

72 Florida Baptist churches sustain damage after Wilma strikes west, east coasts

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Photo by James A. Smith Sr.

A Southern Baptist Disaster Relief crew works at East Naples Baptist Church Oct. 28 covering with tarps parts of several roofs damaged as a result of Hurricane Wilma.

JACKSONVILLE (FBC) – Ten days after Hurricane Wilma tore through Florida’s west and east coast communities, convention officials have surveyed 120 Florida Baptist churches either in person or by telephone to evaluate damage and determine needs of the congregations and pastors.

At least 72 churches sustained major or moderate damage to their buildings and pastor’s homes, reporting roofs and steeples blown off and massive water damage throughout the facilities. Ceilings collapsed, holes were ripped in sanctuaries and windows were blown out. Several pastors experienced significant destruction to their own homes.

Cecil Seagle, director of the Florida Baptist Convention Missions Division, estimated that at least 10 churches have “extreme needs,” citing both Graham Baptist Church in Hialeah and First Baptist Church in Hallandale.

Others, such as First Baptist Church in Hialeah, are insured, but have high deductibles to meet before they can collect their insurance and begin repairs, he said.

Seagle outlined a three-pronged approach to help churches with limited or no resources rebuild and pay deductibles, including interest-free loans and limited grants. In “extreme cases we hope to enlist partner churches that will, with the convention’s help, adopt these devastated churches so that they can survive.”

Seagle said that the convention will look for other sources of denominational funding, “to come alongside and supplement our disaster relief efforts.”

GuideStone Financial Resources and LifeWay Christian Resources have offered financial assistance and discounted materials to needy congregations.

Some heavily damaged churches, such as First Baptist Church in Fort Myers Beach and First Baptist Church in Fort Lauderdale, have said they are self-sufficient, Seagle reported, and encouraged the convention to help those congregations that are “unable to survive without our help.”

“We are taking whatever steps we can to assist our Florida Baptist churches and their pastors recover from the storm,” said John Sullivan, executive director-treasurer of the Florida Baptist Convention. He personally surveyed many of the churches. “Our congregations are resilient. They will bounce back.”

Disaster relief funds given to the Florida Baptist Convention since Hurricane Wilma struck have totaled \$15,736.

Financial contributions are being accepted to help churches rebuild and assist in the recovery process. Send checks payable to the Florida Baptist Convention to the Florida Baptist Convention, Business Services, P.O. Box 5579, Jacksonville, FL, 32247. Designate on check “Hurricane Wilma relief.” To pay by credit card, call 800-226-8584, ext. 3049.

Reports from the following churches categorize the damage as major or moderate (Baptist associations are indicated in parenthesis):

Major Damage:

Belle Glade, First (Big Lake)
Belle Glade, First Haitian (Big Lake)
Bethel Evangelical, Fort Lauderdale (Gulf Stream)
Big Coppitt, First (Florida Keys)
Boca Glades, Boca Raton (Palm Lake)
Cooper City, First (Gulf Stream)
East Naples Baptist (Royal Palm)
Estero, First (Royal Palm)
Florida Gardens, Lake Worth (Palm Lake)
Fort Lauderdale, First (Gulf Stream)
Graham Baptist, Hialeah (Miami)
Hallandale, First (Gulf Stream)
Hialeah, First (Miami)
Horeb, Hialeah (Miami)
Indiantown, First (Treasure Coast)
Ives Dairy Road, North Miami Beach (Miami)
Lake Worth, First (Palm Lake)
Marco Island, First (Royal Palm)
McGregor, Ft. Myers (Royal Palm)
Metropolitan, Hollywood (Gulf Stream)
Moore Haven, First (Big Lake)
New River, Southwest Ranches (Gulf Stream)
North Miami, First (Miami)
Palm Springs, Lake Worth (Palm Lake)
Plantation, First (Gulf Stream)
Providence, Plantation (Gulf Stream)
Renacer, Pembroke Pines (Miami)
Riviera Beach, First Haitian (Palm Lake)
Sugar Loaf, Summerland (Florida Keys)
Taft Street, Pembroke Pines (Gulf Stream)
Tamiami Baptist (Miami)

Wayside Baptist (Miami)
Westland Hispana, Hialeah (Miami)
Westside, Boynton Beach (Palm Lake)
Worship Center, Plantation (Gulf Stream)

Moderate Damage:

Barefoot Bay, First (Brevard)
Bible Baptist (Miami)
Biblica, Lake Worth (Palm Lake)
Buenas Neuvas (Miami)
Church in the Farms, Jupiter (Treasure Coast)
Clewiston, First (Big Lake)
Delray First, Delray Beach (Palm Lake)
El Buen, Hialeah (Miami)
First Haitian, Rivera Beach (Palm Lake)
Fifth Street, Key West (Florida Keys)
Florida Gardens, Lake Worth (Palm Lake)
Fort Myers, First (Royal Palm)
Glendale Baptist (Miami)
Glendale of Brownsville (Miami)
Jesucristo el Camino, Jensen Beach (Treasure Coast)
La Hermosa, Homestead (Miami)
La Hermosa (Miami)
Manantial de Vida (Miami)
McCall Hispanic (Miami)
Mt. Hope Fellowship, Opa Locka (Miami)
Naples, First (Royal Palm)
Naranja Park, Naranja (Miami)
New Hope Worship Center (Miami)
New Life, Carol Center (Miami)
North Hialeah Baptist (Miami)
Okeechobee, First (Big Lake)
Parkway, Opa Locka (Miami)
Pembroke Road Baptist, Miramar (Gulf Stream)
Pembroke Pines Baptist (Gulf Stream)
Pleasant Grove Baptist, Lake Worth (Palm Lake)
Restoring Grace, Ft. Lauderdale (Gulf Stream)
Sheridan Hills Baptist, Hollywood (Gulf Stream)
Sierra Norwood, Calvary (Miami)
Sinai Hispanic, Hialeah (Miami)
Truth Missionary (Miami)
Westside Baptist, Hollywood (Gulf Stream)
United Haitian, West Palm Beach (Palm Lake)