

# TOP FOUR WORST AND BEST

## Ways to Help after a Disaster

BY SUSAN KIM

**WHEN DISASTER STRIKES, OFTEN WE SEE HEART-WRENCHING IMAGES ON TELEVISION. PEOPLE HAVE LOST EVERYTHING. THEIR HOMES LIE IN A TANGLED HEAP. THEIR BELONGINGS ARE RUINED.**

We immediately want to help – a good intention that stems from compassion for our fellow human beings. However, be certain to couple your compassion with good judgment on the best ways to help disaster survivors.

Here are the top four most common pitfalls into which helpers fall after a disaster – and what they should do instead.

- » **Resist the urge to jump from your couch and drive to the disaster site.** When Hurricane Sandy struck the mid-Atlantic, scores of people decided to drive to New Jersey, New York and other affected areas. The result? Clogged interstates, a worsening gasoline shortage and volunteers arriving in droves and diverting the attention of emergency personnel. What to do instead? When you watch or read the breaking news about a disaster, respond immediately – with prayer or a cash donation.
- » **Don't give the shirt off your back.** Did you know that donations of used clothing are commonly called “the second disaster?” When clothing piles up at a disaster scene, it must be stored, hauled away or sorted by volunteers who

could better use their time helping disaster survivors. Instead, cash donations help survivors purchase needed items from local businesses, which boosts an economy weakened by disaster.

- » **Don't believe that recovery takes only a few days.** Well-intentioned donors often give money or relief-supply kits only while a disaster is prominent in the news headlines. In fact, for a major disaster, recovery can take years. If donations dry up after a week or two, responders no longer have the resources to help disaster survivors. Those survivors feel forgotten, and their recovery doesn't progress.
- » **Don't forget your own disaster preparation and training.** If you want to respond in a safe, helpful way, seek disaster response training and learn how to prepare yourself so you can respond should the need arise. Preparing can be as simple as forming a plan with your neighbor, or as involved as becoming a specialized responder who serves on an UMCOR Early Response Team.

The next time disaster strikes, put your compassion into action through prayer, cash donations, relief-supply kits, training and volunteering. You will help disaster survivors around the world.

*Susan Kim is a freelance writer living in Laurel, Md.*

want to help? what are you waiting for?

We know you want to help. Jumping on a plane and flying to the site isn't advisable. So what's a volunteer to do while you're itching to lend a hand? Don't fret! We've got a few ideas:

prayer

<http://umc.org/disaster-pray>

Prayer is not asking.  
It is a longing of the soul.

—Mahatma Gandhi

relief kits

<http://www.umcor.org/UMCOR/Relief-Supplies>

Gather friends, family and neighbors together to assemble cleaning buckets. You'll provide much needed essentials for the recovery process.

Photo: Bill Burton, North Carolina Conference of The UMC

financial support

<http://buff.ly/1GceliM>

100% of your donation goes directly to relief efforts.  
To make an immediate \$10 donation to UMCOR, text the word UMCOR to 80888.

team prep

<http://www.umcor.org/UMCOR/Give/Volunteer>

Recovery doesn't happen overnight. Help will still be needed long-term. Begin assembling and training a team to volunteer in the months ahead.

Photo: Mike Nelson, 2005

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