

Hurricane Charley Ministry Action Team Report August 28, 2004

Preface

Charley followed the Peace River through the very center of Peace River Presbytery, cutting a path of destruction, but Charley hasn't taken the heart out of Peace River Presbytery, her people, pastors, and congregations. Charley has spoken, but as people of faith, we know that, through the power of God at work in Christ and in us, the resurrection hope we share is the last word. That does not mean this time is easy.

Time Line

August 12 - Jim Kirk, Associate Pastor of Moorings and member of the PCUSA Disaster Assistance Team, and Graham Hart, General Presbyter, had an initial conversation about the possible effects of Charley. A broadcast fax was sent to all church offices.

August 13 - Charley makes a sudden right turn into Peace River. The General Presbyter attempted to call all the pastors in the affected area.

August 14 - Several conversations between Jim Kirk and Bruce Wismer who have both served on a Presbyterian Disaster Assistance Team, Stan Hankins (PCUSA staff for Presbyterian Disaster Assistance), Bill Hull, and Graham Hart led to the development of an initial response. Bill Hull, Jerry Voye, and Graham Hart called every pastor/head of staff in the Presbytery to let all know how the Presbyterian family in Peace River fared, to ask that a point/communication person within each congregation be named, and to invite persons interested in serving on a Task Force to a meeting to be held on August 17.

August 15 - Services were held in all Peace River churches except Chapel by the Sea and First, Punta Gorda. At First, Punta Gorda, Steve Mock had prayer with several parishioners who showed up, even though there was no sanctuary. Graham Hart went with an interfaith group of church leaders to Port Charlotte and Punta Gorda. That day he attempted to contact or visit pastors affected by the hurricane.

August 16 - Initial damage assessments were made. Contact was initiated with FEMA, FIND (Florida Interfaith Networking in Disaster) and the Governor's Office. Initial organizational response plans were set in motion by the Presbytery staff.

August 17 -

Graham convened the first meeting of the Hurricane Charley Task Force with 25 people present. Larry Graham-Johnson from Tropical Florida and the coordinator of that Presbytery's Hurricane Andrew response team oriented the committee. An initial decision was made at the request of the Governor's Office that we commit to the long haul. Other groups are in place for first response (Salvation Army, etc), and we will work with them, as their needs become known. PRP's Hurricane Charley Task Force will focus initially on congregational buildings and people needs and put a process in place whereby needs can be coordinated with those able to respond. Ron Kruzel built a Hurricane Charley page on Peace River Presbytery web site. The Task Force prioritizes its work, which includes assembling work crews to repair roof damage at First, Port Charlotte so they can worship on Sunday and reopen the pre-school. Additionally, the Task Force intends to provide support for the pastoral staff of the affected congregations, and set in place a team of Stephen Ministers and others to visit every member of First, Port Charlotte and First, Punta Gorda. Visits are necessary because phone lines are down and needs cannot be assessed. Gary Miller of Cypress Lake agreed to assist Steve Mock in whatever ways Steve needs as First, Punta Gorda begins thinking about what is next and how to proceed.

Stan Hankins was contacted regarding other volunteers from out of the area who might be able to help coordinate needs with those who can respond. A request was made for \$10,000 from Presbyterian Disaster Assistance for the congregations most damaged. This money is provided through One Great Hour of Sharing.

George and Marian MacNeill from Trinity Church, Clearwater, and Katrine and Jim Anderson from Duluth, Minnesota, members of the PCUSA's Presbyterian Disaster Assistance Team, arrived to work with the Task Force. Thanks be to God.

August 18-August 22

Forty Stephen Ministers and pastors from ten churches in Peace River Presbytery and Presbytery of Tampa Bay went to find and visit members of the Presbyterian Churches in Port Charlotte and Punta Gorda. Their task was necessary because of the continued lack of phone and electric service, and the pastors' desires to make contact with each member. However, their work was difficult because most street signs were down, and communication towers for cell phones were not yet restored. The visitors were asked to bring a pastoral presence, assess needs, share essential emergency information, and bring news from their pastors and churches. 450 visits have been made. Many members were found; others have left to stay with relatives out of the area. When no one was found at home, a packet and letter from the pastor was left on the door, and a neighbor was sought to provide information.

One such neighborly visit found an elderly woman in tears with no food in her house. That team of Stephen Ministers took her to the nearest grocery store, for which she was profusely grateful.

The visitation teams gathered at the Presbyterian Center in North Port for orientation from the Rev. Jane Jones-Norris, Chaplain of Westminster Presbyterian Homes, and Rev. Helen Heffington, Parish Associate at Faith, Cape Coral. Pastor Steve Mock of Punta Gorda and Pastor Russ Hickman of Port Charlotte gave each team their assignments.

Work crews under the direction of Bruce Wismer, Co-Pastor of Pine Shores, Jim Kirk, Associate Pastor at Moorings, and Jay Duke of First, Bradenton removed debris for the Port Charlotte church, and work crews from the Bradenton churches brought material to patch a 40x40 foot hole in the roof of the church. The goal was to have services in the sanctuary on Sunday and have the pre-school that serves 125 children open by next week.

Work crews were sent also to First, Punta Gorda, Burnt Store, and Arcadia.

August 22 - A member of Presbytery staff or a member of the Hurricane Charley Task Force was present for worship at each of the affected churches.

August 23 - The Hurricane Charley Task Force had its second meeting, and updates and assignments were made. The following responsibilities were decided:

Bruce Wismer and Jim Kirk agree to be co-moderators of our Task Force
HCMAT initial coordinator -Katrine Anderson
Communication liaison, linking needs with people and resources - Marian MacNeill
Interfaith communications and coordination - Jim Kirk
Care for caregivers - Jim Kirk
Financial oversight - Al Knox
Spiritual support for congregational members - Jane Jones-Norris
Migrant workers liaison - Evan Jorn

Key in being able to respond was to name Affected Congregations Needs Coordinators who would work with pastors to communicate needs of each congregation or community to Marian MacNeill:

First, Punta Gorda - TBA

First, Port Charlotte - Jay Mumper

First, Arcadia - TBA

Chapel by the Sea - Sheila Morales, Parish Nurse

Burnt Store - Debbie Carney, Parish Nurse

Grace - Jill Christman

In addition, other PRP congregations were being asked to name a point person (Congregation Information Coordinator) who would communicate needs to which members of that congregation can respond.

August 24 - Venice Presbyterian Church hosted a breakfast served at St. Paul's for all pastoral staff who had experienced personal loss or whose congregation had experienced loss. Twenty-five pastors and spouses attended and three members of the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance Team led the pastors through a debriefing and some thoughts on how to take care of themselves in the midst of trying to care for others.

Ongoing - Gathering resources of money and people to address the needs.

August 31- September 2 - Moderator Rick Ulford-Chase of the 216th General Assembly will work with us in our relief efforts.

Buildings Assessment

First Presbyterian, Port Charlotte - major roof damage and some water damage

First Presbyterian, Punta Gorda - the roof has fallen into the sanctuary and is a total loss

Burnt Store Presbyterian, Punta Gorda - some roof damage and some water damage, many palms down

First Presbyterian, Arcadia - damaged steeple and stained glass windows

Faith, Cape Coral - roof damage and some water damage

Chapel by the Sea, Fort Myers Beach - window breakage, water damage with sand in the sanctuary

Holy Trinity, North Fort Myers - roof damage

Vanderbilt, Naples - roof damage

People

We do not know of any Presbyterians who were killed. However, many have suffered major damage to their homes or lost them entirely.

Pastors

All are safe, but not all have dry homes. One pastor has suffered major damage to his home that may make it uninhabitable. Six others of our pastors in Port Charlotte, Punta Gorda, Arcadia, Fort Myers, and Cape Coral have suffered significant damage to their homes.

Presbytery Staff

All of our support staff has been significantly affected by this hurricane. Bill Setchel, our financial secretary, has had major water and wind damage to his home. Joan Mock, our administrative secretary, is married to the pastor of First, Punta Gorda whose church sanctuary was destroyed and the rest of the building sustained major damage. Joan and Steve also had some exterior damage to their home. Alesia Sharpe, our office manager, had exterior damage to her home in North Port, as did Craig Countiss, our Stated Clerk who lives in North Fort Myers.

Next Steps

It is too early to know how we will need to respond in the long haul. The representative from the Governor's Office told us that the church was here before Charley, and, after all the initial response teams have left, the church will still be here and will continue to be needed and important in the rebuilding of lives, families, and communities.

For those who can give financial assistance, gifts can be sent to Peace River Presbytery, 5600 Peace River Road, North Port, Florida. 34287. They will be used for either church property restoration or survivor assistance within Peace River Presbytery. A separate account will be set up in the Presbytery to handle these funds, and the Presbytery's Hurricane Charley Task Force will determine their use. Please mark any gift "PRP Hurricane Charley Fund".

The Presbyterian Church (USA) family (www.pcusa.org) has already responded to our needs. Stan Hankins at Presbyterian Disaster Assistance Program has set up two account numbers for any who may wish to assist with financial support for all areas affected by Hurricane Charley, not just Peace River Presbytery:

1. Survivors' Account: #9-2000015
2. Church Property Restoration Account: #9-2000163

Please keep praying and supporting all whose lives have been deeply impacted by Charley; and pray about how you might get involved.

Hurricane Charley Task Force initial members:

Bruce Wismer, Pine Shores; Jim Kirk, Moorings; Graham Hart, Peace River
Presbytery; Ron Kruzel, Trinity; Gary Miller, Cypress Lake; Jane
Jones-Norris, Westminster; William Hull, Kirkwood; Alexander Knox,
Church of the Palms; Kathleen Johnson, First, Sarasota; John Hunt,
Faith; George and Marian MacNeill, PDAT; Helen Heffington, Faith; Wayne
Chaplin, St. Paul's; Becky Jarrell, First, Naples; Tom Atkins,
Northminster; Bob Rea, Peace River Presbytery; Tim Stewart, Burnt Store.