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## FAQ: Japan earthquake and response

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A UMNS Report  
By Linda Bloom\*

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A fishing boat is noticeably out of place after being swept ashore during a massive tsunami that devastated Ofunato, Japan. U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Matthew M. Bradley.

The United Methodist Church, which has had a long-time relationship with Christians in Japan, has been monitoring events following the catastrophic March 11 earthquake and tsunami — and subsequent nuclear threat — in Japan. Here is some basic information regarding the church's response and relationships there:

### How can individuals contribute to relief efforts?

The United Methodist Committee on Relief is working with the United Church of Christ in Japan and GlobalMedic to bring immediate relief to the affected communities. The name of UMCOR's emergency appeal has been changed from Pacific Emergency to Japan Emergency, UMCOR Advance #3021317 and [donations can be made here](#).

The Mission Board of The United Methodist Church in Germany announced March

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16 it would donate 10,000 Euros (about U.S. \$14,000) to Japan relief and recovery through UMCOR.

A grant to the [United Church of Christ in Japan](#) will help the church respond to the most pressing humanitarian needs, such as clean drinking water, food, basic cooking and eating supplies, clothing and heating fuel.

[GlobalMedic](#) has offered three services to the government of Japan: deployment of a rescue team with specialized dog units, use of an inflatable field hospital and distribution of water purification units to the region.



Japan disaster map. Courtesy Wikimedia Creative Commons.

Should the government indicate that it has covered these needs, GlobalMedic will work with Peace Winds Japan, a local nongovernmental organization, to distribute blankets, food and water among earthquake and tsunami survivors.

UMCOR also is in contact with international ecumenical partners [Church World Service](#) and ACT Alliance to help coordinate relief efforts.

#### **Are volunteer-in-mission teams being organized to assist in Japan?**

The situation in Japan at present is not conducive to relief volunteers coming in from other countries. Neither UMCOR nor the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries facilitates volunteers in disaster zones unless requested by local partners or government agencies. No such requests have been made to date.

"Few of us can literally 'roll up our sleeves' and get to work in cleaning up the aftermath," United Methodist Japan missionaries Tim and Yuko "Juji" Boyle pointed out in a March 15 newsletter, "but we can contribute to the funding that is going to be needed to support those who are already bringing in relief supplies and beginning the hard work of cleanup."

#### **Are there reports of church-related damage?**

An initial assessment through the United Church of Christ in Japan showed:

- Eight of 20 church buildings damaged in the Iwate Prefecture;
- 10 of 27 churches damaged in the Miyagi Prefecture;
- 16 churches damaged in Fukushima Prefecture;
- Seven of 16 churches damaged in Tochigi Prefecture;
- Five of 19 churches damaged in Ibaragi Prefecture.

In Chiba Prefecture, a part of the kindergarten building collapsed at Chiba Honcho Church, but the church building was still used as a place of refuge.

Some churches and church members in the areas closest to the earthquake/tsunami, such as the Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures, could not be contacted.



A mother and daughter pause for reflection as they find a family photo amid the wreckage of their home in Ofunato. U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Matthew M. Bradley.

#### **What is The United Methodist Church's presence in Japan?**

The United Methodist Board of Global Ministries has nearly 20 related professionals in Japan, including mission personnel, missionaries and volunteers who work with ecumenical partners. After the earthquake, all were accounted for by the morning of March 13. [Some missionary biographies can be found here.](#)

#### **What are the church's ecumenical relationships in Japan?**

Christian churches work closely together in Japan. The United Methodist Board of Global Ministries continues many historical relationships begun in the 19th century. The Kyodan, or United Church of Christ of Japan, is the largest Protestant church in Japan, formed in the World War II era by a merger of 33 denominations, including the Methodists. Other ecumenical partners include the Korean Christian Church in Japan and the National Christian Council in Japan.

Major institutions include the new Wesley Center in Tokyo, related to the Board of Global Ministries' Women's Division, and the Asian Rural Institute, used by the board for training people from Asia and Africa in sustainable agriculture. The National Christian Council in Japan also works closely with the student Christian center and Tohoku Gakuin University in Sendai, near the earthquake's epicenter.

The Women's Division also has relationships with three universities or colleges in Japan through its higher education initiative: Aoyama Gakuin University in Tokyo, Hiroshima Jogakuin University in Hiroshima and Kwassui Women's College in Nagasaki.

### **In what other ways can individuals respond?**

Church officials, including [the president of the Council of Bishops](#), and missionaries are asking for prayer as well as donations.

Jonathan and Satomi McCurley, United Methodists based at the Asian Rural Institute, asked for prayers for relief efforts, the unstable nuclear power situation and Japan's future recovery. "We are sure this disaster will have numerous effects on people for years to come," they wrote.

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