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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**Appalachia Service Project and the Holston Conference of The United Methodist Church partner in long-term recovery effort in Sevier County**

JOHNSON CITY, Tenn. (March 2, 2017)—Appalachia Service Project (ASP) and the Holston Conference of The United Methodist Church jointly announce a partnership to assist in the long-term recovery of low-income families devastated by the wildfires in Sevier County. This partnership will work in concert with the Mountain Tough Recovery Team and other agencies engaged in the recovery effort.

On November 28, 2016, a fire that started in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park was pushed by strong winds out of the park and into Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. The fire killed 14 people and destroyed over 2,800 buildings, eventually burning over 17,000 acres of land.

The hundreds of low-income families who will need assistance to rebuild their primary residence after this devastating fire have been identified by the Volunteer Recovery Center. Currently, Volunteer East Tennessee's Recovery Center manages the Sevier County Survivor Assistance Hotline (844-965-1386). The hotline takes all unmet needs for survivors, including homeowner clean-up and rebuild. The early rebuild cases were sent to Red Cross case managers to vet the first 5 homes, while the hundreds that remain will go to Mountain Tough's disaster case managers.

Most of these families have been denied Federal disaster recovery loan funding due to lack of adequate income and are unable to secure other resources for rebuilding. These homeowners often fall through the cracks of long-term recovery, and will be the focus of efforts by ASP and the Holston Conference.

The Holston Conference is providing a cash gift to ASP, as well as an in-kind donation of framed walls, to support this recovery effort. This partnership will help underwrite and execute the building of 25 replacement homes over the next 12 months.

“ASP’s partnership with the Holston Conference of The United Methodist Church is an experience of ‘returning to our roots,’” said Crouch. “ASP was founded by a Methodist minister, Rev. Glenn ‘Tex’ Evans, in 1969, and we are headquartered within the Holston Conference.”

“The congregations of the Holston Conference are eager to assist our neighbors in the Sevier County area,” said Mike Sluder, Director of Connectional Ministries for the Holston Conference. “We are excited to work with ASP in these efforts and to draw on their expertise and our long-term partnership as we participate in the rebuilding.”

ASP has some experience with helping communities rebuild after disasters. In 2012, ASP built 25 homes for families who had lost their homes to massive flooding in Washington County, Tennessee. And in 2016, ASP launched a multi-year project to help rebuild homes in Rainelle, West Virginia, and nearby Richwood, West Virginia, for families whose homes were destroyed by flooding. ASP has already completed the first 17 of 60 homes that will be built for low-income families.

“Gifts of grace” are what ASP CEO/President Walter Crouch calls the new homes that ASP will provide for Sevier County families. “No mortgages are involved. It’s a fresh start for those in need and allows us to reach families without regard to their credit history or income level. We do, however, require owners of new homes to attend financial literacy and homeownership courses to prepare them for a successful future in their new home.”

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### **ABOUT APPALACHIA SERVICE PROJECT**

Appalachia Service Project (ASP), is a Christian ministry, open to all people, that inspires hope and service through volunteer home repair in Central Appalachia. Since 1969, ASP volunteers have been making homes warmer, safer and drier for families in need in Central Appalachia and providing life-transforming experiences for everyone involved. In recent years ASP has expanded its outreach to include building new homes for low-income families whose homes were destroyed by flooding and others whose homes are beyond repair.

### **ABOUT THE HOLSTON CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

Located in the mountains and valleys of east Tennessee, southwest Virginia, and northwest Georgia, the Holston Conference is named after the Holston River. In this beautiful setting, the 887 congregations serve their communities and the world with a mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. United Methodists are a group of Christians totaling over 7.5 million in the United States alone.

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### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Visit ASP’s Newsroom (<http://asphome.org/newsroom>) for a fact sheet about Appalachia Service Project, downloadable press releases, photos, and other information.