

Investing in Florida

Recovery is challenging enough for people with means, but hundreds—including people with fixed incomes, the ill, elderly, and disabled—simply lack the resources to rebuild on their own.

With generous contributions to One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS), the United Church of Christ with the help of volunteer work teams from around the country, who have given thousands of hours, have restored close to 200 homes.

A 70-year-old disabled Navy veteran said, “Having a roof that was leaky and falling in was very difficult for me. I did not know what I would do.” His Volusia County, Florida, home lost most of the roof’s shingles to Hurricane Irma’s winds (2017). The storm opened the way to major leaks, which destroyed much of the ceiling in the main living area and bedroom.

UCC Disaster Ministries partnered with Volusia Interfaiths/Agencies Networking in Disaster (VIND) to help the most vulnerable disaster survivors. VIND helped the veteran obtain a loan to pay for a new roof, and deployed a volunteer work team from Altoona (Pennsylvania) United Church of Christ to complete the interior repairs in his home.

“The volunteers ... did it with such love and compassion, taking the job under their wings and making it perfect,” the veteran said. “My health was deteriorating due to breathing in particles and debris from the water damage in my home, but it is improving now. I have a new outlook and I am no longer depressed.” Thanking VIND and the volunteers, he said, “You have changed my life.”

Needs are being met in Florida with support from OGHS. Volunteer work teams, a construction supervisor, and over two dozen UCC congregations have volunteered to help repair homes.

Not too far away from Volusia County, the Florida Panhandle is still trying to recover from a very powerful hurricane, Hurricane Michael (2016). UCC Disaster Ministries is working with Long Term Recovery Groups (LTRG) in seven counties. In fall 2019, Betzi Yungclas, an experienced UCC Partners in Service volunteer, and Benji Benzschawel, a full-time construction manager, were deployed to the area. They will assist the LTRGs with building coordination and volunteer management for a year.

“While progress has been made in Florida over the last year in recovery, there are still significant unmet needs,” said Ken Skalitzy, UCC Disaster Recovery Specialist for the Eastern Region. “Please support disaster recovery with your work teams, donations and prayers,” Skalitzy said.

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OGHS MISSION MOMENT



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