

**GENERAL CONVENTION OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH 2018
ARCHIVES' RESEARCH REPORT**

RESOLUTION NO.: 2018-D007
TITLE: Disaster Resilience Policy
PROPOSER: Mr. Bryan Velez Garcia
TOPIC: National Concerns

Directly Related: (Attached)

None

Indirectly Related: (Available in the [Acts of Convention](#) database, searchable by resolution number)

2015-A155 Recognize the 75th Anniversary and Efforts of ERD
2009-A036 Commend and Encourage Efforts in Support of Haiti

In preparing this report, the Archives researched the resolutions in the Acts of Convention database for the period 1976 through 2015, selecting “direct” resolutions that have a substantive bearing on the proposed legislation. The “direct” resolutions are attached and “indirect” resolutions are available in the Acts of Convention database. Committee members who require other research assistance should contact the Archives at 800-525-9329 before Convention or at Convention in the General Convention Secretariat.

D007 Disaster Resilience Policy

Proposer	Mr. Bryan Velez Garcia
Endorsed by	Lawton, Ms. Sarah; Weaver, Ms. Bonnie
Sponsored by	
Page numbers	Blue Book: p. N/A; Constitution & Canons: p. N/A
HiA / Leg. Cttee	HB / 08 - Social Justice and United States Policy
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RESOLUTION TEXT

- 1 *Resolved*, the House of _____ concurring, That the 79th General convention commend the efforts of Episcopalians to support their families and neighbors in times of disaster, both individually and collectively, especially the leadership of Episcopal Relief & Development in coordinating immediate response and supporting long-term recovery; and be it further

- 2 *Resolved*, That the 79th General Convention acknowledge and commend Episcopal Relief & Development's work with dioceses in providing life-saving assistance such as water, food, housing assistance, medical supplies, gift cards, gas and other emergency supplies and pastoral care to the people of Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands (both United States and United Kingdom), Texas, Florida, and California in the aftermath of a devastating series of hurricanes, floods, fires, and mudslides in 2017; and be it further

- 3 *Resolved*, That the General Convention urge the U.S. federal government to fund and support not only immediate, but also long-term community and economic recovery from human-caused and natural disasters in the 50 States and U.S. Territories in equal treatment, recognizing that full recovery for a community and economy can require decades of investment at a scale only feasible through the collective action of all Americans through our federal government, and that material poverty exacerbates the effects of natural disasters and lengthens the time to recover from them; and be it further

- 4 *Resolved*, That the General Convention urge the United States government to invest in large-scale preventative disaster and resilience planning for the effects of climate change on the scale of natural disasters in the future, and to coordinate these planning efforts with other nations as appropriate (for example, in the Caribbean region, with the United Kingdom, France, Netherlands, and Caribbean governments, and with regional and global agencies); and be it further

- 5 *Resolved*, That the General Convention encourage all Episcopalians to prepare and plan how they will respond to disasters, how their parishes and dioceses can serve, and how to best partner with Episcopal Relief & Development to respond to local, regional, and national disasters as necessary, including using the Episcopal Asset Map and other tools to facilitate local partnerships between Episcopal Relief & Development and local dioceses and congregations.

EXPLANATION

The year 2017 was devastating in terms of the number and scale of natural disasters in U.S. states and territories. It was an unusually destructive hurricane season thanks to the horrific forces of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria that ravaged Puerto Rico, the U.S. and British Virgin Islands, some Eastern Caribbean islands, and Florida and Texas on the mainland USA. The wildfire season in the Western United States was also unusually severe, as evidenced by the many lost lives and personal injuries as well as massive damages to property—the largest death toll and loss of property in California wildfire history. The dioceses of Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Southeast Florida, Southwest Florida, Texas, and West Texas were among those directly hit by the hurricanes, and the Dioceses of Northern California and Los Angeles were affected by deadly combinations of wildfire, high winds, and mudslides. Several dioceses, including Southeast Florida and Central Florida, have also been affected by the mass migration of Puerto Ricans from the island in the wake of the disaster and its ongoing aftermath, and are now working to minister with this diaspora community.

We also know from experiencing these events that while our Episcopal Church efforts are necessary and helpful, large-scale disaster and resiliency planning also is essential and requires the support of government agencies that can bring the resources for immediate relief and long-term recovery. The evident lack of adequate federal resource provision in the wake of two hurricanes that hit Puerto Rico in the fall of 2017 has made the disaster much worse and the recovery much longer than it should or could have been. This resolution seeks to emphasize our church's advocacy work with the U.S.

government to plan for and respond to disasters with the resources that we need. There is also a need to expand the church's advocacy efforts globally to other governmental entities, such as the United Kingdom, France, Netherlands, and Caribbean governments, to encourage them to come together in time of catastrophic crisis and for long-term planning for the effects of climate change.

Here are just a few of the stories of what happened, and how communities survived the immediate aftermath of natural disasters with the help of many partners, including Episcopal Relief & Development in partnership with Episcopal dioceses and congregations. These efforts are to be commended, studied and emulated, because disasters will always be a part of our lives on this Earth, and their effects will be made worse by material poverty, by an increased wilderness/urban interface, and, increasingly, by the effects of climate change on weather events.

Stories from 2017:

Episcopal Diocese of Puerto Rico:

In the month of September, Puerto Rico suffered the impact of Hurricane Irma that affected the islands of Vieques and Culebra and the northeastern part of the island as it passed close by, causing a lot of destruction. The Episcopal Diocese of Puerto Rico quickly organized to help this region and the neighboring islands that suffered the direct impact of Hurricane Irma.

A working group was established that began efforts to collect donations of food and medical items in conjunction with the Episcopal Health System and the Episcopal Hospital San Lucas, which they called "San Lucas for Puerto Rico and the Caribbean" to respond to the needs of the people affected by Hurricane Irma.

Unfortunately, many of these efforts could not be completed because on September 20, 2017, Puerto Rico suffered the direct impact of Hurricane Maria, a category 5 hurricane, one of the strongest in the

history of the region. This hurricane affected all the social, energy, political and communications structures of the Island.

When the communication could be established a bit, the Bishop of Puerto Rico summoned an Emergency Task Force immediately to establish the protocol of how to respond to the suffering caused by this extreme catastrophe. Immediately, this group went out to visit each of the parishioners to see how the clergy and communities were faring, because the lack of communication made it impossible to communicate with each one of them.

Thanks to the first efforts of the diocese to respond to Hurricane Irma, we could respond immediately with the resources we had available and the emergency funds that Episcopal Relief & Development had sent to Puerto Rico.

As soon as we could establish communication with church staff in New York, Episcopal Relief & Development sent a consultant to facilitate the response processes to the recovery. Episcopal Relief & Development has since done an extraordinary job in the Diocese of Puerto Rico and has provided many resources so that we can serve the entire population of Puerto Rico. Thanks to these resources, our diocese has been able to carry out focused and effective relief efforts through the provision of food and necessities, economic aid for housing repairs, pastoral and psychological assistance, and medical missions in the various municipalities of the Island.

The Diocese of Puerto Rico continues working with different groups, dioceses and organizations, including Episcopal Relief & Development, to help with Puerto Rico's long-term relief and re-development needs. Lack of sufficient resources from the U.S. federal government continues to be a major obstacle for this process.

Deputy Bryan Vélez, Diocese of Puerto Rico

Episcopal Diocese of the Virgin Islands:

In the Virgin Islands (UK), the eye of Hurricane Irma was a direct hit on the island of Virgin Gorda. In the matter of hours, homes on the island, particularly on the northern end were leveled to the ground, with only a few homes left standing. Hurricane Irma did not discriminate, all structures sustained massive damage. The damages were so severe that CNN's aerial view of the island led to reports that no one survived; all were dead. The sole Episcopal Church and its properties on the island was severely damaged, one building completely totaled. Sunday services and other church related activities are held on the parish hall.

The island of Tortola, the location of two Episcopal churches, numerous buildings and roads were destroyed, and many residential zones left in ruins. Lines of communications were destroyed; residents were left in the dark when the power system was destroyed. For the first time in its history, a state of emergency was declared.

When the winds died, the water drained and the dust settled in the British Virgin Islands, residents witnessed mass destruction that was never before seen or experienced: homes and businesses were

destroyed; families and friends were left homeless; Families were eventually separated with the closures of schools and loss of jobs, which caused more than 4,000 people to relocate to the mainland and other Caribbean islands; places of employment were totally destroyed, thereby eliminating income for many households, particularly in the tourism Industry.

The impact on people of the Virgin Islands—the human factor was, and still is, immeasurable; the elderly witnessed their life's work and holdings blown away; some traumatized children experienced nightmares with the memories and they react physically, with the sound of strong wind or rain.

SURVIVAL AND RECOVERY EFFORTS

The Episcopal Church, through its Episcopal Relief & Development, rendered assistance immediately after the Hurricanes and their generosity and enthusiasm to continue assisting the Diocese of the Virgin Islands and surrounding community continues to date. While in the immediate aftermath of the hurricanes Episcopal Relief & Development, who partnered with Convoy of Hope, provided “survival” supplies: water, food, housing assistance, medical supplies, gift cards, batteries, plywood, gas and other emergency supplies. As some semblance of “normalcy” slowly began to return, the focus turned to providing “hands on” assistance, such as rebuilding and repairing homes.

In 2016 the Diocese of Alabama and the Virgin Islands engaged in a Companion Diocesan relationship, thus forming the Diocesan Companion Commission, on which several leaders from the respective dioceses serve. This relationship is indeed a godsend to the Virgin Islands, aiding even before the hurricanes were envisioned. The relationship has inured into one of mutual sharing and in the days, weeks and months post hurricane, our companions have been a source of strength and encouragement. They have partnered with Episcopal Relief & Development to render aid to the Virgin Islands. They are committed to assisting with pastoral care, volunteer clergy will come to assist the local clergy (who also sustained personal loss), professionals will assist with our schools and church ministries. We are walking and experiencing the Jesus Movement. Our companions are holding hands with Episcopal Relief & Development as we organize and formulate a plan of action forging a way forward in the Diocese.

A Diocesan Disaster Coordinator was appointed, disaster coordinators at the congregational level were assigned tasks for their individual parishes/missions and this team has organized into what is now the Disaster Response Committee. In January 2018 the Presiding Bishop visited our Diocese and left us with words of hope, “you are not alone,” and indeed we are not. Episcopal Relief & Development has committed to work with the Diocese for a period of at least five years to provide an able-bodied staff of professionals and volunteers to render “hands on” assistance, such as rebuilding homes, providing pastoral care and other clergy and professional help.

The congregations of the Diocese of the Virgin Islands know firsthand the reasons the Episcopal Relief & Development appeals for donations. For most, it was the first time that they realized, experienced and benefited directly from the value of their donation.

While no one can predict the form of the next disaster, Episcopal Relief & Development is working with local church leaders by providing expert advice to formulate preparedness, mitigation, recovery and resiliency plans of action to ensure that the human impact of future disasters will be lessened. Episcopal Relief & Development is teaching the Community of Faith in the Virgin Islands “how to fish.”

The Rev. Jabriel Simmonds Ballantine, Member of Executive Council

Episcopal Diocese of Southeast Florida:

When the eye of Hurricane Irma went through the Middle Keys on September 10, 2017 (Marathon and Big Pine Key), two of the churches of the Diocese of Southeast Florida were in the path of destruction. Our other three churches in the Keys received some damage as well. At the request of our bishop, Episcopal Charities took the lead organizing our churches to get supplies and workers to the Keys and to make application for disaster relief money from Episcopal Relief & Development. We have applied three times for grants and are grateful for the support received.

Feeding Programs were expanded and food pantries replenished at nine sites in South Dade County and the Keys. At most of our North Diocesan sites, power returned quickly and food was replenished with Episcopal Relief & Development grant funds. Because of this support, most of the feeding programs/food pantries were able to quickly reopen to support the needs of larger numbers of hungry people.

Boats at Boot Key Harbor, Marathon were removed from the water and returned to their owners. This is important as the cost charged by recovery agencies is prohibitive, so boats would have been destroyed by professional salvagers and more people left homeless. (Boats in the Keys are people's homes.) Leadership at St. Columba Church was able to find professions who would work for much less.

Independence Cay Transitional Shelter, Shower, Laundry and Lunch Program in Marathon was seriously damaged and was repaired with Home Depot Gift Cards so that 20 men could return to shelter. A lunch, laundry and shower program served over 50 men and women per day reopened.

Most importantly, for the rebuilding of the Keys, we turned to buying and renting travel trailers in which families could live while rehabbing their homes. Unlike the FEMA trailers that usually house displaced persons for sometimes years, our trailers have had several turnovers in residents. As they repair their homes to a habitable point, they move out so others can move in. We know of a family with two infants who had been living in their car for several months who were able move into a recently vacated trailer.

FEMA was overwhelmed with disasters and was little help in the Keys. They had trash pickup into early November but then left the cities and county to manage the rest of the mounds of debris. FEMA also provided hotel vouchers for displaced persons but that ended in October with many hundreds of people still homeless. There were few to no FEMA trailers in the Keys.

Our churches mobilized. Workers, supplies and money came from as far away as Minnesota and Pennsylvania. They came from Georgia, Alabama, North and South Carolina and from the dioceses across Florida.

A workshop has been planned: After the Storm: Resilience in the Midst of Transitions and Unexpected Loss. Episcopal Charities and the diocese also studying what we did right and what needs

to change or be improved so that we will be ready in the face of any new disaster.

Deputy Bonnie Weaver, Southeast Florida

Episcopal Diocese of West Texas:

Hurricane Harvey made landfall in Texas on August 25, 2017 as a Category 4 storm. The highest recorded wind speed in Rockport was 150 mph, with Port Aransas recording a peak reading of 132 mph (However, because many weather stations were eventually disabled by high winds, the National Weather Service has reported that wind speeds across South Texas are statistically underestimated). The storm continued to produce high winds and record-breaking rainfall across Texas for several days before eventually making landfall again at Cameron, Louisiana, on August 30th. After the storm passed, experts reported that Harvey was the first Category 4 hurricane to make landfall in Texas since Carla in 1961, with damage estimates surpassing \$180 billion.

In the early days after the storm, a variety of organic relief and response efforts began taking place across the diocese. Within two weeks, representatives from Episcopal Relief & Development arrived in the Diocese of West Texas to visit with diocesan leaders about relief and recovery. During their conversation, Katie Mears (Senior Director of Episcopal Relief & Development's US Disaster Programs) recommended to Bishop David Reed that a coordinator be hired to oversee the diocesan response. On September 15th, Jennifer Wickham assumed the position of Bishop's Deputy for Disaster Recovery. Wickham had already been deeply involved in recovery efforts in Port Aransas.

The Diocese of West Texas contains 15 of the 41 counties which were declared federal disaster areas. There are 23 congregations serving these counties, many of which sustained some sort of property damage. While there is a wide range of need across the 15-county area, diocesan response efforts are currently being focused around the hardest-hit communities of Aransas Pass, Corpus Christi, Port Aransas, Refugio, Rockport, and Victoria. Property damage is widespread, and there continues to be a great need for both skilled and unskilled labor, as well as for material and monetary donations. Though much has been accomplished in the months since the hurricane, experts expect recovery to take a minimum of seven to ten years.

The Diocese of West Texas is partnering with other long-term recovery groups on a coordinated regional response. It is important to remember that recovery will take a very long time and a tremendous amount of resources, and that while volunteers are still needed, the biggest need is for financial support. Please continue to pray for all those impacted by Hurricane Harvey, and consider how you can support your diocesan neighbors during this epic hour of need.

Jennifer S.T. Wickham, Bishop's Deputy for Disaster Recovery

Episcopal Diocese of Northern California:

The October 2017 Northern California wildfires, also known as the Northern California firestorm, were a series of 250 wildfires that burned across several northern California counties during the

month of October in conditions of extreme fire danger – dry vegetation, high heat, and high, dry, easterly winds.

Church of the Incarnation in Santa Rosa had 11 families who lost their homes, and many more evacuated, some more than once. We used the church as a shelter until we had to evacuate the building on the third night of the fires (the church building is fine). The fires roared through Santa Rosa like a blast furnace. More than 8,000 homes, businesses, and farm buildings were lost in our region, and many people died who were unable to escape. These fires burned an enormous territory -- extending through Sonoma, Napa and Lake counties and portions of Mendocino and Solano counties. It takes more than an hour to drive just the width of the fires. The community is in trauma and the rebuilding will take years. Incarnation raised thousands of dollars through a website button for donations; they decided to focus on assisting those who are the most vulnerable, including renters who have no insurance, low-income people who have lost jobs because of the fires, and undocumented people. The Rev. James Richardson, priest-in-charge, paid the \$600 rent for a woman who cleans houses; she lost most of her income because the houses she cleans burned.

Healdsburg had four parishioners whose houses burned down and one renter who was displaced while repairs were made to her apartment. The renter also suffered an injury while displaced and couldn't work to pay her rent, and so Rector Sally Hubbell paid one month's rent for her. The ECW also made significant cash gifts to the parishioners who lost their homes. St. Paul's shower ministry was busy beyond all historic records.

St. Stephen's, Sebastopol, made shelter for about 15 people during the fires in the sanctuary. Deacon Kate Sefton at St. Stephen's is still working overtime on this and connecting with other, secular organizations.

In Mendocino County, a family who lost everything, including their two teenage children, was helped by a fund drive put on by Faith Church in Cameron Park. St. John's, Roseville, put on a Winterdance Celtic concert that brought in a lot of money for fire victims.

The Rev. John Day, priest-in-charge of Holy Trinity, Ukiah, has made presentations to fire survivors in the Redwood Valley where nearly 400 homes and businesses were lost. Currently, he is the only person that Mendocino-Rebuilding Our Community recognizes as qualified to counsel fire survivors and that is because he was trained as a Red Cross Disaster Chaplain and served as a Chaplain at Ground Zero in New York.

All the churches in the areas affected, especially Grace, St. Helena, which has a large community of farmworkers, gave out lots of cards for gas and food, plus got hotel rooms for some people and gave other specific financial assistance in terms of paying utility bills. Many of them continue to help those who have fallen through the cracks and will continue to aid rebuilding efforts as needed.

Lori Korleski Richardson, Interim Communications Director, Office of the Bishop

Episcopal Relief & Development:

A full account of Episcopal Relief & Development's response to the 2017 hurricanes can be found on their hurricane response page: <http://www.episcopalrelief.org/what-we-do/us-disaster-program/hurricanesresponse2017>. Information about Episcopal Relief & Development's response to the 2017 wildfires can be found here: <https://www.episcopalrelief.org/press-and-resources/press-releases/2017-press-releases/california-wildfires>

During the initial relief phase, Episcopal Relief & Development helps get critical food, water, and emergency supplies to affected regions. As relief and short-term recovery phases unfold, residents in many locations receive housing assistance, medical supplies, gas for transportation and gift cards to purchase what they need and to help support the local economy. Episcopal Relief & Development is continuing to work with the affected dioceses and local partners to assess long-term needs and to support the recovery over months and years.