

BDG: Friends,

On October 10, 2018, parts of the Alabama-West Florida Conference were changed forever. Hurricane Michael raged ashore leaving miles and miles of devastation. Although the road ahead can seem overwhelming, we have made so much progress with our disaster response efforts. I am here today with the conference Director of Connectional Ministries, Rev. Ashley Davis. She has orchestrated an outstanding team along the panhandle and I am grateful for her leadership and the leadership of many others.

AD: Thank you, Bishop. In the past month an extraordinary amount of work has gone into helping those in the Marianna, Port St. Joe and Panama City areas. In the immediate days after, we saw many of our churches collect supplies and assemble UMCOR kits. We are so thankful for the extraordinary ways you continue to respond. Without asking, Good News UMC and Woodlawn UMC immediately responded and became command centers for supplies and work teams. There are simply no words to express how much these churches have done for our disaster response efforts. As we move forward in the recovery process, we will establish volunteer centers in Marianna, Port St. Joe and Panama City areas. Through UMCOR funding and support, volunteer coordinators, construction coordinators and case managers will be hired and trained to work in these centers and throughout the Marianna-Panama City District. We have now moved into the phase of needing ERT teams. Those from out of conference are invited into the area. All volunteer teams, regardless of skill level, need to register at the online portal that can be found on www.hurricanemichaelrecovery.org.

BDG: Some people have asked why it is necessary to register a team when they have direct contact with a pastor. Many of our pastors with damage in their communities are overwhelmed and cannot properly handle the scheduling of volunteers. This portal allows our volunteer coordinators to assess your skill level and match it with the appropriate need. It also ensures we don't have too many or not enough teams in an area. Upon registering through this portal, a volunteer coordinator will reach out to you within 24-48 hours. This portal is also important to track volunteers for potential grant dollars.

AD: On that topic of grants, Kristi McClellan, the conference grant writer, has done an outstanding job for us already. She quickly submitted several grants and continues to work on them to support structure for three volunteer sights. We have already received several grants to assist with salary support and various ministries affected by Hurricane Michael. She is extremely talented in this area and will be a significant team member in our response.

BDG: I am humbled by the monetary donations we continue to receive from around the world. One donation came from a church in New Jersey who recalled the pain and destruction after Superstorm Sandy and wanted to simply pay it forward. Our connection is truly at its best in the worst of times. I continue to ask you to consider donating directly to our conference through www.hurricanemichaelrecovery.org. Thanks to your generosity, we have already distributed funds to help support salaries of pastors and staff of churches who are not functional due to the storm. Please know your money is being carefully handled and managed and will go directly to assisting those in need. For those churches in other areas of our conference not affected by the storm, I would ask you to do everything in your power to fulfill your missional giving commitment for 2018. It will be so important to receive funds for which we have planned for the year so that we can continue to assist those in the panhandle.

AD: As we previously reported, twenty-eight churches received damage of some sort. Those pastors have been assigned a prayer partner who will walk alongside them during this difficult time. This is one way we can ensure the spiritual and emotional needs are being met in addition to the financial and logistical needs.

BDG: There is no better example than to lead through action. I am taking the conference cabinet to the Marianna-Panama City District in the coming weeks to spend several days working and helping with the cleanup efforts. I invite your church to consider which members could be trained and sent to help our

friends in need. Each day I see reports of so many devastating things happening in this world, I can think of no better way to bless our neighbors than being the hands and feet of Christ on the ground doing Kingdom work. Thank you again for all you have done to carry us through these difficult times. Pray with me that God will lead these efforts and will show us that the best is certainly yet to come.