

VIM to UMCOR WEST to Salt Lake City, Utah
801-973-7250
September 26 to October 2, 2010
Rev. Marsha Purtell, Muskogee District UMC VIM Team Leader

Events of the Project

1. Our eight RVers in four different rigs (George & Sharon Isbell, Jim & Vicky Tracy, Tom & Janet Wiseman, David & Laura Morrison) headed for Utah via a scenic route several weeks before the project began.
2. Laura and David Morrison needed to head back to Oklahoma for family reasons prior to the beginning of the project. They were missed.
3. The ten traveling by air (Sara & Dudley Brown, Peggy Cotten, Carolyn Hawley, Juanita Joseph, Bill Prentice, Rev. Marsha & Rev. Clint Purtell, Susie & Earl Williams) met at the Tulsa airport on prior to an early afternoon American Airlines flight. Our efficient and fearless leader, Rev. Marsha Purtell, had luggage markers and ticket information ready for us. Changed planes at DFW airport and headed for Salt Lake City. When crossing the Rocky Mountains there were opportunities to view groves of beautiful yellow aspen trees. We were picked up at the airport by Rugged Rental Van and transported to the Episcopal Center after a short scenic trip through downtown Salt Lake City.



4. A part of the welcome for us at the **Wasatch Retreat and Conference Center/ Episcopal Church Center of Utah** www.eccuevents.org/ was sufficient groceries on hand for a simple evening meal of Soup with Peanut Butter and Jelly sandwiches—a welcome meal for ten people who were not anxious to head to a restaurant just yet.
5. Earl's evening devotional on "Love Your Neighbor" that included John Wesley's "Do all the good you can..." and Paul's 13th chapter of I Corinthians was great preparation for the work of the week ahead.

6. Susie, our team's journal writer, asked for one word responses to our arrival at the Episcopal Center—delightful, welcoming, marvelous, absolutely amazing, beautiful, well organized, comfortable, and exceeds our expectations.
7. Monday morning devotional was by Peggy, "Sewing Seeds: Good or Bad." Other devotions during the week were given by other team members.
8. Our first morning at UMCOR West included an orientation by Rev. Brian Diggs, the UMCOR Director. Because we are in the dessert at 4500 ft. Brian encouraged us to drink 4 to 8 bottles of water/liquids per day to stay hydrated.
9. Work completed included:
 - Assembling Health Kits for 1½ days.
 - Checking/verifying, boxing and stacking LOTS of school kits for 3½ days.
 - Helped bring 30 pallets from another site to UMCOR West, loaded 36 completed flood buckets on 18 pallets, wrapped with plastic wrap, and used the fork lift to store them.
 - Helping to clean and organize storage at the UMCOR Depot and the Crossroads Community Food Co-op.

UMCOR WEST, UMCOR, and Women's Division Information and Projects

10. To respond to the vast needs of human suffering worldwide, and to act as a "voice of conscience among Methodists," M-COR, Methodist Committee for Overseas Relief was organized by the 1940 General Conference of the Methodist Church to funnel money into overseas relief.
11. Then in 1968 M-COR became UMCOR, United Methodist Committee for Overseas Relief with a mission that included hands-on national as well as international relief.
12. The site for the first UMCOR Depot at Baldwin, Louisiana began in 1867 as an orphanage for African American boys after the Civil War funded primarily by a predecessor to the Black College Fund of the UMC. [new.gbqm-umc.org/umcor/work/sagerbrown/140anniversary/history/?search=Sager Brown History](http://new.gbqm-umc.org/umcor/work/sagerbrown/140anniversary/history/?search=Sager%20Brown%20History) After Hurricane Andrew in 1992 the abandoned Sager Brown campus became a staging ground for supplies for hurricane relief. The **UMCOR Sager Brown Depot** opened in 1996 to store relief supplies for use throughout the world. The UMCOR Depot is owned by the Women's Division of the UMC.
13. Because **UMCOR Sager Brown** is in Hurricane Territory, **UMCOR West** was located to stockpile kits for use in the western US. **UMCOR West**, located at 1479 South 700 West in Salt Lake City, Utah, UT 84104-1605 opened May 31, 2009. new.gbqm-umc.org/umcor/newsroom/releases/archives09/umcorwestopens/ Currently there is only one staff person at UMCOR West, Rev. Brian Diggs, former pastor of First UMC, Salt Lake City for ten years.
14. **UMCOR West** receives, checks/verifies, boxes, and stores on pallets the same six kinds of kits that UMCOR Sager Brown does (health, school, layette, birthing, sewing, and bedding) as well as the same flood buckets.

15. It was very helpful for Brian to clarify how UMCOR is a humanitarian and non-proselytizing branch of the United Methodist Church. UMCOR preaches the gospel by "what we do." Checking kits is for the purpose of removing religious, patriotic, and Disney labels from the kits—items that might cause customs officials to confiscate the whole shipment (so the customs workers can sell it on the black market).
16. **UMCOR West** has a new fork lift and a number of tall new racks for storing kits on pallets. Others racks are needed as well as a fire safety door.
17. **UMCOR West** shipped 23,000 health kits to Haiti after the earthquake and UMCOR Sager Brown shipped 77,000 health kits. Following the donation of 23,000 health kits to Haiti, 61,000 health kits came in to **UMCOR West** to replace them. **UMCOR West** also sent flood buckets to Colorado after recent fires at Boulder.
18. **UMCOR West** is preparing to send 15,792 school kits (47 pallets) to Palestinians in Gaza in October 2010. By the time our week of volunteer work was completed there were 58 pallets of checked/verified school kits, more than enough to fill the request from Gaza for school kits because of resettlement issues. "School kits help to bring stability to a community after a disaster by getting children back in school" and "churches that work together to donate school kits build cohesion within their group," stated Brian.
19. **UMCOR**, which exists largely from volunteer workers and volunteer sharing, is now working in 81 countries. The listing of Advance Specials includes 1,000 different projects. **The Advance number for UMCOR West is 901440.** Haiti's UMCOR Advance is 418325.
20. **UMCOR** receives no apportionment money, but the **One Great Hour of Sharing Offering** goes for UMCOR Administration so that 100% of all special giving can go to the designated project.
21. Other mercy ministry projects of the Women's Division of UMC are (1) Crossroads Urban Center, (2) Crossroads Thrift Store, and (3) Crossroads Community Food Co-op. (See below.)
22. **Crossroads Urban Center** (347 South 400 East), established in 1966, is a multi-faith community center in downtown Salt Lake City. The program is housed in a 104-year old house owned by the Women's Division of the UMC and rented to Crossroads Urban Center for \$1 per year. The Center assists homeless and low income people by providing bus tokens, rental assistance, pharmacy assistance, job skills referrals, job placement assistance, and a food pantry of mostly non-perishable foods. <http://crossroads-u-c.org/> The food pantry is the busiest food pantry in Utah.
In addition to the mercy functions of Crossroads Urban Center listed above they promote a number of justice issues such as the abolishment of the tax on food, need for better housing opportunities for the poor, changing local camping program

rules so that the homeless are not ticketed for sleeping in a public park during the day-time, reduction of the pay day loan interest from permitting 300-500% interest to a maximum of 36%, and need for better availability of health care for the poor.

23. **Crossroads Thrift Store**, (14th West & Indiana Avenue/840 south) established in 1966, is operated by a former US2 to Crossroads in the 1980's and many volunteers. Churches and social service agencies write referrals (vouchers) for those in need to receive some free clothing. In 2009 the Crossroads Thrift Store provided good used clothing and household goods to 18,199 people and sold low-cost clothing to others in need. New socks, underwear, and baby clothes are always needed. www.crossroads-u-c.org/StorePic.htm
24. **Crossroads Community Food Co-op** (1726 South 700 West), established in 2005 is not a food pantry but addresses: (a) food insecurity through selling reduced price fresh produce and fresh meat and (b) community building by stimulating volunteerism. Membership in the Co-op is \$5 for a lifetime plus two hours community service per month either at the co-op or at another location of their choice. Foods include fruits, meat, and vegetables priced 30-50% less than at the grocery store. A share of fresh fruits and vegetables costs \$10; a share of fresh meat costs \$15. Groups place their orders two weeks in advance, and then volunteers pick up the order at the specified date and time and take it back to their church for distribution to those who ordered it. There are 60 team sites such as churches or community buildings where volunteers distribute the food to those who have ordered and paid for it. www.foodco-op.net/ Members of our team helped clean and organize the Co-op in preparation for the visit of donors that evening.
25. Another notable program in Salt Lake City, though not United Methodist, is **Family Promise**. Area hosting churches agree to provide facilities for homeless families with a child under 18 to stay for one to two weeks. Breakfast and dinner are provided as well as a place to shower, sleep, and wash/dry clothes. During the day the family may go to the day center, pursue work, etc. After the one to two weeks at one church, a homeless family can change to another church shelter or hopefully progress to independent living. The short duration for individual church related volunteers helps prevent volunteer burn-out. A number of United Methodist churches in the area participate in **Family Promise**. www.fpsl.org/

Cultural Immersion Events by some or all

26. Experiences with food and Meals
 - **Mexican food** at Victor's Tire Shop and Restaurant, located down the street from UMCOR West—great food, reasonable price (\$5-6)

- Enjoyed **New Orleans dinner** prepared by Juanita, who experienced Katrina with her family. Guests were Rev. Brian Diggs and former librarian from NSU/ Tahlequah, Jill Morierarty, University of Utah librarian, as our guests. Presented Brian with Muskogee District Missions check for \$1,000 and Tahlequah FUMC check for \$200 to help with the additional shelving needed at the depot. Sara & Dudley Brown presented Brian with an African stole made by women with aids.
 - Enjoyed eating at the original **One World Café** that serves nutritious home cooked meals that utilize fresh produce and organic foods when available. There is a three-tier payment system: (1) "guests" who eat for free, (b) "hand-up" who pay what they can afford, and (3) those who can pay full price or even a little more to help pay for those who can't pay. There are 12 One World Cafés in the U.S. In September they served 750 free meals (about 15-22 per day) and about 3-4 hand-up meals per day.
 - Final evening meal out was enjoyed at **Cedars of Lebanon** restaurant.
27. After only one day working at the depot, VIM volunteers had a new appreciation for the repetitiveness of assembly line work and an appreciation for the great job that UMCOR West is doing.
28. Tourist sights visited:
- Grounds tour of Temple Square.
 - Mormon Tabernacle Choir Practice at the Convention Center and enjoyed the beautiful eight part harmony of the 360 member choir.
 - Driving tours of the city including at night.
 - University of Utah Library and the City Library.
 - Museum of Natural History.
 - Episcopal Cathedral and Chapel and mass at the Episcopal Cathedral.
 - Walked the Labyrinth at the Episcopal Center.
 - Greek Orthodox Cathedral and Museum
 - Cathedral of Magdalene.

Closing Thoughts

We felt honored to be the first VIM Team to come to UMCOR West from as far away as Oklahoma.

During the meditation at our closing communion, Rev. Brian Wiggs, director of UMCOR West, stated that "true faith" is not just a matter of believing a set of doctrines, it is a matter of seeing the kingdom that Christ has set before us which means that as Christians we are in this for the long haul—to do justice and to offer mercy. Amen.

Written by Susie Williams of Tahlequah, OK with input from our VIM team members.