

SPECIAL EDITION, JULY 2026

# TRINITY

MAGAZINE

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DISASTER RELIEF MINISTRY @

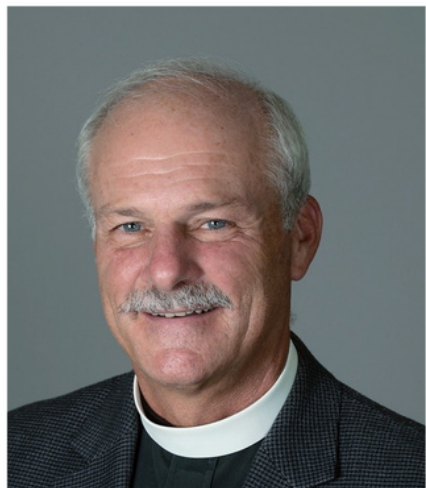


TRINITY LUTHERAN  
CHURCH

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# AN INTRODUCTION TO OUR 2026 PROJECT

by Rev. Henry Zorn



In September 2024, Hurricane Helene ravaged significant damage to parts of eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina. From June 1-5, 2026, nine volunteers from Trinity Lutheran Church participated in our second annual congregational disaster relief trip. Our work took us back to Roan Mountain, Tennessee, about fifty miles west of Asheville, North Carolina.

Disaster relief trips can be thought of as “spiritual retreats with nails.” The primary objective of every disaster relief trip is attentiveness to the inner work of the Holy Spirit in the individual and among the team members. When we move outside of the familiar geography of our home and comfort zone, we often can discern God’s presence. Every evening, in an effort to discern the Spirit, we debrief the day by sharing our highs, lows, and God-moments. The second objective of disaster relief ministry is the building of community. Spending a week together in prayer, at meals, and in conversation affords the opportunity to get to know each other on a deeper level. Our faith sharing this year was focused on the question “What is your sermon?” Each evening participants reflected on their understanding of the essentials of Christian faith that guide our lives and discipleship. The third objective of disaster relief ministry is to offer healing and hope to those who have suffered significant loss. We listen to the victims’ stories of pain. We immerse them in prayer. We offer compassion. We wrap them in the love of prayer quilts. Finally, the objective of disaster relief ministry is to reconstruct homes and thereby, lives.

On this trip we worked at the home of Miss Vicki. She is wheelchair-bound and her deck was in very poor condition from age and the effects of the storm. Our work began by tearing out her old deck. When we began to install a new back door, we realized that the wall was flimsy and unable to support the new door. We tore out the back wall and built a stronger structure. Finally, we built the new deck and an access ramp with two landings. Some of our time was also spent cleaning up her property and the property of a neighbor.

Thanks to the generosity of Trinity members, we were able to provide Miss Vicki with a gift card to purchase furniture or plants for her new deck. We were also able to give a significant financial gift (\$2,700) to our hosts who allowed us to stay in their cabins free of charge. As they continue to recover from the storm, we also gave them gift cards to help rehab one of their cabins. Finally, we gave the construction manager a gift card for himself and gave a gift of \$325 to Carter County Long-Term Recovery Group to help in their efforts to assist other victims of the hurricane. In total, Trinity members and the quilt guild contributed \$775 of gift cards, \$380 cash for a team dinner, and two quilts. A Trinity member also made a very generous donation to the church’s disaster relief restricted fund. The members of Trinity Lutheran Church were with our team through their thoughts and prayers and their generous financial gifts to assist in the recovery effort.

As you will read in this magazine, this truly was a congregational effort in which our team functioned as the Body of Christ, each offering their gifts and abilities while partnering with the Carter County Long-Term Recovery Group and The Chalet Retreat Center. Nineteen Trinity members have now participated in disaster relief trips, and our mission is stronger for it. Next year’s trip will take place from June 6-12, 2027. Mark your calendars now! ■



# The House Across the Street

by Jerry Kyle

As I have gotten to understand "Our mission" on these disaster relief trips it is to help to re-build their... in this case... Vicki's life. The physical part in this case was to build her a much needed ... safe.. deck with a functional safe ramp. A way for her to get in and out of her house safely for all of her needs and God forbid to get her out of her house in the case of another flood.

But as we found out last year... it's also about helping to heal their heart and mind and soul.

To help re-build their lives.

And to find out something about ourselves.

Upon reaching the site on Monday morning- Mike, Henry and I parked in a driveway across the street from the side of Vicki's house. The others parked in different spots as the roads there were tight in this neighborhood and we all had to find a good place to park that wasn't in the way with not only the work we were doing but also the other neighbors.

On that first day I made many trips back and forth from Vicki's house to Mike's truck parked in the driveway across from the worksite. It wasn't until lunch that first day as we sat in Vicki's backyard that I dialed in to that driveway across the street where the truck was at and the house that was on it.

And for the rest of the week I couldn't help but keep looking across the street.. at this abandoned house.



*The abandoned house across the street*

The house across the street was a brick house. That was notable as I did not see another brick house in the neighborhood. It was also a fairly large house with a fairly large yard once again for the neighborhood.

But it was a sad house. It was abandoned... in major disrepair... and still a year and a half later bore the scares of the flood....my eyes and thoughts kept being pulled back to this house.

This years site was different than last years site even though it was in the same general location. As I would spin around there were mountains all the way around. It felt much more like we were in a fishbowl.

According to Matthew (Vicki's son), when the hurricane hit and the water came rushing down off of all of those mountains and rising creeks overflowed into their neighborhood and into their lives, the water quickly rose to the height of the bottom of that brick house's mailbox.

Sadly, that house appeared to be on the lowest spot in the neighborhood. That meant that that house, had 3 to 4 feet of water rushing around, in and through it.

It was devastated and as Charles (our onsite contractor and who lives there in the area) said ...its a tear-down.....

**CONTINUED on next page**



I looked at the front and the back yard and you could still see a year and a half later the action of the rushing water and how it still bore the scars of the rushing water. It still could not even grow grass or even weeds in large areas... a year and a half later!

My mind kept going back to what it was before.... Before the flood. A yard that possibly had family parties, family games or easter egg hunts... now just wiped away.

I couldn't keep my mind and eyes off of this place that once was "a home" for someone.



*The scars of rushing water a year and a half later*



*Abandoned dog leash still attached to what was a fence*

I saw a dog's leash hanging off what was left of a fence that was virtually totally removed by the storm. They probably had a dog. My mind slipped away to happy days of throwing old spot a frisbee or good old spot basking in the sun on the front lawn.

I saw the bench on the front stoop... it looked like it could have been a beautiful place to sit and gaze at all those beautiful mountains that wrapped around them... now abandoned and rusty.

I looked out into their backyard at a yard that too was still washed out from the flood and their stuff... momentos of life... scattered around... ruined like their life may have very well been.



*The bench on the front stoop*

I looked out into their backyard at a yard that too was still washed out from the flood and their stuff... momentos of life... scattered around... ruined like their life may have very well been.



*A view of the backyard*



Once again I couldn't help but envision that kitchen... where family meals were eaten, the days events discussed... birthdays celebrated... destroyed in the blink of an afternoon storm. I couldn't help but wonder where are they now. Are they okay?

Right beside that lot was a small trailer that a lady lived in... she had lost her house in another area of town and had moved there into this small trailer. She looked like she was living a challenging life. Were the people in this brick house also living in a difficult situation like her?

I caught myself praying for this family which we never saw the whole week that we were there. I felt for them.

This was just a reminder of maybe how good we all have it. And often in our busy lives, we don't recognize God's blessings to us.

We may wish we had this or that... or bigger better this or that

I couldn't help but think of how sad it must have been the day they walked away from that house with all of their possessions ruined... with only memories of the better days there... but still that crushing, haunting most recent memory of the flood that took all that away...

Then I would look back over to Vicki's house. Matthew (her son) explained the water just made it up to the edge of their house which was on slightly higher ground. It did very sadly get into their basement and filled it up but the contents above the basement were unharmed.

Just by being on a little higher ground. ■



*The abandoned kitchen*



*Small trailer*

**Join the NEXT mission trip**

## **DISASTER RELIEF TRIP - JUNE 6-12, 2027**

### **Trinity Lutheran Church - Location TBD**

Consider participating in the next up-coming "spiritual retreat with nails" and share Christian compassion and love with a community in need. Please mark your calendar and connect with Pastor Henry Zorn with your interest in learning more or if you have any questions. [henryzorn1@gmail.com](mailto:henryzorn1@gmail.com) or call (513) 250-6654.



# DISASTER RELIEF TRIP 2026

## The Beginning

by Rev. Henry Zorn

*Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. Ezekiel 37:5*

Nine members of Trinity Lutheran Church, Vermilion, have returned to Roan Mountain, Tennessee to perform disaster relief work from Hurricane Helene, which struck this area in September, 2024. Yes, the disaster relief work is ongoing! It surprises people to hear this because few people realize the scope of the devastation. Thousands of homes and businesses were destroyed or damaged by the storm. It takes many years to recover from such devastation.

Our church decided to return to the same area as our initial trip in 2025 because there were (thankfully) no other major disasters in our region since last year and because our accommodation was excellent and the long-term disaster recovery group was good to work with in Carter County.



*Ralph, our Carter County  
Disaster Relief Coordinator*

Ralph told us about a young husband and wife who applied for relief assistance through the Carter County Long-Term Recovery Group a week ago. They had an infant son whose middle name was Ruah. The Hebrew word Ruah, is translated as wind, breath, or life. For example, God's Ruah blew over the chaos in Genesis 1 and Creation began. God blew Ruah into the dirt in Genesis 2 and Adam was given birth.



On Monday morning, we met Ralph, one of the disaster coordinators, at the site of the home that we were going to work on. Before we began to work, I asked Ralph to share his experience of Hurricane Helene with our team. Ralph is pictured, on the right, with Mike, one of our volunteers. The deck that we are going to replace is in the background. The homeowner is non-ambulatory, so replacement of the deck and ramp is essential to her wellbeing.



Ralph went on to explain that the people of Carter County, Tennessee were like the dry bones of Ezekiel 37. God took Ezekiel into a valley of dry bones and asked him if they could live. Ezekiel prophesied and sinews and flesh came upon the bones. Then God breathed God's Ruah on the bones and they returned to life. The people of Carter County were able to help each other to recover, but Ralph explained that it is the volunteer groups that come to the area and bring life and hope to the people. The volunteers let the traumatized victims know that somebody cares about them and that God has not forgotten them. This faithful metaphor is what brought Trinity Lutheran Church back to Tennessee; to breathe the life of God upon them!

On Monday, we tore out the old, hurricane-damaged deck. Our team made great progress. Some of the team members asked me if there would be more work for us at the end of the week because we were surely going to finish this project in less than five days. I assured our team that there was more work to do.

Then on Tuesday, we arrived at the site eager to begin building the new deck. Unfortunately, the construction manager determined that the wall of the home was not stable enough to hold up the new door that was going to be installed. We began "unpeeling the onion," so to speak; siding, insulation, board, and support beams. Ultimately, it was determined that the entire wall had to be replaced!



Cindy Zorn, a Trinity Volunteer



Unexpected complications!

By 2:00 p.m., the wall was replaced and we were ready to start working on the deck. We had lost more than half a day to unexpected complications! This is the nature of disaster recovery work. When you enter a disaster area, you should expect nothing less than....disaster! After twenty-years of disaster relief experience, I have learned to expect the unexpected and roll with the complications. We are not working on the clock. We are volunteers who offer help with the confidence that the next team of volunteers will pick up where we left off until the project is complete.

We made good progress that day. The deck and ramp will surely be completed by Friday. It will be a joy to see Vicki, the homeowner, come out of her house in her wheelchair onto a new deck. Dry bones will have received breath. Ruah is the nature of disaster relief work. ■

*By God's grace, the Ruah will have come upon nine saints from Trinity Lutheran Church who will receive more life than they will give! This is the nature of sharing God's love with the neighbor. Somehow, it always comes back magnified!*



# Family Mission Trip

An Amazing Opportunity

by Brian Thomas

When we decided as a family to do the mission trip this year, I really looked forward to it. My family are a bunch of active people but there aren't a lot of activities that we actually all do together. Usually one or two of us participate in something and the others participate in the audience or possibly booster organizations. Usually when we travel somewhere together it is for vacation. This is the first time we've done something where we all took time off from our busy lives and worked together to accomplish something.....And it was good.



It was so wonderful to have fellowship together with my wife, my sons, and my brothers and sisters in Christ and to actually do God's work with our hands. A Habitat for Humanity

group coordinator in Homestead Florida after Hurricane Andrew told me something long ago that has stuck with me; "Don't look for God in the destruction of the storm, look for Him in it's response" The destruction in the area where we were at in Roan Mountain and the surrounding communities was substantial. Every local we talked too had a story and usually video of the storm. Hurricane Helene didn't just damage this area either. Multiple states were affected. There is construction and repair work for years to come in these communities. We only completed a small part of the work in a small area that needs done but every little bit counts.



What we did mattered to Miss Vicki and her son that's for sure. What we did mattered to us. I will hold these memories in my heart for as long as me head allows me. My family got to work together to directly make Miss Vicki and her sons home and standard of life better. What a blessing. Our church family got to continue our support of the Carter County Restoration Project in rebuilding their community. What a blessing for both us and them. This community and I hope all the other affected communities across the region are doing the work day by day that needs to be done. It was an honor to be a part of it.



*The entire Trinity Group with Miss Vicki*





The group of us got to experience fellowship together that is so much more intense than what we can experience on a Sunday morning. We ate & prayed & worked & played games & sang songs together and still had time for quiet personal reflection as well. What a great blessing. Ask any of us about the great Dalmuti and we may have a story to tell. Our fellowship extended to the chalet owners and their staff who hosted us, the great people whom I never even met who kept us well fed, Charles and the Carter County Restoration

staff whom we assisted, Vicki and her family, her caregiver, and neighbors. Everyone who we interacted with was also in fellowship with us. What an amazing blessing.

On a personal note we had a ginger cat show up (on Wednesday I think). It hung out for a while and supervised the way cats do. It was quite friendly and let me scratch its ears which was great because I was missing my kitties at home and thank you Steve and Alex for watching over them. I quite often feel like cats are involved in my God sightings and I'm glad this orange messenger gave us his blessing. On the last day I installed a new lock and handle on the front door and got to talking to Miss Vicki about her Tennessee mountain Baptist faith and I shared with her some on my Ohio lakeside Lutheran faith and we took pride in our shared human Christian faith. God's work. Our hands. What a blessing. Thank you for this amazing opportunity and journey for me and my family. ■



*Yes - rolling around on top of the roof!*



**Consider participating in an up-coming "spiritual retreat with nails" & share Christian compassion and love.**

## How Can I Help?

We invite you to partner with us in supporting Disaster Relief Ministry. There are several ways you can get involved:

- Share this magazine with your friends, family, and colleagues!
- Donate to Trinity's General Fund:  
Your financial contributions directly fund our Disaster Relief Ministry and other Giving Project initiatives.
- Volunteer for a trip:  
Trinity Trip: June 6-12, 2027: Watch Trinity communications for info as the trip is planned next year.
- Spread the Word:  
Share our Giving Projects with your friends, family, and colleagues to raise awareness and encourage wider participation.
- Share Trinity's website page "Our Outreach Missions".



# THE STORM IS PASSING OVER

by Anne Ford

I've often said that my truest form of worship is in song. That's probably not a very big revelation for those who know me, but it bears repeating to help me frame the God moments I experienced during our time in Carter County.

See, I found that the same message kept coming back to me throughout the trip, like returning to the chorus of a song. And the first time I recognized it, it was in the echo of a God moment I'd experienced a long time ago, a reminder resonating with me all over again.

We arrived promptly at our work site on our first day, met our project manager (Charles), and our liaison with the Carter County Recovery Team (Ralph), got to unloading the trailer, and then, contrary to what my weather app had promised, it rained. Hard. Hiding-inside-the-trailer-for-shelter-because-we-don't-have-a-tent-up-yet kind of hard.

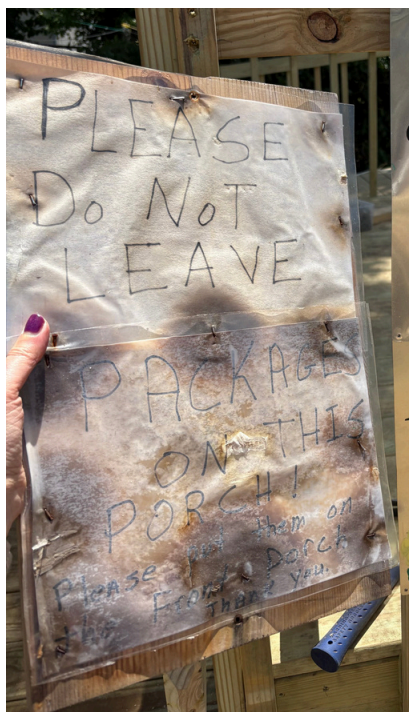
And of course, me being me, it reminded me of a song. Not "You can stand under my umbrella," we didn't have any. Or "Raindrops keep falling on my head," I was in the trailer. But a gospel song I'd learned more than a decade ago, that I sang with a choir at the sight of a tragedy from centuries earlier across an ocean. That's a story for another time, talk with me later about it if you want.

The song is called "The Storm is Passing Over," by Charles Albert Tindley, arranged by Barbara Baker. It struck me how well that fit, with the rain of that first day, but even more so with the devastation of Helene. The floods may have been years ago, but the storm was still in the process of passing. There was still plenty of detritus to be cleared away.

Of the wreckage of and around Miss Vicki's porch, there were very few things that they asked to save. One of those was a sign that asked for delivery men to leave packages on the front porch rather than the back. However, it was not in good condition.



*Hiding inside the trailer*



*"Please save the sign"*

Barely readable up close, much less out by the street. So when I found that there were times we couldn't all work on the porch at once, I decided to make it a personal project to paint a new, more permanent sign, to replace the unreadable one.

I bought some signs with a blank side, outdoor paint, and some brushes. Then whenever I found myself waiting until my hands to be needed for the porch, I painted.



By the end of the day I started the signs, I had a good chunk done. I put the paint and brushes in a bag, put it in the trailer for the evening, and was on the way out.

Then a little disaster struck. Something had been left in the trailer, and in the process of getting it out, the bag was knocked over and green paint went everywhere. There are stains that will never come out on the trailer, and trying to get it off of everything it coated was awful. The bag was a lost cause, and it took many, many, washes to make sure several of us didn't spend the rest of the week with green hands to boot.

It was disheartening, and yet it led to one more undeniable reminder that the storm was passing over. That all storms pass over.

See the very next day, with the sign painted, and laid out to dry. I noticed some paint splatter on the grass where we had set the paint coated materials the other day, and noticed something unexpected.

Do you see it? I looked at the splatter and thought to myself, "does that say 'Joy'?" It looked clear to me, but I asked a few of the others, and they agreed. The disaster from the previous day now said "joy".

Giving me another reminder that the storms we face in this life, both big and small, will pass over. And afterwards, out of the wreckage there will be joy.



*Random paint splatters?*



So throughout our work as a disaster relief team, this song and its message kept coming back to me.

*Have courage my soul, And let us journey on.*

*Though the night is dark, And I am far from home.*

*Thanks be to God, The morning light appears.*

*The storm is passing over, The storm is passing over!*

*Oh, the storm is passing over, Hallelujah! ■*



*Oh, and I was pretty pleased with how the sign turned out*



# AN AMAZING EXPERIENCE

by Jude Thomas

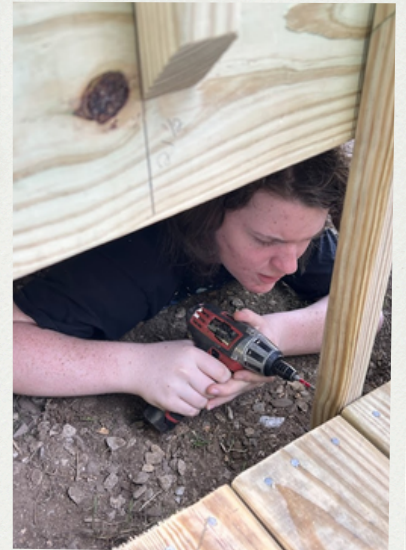
## *“Highs & Lows”*

I thought that the trip was an amazing experience for me! I learned many new skills like how to use different power tools, use a mattock, and swing a hammer correctly. It was especially fun because I was able to do things most teens are told they are too young to do.

My biggest low was the first day, because I left my water at the cabin and I got really exhausted around midday. My biggest high was the day we finished the deck and we could actually stand on it with it supporting us. Meeting Vicki, the person we were helping, was also awesome. She had a really bright outlook and always had a smile on her face.

Before the trip, I thought it was just going to be long and boring, but it was really fun to hang out with everyone else. Using my own time and resources to help others out felt really rewarding in spirit. It brought me great joy to bring joy to other people.

Some other fun things I liked about the trip were being underneath the deck during construction, being the Great Dalmuti, learning more about the people in the church, and trying new foods in the places we went out to eat. Also using the mattock, which is essentially a big pickaxe, was really fun. ■





# ONE BODY, MANY PARTS

by Cindy Zorn

*1 Corinthians 12:12- "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all of its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ."*



I have been on many disaster relief trips and this trip was unique from the others by its composition of team members. Almost all of the past trips I have been on were very much a trip of my peers. This team was very different as it was a multi-generational crew represented by ; teens, 30's, 40's, 50's, 60's, and 70 year old members! You can look at the pictures and try to match the ages!!!

Along with the differences in age also came the dimension of skill sets. Some members of the Blue Crew were very familiar with tools, their names and uses and others had never used the tools before. But now everyone now knows the difference between a star bit and a square drive and all the tools that were required to build a deck, back wall and install a door. The beauty of a Disaster Relief Trip is that everyone is important in the building



process. Just as most of us have been nurtured in our faith, the success of the trip depends on teaching and nurturing new skills. Our completed project represents the unity and diversity of all team members that was exercised by God's builders. And when God's people come together led by the Holy Spirit (I believe we were all called to be a member of this team) and by Charles our site supervisor we can bless Miss Vicki with a completed project.

## **One Body, Another Part**

Once again, Carter County LongTerm Recovery Group facilitated our work effort. We were supported by materials, expertise along with thanks and encouragement all week long. While 80% of Carter County has recovered there are still many folks in need and they persevere with recovery efforts.

## **One Body, Another Part**

The Chalet Retreat Center was once again our home base while on Roan Mountain. The owners Nicole and Micky extended their gracious hospitality to us during our stay. In addition we were provided with wonderful meals from several local churches all appreciating our time and efforts.

## **One Body, Another Part**

Thanks to St. Matthews Church for once again letting us use their disaster relief trailer. Having a place to haul and store our tools safely makes for a much nicer trip

## **One Body, Another Part**

Lastly, ALL the members of Trinity Lutheran Church were with us on our trip. Through your prayers, financial support and kind words we were able to be God's hands.

Thankful to be a part of this trip. ■





When I realized that the 2026 Trinity Outreach Mission Trip fell during one of the few weeks of the summer that was still open on our family calendar, it seemed like a wonderful opportunity for us to serve together. As excited as I was, though, the prospect of a new adventure brought plenty of worries and anxieties.

Would everyone be safe? Would someone accidentally get hurt? What would it be like sharing a home with people we barely knew and who spanned so many different ages? Would we all find meaningful ways to contribute? Would we connect with the family we were serving? Would my whole family survive the long drive without getting sick? Most of all, would we be enough?

But once we arrived on Monday and learned about our project—rebuilding a deck—I could feel many of those worries begin to fade. Not all of them, of course; concerns about injuries still lingered in the back of my mind. Yet as I lay in bed at the chalet that evening, a quote came to me:

Mother Teresa once said, *“You may believe that what you are doing is just a drop in the ocean, but the ocean would be less without that single drop.”*

AND IT STAYED THERE.

This quote echoed through my mind all week during our adventure.

Drop. Drop. Drop.

 **Drop** - Noticing my boys grow under the guidance, patience, and encouragement of others—especially Charles, who taught them the technique of hammering.



 **Drop** - Watching my sons volunteer for some of the less desirable jobs—digging holes and crawling under the deck—without hesitation. And laughing along the way.



💧 **Drop** – Pushing through frustration, taking breaks when needed, and choosing to come back and finish what we started. Learning that sometimes a hole needs to be deeper, wider, or moved a few inches over – and that perseverance matters more than perfection.

💧 **Drop** – Seeing the tangible results of our work at the end of each day: a floor, a railing, a ramp, a wall, a deck slowly taking shape before our eyes.

💧 **Drop** – Learning from one another, encouraging each other, and celebrating even the smallest completed tasks.

💧 **Drop** – Making music together across all skill levels, creating a space where everyone felt safe enough to try something new. I loved sharing the simple joy of chime ringing and singing together.

💧 **Drop** – Sharing favorite games with new friends and watching the competition and Joy spread from person to person —thank you, Great Dalmuti.

💧 **Drop** – Sharing daily highs and lows, recognizing “God sightings,” and realizing how each person could experience the same moment in a different way.

💧 **Drop** – Witnessing the tears of gratitude from the person for whom that ramp and deck meant so much. The love and gratitude were palpable as we gathered around Vicki thanking her for allowing us to be part of her story.

💧 **Drop** – This time the drops were tears. Tears in my eyes as we stood with Vicki. And tears in my eyes now as I write this reflection and remember the week.

By the end of the week, no single drop stood above the others. None was insignificant, either.

What began as small, separate moments became something greater. Together, those drops became a steady and meaningful wave, reminding me that even the smallest acts of service, encouragement, patience, and love can carry far more weight than we expect and touch far more people than we ever realize.

As I reflect on our week in North Carolina, I keep coming back to the same truth that first came to mind that first night: each of us was only a drop. Yet the deck was built, friendships were formed, faith was strengthened, and lives—including my own—were changed. The ocean would have been less without any one of those drops. ■



*The Blue Crew out for dinner supporting local business.*



The disaster relief trip was a huge success and I recommend the reader goes on the one next year. It can be both physically and mentally rewarding. The trip allowed me to get closer to those around me and God.

During the trip I learned several different skills. I learned how to use power tools. Now to be completely honest part of the reason I went on the trip was for the power tools and I was glad they let me use them. Granted it was limited to a screwdriver, but it was a power tool nonetheless. I also learned the proper way to swing a hammer. At the start of the week it was quite frustrating, but I grew into it. A less tangible skill that I learned over the week was patience. I was tested on several occasions but the biggest challenge was when we were creating the post holes and I had to battle roots to move the hole. Me and my mother toiled with two of these holes for at least fifteen minutes after we thought we were done. A large amount of that time was trying to figure out how to navigate the roots. But after we finally finished the sense of accomplishment was wonderful.



*Tamlin and Cindy at the worksite*



*Altar for Faith Sharing*

Throughout the trip we learned a lot about each other through working together and our nightly routine. Our routine consisted of going through our highs, lows, and god moments of the day then a couple sermons about tangible objects we brought. Through this habit we learned what motivated us. Out at the site we were sweating together, but we were also joking around and telling stories to each other. Through this we learned how each of lived and interacted with life.

Overall I recommend going on the 2027 disaster relief trip. It can not be described the spiritual fulfillment after we finished Vikki's deck for her. Throughout the trip I became closer to God and those around me. I learned how to be patient and how to use a powered screwdriver. I think disaster relief trips are completely worth the time and effort that goes into them and I hope that the reader will find that out for themselves. ■



*Tamlin and Summer*



# Trip Reflection

by Mike Kreger

Participating in this trip was a deeply rewarding experience. It was everything I had hoped it would be, and I am grateful to have been part of it.

## Finding Our Rhythm as a Team

At the job site, our group got off to a slow start. But as we became more comfortable with Charles, and he became more comfortable with us, everything began to come together. We each found our place and settled into the work. There was a real sense of calm and togetherness throughout the week. We moved easily between working as one team, breaking into smaller groups, or taking on individual tasks as needed. I saw that teamwork in many moments: setting up wood and measuring with Charles, Brian stepping away to do trimming, and Anne creating a wonderful sign for Vicki's delivery people.



*The new sign!*



*making a difference a wheelbarrow at a time*

## Helping Where We Were Needed

We had a goal to accomplish, and everyone gave their best. In addition to helping Vicki, I noticed another neighbor working alone on a large pile of dirt and clearly having difficulty. I mentioned her situation to Pastor Zorn, who encouraged me to speak with Ralph, our Carter County facilitator. The next day, after I spoke with Ralph, he talked with the neighbor, and said we could help her if we had time. Pastor spoke with her and Tam, Pastor, and I went over to assist. Together, we made a big difference by wheelbarrowing dirt to where she wanted to create a yard.

## Listening to Roger's Story

While we were working, another neighbor came to his fence, so I walked over and began talking with him. His name was Roger, and he wanted to know what we were doing and where we were from. After I explained the details of our group, he shared what had happened to his and his wife's home. Roger told me that water had reached the floors in part of the house. They lost their entire deck, and their septic system was badly damaged. He also explained that his insurance had done essentially nothing for him, leaving him to pay out of pocket to repair the septic system and a large section of his fence. He also shared that his kitchen floor had been ruined and needed to be replaced. When he finally found someone to repair it, they took \$600, tore out the damaged floor, and never returned. In the end, Roger's brother-in-law completed the replacement. He showed me a video of water rushing around his house, and it was incredible to see. I told Roger I would ask the Carter County facilitator to come over. The next day, I explained that to Ralph that Roger felt ignored, so Ralph spoke with him. They met a few times, and I believe Roger will be connected with trustworthy help.

## A Blessed Experience

When we pulled out of Vicki's on Friday afternoon, I felt deeply content. I believe that I—and all of us—had done blessed work. I would absolutely go again, and I encourage others to go as well. The daily sharing of our faith, paired with meaningful work, is an experience that cannot be beat. ■



*A gift to Miss Vicki*



# DISASTER RELIEF TRIP 2026:

## MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

by a Big Team!

by Rev. Henry Zorn

**We are the workers, not the master builders, ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future that is not our own. - A prayer in honor of Archbishop Oscar Romero**

We have returned safely from our disaster relief trip to Roan Mountain, Tennessee. Over the past two days, I have moderated three showings of Ripples of Plastic (more on that in a later blog post). I have caught my breath and found this time to reflect on the disaster relief effort.

The 16th century Carmelite nun and mystic, Teresa of Avila, wrote a poem titled Christ Has No Body, which has been quoted often in spiritual writings because it is very rich in meaning.

*Christ has no body but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks  
Compassion on this world,  
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,  
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.  
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,  
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.  
Christ has no body now but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks  
compassion on this world.  
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*

This poem can be understood and applied in many ways. When I read it, the word “discipleship” resounds in my mind. Surely, it describes disaster relief work spot on. The volunteer team incarnates Christ to the needy neighbor, and each member of the team manifests a part of the Body. I am continually amazed at how the parts come together in the work of restoration; young and old, skilled and less skilled, praying people and working people, quilting people and generous donors, all work together for the good.

As I installed our team at the end of the worship service before we departed for Tennessee, I asked all of the worshipers to come to the altar and lay hands on the team members. I reminded the congregation

that it was not just nine members who were making the trip. We were ambassadors for the entire congregation. In spirit, vicariously, every member of our church participated in the trip. Through their prayers, by their donation of \$775 gift cards, through \$380 donated for a team dinner, through two quilts, and in one major gift of \$5,000 to our church disaster relief budget, this was a team effort.

We tend to think that it is big governmental organizations, for example, FEMA and state emergency funds, that make the difference in disaster response. The truth is that volunteers and the local community contribute most of the resources to recovery. I was deeply gratified when our construction manager looked over the project with us at the end of day four and commented that our effort - replacing the back wall of the home, installation of a new door, and the new deck and wheelchair ramp - had a value of \$15,000-\$20,000 including labor and materials. In other words, volunteer groups matter!

It just so happened that the local television network in Johnson City wanted to run a story about the continued relief efforts from Hurricane Helene (which struck in September 2024). A reporter came to our jobsite and produced a wonderful news story about the partnering work of the Carter County Long-Term Disaster Recovery Group and Trinity Lutheran Church. My daughter, better at analytics and media than I, told me it was the most viewed story in the newsfeed that night! Can anybody say evangelism!

You can view the entire two-minute television story at this link. (Note that you will have to endure the preceding advertisement first.) Very affirming for our church! <https://www.wjhl.com/news/local/hurricane-helene/ohio-church-helps-aid-in-ongoing-hurricane-helene-restoration/>



Every disaster relief team - eager beavers that they are! - wants to complete the assigned task. Sometimes that is possible, more often it is not. In pre-trip organizing meetings, I always remind team members that they are not "on the clock." The nature of the work is that your team picks up where the last team left off. The next team will pick up where yours left off. I also remind team members that we are headed into a disaster zone. That means...expect disaster! Expect complications. Expect the unexpected! Be patient when things don't go according to plan.

On this particular project, we discovered that the back wall of the house was held together by shoelaces and chewing gum. I almost mean that literally! There wasn't a 2x4 in the entire wall! To replace the door and tie in the deck, we had to rebuild the entire wall first! I could see the team members revelation, "With this delay, we might not finish deck by the end of the week!"... Expect the unexpected!

Thankfully, our construction manager was very experienced and able to solve the problem and keep us on task. By the end of the week, we had replaced the door, completed the deck and the ramp.

Miss Vicki, the homeowner, was not feeling well enough to be wheeled out on her new deck. Alternatively, our team went into her home and engaged in conversation with her. Needless to say, she was extremely gratified. We gave her a new quilt (which happened to be purple, her favorite color!), laid hands on her, and blessed her, reciting the words from The Letter of James that I have so often used in pastoral visits to the homebound, "Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them... The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective." (James 5:14, 16) With wood and nails, saws and levels, a quilt, a gift card (to purchase furniture or plants for her new deck), prayer, and the laying on of hands, Miss Vicki was loved and (at least in spirit) healed that Friday.



By the wisdom and mystery of God - e.g., the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully...God loves a cheerful giver... when you lose your life you will gain it - I am confident that every member of our team was, in some way, healed in that same room on that Friday afternoon. Prove me wrong, but I believe that we get more than we give in every act of kindness and generosity.

The Salvadoran Archbishop, Oscar Romero, was an advocate for the oppressed during the time of "liberation theology" in the last century. By lifting up the poor and organizing them to fight for their freedom and justice, he was viewed as a threat to the corrupt government of El Salvador. He was not favored by the Roman Catholic Church because he was stirring the pot.

Pushing against the status quo never goes over well with those in power. In March 1980, Archbishop Romero was gunned down at the altar while presiding over the Sacrament; a martyr of the Church. He often told the peasants and their persecutors that if he was killed, his spirit would live on in the life of the poor.

A prayer (on the back cover of this magazine) was written in his memory and as a tribute to his life. I have found that this prayer is also quite apropos of disaster relief work, and frankly, of life in general. The bolded sentences are my edit to offer clarity and depth of meaning. The prayer is very liberating. In life, you don't have to accomplish it all. Contribute to the good...and trust that God is the Master Builder of the Kingdom that is beyond us.

No disaster relief trip completes the recovery. We do something and try to do it well. The Lord's grace will enter and do the rest.

Enjoy your deck, Miss Vicki! Thank you for the privilege to be God's Hands to you. Thank you for being the (broken) Body of Christ to us! ■

PRAYER ON NEXT PAGE



### Oscar Romero's Prayer

*It helps, now and then, to step back and take the long view. The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is the Lord's work. This is what we are about.*

*We plant seeds that one day will grow.*

*We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.*

*We lay foundations that will need further development.*

*We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.*

***We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.***

*This enables us to do something and to do it very well.*

*It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning,*

*a step along the way,*

*an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.*

***We may never see the results,  
but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.***

***We are the workers, not the master builders,  
ministers, not messiahs.***

***We are prophets of a future that is not our own.***

*Nothing we do is complete,  
which is another way of saying  
that **the Kingdom always lies beyond us.***

*No statement says all that should be said.*

*No prayer fully expresses our faith.*

*No confession brings perfection.*

*No pastoral visit brings wholeness.*

*No program accomplishes the church's mission.*

*No set of goals and objectives includes everything.*



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