

Local Church Members Help With Hurricane Relief

By: Karen Carpenter

When tragedy strikes in other parts of the country, people often desire to help. They send money or even supplies but really don't get the opportunity to actually see the fruits of their generosity.

Thirteen members of Grace United Methodist Church in Fergus Falls were fortunate to be able to give some hands-on help in September.

Attending were John and Karen Carpenter, Roger and Sue Erstad, Bill and Linda Dumke, Sharon Henderson, Julie Hoefs, Diane Iverson, Del and Carol Larson and Norm and Ann Newell.

John and Karen Carpenter are former residents of Barnesville. Norm and Ann Newell are the parents of Eric Newell of Barnesville.

Carol Larson served as leader and organizer of the team from Fergus Falls.

The group traveled to Baldwin, LA, spending five days packing flood buckets for North Carolina and other regions devastated by Hurricane Florence early in September.

The United Methodist Committee

On Relief (UMCOR) Sager Brown Depot is located in the small town of Baldwin. The Sager Brown campus spans several acres. More than a dozen buildings occupy the property.

Baldwin, located in St. Mary Parish in the middle of Cajun Country, is the poorest parish in Louisiana.

Sager Brown is best known as a place where thousands of volunteers spend a week or two each year packing relief supplies for disaster victims.

The property where Sager Brown is located is owned by the United Methodist Women. UMCOR owns the buildings.

The Fergus Falls group along with 47 other volunteers from around the United States, provided help for some of the outreach services provided by UMCOR in the small community.

During the week, Grace UMC members visited low income, elderly or disabled housing project. While there, some helped with light cleaning tasks or played bingo with residents.

Other opportunities to help were in the form of sorting clothing at a residential facility for women who suffer from addiction. Also visited was a home for women and children who are victims of domestic violence.

All of the opportunities to help touched the hearts of the givers as well as receivers of the help.

While at Sager Brown, it rained part of every day, so volunteers were unable to help with the community garden or outside landscape jobs that are ordinarily part of the experience.

In between rains, a couple of the men from the group were able to haul lumber to help build a ramp for a disabled household.

Most of the work for the week was verifying flood buckets donated by churches or individuals from around the country.

In the fall of 2017, Grace Methodist, along with other churches in the area, donated packed buckets to the Sager Brown Depot.

What the work at the depot entailed was unpacking the five gallon buckets, making sure that all



Thirteen members of Grace United Methodist Church in Fergus Falls traveled to Baldwin, Louisiana recently. They helped pack flood buckets to be sent to the flood ravaged eastern states after Hurricane Florence hit the region. They are, left to right, back row - Roger Erstad, Sue Erstad, Sharon Henderson, Norm Newell, Ann Newell, Del Larson, Bill Dumke; front row - Diane Iverson, Julie Hoefs, Karen Carpenter, Carole Larson, John Carpenter and Linda Dumke.



These women from Grace United Methodist Church in Fergus Falls helped sort clothes at a facility which gave temporary shelter to women and children of abuse. Left to right are, Ann Newell, Karen Carpenter, Diane Iverson, Sue Erstad, Sharon Henderson and Julie Hoefs.

of the proper items were included then repacking. Buckets are distributed to flooded parts of the country.

Included in each bucket is laundry and dish soap, liquid cleaner, insect spray and air freshener, trash bags, sponges and scouring pads, Handiwipes, a scrub brush, clothespins, clothesline, rubber gloves, respirator masks and work gloves.

Each liquid item must fall into a certain ounce size. A specific number of each of the other items must be included in order for everything to fit within the confines of the bucket.

Sounds easy enough but many buckets contained items not on the list or were wrong sizes. The wrong kind of sponges were included in many which caused mold to grow inside the bucket.



Norm Newell was in charge of shrink wrapping the pallets of 36 buckets. The pallets were then loaded onto semi trucks headed for delivery on the East Coast.

One group of volunteers counts out 24 garbage bags, making sure they are within the 35-45 gallon size range. The bags are then rolled tightly and secured with a rubber band. All bags are removed from the buckets, counted and re-rolled.

After the buckets are inspected and repacked, lids are hammered down securely and the buckets stacked on pallets. The pallets are then shrink wrapped and loaded onto semi trucks for transport to disaster stricken areas of the country.

During the week the volunteers from Fergus Falls helped at Sager Brown, two semi loads of buckets were shipped out to North Carolina.

Nearly 2,000 buckets were readied for shipping and 35,000

plastic bags were counted and rolled.

On Wednesday morning most volunteers helped with the monthly food distribution to elderly and low-income families in the Baldwin and surrounding area.

Boxes of government commodity food supplies were loaded into cars for the recipients by volunteers. Over 200 boxes of food were distributed in a two hour span of time.

Meals for the volunteers were provided in the cafeteria on campus.

Teams took turns giving the before meal blessing, then bussing tables and washing dishes.

Volunteers stay in dorms or apartments on the Sager Brown campus during their stay.

The rewarding week sped by quickly for the volunteers. The memories made will last a lifetime.

For the volunteers from Grace United Methodist Church it was a rare opportunity to do hands-on work to help others in a time of need.



John Carpenter had the task of opening flood buckets so that the contents could be verified. Thousands of buckets were in the depot awaiting volunteers to check the contents. The buckets contained cleaning supplies and were sent to victims of flood due to hurricanes.



Karen Carpenter is counting out garbage bags. A total of 24 are placed flat and then rolled and secured with a rubber band. The bags were then ready to place in the flood buckets. Over the course of the five days that the Fergus Falls volunteers were at Sager Brown 35,000 bags were rolled.



Volunteers from Grace United Methodist Church in Fergus Falls took their turn washing dishes after meals at Sager Brown. These Midwest residents sampled Southern delicacies such as grits, okra, crawfish and pecan pie. Dishwashers from left to right were John Carpenter, Bill Dumke, Roger Erstad and Julie Hoefs.

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