

**Hurricane Preparedness Manual
Best Practices: A Living Document
July 2005**

Introduction:

During the summer of 2004, we got used to checking the weather forecasts often and tracking the paths of the hurricanes. What we also found out in 2004 is that tracking is an imprecise science or maybe a well developed art! Whether or not our part of the Florida District has ever had a direct hit, or we don't view ourselves as vulnerable to storms of this magnitude, we found that we need to be ready. None of us is automatically exempt from being in the path of the storm, so all must be ready to respond and keep ourselves and our congregations safe.

On Saturday, July 16, 2005 eight members from congregations in various parts of our district held a meeting to combine our wisdom, preparedness needs and plans and envision a guide that identifies some of the best practices that our congregations used to prepare themselves for a hurricane. We view this as a living document, so if you have some other wonderful ideas that we can add, please let us know and we will include your insights in our online version of this manual. **The online version is located at www.floridadistrict.org**

Forecasts:

There are a couple of websites that give reliable information about the paths of tropical depressions, storms and hurricanes. (Wouldn't it be great if they offered promises as well!)

www.wunderground.com/tropical/ (weather underground) this site takes you right to the tropical hurricane section of the website. Very accessible and solid information.

www.noaa.com/ is a more technical and comprehensive website than some but a bit harder to maneuver.

www.weather.com/newscenter/tropical/ is the Weather Channel's website. It is easy to read and understand.

Do you have another favorite? Let us know.

Hurricane Preparedness:

There is a wealth of information available in the media to help individuals prepare their homes for the eventuality of a hurricane. We have decided not to reproduce their information in this document, but thought we would share with you a few of the website addresses that offer good, basic information that can help individual members cope in the event of hurricane watches and warnings.

www.fema.gov/hazards/hurricanes The FEMA website has a huge amount of information in it to help you and your congregation members prepare for a hurricane. There is information about what the different hurricane terms actually mean, what the category (1-5) of the hurricane tells you about the conditions you can expect and what it predicts for your area.

<http://www.redcross.org/> is also equipped with a preparedness tool for hurricanes. This checklist primarily for homeowners is attractive and could help everyone be prepared.

http://www.floridadisaster.org/hurricane_aware is the Florida website for disaster Management

<http://americanfamilysafety.com/store/cart.php?target=communicationplan> has a wonderful **family communication plan template** on its site. It helps your family members let each other know how to reach all the others in case you are separated. It recommends that you send copies of it to your families in other states so they know how to contact you as well.

Have you found other websites and resources you think ought to be included here? Let us know and check the Florida District website at floridadistrict.org for other new information.

Keeping Track of our Congregational Membership:

There are many ways that different congregations have tracked their members but it is maybe the most important task to undertake before a hurricane is heading your way. There are many ways to keep track of the members. Some congregations use the phone tree, others a system of information that is gathered on an emergency contact card on Sunday mornings, or both. We have samples of both ways of gathering the information here.

Summer Emergency Phone Tree: Many congregations have a phone tree, but during the summer there may be a need for your congregation to develop a Summer Emergency Phone Tree since so many of our congregational members are out of town for the summer. It could be dangerous to track down members who may be out of town already, so knowing where your members are keeps anxiety and risk at bay.

Organizing the Emergency Phone Tree:

It is important when organizing the information for a Summer Emergency Phone Tree that you make sure that you get information from every member and active friend of the congregation that is in town so no one is lost in the shuffle. This means you may need to seek information in many ways and keep track of it in a master data base that is held by many authorized members or staff. We never know which houses might be hit, so multiple copies and a coordinated plan of who will do what is critical. We have included a sample of the information that can be gathered in a number of ways. We suggest that you utilize multiple methods of communicating the need for the information:

- Newsletter;
- Information cards in Sunday morning Order of Service;
- Caring Committee outreach calls to the homebound or ill.
- Others?

In Appendix 1 there is a sample of the information you may want to have for each member who is remaining in Florida in the summer. Please feel free to reproduce or modify this sheet if it is helpful to you.

If you use an Emergency Phone Tree in the summer, the information most needed from the callers is:

Are you staying in town during the hurricane?

Do you have anyone staying with you or would you like to be paired with someone else to ride out the storm?

Do you need any help getting your home ready or needed supplies into the house to be able to ride out the storm?

Are you able to provide help to others? What kind?

Information for Your Members

Also include in your communication an insert that lets your members know of the emergency contacts that are waiting to hear from them so they can assess the needs of the community in case of a hurricane or storm. A sample is enclosed in Appendix 2. Please feel free to reproduce or modify this information sheet as works in your particular situation and add your specific congregation's contact information. Please let your people know that the Florida District is there to assist them however we can.

Church Specific Planning:

Insurance:

- i. Know where your **insurance policy** is;
- ii. Have the **Policy number, the agent's phone number and the "800" claims number** in the homes of three or four different congregational leaders. If your church is damaged, it might be hard to get that information in order to file your claim without this. We found in 2004 that the sooner you filed the claim and got in the queue, the better off you were.
- iii. If you have not checked on the **hurricane provision** in your particular policy lately, please do so immediately so that you know what the provision are to support you and your congregation and so there are no nasty surprises when it comes time to settle. If you need or want to make adjustments to the policy to provide more coverage, you cannot do that usually after the storm has formed.
- iv. It is also a good idea to see what **liability coverage** your policy includes for those who might want to help the church get back on its feet in the aftermath of a storm. The Florida District coverage says that we are covered as long as the activity is in the scope of our mission and as long as due

diligence is followed when allowing folks to use power equipment and the equipment is in good repair.

- v. It is important to **secure the building** as soon as possible if there are leaks so the damage does not increase due to water infiltration. For many of our congregations, damage done by leaks after the hurricane passed was excluded from coverage. Having **Tarps** on hand can speed that up, but it is important to make sure that those trying to secure it are able bodied enough so they do not cause injury to themselves.

Safety:

Chain saws are very dangerous and in the aftermath of a hurricane is not a good time for a new person to learn to use one! There are more than enough people who can use the chainsaw who have experience. One disaster in any time period is more than enough. It is important that we keep our rescuers safe. Make sure that the chainsaws and other power equipment have been serviced since the last hurricane and are sharpened and lubricated appropriately.

Heat exhaustion is a very real threat to safety. Make sure to have plenty of water on hand and help to normalize regular periods of rest.

The insect population seemed to thrive in the aftermath of the 2004 hurricanes, make sure that the congregation has **insect repellent** on hand for the volunteers. They will have a much better experience if itching is kept to a minimum!

Water is often not available so keep some **hand sanitizer** in your congregation's preparedness kit so people can keep their hands clean.

Repairs:

There need to be **lists of vendors** in the homes of a few key leaders with the names and phone numbers of the companies that the congregation has used in the past when they had service needs. We found that existing customers get a better response than if you have to make a cold call for service after a storm.

Those vendors include:

1. Air Conditioner Repair
2. Roofing Contractor (They will come first for previous customers if you call quickly)

3. Tree Services
4. Others?

Recovery from the Storm

The Florida District Office staff will call your ministers and President's first to assess the needs in the district for support and funding.

The Florida District worked in 2004 to provide funding and relief to the farm workers in our district and I anticipate doing that again. Call the District Office at 407-894-2119 for the contact person for that ministry.

The Florida District office will communicate with the UUA so they can publicize our needs and our assessment of our district's needs.

There are Volunteer Coordinators in the differing geographic areas of the district to assist you and your congregations. Please call the District Office for the name(s) of those who can help you best.

Funding and Priorities

There are limited funds left from the 2004 hurricane relief funds. Below are the priorities that we established for the dispersal of the funds:

1. Congregational building and sanctuaries restored to use.
2. Members, whose ministers and / or Presidents communicate to the District office that there is a need for immediate assistance to provide money to help with deductibles, purchase of emergency supplies, medication, etc. Last year we found that many people had need but had difficulty asking for aid. They were sure there was someone who needed it more. The money has been sent to help them out and nothing is a better thank you than to accept the gift of aid this year and pass it onto the future whenever the chance presents itself in the future.
3. Farm Works in Arcadia. We worked through the Migrant Education Program at Manatee Community College and the Catholic Church in Arcadia. I hope to expand the geography this year while maintaining our focus on helping our expanded community.

Printed Materials:

The Florida District office (uaafldistoffice@aol.com or 407-894-2119) has printed materials about some of the predictable **emotional aftermath** of storms such as we endured in 2004. WE have resource materials for **adults and for use in groups of children and youth**. These materials were distributed in 2004 to your congregations, but if you would like a new set or cannot find last year's copies, please let us know and we will send them to you.

Ministry to the ministers and religious educators

One of the most important jobs of the District staff in the 2004 year was ministry to the professional staff in our congregations. That will be true should we suffer again. The stress and strain on this particular group of caregivers was immense.

Ministry to Lay-led Congregations:

For those congregations that do not have a religious professional on staff, the Florida District has arranged for a minister to be on call to help your lay leaders address the emotional and spiritual needs of your members. There are materials available to help your congregation minister to each other in the aftermath of a storm. In addition, you can receive the contact information for the on-call minister by calling the Florida District Office at 407-894-2119.

How Congregations not in the path can help:

1. Send notes to children and adults in affected areas;
 2. Volunteer to assist congregations and UUs in our District get back on their feet;
 3. Have your children send care packages to children in affected areas: both UUs and others.
 4. Take a congregational collection to assist in the rebuilding efforts;
 5. House evacuees;
 6. Provide food for relief crews working in your area;
- Add your thoughts here:

Conclusion:

The Florid District kept a notebook last year of all the wishes sent our way from UUs all over the United States. It boosted our spirits as we went about the rebuilding process. Never underestimate the power of a few words to stir our spirits from despair and isolation to hopefulness. We each have something to share no matter our age, financial status, or health. We ask for your input and reflections on our guide. May our hearts soar even if the winds blow!

Appendix 1
Summer Emergency Contact Information
2005

Name(s) of all who are permanent residents in your house this summer:

Address Please attach a Mapquest Map from the church to your house if possible. If you do not have the electronic capability to do that, do not worry. We will find you anyway! This is requested so we can find your house in the unlikely event that our street signs are out and we have enlisted help to make sure all our members are safe.

Telephone Numbers *We recommend that you have a car charger for your cell phones. If the electricity is out, it will be the only way you can keep in touch with the outside world.* Of course, a full tank of gas is needed to if you want to run the car, but that is another issue!

Home Phone: _____
Cell Phone(s): _____

Emergency Contact Numbers Please leave us the number(s) of family members or friends who live outside the area whom we can contact in the unlikely event that we need to. Our ability to contact them will help us help you and might relieve their anxiety as well.

1. _____ Phone _____
2. _____ Phone _____



This information will be used only to reach you in the case of an emergency when the members of your congregation are concerned for your safety and wellbeing in the aftermath of tropical storms or hurricanes. This information will not be published anywhere else or shared with anyone except designated staff and members who are trying to offer assistance to you.

Appendix 3

**Disaster Preparedness
Congregational Information Sheet**

Insurance Company Name: _____

Insurance Policy Number: _____

Insurance Agent's Name and phone #: _____

Insurance Claim Phone Number: _____

Hurricane Provisions in your policy:

Liability Coverage in your policy:

Where are the tarps and other items for relief workers?

Tarps: _____
First Aid: _____
Equipment: _____

Building and grounds people (with their cell phone numbers) who will direct the relief efforts for our congregational building:

_____ Cell Phone: _____
_____ Cell Phone: _____
_____ Cell Phone: _____

Congregational leaders and staff numbers:

_____ Cell Phone: _____
_____ Cell Phone: _____
_____ Cell Phone: _____
_____ Cell Phone: _____
_____ Cell Phone: _____

Appendix 2

After the Storm: UU Connections

We want to make sure that you are in touch with members of our congregation as soon as possible in the aftermath of a storm. In order to do that we have compiled a check sheet of contact information for you to keep handy to help us reconnect on the other side of “the big blow.”

1. If you have telephone service, please call one of the following people: **(Insert you member/staff contact information here.)** They will be waiting to know:

- How you are. This is our primary concern, of course. We will worry about you if we do not hear from you!
- Do you need any physical assistance?
- Is your house damaged? If so what is the nature of the damage?
- Can you help others? If so, how? Space, shower, food, electricity, air conditioning (Be prepared for the multitudes!!!!), car, or kennel, for instance.

2. If you cannot reach anyone in your congregation, especially if you need help, please call the Florida District Office of the UUA and leave a message. Even if the phone is out there, they can usually retrieve their messages and will get back to you ASAP. There are volunteers, funds, chain saws and other assistance available to help us and our congregation get back on our collective feet, so please do not hesitate to call. The Florida District phone number is:

Mary Higgins or Jessica Curren
407-894-2119

Mary or Jessica will be able to put you in contact with our regional coordinators and get you friendly, cheerful help from other parts of our district.

The interdependent Web is Alive and well in Florida.

If you are able to make contact with your congregational leaders, they will let the district know how they can be of help, so you do not need to call the district and your leaders.

3. If you are going out of town or to a shelter, please call the congregational contacts listed above and let us know when you return so we can help you if need be.

4. The anxiety surrounding hurricanes and their aftermath has been hard on all of our congregations. If you are feeling out of sorts, distracted, depressed, confused, afraid, or just want to connect with others, please let us know, so we can help you. The Florida District has a **minister on call** to help our lay led congregations whose members want to debrief or need pastoral care. We are all affected when hurricanes hit, so please let us support each other. Please call Mary or Jessica in the district office at 407-894-2119 to be put in touch with our on-call minister.

How can our religious community support you and your needs? How can you help others? We are stronger together than alone.