Time and Treasure: Faith-Based Investment in Hurricane Harvey Response

> *"Faith-based groups bring a unique combination of relationships and expertise to disaster recovery. Through local congregations and houses of worship, they serve as centers of connection and can play a vital role in identifying unmet needs and communicating available resources. Because faith-based groups are rooted in communities prior to and long after disasters, they have pre-established trust with survivors and a vested interested in their long-term recovery. Additionally, denominational or affiliated disaster recovery ministries and organizations add to those relationships the specialized knowledge and experience specific to disaster recovery as well as financial resources, human capital, and practical models and guidelines. As such, faith-based groups are well positioned to advocate for and support holistic recovery that results in more sustainable and resilient communities. Good coordination between public sector and faith-based groups leads to more efficient disaster response, increased confidence among survivors, and more complete recovery."*
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> *— Rev. Caroline Hamilton-Arnold, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*

Introduction

When disaster strikes, faith communities respond. From local congregations to global institutions, organizations grounded in all the major faith traditions participate in disaster response and recovery. Increasingly, they also engage in disaster preparedness activities, especially pertaining to making their own houses of worship and other facilities resilient.

In reports on disaster response and recovery, faith-based organizations often are lumped in with "philanthropy," but this is insufficient to characterize their involvement. Faith-based groups are funders, workers, and victims—and because they are place-based, they are stakeholders in the long-term recovery.

Survivors of disasters and policymakers alike often identify faith-based help as coming from local congregations or assistance ministries, but religious disaster response actually is a highly professionalized field, in which national and international faith-based disaster response organizations work through local and regional partners, depending on volunteers to leverage the efforts of professional staff. Furthermore, many faith traditions have *connectional polities*. In these traditions, local congregations all are tied directly to national or global systems of faith-based relief and capacity building that work to produce transferrable learning and resource efficiency worldwide.

Hurricane Harvey provides a textbook example of the significant role faith communities play in disaster response and recovery, both in hands-on activity and in financial commitment.

Hurricane Harvey also demonstrates the complexity of faith-based disaster response, and highlights the specific capacities and limitations faith communities bring to the table.

Each faith-based organization is slightly different when responding to disaster. In the wake of Hurricane Harvey, for example, some faith-based organizations addressed short term needs like food, water, and shelter, while others worked on mucking out and rebuilding damaged homes. Still others are providing long-term case management services to make sure that everyone gets the help that they need and to ensure that no one falls through the cracks. Faith communities support many kinds of charitable services that are distinct from disaster response and recovery but have important points of intersection with it, such as health and mental health; housing assistance; and childcare. It therefore would make sense to view faith-based spending on disaster response and recovery in the context of all the services faith communities provide, and to find all possible efficiencies to ensure both public and charitable dollars are maximized.

Unfortunately, our research revealed lack of public-sector awareness of faith-based organizations' contributions, skill sets, and capacities. This lack of awareness leads to a disconnect between government programs charged with making plans for mitigation and response to future emergencies, and Texas faith communities—whose participation those plans typically take for granted. This disconnect is no small concern, as communities across the state and around the world are under pressure to increase their resilience to a range of stressors, including natural disasters and other emergencies.

Furthermore, lack of public-sector understanding of faith-based disaster response programs complicates the task of accounting for resources that are brought to bear in emergencies—which in turn confounds efforts to project possible future costs. According to the Texas Legislative Budget Board, as of August 31, 2018, a year after Hurricane Harvey, state agencies had spent approximately $500 million in state funds on hurricane response and recovery, as well as $2.2 billion in federal funds. As this report shows, over that same time period faith-based organizations collected or allocated well in excess of $210 million on Hurricane Harvey response and recovery—nearly half as much as Texas spent in state funds. However, it is likely that there is double-counting on one or both sides. Some of the faith-based funds have been collected within faith communities, but other funds have been re-granted from private and public funders or come through FEMA and other public sources of disaster assistance. There is not a consistent accounting for all sources of funds across organizations and programs, and it would be impossible to say if all the taxpayer funds that faith-based organizations have received have been spent in a manner consistent with applicable civil rights laws.

Texas should build on faith communities' historic leadership and long-term commitment to disaster response and recovery by establishing robust frameworks for public/private collaboration that ensure financial accountability and transparency, as well as respecting the growing diversity of Texas' religious landscape. To help develop such frameworks, the Texas

Emergency Planning Council should include representatives of institutionally affiliated disaster response programs in Christian and non-Christian traditions.

Developing robust collaborative frameworks demands thorough understanding of faith communities' activities in disaster response and recovery. Acquiring this understanding can be challenging, because faith-based organizations are not required to share their financial or programmatic information with government agencies—nor should they be required to do so. The Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy serves a unique bridging role between government agencies and our membership base of denominational institutions. We seek partners to support our ongoing research, which will yield information to help both faith communities and government actors improve their planning processes.

Methodology

> *The fact that faith-based organizations and houses of worship are so prevalent in even the smallest places, really makes a difference in how people are reached with assistance of all kinds. Not only that, in many places religion is so central to who people are that their level of dedication and their willingness to sacrifice generally goes beyond anything a governmental organization or even a secular organization can do. Faith related institutions have a local legitimacy and they instill trust and so can be very effective in delivering goods/services, mental/physical health, and in gathering and disseminating information.*
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> *— Sharon Billings Franzén: Brethren Disaster Ministries*

This report builds on research and conclusions from two prior reports by other organizations. In 2009, the National Council of Churches of Christ (NCCC) wrote "Climate and Church: How Global Climate Change Will Impact Core Church Ministries," which focused on how climate change would intensify worldwide demand for disaster assistance as well as food assistance and immigration services. The report is available at https://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/ClimateWhitePaper_finalREV.pdf

In 2012, the University of Southern California Dornsife's Center for Religious and Civic Culture produced "Faithful Action: Working with Religious Groups in Disaster Planning, Response and Recovery," which assessed faith-based response to Hurricane Katrina and made numerous detailed recommendations to the California Emergency Management Agency to improve the agency's collaboration with faith-based organizations for disaster prevention and response. That report is available at https://crcc.usc.edu/files/2015/02/FaithfulAction2012.pdf

To gain a basic picture of faith communities' investment in Hurricane Harvey response and recovery, the Texas Interfaith Center conducted exploratory research during the summer and fall of 2018, to coincide with the one-year anniversary of the hurricane. We collected financial and volunteer statistics from faith-based organizations, and we collected qualitative information through a series of small group discussions called "Talanoa Dialogues."

Our exploratory quantitative research focused on 40 organizations that appear consistently on national lists of faith-based disaster response organizations, listed in Table One. Our qualitative research focused on representatives of local communities that were hit by Hurricane Harvey, including faith-based organizations serving those communities.

Our research was limited in scope, and was intended to assess the potential value of more extensive research. In terms of both the numbers we counted and the stories we collected, our research revealed the need for more thorough exploration. This report offers a thumbnail sketch of the magnitude of faith-based resource commitment to Hurricane Harvey, but more research is needed to develop a detailed picture of sources of funds, spending patterns, and accounting practices.

The complete impact of faith-based disaster response and recovery is difficult to quantify due to the time and manner in which faith communities provide services. Moreover, the impacts of their efforts are amplified through their connections, which can be local, regional, or even global.

Time: The faith community and their corresponding disaster organizations are involved in disaster response for several years after a singular disaster. Most of the organizations that have been contacted for this report are still involved in Southern Texas helping them to recover from Hurricane Harvey and will continue to be involved for several more years.

Manner: Faith communities and faith disaster organizations provide a wide range of services to communities struck by disaster. They provide funds and resources such as blankets, medical kits, hygiene kits, food, and cleaning supplies. They often send volunteers and provide case management, emotional and spiritual support, and use their facilities for housing and other services. Faith-based disaster organizations also do a lot of work assessing the needs of the community and determining those in the community who are the most vulnerable.

Connection: Faith communities are an integral part of the community that they reside in, therefore they have an intimate connection to its people, as well as knowledge of its needs and resources. It is also important to understand that faith communities and faith-based disaster organizations act during minor disasters, those that have not had a declaration by FEMA. The impact of such knowledge and connection allows for deeper and wider distribution of services while also striving to ensure that those who would otherwise fall into the cracks receive services as well.

Significantly, it was difficult to connect with several of the organizations because their staffs were focused on current or upco
ming disasters. For example, many organizations were not able to provide us with financial information on Hurricane Harvey because they were deployed in the field to help with Hurricane Florence.

Table One. Faith-Based Organizations Active in Disaster Response and Recovery

Adventist Development and Relief Agency

American Baptist Men

Brethren Disaster Ministries

Catholic Charities

Christian Disaster Response

Church World Service

Church of Scientology

Convoy of Hope

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Episcopal Relief and Development

Feed the Children

Friends Disaster Services

Habitat for Humanity

Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) Relief

International Fellowship of Chaplains

International Orthodox Christian Charities

Institute for Collective Trauma and Growth

Islamic Relief

Jewish Federation of North America

Latter Day Saints Charities

Lutheran Church Missouri Synod

Lutheran Disaster Response

Medical Team International

Mennonite Disaster Service

NECHAMA Jewish Response

Nazarene Compassionate Ministries

Operation Blessing International

Presbyterian Church in America

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PCUSA)

Salvation Army

Samaritan's Purse

Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Southern Baptist Disaster Relief

Taiwan Buddhist Tzu Chi

United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR)

United Church of Christ

United Sikhs

World Renew

World Vision

Findings

As Table Two shows, we identified more than $211 million in Hurricane Harvey response and recovery funds that faith-based organizations expected to raise through appeals; pass through from other faith-based funders or public sources; or allocate from within existing funds, of which about $80 million had been spent or disbursed as of October, 2018. We also identified more than 45,000 volunteers, and more than 526,000 volunteer hours.

These figures are far from complete. Of the 40 organizations we focused on, we obtained financial information from 23 organizations. We received detailed information from seven organizations through direct email contact and telephone interviews. An additional 16 organizations had basic financial information and spending reports on their websites.

We also gathered volunteer information from many of the organizations. Fourteen faith-based organizations reported providing more than 45,000 volunteers to support Hurricane Harvey relief and recovery. Nine organizations distinct from the first fourteen reported more than 526,000 volunteer hours. It is certain that this total does not include all the time spent by local congregations, even when those congregations are part of denominations with official disaster networks, because congregations often are the very first responders in their hyper-local areas and already are working before official disaster response systems are in place.

Table Two. Financial and volunteer outlays for Hurricane Harvey response and recovery by selected faith-based organizations as of October 31, 2018

	Funds Raised or Designated	Funds Spent or Disbursed	Volunteers Deployed	Volunteer Hours Logged
Denominationally Affiliated	121,298,000	41,673,000	22,032	447,548
Non-Denominational	90,199,384	38,599,384	23,077	64,363
Total	211,497,384	80,272,384	45,109	526,674

Sources: data publicly available on organizations' websites; telephone interviews; email correspondence

In addition to raising substantial funds through tithes and offerings from local congregations, many faith-based organizations obtain funds through additional sources like FEMA, government grants, community foundations, or other organizations. For example:

- The City of Houston's Hurricane Harvey Relief Fund awarded roughly $106 million dollars to local non-profits. After four rounds of grant distribution, nearly $26 million dollars from the Fund have been distributed to faith-based organizations or congregations.
- The Rebuild Texas Fund is a collaborative project of the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation and OneStar Foundation. Rebuild Texas raised a total of $100 million to assist

with Harvey recovery. Of this, $50.65 million has been awarded to local organizations, with $4.7 million of that going to faith-based organizations.

- The Red Cross Hurricane Relief Fund awarded more than $60 million in community-based grants, of which $6.29 million has gone to faith based organizations.
- The Center for Disaster Philanthropy Harvey Relief Fund disbursed $217,000 to faith-based organizations.
- The Lilly Endowment awarded the Salvation Army $10 million to use at its discretion to meet urgent needs associated with Hurricanes Harvey and Irma.

Faith-based organizations are committed for the long haul. Some of the faith-based organizations working on Harvey recovery plan to be on the ground for three, five, or even ten years. Currently, it is impossible to track all the faith-based funds that have been raised and designated for Harvey relief versus funds that have been expended, because so many organizations are still in the middle of long-term projects.

Discussion

> *When local, regional and national faith organizations come together and coordinate, it becomes a coalition of good. Yet in local and state planning, the faith communities are often overlooked when it comes to the organizational strategy or one local church is handed all the authority and they have no concept of how the national organizations function with and through their local churches. Volunteer Organizations Acting in Disasters (VOAD) need to be given the authority to work with and beside emergency managers for coordination purposes and to mitigate denominations that see their mission to proselytize during a community's time of need.*
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> *National and regional teams working through VOADs need to have a way of being recognized in a disaster area, so their efforts are not hindered or slowed down by authorities who do not recognize a name or take issues with a denomination's theology. The Texas Resiliency Crisis Team should be given the lead when it comes to spiritual care during a crisis. This is an interfaith program that is dedicated to taking spiritual care directly into the disaster zone to aid all who are in crisis. All of the team members are ministers, chaplains, or trained lay people who do not manipulate the emotions or situation.*
>
> *— Ed Sackett, Mission Presbytery Disaster Recovery Coordinator*

Tracking faith-based spending on Hurricane Harvey response and recovery proved to be very challenging because of core characteristics of faith-based organizations—some of which are the very characteristics that make faith communities such vital partners in emergencies. Many of the organizations included in this analysis are agencies within religious denominations, or are otherwise subsidiary to a larger faith-based entity. These organizations raise or receive funds that are raised through donations, tithes, and offerings. Such sectarian funds typically are not subject to the same restrictions or level of scrutiny as are public or foundation grants.

This impacts how quickly and easily funds can be distributed, but also may reduce the accountability and transparency of the uses of the funds. Very few of the parent organizations of the entities included in our analysis track their disaster response and recovery spending across all levels of their organizations. Most of the organizations included in our analysis so far have not differentiated Harvey-specific spending from their general domestic missions spending for purposes of their publicly available financial reports. Moreover, many of the organizations included in our analysis partner with local congregations, and depend on local partners to track detailed spending information. The non-sectarian funds local partners are asked to track can include federal funds; other public grants and contracts; and foundation grants. In the case of national organizations, there may be an additional layer of complexity in the form of regional subsidiaries that contract with local faith-based groups. We could identify no centralized collection of overall spending for many of these organizations. Each local branch may have a small piece of the overall spending picture. Some locals do not communicate back to their national umbrella organizations about spending, leaving unresolvable gaps in spending and outcomes data.

Despite these challenges, government should be highly motivated to work with faith-based partners on collaborative approaches to analyzing faith-based disaster-related income and spending. Better understanding of faith-based spending would help policymakers plan for future public spending needs and provide insights into possible gaps and areas of duplication of services.

Lack of data also complicates the picture of faith-based deployment of volunteers. With respect to volunteers, we could discern no consistency in accounting for individual volunteers or volunteer hours. It would be impossible for public sector disaster response managers to know the size or skill sets of the potential pool of volunteers who could be deployed in the event of a future disaster. As with spending data, government should be motivated to collaborate with faith-based organizations to develop systems for tracking volunteers and volunteer hours to help gauge capacity and identify gaps.

Talanoa Dialogue

To gain a deeper understanding of the role of faith communities in Hurricane Harvey response and recovery, we held a series of small group discussions with residents of impacted communities, some of whom represent faith-based disaster response organizations. We structured our discussions using the Talanoa model. The United Nations used this model throughout 2018 to generate discussion related to climate change. All over the world, governments and civil society stakeholder groups held Talanoa dialogues, which are characterized by three framing questions: *Where are we? Where do we want to go?* and *How do we get there?*

We submitted the results of our Talanoa dialogues into the United Nations Talanoa portal, where they became part of the proceedings for the ongoing global climate negotiations. Many of the observations also are relevant to state policy and planning.

We identified several common themes across the discussions. Many participants reflected on the importance of local relationships and support networks. In every dialogue, there was broad agreement about the vast unmet need for mental health services. There was pervasive frustration with FEMA and bureaucratic processes in general.

Participants raised concerns regarding the public sector's approach to partnering with the faith community. One participant put the issue succinctly: "The Legislature seems to be underestimating faith-based organizations and doesn't understand how the church works in response to disaster. The best-coordinated efforts are when a meeting has the community's different faith traditions represented because they have a close connection to the community and can identify needs and provide resources."

Another participant pointed out that public sector expectations for faith-based response may create problems in the longer term by draining nonprofit resources, saying, "The other thing is that we need to think about long term recovery and resiliency. We also need to be careful with our funds because if you have six months of funds saved up for operating expenses and it all gets spent on helping the community, how can they last long enough to be able to help people. The perception is that non-profit organizations should spend their own money, but they have saved up that money for future expenses."

Recommendations

> *Emergency managers often identify the most common faith and cultural traditions in the community, but may not regularly engage with members of lesser-known faith-based groups, cultural centers/associations, and community organizations. The organizational capacity of these latter groups may seem small, but their reach into underserved communities can be quite significant.*
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> *—US Department of Homeland Security, "Engaging Faith-based and Community Organizations: Planning Considerations for Emergency Managers"*

The Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy's research has shined light on the scope of faith-based financial and volunteer participation in one recent disaster. As policymakers work to make Texas resilient to future disasters, creating stable partnership between government and the faith-based sector should be a top priority. Specifically, the Texas Legislature should give legislative direction to the Texas Department of Emergency Management (TDEM) to implement the following recommendations:

Coordination and communication

1. The Texas Emergency Planning Council should be expanded to include a member who

represents institutional disaster response programs of Christian and non-Christian traditions.
2. TDEM should appoint and provide administrative support to a task force on faith-based disaster response.
3. TDEM should work with the task force to develop recommendations to integrate faith-based disaster response into Texas' emergency management systems.

Transparency and accountability

1. TDEM should establish and promulgate standard formats and practices for reporting faith-based expenditures, volunteer hours, and other relevant metrics for faith-based disaster response and recovery.
2. State agency personnel who participate in grant or contract award or management processes should complete mandatory training in religious nondiscrimination and the proper boundaries between religion and the state with specific attention to the use of public funds.

Future Research

The legislative recommendations above would provide a more solid framework for collaboration between state agencies and institutional faith-based disaster response organizations. For local emergency managers to establish tangible partnerships, however, they would need granular information about the capacities and limitations of faith communities in their areas.

The next phase of the Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy's research will use qualitative and survey research to build a comprehensive picture of current faith community disaster preparedness, response and recovery activities, including how faith communities interact with local governments and other resilience stakeholders. We aim to close the knowledge gap about the ongoing quantity, typology, and value of faith-led resilience-building activities in Texas communities. The proposed research will identify gaps and impediments that prevent local communities and faith communities from collaborating to strengthen local resilience, and generate strategies that overcome those issues. ⋆

The Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy is the foundation arm of Texas Impact, Texas' oldest and largest statewide interfaith network. Texas Impact convenes organizations, congregations, and individuals of all faiths from across the state of Texas to advocate collectively for public policies that advance justice, freedom, and peace. The Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy provides education, advocacy training, and policy research on issues of concern to mainstream faith communities. This project was supported in part by the Meadows Foundation, the Shield-Ayres Foundation, SunRun, the Lutheran World Hunger Program, and the Regeneration Project.

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