

proclaim is that God is with us through it all.

#### A different question

When Jesus and his disciples encounter a man born blind, the disciples ask Jesus the question we are asking. "Rabbi, who sinned so that he was born blind, this man or his parents?" (John 9:2). Jesus, why does seemingly arbitrary suffering occur?

Jesus' answer, "Neither he nor his parents," tells us that the disciples are asking the wrong question. "This happened," Jesus continues, "so that God's mighty works might be displayed in him" (John 9:3). Jesus asserts that it is in our response to suffering that God is found, in moments of everyday grace and in grand and sweeping gestures of care and solidarity with the suffering. God's mighty works are found in hospitals and nursing homes and shelters.

Jesus is calling his disciples and us to a ministry. We are to join Jesus in displaying God's mighty works. We are an extension of God's presence in the midst of the tragedy as we come beside those who are suffering in ways we don't comprehend. We are to be agents of healing, working to restore God's order to people's lives and communities. We are to be representatives of the day of resurrection to come, as we seek to rebuild and renew.

In our United Methodist congregations, we join together in these ministries. We assemble flood buckets and work alongside those who shovel the muck from floodwaters from the floors of their



homes. We rebuild homes. We stand in the gap alongside the suffering. We support our local food banks, help build houses in our communities, take care of one another's cars, visit those who are ill and imprisoned, and so much more. We are also active in our communities, working to change systems that inflict suffering on people in our communities.

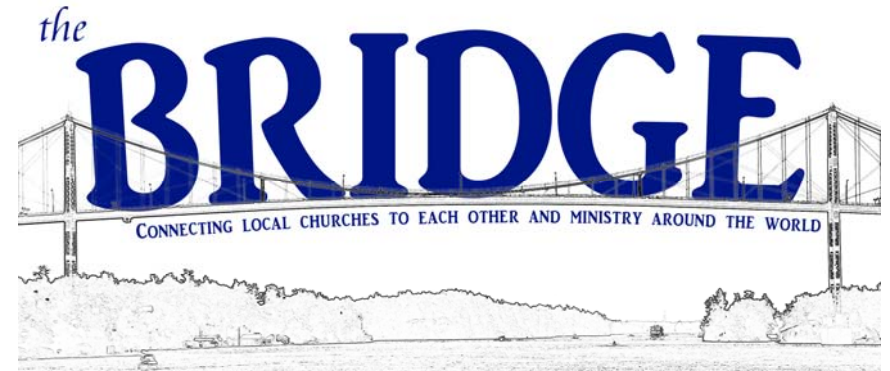
In the aftermath of tragedy, we give witness to the love of God. In our outpouring of support, we proclaim the value of every human life. As we grieve with those in mourning, we share the love of God. When we send supplies through the United Methodist Committee on Relief, we witness to God's provision. When medical professionals bind up wounds, Jesus is shown as a healer. When homes are rebuilt, we proclaim resurrection.

We may not know why things happen, but we embrace the ministries of healing, renewal and reconciliation to which Jesus calls us, and in doing so, God's mighty works are revealed.

*The **Bridge** is a Conference Communications Ministry tool that delivers to local churches news and stories of ministry from around the Upper New York Conference and the world.*

[www.unyumc.org](http://www.unyumc.org)

Visit <http://bit.ly/WorldCommunionSun2017> to prepare for World Communion Sunday.



The Upper New York Conference's vision is to live the gospel of Jesus Christ and to be God's love with our neighbors in all places.

## A look inside!

From the desk of Bishop Mark J. Webb: Response to Hurricane Page 2

Ask the UMC: How do United Methodists understand human suffer- Page 3

## From the desk of Bishop Mark J. Webb: Response to Hurricane Irma

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Once again, we have seen the incredible destruction a powerful hurricane can bring. Our prayers are with the people of the Caribbean, Florida and the other places along Irma's storm path. Just as with Harvey, we know recovery from this latest storm will take years. Likewise, we know we are called and equipped to play a part in this work. Your prayers, your love and your giving are vitally needed now.

Here's how you can help:

1. Invite your congregation to take up a special collection in the next few weeks. If you've already done this for victims of Hurricane Harvey, I ask you to do this again for Irma's victims. If you've yet to take a collection, combine the two and ask people to be doubly generous. The need is great. Announce to your people which Sunday you will do this and ask them to be especially generous. You may forward these funds to the Conference Office with a single check, made out to Upper New York Conference with FUND # 482 – "2017 Hurricane Irma Disaster Relief" on the memo line.
2. Assemble Cleaning Kits (Flood Buckets) and bring these to the Mission Central Hub at the United Methodist Center. We have committed to filling at least one tractor trailer (around 430 buckets). Let's exceed our expectations and fill several! Visit <http://bit.ly/UMCORcleaningkit> for instructions.



As with Harvey effected areas, Volunteers in Mission (VIM) will be needed to help with the Irma recovery, but this will be down the road. The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) will let us know when teams can be sent.

Finally, what I said in the wake of Hurricane Harvey remains just as true after Irma: God does not abandon, but stands with us amid the wreckage and will enable the people to recover. We are invited to embody God's loving presence and power in this work. And so, I ask you to offer your prayers, your dollars, and your time. Thank you in advance for your generous spirits. I am grateful for your ministry and your willingness to be the hands and feet of Christ in all opportunities!

Grace and peace,

Bishop Mark J. Webb

## Ask the UMC: How do United Methodists understand human suffering from natural disaster?

UMNS- Sometimes the devastation is overwhelming. The waters rise and the rain won't stop. The ground shakes beneath our feet, or the wind blows the roofs off homes. Sometimes, even the side of the mountain roars into town. The problems seem insurmountable, the destruction beyond our comprehension.

When tragedy strikes, it is common for us to ask why. We turn to our faith for answers, but answers don't come easily. We wrestle with making sense of the suffering we witness, in light of our Christian faith. Questions are left unanswered. The tragedy is not explained.

In a sermon titled "The Promise of Understanding," John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, says we may never know. He writes,

"[W]e cannot say why God suffered evil to have a place in his creation; why he, who is so infinitely good himself, who made all things 'very good,' and who rejoices in the good of all his creatures, permitted what is so entirely contrary to his own nature, and so destructive of his noblest works. 'Why are sin and its attendant pain in the world?' has been a question ever since the world began; and the world will probably end before human understandings have answered it with any certainty" (section 2.1).

The short answer is: We do not know why natural disasters and other suffering are part of our world.

### Did God do this?

While Wesley admits we cannot know the complete answer, he clearly states that suffering does not come from God. God is "infinitely good," Wesley writes, "made all things good," and "rejoices in the good of all his creatures."

Our good God does not send suffering. According to Wesley, it is "entirely contrary to [God's] own nature, and so destructive of his noblest works." Suffering is not punishment for sin or a judgment from God. We suffer, and the world suffers, because we are human and part of a system of processes and a physical environment where things go wrong.

### God with us

In another sermon titled "On Divine Providence," Wesley again writes of God's love for humanity and that God desires good for us. He then adds how God is always with us, even in the midst of tragedy. Wesley shares,

"[God] hath expressly declared, that as his 'eyes are over all the earth' [see Psalm 34:15; 83:18], so he 'is loving to every man, and his mercy is over all his works' [Psalm 145:9]. Consequently, he is concerned every moment for what befalls every creature upon earth; and more especially for everything that befalls any of the children of men. It is hard, indeed, to comprehend this; nay, it is hard to believe it, considering the complicated wickedness, and the complicated misery, which we see on every side. But believe it we must" (paragraph 13).

This is good news. While we cannot fully comprehend the why, we know that God is with those who suffer. Note that Wesley says God cares for "every creature." We are never alone in our suffering.

In our experience, we know that tragedies happen to Christians and non-Christians alike. As Jesus said, "[God] makes the sun rise on both the evil and the good and sends rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). The good news we

*Continued on Page 4*