

# Advocate for Disaster Aid for All

*“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only...” - James 1:22*

## Action Steps Your Congregation Can Take to Help Communities Affected by Disasters

After the devastation of Hurricanes Irma and Maria many folks in Puerto Rico went without power for months, severely limiting access to food, water, shelter and economic opportunity. This means a significant portion of the island’s residents are food insecure. Prior to the hurricanes in 2017 there were already issues with economic stagnation, now many more people (primarily families with children, seniors, and people with disabilities) need access to both nutrition and medical assistance. But right now, critical funding for Puerto Rico’s Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP) has all but run out- meaning over a million U.S. citizens are going without basic necessities. Congress must gather the political will to address this ongoing crisis and provide immediate relief to the residents of Puerto Rico. For months now Congress has been quarreling about disaster aid, including aid to Puerto Rico, never-mind that while they argue vital assistance is needed urgently by over 1.35 million people, or over 1/3 of Puerto Rico’s population. This inaction is reprehensible. All across the United States communities have been affected by disasters and these congressional delays mean that people continue to go without basic necessities and are unable to rebuild their lives.

As people of faith, and as the United Church of Christ, we respond when disaster strikes. Living out our call to love our neighbor extends far beyond that of our physical neighbors. UCC Congregations have given financial and material assistance as well as pastoral and spiritual help. We are calling on UCC congregations to help in another way – by engaging in advocacy actions to help ensure the residents of Puerto Rico and many other communities around the country have access much needed disaster relief and assistance.

## Background

*UCC Disaster Ministries is a program of the United Church of Christ that responds to natural and human caused disasters all over world and is well positioned to respond in most events.*

*Through our volunteers, congregations, Conferences and partnerships UCC Disaster Ministries seeks to serve the most vulnerable populations that require spiritual, physical, financial and psychological support.*

*More information and additional UCC Disaster aid resources can be found at <http://www.ucc.org/disaster>.*

*Doing justice, seeking peace and building community are central to the identity of the United Church of Christ. For more information on the justice advocacy work of the UCC visit [ucc.org/justice](http://www.ucc.org/justice) or join the Justice and Peace Action Network at [http://www.ucc.org/join\\_the\\_network](http://www.ucc.org/join_the_network)*



There are action steps you can take in your congregation to help people in Puerto Rico as well as other states and communities affected by disasters.

### ***Write and call your Member of Congress***

You can look up your elected officials here: <http://p2a.co/Nmw4YqN> to let them know it is unacceptable and unconscionable that Puerto Rico as well as other states and communities have not received the disaster aid assistance and relief needed to provide for millions of U.S. citizens.

Here is a sample script:

*“As a person of a faith and your constituent I urge you to take immediate action to ensure that disaster aid funding for Puerto Rico is passed by Congress with no additional delays. Thank you for doing all you can to ensure the residents of Puerto Rico receive the funding that is needed to ensure the continuity of the Nutrition Assistance Program as well as ongoing rebuilding efforts. Please pass a disaster aid package that provides for aid for all.”*

### ***Reach out on social media to your Member of Congress***

Here some sample tweets:

- *It is far past time for Congress to pass disaster aid legislation for Puerto Rico. Further inaction is unconscionable and immoral. #DisasterAidNow #AidForAll*
- *As people of faith we are called to love our neighbor and we believe in showing up for those who face disaster and for those who hunger. It's time Congress does too. #DisasterAidNow #AidForAll*
- *Disaster aid has been delayed in Congress for months now, while people go hungry and disaster recovery stalls. Congress must pass disaster assistance now! #DisasterAidNow #AidForAll*

### ***Arrange an in-person meeting with your Member of Congress or their staff in their district office***

This is a chance for you, as a constituent, to directly ask your legislator what steps they are taking to ensure that the residents of Puerto Rico and many other states and communities receive disaster aid with no further delays. This would be a good chance for you to talk about ways your church has helped with disaster aid, or even a time when you or folks in your congregation experienced disasters yourselves. Personal stories help cement your “ask” by providing context and making the visit more meaningful. After the meeting be sure to follow up with them thanking them for their time and reiterating your request. You can look up your elected officials here: <http://p2a.co/Nmw4YqN>

### ***Write a letter to the editor***

A sharply written letter to the editor has a bigger impact than you might think. If you specifically mention your Member of Congress by name, their staff will often bring the article to their attention. This is another powerful way to let your legislator know what you think, and it can also inspire other people in your community to get involved. Start by identifying yourself and your connection to the community. Express that, as a person of faith, working to ensure all have access to food, water and other essentials is one of the ways you live out Christ's commandment to love our neighbors. Explain why passing a disaster aid relief package with no further delay is important and ask that Congress take immediate action.