

Church, Voluntary Groups Team Up to Rebuild After Hurricane Michael

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TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – The church has warehouse space. Hurricane survivors need to rebuild their homes. A disaster relief organization has construction workers. It's all coming together in Marianna, Fla.

Before Hurricane Michael, [Rivertown Community Church](#) was already engaged in community activities through its ministries. After the storm, the church made its 20,000-square-foot warehouse available as a distribution point for relief supplies in northwest Florida. More than 4.5 million pounds of supplies were distributed from the site.

But there was more to do. [Mennonite Disaster Service](#) asked if the church could outfit the warehouse to house 40 volunteers who would rebuild houses. The [United Methodist Committee on Relief](#) (UMCOR) asked if it could participate in the joint effort as part of its Hurricane Michael response, providing services such as disaster case management.

Rivertown Community Church responded. "We realized that to rebuild and help uninsured or underinsured survivors, we have to engage the expertise of groups outside our area," said Kevin Yoder, associate pastor for the church. "We want to manage local needs with resources."

To build out 6,000 feet of the warehouse to accommodate the volunteers, materials would cost \$92,000. "That's a small price to provide adequate housing for people in need," Yoder said.

With \$30,000 in grants from Volunteer Florida and others, Rivertown Community Church has purchased the drywall, insulation, studs and other material to begin



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the work. Construction has begun. The project will require another \$62,000 to complete electrical, lighting, heating and plumbing work. Working with FEMA's Voluntary Agency Liaison and the philanthropic advisor for FEMA's Integrated Recovery Coordination Group, the church is identifying potential philanthropic funding for the work. A nonprofit organization, North Florida Inland Long-Term Recovery Group, was formed for this purpose (www.northfloridarecovery.org).

Darin Bontrager, regional operations coordinator for Mennonite Disaster Service, said his organization partners with local long-term recovery groups to provide skilled construction labor for repairs or new construction of homes for people who otherwise would not be able to return to their homes. "As an outside organization," he said, "we need to listen to the needs of the local people. We always want to be invited into a community rather than show up uninvited. I anticipate a long road ahead for recovery in the Panhandle. But one client told us: 'I was at the end of my rope and now I see a glimmer of hope.'"

Photos of the project are available in the FEMA Media Library:

<https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/images/176641>

<https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/images/176640>

<https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/images/176639>

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For a list of resources available to individuals and businesses affected by Hurricane Michael, visit www.floridadisaster.org/info.

For more Hurricane Michael recovery information, visit www.fema.gov/disaster/4399.

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