

## UMCOR Disaster Response Training Supports Methodists Worldwide

By Michelle Scott\*

October 28, 2010—The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) has long been known in the US as the go-to organization for disaster response training. In addition to providing a variety of disaster response and preparedness courses to United Methodist annual conferences, UMCOR is also called on from time to time to train other groups outside of the United Methodist connection.

Over the past year and a half, UMCOR has branched out to extend a very similar training program to Methodists worldwide. "My vision is to replicate the success of the US training program along with the success of Volunteers in Mission," says Melissa Crutchfield, head of UMCOR's international disaster response unit, noting the importance of including local volunteers in any disaster recovery effort.

The first international training took place in the Philippines in July 2009. It coincided with the opening of the UMCOR Philippines office outside of Manila. The three-day workshop—like all the disaster training sessions to follow—was attended by people representing various regions throughout the conference. The main product of every disaster response training workshop is a disaster response plan. For the Philippines, it was put into action almost immediately.

### Putting Training to the Test

Just two months after the UMCOR training Typhoon Ketsana inundated parts of the country with water. A second major typhoon hit the country a month after that. Ciony Eduarte, who leads UMCOR's Philippines office, coordinated supplies, volunteers and relief efforts, putting the newly minted disaster response plan into action.

Chile had a similar experience. The Methodist Church of Chile invited UMCOR to provide them with disaster response training in October 2009. As part of the session, the church established its own disaster response organization, the Methodist Humanitarian Aid Team (EMAH).

The following February an 8.8 magnitude earthquake rocked the country and the disaster response plan EMAH had developed with UMCOR was called into action in a big way. During a recent presentation about the response in Chile, Juan Salazar, the disaster response coordinator for the Methodist Church of Chile, called it their "final exam" for the training that they had received in October.

The Methodist Church of Chile has since asked UMCOR to do a follow-on training, which was conducted at the end of September 2010. They took the opportunity to develop some lessons learned from the earthquake response in this session. With UMCOR facilitators, the Chilean Methodists pinpointed some weak areas in their disaster response plan and determined what they needed to do to shore it up for future disasters.

### Training Plans

UMCOR has also provided disaster training in Cambodia and plans are being made for workshops in other countries during 2011.



A disaster response coordinator presents response plans during a workshop at the United Methodist Committee on Relief's office in Cavite, Philippines.

*Melissa Hinnen/UMCOR*

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"Each training has the same 'basic bones' every time," explains Crutchfield. The three-day disaster response workshop covers the following:

- Sphere Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response & ICRC Humanitarian Code of Conduct
- Use of material resources and volunteers in disaster response
- Different types of disasters
- The cycle, phases and levels of disasters
- Balancing needs vs. capacity to respond
- Local partner and national networking
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While every training session has some basic components, Crutchfield notes that there are many variables that make disaster response different in each country. For example, text messaging is a primary means of communication in the Philippines. One of the training exercises included a practice emergency alert via text to each of the coordinators who then walked through the drill with their team, coming up with responses to each of the potential scenarios.

"The hope is that we can put ourselves out of a job," Crutchfield says of the need for UMCOR disaster response internationally. The overarching goal for the training program is to build capacity in each region so that they can be self-sufficient in disaster response.

Learn more and support UMCOR's International Disaster Response program [online](#).

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