

# **“When Disaster Strikes”**

A brief history of the Disaster Relief Ministry  
by Mac Shotwell

The Flood of 1993! Remember? It was out of that disaster that the dream for a Disaster Relief Trailer and Ministry among American Baptist Men was born.

***“Out of Every bad situation, something good will happen!”***

When LaVerne, my wife, and I were in seminary we heard these words. Being young and inexperienced, we doubted that quote! We questioned it. We even argued with our professor. That was in 1957 and in the years since we have discovered that, indeed, it is true. For example: out of a bad, destructive flood here in Illinois, some good things began to happen!

I was executive minister of the Great Rivers Region at that time and I was overwhelmed not only by the destruction of the flood, but by the outpouring of love and compassion. Hundreds of people from across the nation came to help. Dan and Marie Vititoe accepted my invitation to join our staff to manage the many volunteers as well as oversee the clean up in the village of Hull and other places along the Mississippi. Frank Sparks accepted the invitation to manage the cleanup around the Alton area. One Great Hour of Sharing money came to help as well as gifts from many of the churches in this Region.

Out of that flood experience an idea was born! Some of us began to have a vision of a disaster relief trailer equipped and ready to respond when the call came for help. At our 1995 Men's Conference we discussed this dream. Mel Sparlin, Van Peters and David Johanpeter presented me with a model of our dream---a toy replica of what the trailer would look like. The dream became a reality in 1996 at my last regional convention as executive minister. The trailer was on display and I was honored to learn that it was being dedicated to me!

Ken Webster, who had been on several teams that came to help in 1993, became a member of the ABMen's staff at Valley Forge and helped make the vision a reality...



Our trailer was the first of 13 across our American Baptist family. On reflection, Ken remembers: *"The efforts of the men of the Great Rivers Region were an incentive for the rest of the men across the country. The ministry literally took off and has become a nationally recognized entity in the disaster relief community by both FEMA and the Red Cross. The Great Rivers Region trailer was our pilot program. March 15, 1997 is a day I'll never forget. When I saw that trailer sitting in the middle of the flood ravaged neighborhood in Cincinnati on its first response, it was hard not to be proud and boastful."*

For various reasons, the trailer sat dormant after two initial missions. In February of 2004, the ABMen's Council of the GRR asked me to join them in helping to reactivate this ministry. I was pleased to know that I would be working with dedicated men like Warren Craig and John Phillips and a host of men to which I would soon be introduced or reintroduced.

The trailer was first relocated from Carthage to Gridley and more recently moved to Congerville where it will be close to the residence of John Phillips, our trailer coordinator and driver.

At a prayer breakfast in Springfield in April, 2004 the need for revitalization and reactivation was presented. I asked the men to (1) pray, (2) give and (3) go when the need to help came. With gratitude to God and thanksgiving to a host of people, these three things are happening!

The power of prayer is felt almost daily as this ministry is renewed. Over \$10,000.00 has been received in monetary gifts, equipment and supplies. Elsewhere in this workbook you will find a list of some of the donors. Teams are being formed in each of the five areas of our Region and three communities struck by tornados have been helped. (More about this later.)

In May of 2004, Warren Craig and I went to Louisville, Kentucky to attend the 12th annual conference for Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD). We learned more about the 4 Cs for Disaster Relief Ministry: Cooperation, Communication, Coordination and Collaboration.

We met with American Baptist Men's coordinators from across the country. As mentioned earlier there are now 13 regions with trailers. What began as a dream



here in this Region has now become a reality across our American Baptist family.

Before we were ready to respond, a call came for help from Winchester and Jacksonville, both communities hit by tornados. On May 27 and 28, 2004 twenty-one men from teams two and four, plus some youth and one ABWoman helped.

Earlier we had been in touch with the leadership in Utica where team one was ready to respond, but our help was not needed. On July 17, 2004 eleven men from team three and four men from the First Baptist Church of Rantoul responded to a tornado disaster at the Triangle Trailer Park just north of Rantoul. On November 22, 2004 eight from team one helped with clean up from the flood and tornado in Utica.

On these four "maiden voyages" we learned many things and feel better equipped to respond "when disaster strikes" and the call comes for help.

As this ministry was reintroduced at the ABMen's Conference in Bloomington in July, 2004 the following questions and answers were shared:

**WHY?** --*Because Jesus asked us to be his hands and his feet. To help those in need. As our mission motto states: "Because Jesus Came, We Come!"*

**WHEN?** --*When the need is present and the call for help comes.*

**WHERE?** --*Anywhere in our Great Rivers Region or within a 500 mile radius of Springfield, Illinois.*

**WHAT?** --*Help clean up! Once the need has been appraised and the help requested.*

**WHO?** --*Any one who is well and able and can give the time.*

**HOW?** --*See the Plan For Action diagram later in this book.*

Many years ago when I was struggling with God's Call and His Will for my life, I read a definition of a "call". It went like this:

"A call is a need,  
the knowledge of that need, and  
a consciousness of your ability to meet that need."

As we engage in the reactivation and revitalization of this disaster relief ministry, my prayer is that we will see the needs, acknowledge them and be conscious of when and how we can help. With God's help and call, when a disaster strikes and we are needed, we will respond!