

Building New Relationships in the NC Mountains – Responding to Hurricane Helene

After five months waiting for roads and bridges to be repaired from the ravages of Hurricane Helene, the way is now clear for Eastminster folks to head to the NC mountains to help our friends in the NC mountains as they recover from what seems like astronomical loss. A small team of MSB members and two of our member contractors have recently visited several sites in Swanannoa and Black Mountain/Montreat and have selected Hammer & Heart, a local not-for-profit organization, to be our first partner in selecting the best use of our labor and materials to help in the recovery.

Hammer & Heart was formed about 15 years ago with primary emphasis to help the poorest of the poor with their housing needs. These include retired and disabled folk without any or limited income as well as the working poor of all ages. Residents apply for assistance, a means-to-pay assessment is completed, and services are rendered free or with payment partnerships between the homeowner and H & H. Services are provided for house trailers as well as stick-built homes and may include internal or external structural repairs as well as replacement of necessary equipment, like a clothes washing machine or a working toilet.

Our first project with H & H will be to continue repairing or replacing the skirting around mobile homes that washed away in the floods. This simple repair, that requires no prior building skills, aids in preventing water pipes under a home from freezing in winter weather as well as keeping animals from setting up nests under homes where the 4-legged guests can gnaw on wires and wood. Prior work groups have shown that a single trailer can be wrapped by 3-5 workers in a day at a cost of about \$1000 per single trailer (in the range of \$1500 for a double wide unit). There are thousands of trailers in the Greater Asheville area that need this repair! In three parks in Swanannoa, H & H has received requests from 75 trailers that have already been mucked-out and are ready for skirting.

As we work on immediate skirting needs, damaged trailers and homes are being readied for interior work. Thousands of homes will need sheetrock and

insulation repairs, new porches and steps/ramps for entry, new woodwork, etc. We will grow into those projects as they are ready and as we work to complete the skirting list. The interior repairs must await approval by insurance and FEMA agents as well as local structural code inspectors for Buncombe and other counties. Financial assistance requests must be cleared for those who will get payments from their vendors. The trailers awaiting our help are already approved for repairs so there will be no delays in those projects when we arrive.

For those who may not be able to work outside, we will need two or three kitchen helpers (if we have at least 15 workers) at the Asman home preparing meals for the entire team daily.

Within the MSB benevolence budget, Eastminster will contribute \$1000 toward the skirting materials to wrap every trailer improved by our teams. This saves H & H from having to write grant requests to otherwise raise the funds and certainly allows the home improvement to be accomplished faster. We will provide some cost-sharing funds as we grow into larger projects over time, similar to our support for building Habitat homes in Columbia. We are also talking with the Fuller Group regarding building homes for families experiencing total home loss in the floods but that partnership is in the very early planning stages and we will provide more information before we begin work with Fuller.

We want to provide varied working times so that more of our members can help. Our first trip will have two schedules: a 2-day work schedule to arrive the afternoon/early evening of April 4 and depart for home the late afternoon of April 6 or a 6-day schedule to arrive the afternoon of April 6 and depart for home at mid-afternoon of April 12. Cost for 2 nights will be \$200; cost for 6 nights will be \$600 per person, covering lodging and two cooked meals per day plus a noon-time bag lunch. Couples will be housed in the Montreat home of Agnes and John Asman until that home is full; overflow of couples and all singles will be housed at the SC Inn at Montreat, 2 blocks away from the Asman home. There will be a Dutch-treat night-out in Black Mountain during each of the stays. Cost is \$100 per

night per person so if you can work April 4 through April 12, we would love to have you for 9 nights!!!

What can YOU do NOW:

1. Complete the registration form and submit with payment to Rev. Ben Sloan at the Eastminster address or drop your form and payment in his workroom mailbox. We need these ASAP in order to block rooms at SC Inn.
2. **If you cannot go** on this April trip, please consider making a gift in the name of a person you know making the trip or to a participant who applies for trip scholarship aid so that our members who can give their time may do so at a reduced cost. Your gift may be in any amount you choose. Please write "Eastminster Disaster Assistance" on your Eastminster check and the name of your designated worker if you want to help a specific person; otherwise your gifts will be shared among any workers who request financial assistance. Gifts may be made also by Sunday School and Small Groups.
3. Sunday Schools and Small Groups are asked to help us gather up first aid supplies for each work team (so we're hoping for 5 kits). Lists of items requested will be available on the MSB website shortly. We will save any in-date First Aid items for the next trip so this task should be reduced as we host future work trips.
4. Watch the MSB Missions website for announcements requesting new stuffed animal toys for children in families who are able to move back into their homes after our repairs. We also hope to be able to give each family some assistance in replacing kitchen tools, etc. as their needs become known to us and as we near completion of each project. We have very limited storage space at the church so do wait until we call for this help before sharing your generosity on these particular needs. But we thought you might like to know our longer plans in order to be on the lookout for some good sales here at home for future gifts!

We hope to plan two or three more work weeks for 2025 and hope you will consider being a work team member on at least one of these trips. Based on the needs we've seen and our similar experiences in Brazil, Peru, Haiti, Mexico, and Louisiana, we believe there is enough work for Eastminster to offer four or five work weeks in the NC Mountains for five years or more!



Our team +2

