

**OU HURRICANE RELIEF FUND AIDS COMMUNITIES AND INDIVIDUALS
AT POINT OF IMPACT; MAY BE ACCESSED AT [WWW.OU.ORG](http://www.ou.org);**

**PROCEEDS TO BE DISTRIBUTED BY RABBIS' DISCRETIONARY FUNDS
AT OU SHULS IN AFFECTED AREAS**

By Stephen Steiner

In an entirely new OU approach to fund raising in the wake of a national disaster, in this case **Hurricane Sandy**, contributions to the [Orthodox Union's Hurricane Relief Fund](#) are being channeled directly to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund in OU shuls in stricken areas so that needed assistance will be distributed on the ground at the point of impact by the rabbis who are dealing with the situation day by day.

"Who knows better than the rabbis the suffering in their own communities?" said **Dr. Simcha Katz**, OU President. "Likewise, they know the damage inflicted on local Jewish institutions, the synagogues and yeshivot, including their own shul. That is why this unique means of delivering aid has been chosen by the OU for its Fund."

Dr. Katz noted that the OU has established a committee to allocate Hurricane Relief Funds to the affected communities. "Some will be outright gifts and some will establish non-interest loan funds so that when people are reimbursed by their insurance company or by FEMA, those funds can be used by someone else in an effort that is certain to go on for years."

Contributions may be made to the Fund at www.ou.org. In addition, those with hurricane-related problems, community requests or alerts can email the Orthodox Union at hurricane@ou.zendesk.com.

In a condition resembling wartime, with people's homes destroyed, lives disrupted, memories of a lifetime swept away, jobs unreachable, schools closed, infrastructure disabled, despair everywhere and recovery a process that may take years, the OU went into action, as it so often has done when nature erupts. This Fund follows the Hurricane Katrina relief effort and other emergency funds established by the OU in the recent years to deal with natural disasters.

According to Dr. Katz and **Paul Glasser**, OU Senior Director of Institutional Advancement, "Many of our communities were in the direct path of Sandy and many families were left homeless. In an effort to help with the relief and recovery for those of us who have been most affected, we have established this Fund, as we did in the case of New Orleans. This time, however, it is much more personal."

Communities most deeply affected include Long Beach, which was almost completely destroyed: the Rockaway Peninsula of Queens, including Belle Harbor; the Five Towns and Merrick, of Nassau County; Seagate in Brooklyn; and the coastal towns in New Jersey.

The OU leaders noted that they have reviewed reports of damage to Orthodox facilities, such as **Congregation Ohab Zedek in Belle Harbor in the Rockaways**, which has 12 feet of water, completely destroying the *Beit Midrash*. The **Manhattan Beach Jewish Center** in Brooklyn had its basement flooded. The **Young Israel of Oceanside** on Long Island had extensive flooding, ruining its lower level and all of its youth rooms, as well as damage to its sanctuary. At the same time, the iconic **Bachurei Chemed Synagogue in Long Beach** suffered significant water damage and the rabbi's residence was destroyed. The **Young Israel of Woodmere** was flooded and damaged, and its rabbi's house was severely damaged.

Rabbi Steven Weil, OU Executive Vice President; **Dr. Katz**; **Stephen Savitsky**, OU Chairman of the Board; **Ronnie Lipstein**, OU Board Member; and **Rabbi Judah Isaacs**, OU Director of Community Engagement, visited the flooded community of Woodmere in the Five Towns and then went to the nearby Rockaway Peninsula, surrounded by water on three sides.

Rabbi Isaacs reported, "As you drive around the neighborhoods, house after house has the contents of the basement and first floor laid out on the street to be picked up by the Sanitation Department. There are literally no basements or first floors." He quoted **Rabbi Hershel Billet** of the Young Israel of Woodmere, who stated, "People are in a state of shock," adding that even if they get back power, in some cases, their boilers had been washed away.

At a shelter in Far Rockaway, a woman reduced Dr. Katz to tears when she told him, "I lost everything."

Meanwhile, OU programs such as [New York NCSY](#) based in the Five Towns; the **Seif Jewish Learning Institute on Campus program at [Queens College](#)**; and [New Jersey NCSY](#) have begun their own disaster relief efforts. New York NCSY Chief Operating Officer **Carol Rhine** wrote, "NCSY has been very busy working around the clock with disaster relief programs to help out those neighborhoods that experienced devastating destruction, loss of homes, and loss of power. Our NCSY teens in Brooklyn have been very busy hosting families that are displaced from their homes, and preparing meals in local food shelters for those who have no access to food.

"Groups of our teens are meeting in Westchester and want to mobilize to help. Across Long Island we are busy going door to door, checking on teens and their families, assisting with clean up, collecting *Shaimot* (religious items mentioning God's name, which must be buried in cemeteries), organizing food drives, and they also worked with one shul to preserve their *Sifrei Torahs* damaged by water."

“From several conversations with lay leaders to strategize how to continue to best utilize our assets,” Mrs. Rhine continued, “we believe that the best idea right now is to organize groups of volunteers and to send them to specific areas that need assistance. Working together with *Achiezer*, the Long Island community resource center which is the hub of disaster relief here, we will be directed to respond to specific needs in the Long Island area. *Achiezer* has done an outstanding job of meeting the challenges on the ground.”

At Queens College, **Rabbi Robby Charnoff**, Torah Educator of the JLIC program, wrote to students: “Our hearts go out to all those who suffered losses during the devastation of Hurricane Sandy. Whether it be power, heat, cars, basements or entire homes or businesses, the effects of this disaster will be felt for a long time. As we continue to hear about the fallout of this terrible blow to our greater community, we want to make sure that all of you know that the Queens College Jewish Community, particularly through Queens College Hillel and the OU Seif Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus, along with all of your fellow students, are here to help in any way we can.

“Since the beginning of this semester we have been placing a strong emphasis on what we have coined, ‘Transforming a commuter school mentality into a Queens College Jewish Community.’ Those were not mere words and we wish to do everything in our power to assist our larger, broader, QC Jewish community in this difficult time.

“In the spirit of the adage of our sages, *emor me'at va'aseh harbei* -- *say little and do much* (*Avot 1:15*), we want to focus on the immediate, practical efforts being made to assist our students who are in need.”

In another action, New Jersey NCSY, which has done clean-up efforts in New Orleans and around the country, did not have far to go Thursday -- 20 minutes to the town of Hoboken, flooded by the waters of New York Harbor and the Hudson River. They will continue their efforts today (Friday) and Sunday under the leadership of **Rabbi Ethan Katz**.

Considering the needs and the expected OU response, President Katz and Mr. Glasser said, “Our community has always proven itself to be exceedingly resilient. We hope it can find comfort in knowing that we came together for each other in this time of dire need. As a community we’ve shown time and time again that when help is needed we are there for each other. This time will be no different.

“The Orthodox Union will be working to help our communities recover and rebuild,” Dr. Katz and Mr. Glasser firmly declared. “We will not be deterred and we know that the response to our Fund, drawing on the commitment to acts of *chessed* (loving-kindness), will be generous and heart-warming.”

Mr. Glasser noted once again that the funds will be distributed through the OU synagogues themselves.

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