



## Happy Birthday Faith Responders!



One year ago today on November 1, 2023, Faith Responders Disaster Response and Recovery Ministry, a partner of the Global Methodist Church was formed by clergy and lay members of the Global Methodist Church in Florida. Our journey started one year earlier after Hurricane Ian as a group of the Wesleyan Covenant Association board in Florida gathered together to discern how to respond to the many needs of those impacted by the storm. We began to support several churches in transition from the UMC located on the Gulf Coast of Florida who were responding in their communities through distribution of supplies, partnership with volunteer organizations and mucking out homes. Having a background in disaster response and recovery since 2015, I volunteered to visit the churches weekly to learn how we could support them in their efforts. I witnessed God opening hearts and doors as these congregations built relationships with survivors by sharing the gospel in tangible ways.

One of those churches was Estero Church in Estero, Florida in South Fort Myers. We learned of a neighborhood just a mile from the church which received 8-10 feet of flooding throughout a hundred homes. Several of the families from the hispanic ministry lived in the community and needed help. As the church provided aid, an idea was born that we could do more. The church received an outpouring of financial support providing an opportunity for us to work one on one with families to discover what each needed to recover and rebuild. I felt the Lord calling me to a

new opportunity and a new ministry. A ministry focused on empowering, equipping and engaging congregations to offer Christ in tangible ways in their own communities following a disaster. I resigned from my position as a Hospice Chaplain, not knowing when or where my next paycheck would be coming from but trusting that God had a plan. And HE DID!

We engaged the Estero Church Congregation and trained over 35 volunteers to help as Family Advocates, Construction Assessors, and Volunteer Hosts. We reached out to WCA and the GMC for volunteer teams to help with repairs and waited for God to move. I volunteered for over 2 months trusting that God would provide. In January of 2023 I received a call from Keith Boyette who had received a check for Hurricane Ian relief for \$12,500 which had not been designated. He offered it as a grant for a 6 month project for Disaster Recovery in the Estero Area with monthly reporting and a small board of supporters from the WCA group. We accepted and that was my salary for 6 months. Oddly enough, my prayer to God was for \$25,000 over a 12 month period to cover my financial obligations. God was taking it 6 months at a time. God is Good!

Over the next 6 months, I traveled from Tallahassee Florida to Estero Florida on pretty much of a weekly basis to work with church members, homeowners and volunteers as we put our plan into action. We partnered with volunteer groups from Florida, Michigan, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and many other places. We developed a great relationship with another disaster organization Action Crisis Teams led by Ed Schraeder, a general contractor, who volunteered his time to work with the teams. We were able to assist over 50 families, logged over 8600 volunteer hours and assisted families with building materials, appliances, household goods and repairs totaling \$162,062.

My favorite story is of a single mom of three teenagers, whom she had adopted from another family member. Their roof was damaged and water caused damage to the interior of the home. They were living in one bedroom - the only habitable space in the home. She was discouraged, overwhelmed and felt hopeless when we met her months after the storm. As we worked on the home over the next 6 months, we built a relationship with the family. The kids started back to church and so did the mom. The roof was replaced, new walls and insulation was installed, new plumbing and electrical. Each team ministered to the family and the teenagers were always ready to jump in, helping with repairs and learning how to change out an outlet, dig sewer lines, hang drywall and paint. Hearts were changed and lives were transformed. Their hope and their future was restored. When we completed the job in June of 2023 and dedicated the home, the mom said to me "this storm was the best thing that has ever happened to us". Not because of what we did but because of what HE did through us and in their lives.

Disaster response and recovery provides a unique opportunity for the body of Christ to step into survivors lives - survivors who may not attend your church, or may be isolated, or have possibly been hurt by the church or have never been to church. By serving these survivors, we are able to offer God's restorative love in real, practical, tangible ways and be witnesses to God's amazing transformative power in lives as hope is restored. It is an honor to be on this journey. I look forward to serving with you in the field over the next 12 months.

Happy Birthday Faith Responders!

Many blessings, Laura

*"For I know the plans I have for you", declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you" declares the Lord, and I will bring you back from captivity". Jer. 29:11-14*

*\*\* pictured above: Tana Day (Zephyrhills volunteer), Laura Lambert, Lorne Becker (Zephyrhills volunteer), Elizabeth Chryst, Board Chair*

Thank you for making this ministry possible!



[www.thefaitresponders.org](http://www.thefaitresponders.org)

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