



**Hospitality Guidelines  
From UMCOR**

# Opening Your Doors: A Hospitality Guide

## Tips for Congregations that May Host Evacuees

### Remember, It Takes a Community

**Form a Committee**

Before any decisions are made regarding hosting evacuees, form a committee among interested persons to work together. Hosting evacuees should be a community effort. UMCOR does not recommend individuals sponsoring evacuees. Evacuees belonged to a community before Hurricane Katrina. Now, they will need a new community to support them.

**Evaluate Resources**

Have a meeting to determine community interests and assets. Make a schedule for future meetings – determine if people are willing to commit for 18-24 months or longer. Share available information, or ask persons to find out:

<input type="checkbox"/> <b>What is available within the group?</b>	Furnishings, visiting, transportation, primary contact person, etc.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>What is available from the church?</b>	Benevolence fund, initial welcome, counseling services, etc.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>What is available from your local community?</b>	Clothing bank, food bank, temp agencies, job listings, etc.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>What is available from local government agencies?</b>	Public assistance, medical coverage, application processes, etc.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>What is already happening in your community that you could support?</b>	Relatives hosting families, a Red Cross or other shelter, etc.

### Network

Start contacting reputable “clearinghouse” agencies: The Red Cross, FEMA.

Check the UMCOR website for updates: [www.umcor.org](http://www.umcor.org).

Many agencies are also working on evacuation questions – check other websites.

There may be an opportunity to register your interest in hosting with one of the annual conference disaster recovery offices supported by UMCOR in its goal of long-term recovery. When these offices are set up they may be able to refer evacuees to your congregation. Stay tuned for future developments!



## Think, Pray, Plan

Be prepared for uncertainties and difficulties. Take time to think, pray and plan. Hurricane survivors may need extra time to make major decisions. Evacuating to a new place – new city, new state – is a major decision.

Hosting an evacuee is a major decision. Be flexible, be open, and listen to the wisdom of those who are experiencing this.

## Find Adequate Housing

Strongly consider renting separate housing rather than “living in”. “Living in” can be extremely stressful for hosts and guests. Guests are traumatized, hosts are eager. Both need their space. Cultural practices may be different.

Ask the broader church or community for assistance to locate adequate rental housing. Be sure you have a rental agreement that is written, agreed to and signed by all parties.

## Listen, Listen, Listen



After evacuees arrive, share responsibilities among at least 4 or 5 persons—see “It Takes a Community” above for ideas.

Find your best listeners and assign them to do just that—listen to evacuees and hosting constituents.

Assign persons to accompany evacuees, if needed, to social service agencies and government agencies.

Be particularly alert to service providers who might demean adult evacuees by treating them as children. Let them select what they need from you. Offer a menu.

Don’t push a job search until evacuees are feeling safe, secure, and able. Assist in due time and as appropriate.

## Educate Yourself

Remember that evacuees will be traumatized with differing levels of symptoms. Educate yourself on what to expect, educate your church, and educate the evacuee. Identify a good listener who seems to connect with the evacuee to be the one to help with finding a counselor when needed. If there is a family, each member needs a good listener. Think through rules of confidentiality for the listeners.



📌 **Resource:** Stephen Ministry Guidelines, [www.stephenministries.org](http://www.stephenministries.org). Photo: Reuters/Rick Wilking, courtesy alertnet.org



## Get It In Writing

The relationship between host and evacuee should be in writing. UMCOR has posted two questionnaires, one for congregations and one for evacuees, adapted from Church World Service to guide your planning. Use these, or develop your own.

① **Resource:** Visit us online at [www.umcor.org](http://www.umcor.org).

## Expect the Unexpected

Do not expect the evacuees to be United Methodist. Find out if they would like to attend their faith services, invite them to your church, respect them if they do not want to attend church at all. Realize they may be having serious questions about their faith, and that church services can be emotional and they may not be ready for that.

Be flexible and open. This is a humanitarian response—the goal isn't to find new members or best friends for your congregations. While it would be wonderful, it is not the goal.

## To Assure Availability of Services, Help the Families You Host Register With FEMA

UMCOR is not processing referrals for evacuee resettlement at this time. When the long-term recovery offices of the affected annual conferences are established, this kind of referral *may* be an option.

If you are in an annual conference located in an area receiving large numbers of evacuees into shelters, collaborate with those shelters. Perhaps you could organize the referral process. Maybe they have one already.

If evacuees are being placed into your state, urge your State Office of Emergency Management to apply for a “federal declaration” if they haven't already in order that the evacuees can be eligible for housing and other benefits from FEMA. Many other services are not available to them until they have registered with FEMA – be sure to help them do that before they come to you if your state is not yet “federally declared.”

① **Resource:** Find out about your state at [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov).

*Adapted from the Mennonite Central Committee's "Suggestions for Potential Evacuee Hosts"*