake interview. Sue wants to know where Barbara feels most comfortable for a meeting.

"We could meet here in the office, at your home, or we could use the conference room at the Aransas Pass airport. Or maybe the Whataburger on Main Street is more convenient. Whatever works for you." They set a time and date at the airport.



On the day of the meeting, Sue immediately notices how haggard and tired Barbara looks. After introductions and getting some basic information like address, phone number, and names and ages of family members; Sue gently asks Barbara to tell her story of how Hurricane Harvey upended her life.

Sue learns that the storm damaged the roof, and Barbara hasn't found anyone to fix it. Many of the family's personal belongings were ruined either by the days-long power outage (it pained her to throw out all the food in the refrigerator and freezer; she went shopping before Hurricane Harvey hit) or by the rain that the storm flung into their home through windows and under doorways. She has been trying to replace everything little-by-little, but often it's a choice between paying the electric bill or purchasing a pair of replacement shoes for her son. She used what little savings she had for expenses when they evacuated the area for a week last August.

She has no more spare funds.

And then there's all the FEMA paperwork. Barbara has never dealt with any kind of government bureaucracy, with insurmountable questionnaires and forms to complete. FEMA denied her claim, and she doesn't know what to do.

Barbara can't afford to replace the sofa in the den that the rain ruined or the television that her children enjoyed watching after school. A friend lent her a small television, but she wants to get one of their own and return the loaner. Try as she might, she simply cannot fix the back door that leaks every time rain arrives. Sue jots down notes as Barbara speaks.

Sue smiles reassuringly and lets Barbara know that the Rio Texas Conference and UMCOR will do everything they can to help her get back on her feet. Sue gives Barbara the number for the local volunteer group providing counseling services and encourages her to call for an appointment.

"Getting your life back in order is hard work," says Sue. "It helps to have an outside resource to talk to, someone to listen. They can help you learn how to handle everything, including where to start."

**Read the rest of this story and learn more about recovery efforts at [riotexasresponse.org](http://riotexasresponse.org)**



# Connexions

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LAURA BRAY

## Connection (Brit: connexion): historical; An association of Methodist Churches.—Oxford Dictionary

A few wildflowers poked their heads out of the ditch in front of the home, where a crew from Michigan painted siding, installed extra wall supports and prepared for drywall installation. In a down-to-the-studs interior space, a team member explained the new kitchen layout to the homeowner. A Rio Texas project manager unloaded yet more supplies just procured from the hardware store.



So why is a team from First UMC in the small town of Midland, Michigan (pop. 42,000) all the way down here in Rockport, Texas? As unbelievable as it sounds—because one member of their small Michigan congregation is originally from First UMC in Portland, Texas.

Originally a circuit of prayer groups, a “connexion” forms a fundamental basis for United Methodism: we all belong to a wider church, regardless of the size of our local congregation. Sometimes, that connection manifests itself in unexpected ways—such as a family visit from “back home.”

Last fall, senior pastor Dr. J. D. Landis of First UMC, Midland felt a burden on his heart.

“We had recently experienced a lot of flooding in Midland and sent lots of people to help. Then we heard about Harvey and Puerto Rico, and I felt that we needed to act.

I felt very connected to Texas especially because I heard that it experienced some of the worst floodings our country had ever seen. I also thought about how Texans had shown so much compassion for the displaced from Hurricane Katrina. I felt we ought to reach out and show that same love to those who were now facing that same terrible destruction,” said Dr. Lanis. “So one Sunday, I issued a challenge to our congregation to do something.”



“After the service and totally unbeknownst to me, I learned there were two people in the congregation from FUMC Portland: Stacey Hall and her mother. Robin, Stacey’s daughter, is a member of our church, originally from the Portland area.”

Stacey told me afterward, “We couldn’t believe you were talking about Harvey. We felt like you knew we were here.” Stacey helped J. D. make a connection to the Rio Texas Conference to arrange for a work team, and planning began.

The team formed quickly. “Four people volunteered right off the bat, and it then snowballed to 13,” said J. D.

**Read the rest of this story and learn more about recovery efforts at [riotexasresponse.org](http://riotexasresponse.org)**

# We Need Your Help!

1

## ORGANIZE

Visit with your church leadership / mission committee about organizing a team.

2

## LEADER TRAINING

Identify team leads and seek Volunteer in Mission (VIM) leadership training through your District VIM coordinator.

3

## TEAM HOUSING

Secure your dates to stay in the volunteer villages in either the Crossroads or Coastal Bend Districts. [riotexasresponse.org/volunteer](http://riotexasresponse.org/volunteer)

4

## TEAM PREPARATION

Begin building your team and prepare for your arrival: complete all necessary VIM forms and Trusted Con Confianza Safety Training. Gather tools and raise funds for your trip.

5

## GO...AND GO AGAIN...

Servant leaders depart to the mission field!

6

## PRAY!

Prayers are appreciated for the many individuals and families we are serving in these communities impacted by Hurricane Harvey. Pray for our staff as they work day-to-day with limited resources to meet all the needs. Pray for our volunteers as they travel and work safely.

7

## GIVE \$

CONFERENCE ADVANCE #2057. Your giving will support the Rio Texas Annual Conference Disaster Response Fund for immediate and long-term response.

[riotexasresponse.org/take-action](http://riotexasresponse.org/take-action)

*"I continue to dream and pray about a revival of holiness in our day that moves forth in mission and creates authentic community in which each person can be unleashed through the empowerment of the Spirit to fulfill God's creational intentions."*

-John Wesley

# RECOVERY CASES

Through our UMCOR case management, an estimated 805 cases will be addressed by 23 case managers over the next 18 to 24 months throughout 14 affected counties within our conference boundaries.

# REBUILD CONSTRUCTION

Estimated application average of \$10k per case towards restoration / rebuild at 805 cases = \$8 million

# VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Our volunteer villages have the capacity to house 100 to 110 volunteers weekly. That translates to 10 to 11 ten-person work teams that can be part of the ongoing needed rebuild process. If one work team produces 400 hours of volunteer labor with in-kind values of \$15 / hour, that is a \$6,000 value. Eleven teams per week over a year brings a value of \$3.43 million to the rebuild equation. Easily, 572 volunteer work teams could be of great service and value to the rebuilding process. Volunteer teams will be needed consistently over the next three years and even beyond...

# TEAM RESPONSE CHALLENGE

To add to the great work completed and ongoing by Early Response Teams and Volunteer In Mission Teams from with the Rio Texas Conference and beyond, moving forward –  
What if annually, we mobilized 300 Volunteer In Mission rebuild teams to embrace this challenge in offering hope and encouragement to those most affected by Hurricane Harvey?  
What if each district considered mobilizing 43 Volunteer In Mission rebuild teams annually responding to this cause? This could be in the form of:

- 43 teams working in the field once annually
- 22 teams working in the field twice annually
- 15 teams working in the field three times annually
- 11 teams working in the field four times annually

Learn more at :  
[riotexasresponse.org](http://riotexasresponse.org)