

2023 Annual Report Disaster, Relief, Recovery, and Preparation Commission

The Disaster, Relief, Recovery, and Preparation Commission (DRRPC) of the Episcopal Diocese of East Carolina presents its Annual Report for the year 2023.

Overview:

The commission was established in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew in 2017 with the mission to coordinate the Diocese's compassionate response to natural disasters, alleviate human suffering, and provide advice on disaster relief, recovery, and preparation. Collaborating with Episcopal Relief and Development (ERD), the commission administers funds through a grant process, helps parishes develop preparedness plans, and forms partnerships with relief agencies at the state and local levels.

Severe Weather Impact in Eastern North Carolina:

The year saw multiple severe weather events in Eastern North Carolina. On April 22, multiple rounds of thunderstorms moved across the eastern Carolinas. On May 19, persistent showers and thunderstorms developed across the Cape Fear region. Reports of 6 – 10 inches of rain fell in the Belville/Leland area closing over 20 roads due to high water. A high-pressure system in mid-August brought very high humidity and daytime temperatures in the upper 90s and extremely warm nights in the 80s. August 13 – 15 was the second longest period of such oppressive heat on record. On August 30, Category 3 Hurricane Idalia struck the Florida Gulf coast but weakened to a tropical storm as it moved northeastward over coastal Carolina. It brought heavy rainfall with totals of 5 – 10 inches, resulting in flash flooding in multiple areas and triggering tornadoes south of Wilmington. In September, Tropical Storm Ophelia brought widespread heavy rainfall, gusty winds, and significant river and storm surge flooding to portions of eastern North Carolina. A long period of unusually dry weather began in early October and persisted into December. Accumulated rainfall deficits exceeded 6.8 inches in Wilmington. Finally on December 17, a strong storm moved along coastal Carolina bringing heavy rainfall and flash flooding to the diocesan region.

While 2023 saw numerous severe weather events, by the grace of God there was no severe damage to diocesan properties reported. Ironically, therefore, the DRRPC's administrative work was rather quiet.

Commission Activities:

The commission organized two workshops in May and July on disaster preparedness planning for parish and deanery personnel. Unfortunately, there was insufficient interest on both occasions. So, classes were cancelled.

The commission is exploring alternative approaches such as virtual classes, online videos, or presenting information during trips to deaneries. Efforts were also dedicated to planning for the diocesan revival at Newton Grove. Sadly, the event was canceled. However, the commission's planning proved valuable in preparing for the 2024 Diocesan Convention.

Alignment with Diocesan Mission Priorities:

The commission assessed the alignment of its mission and goals with the diocesan mission priorities and concluded that it supported each priority as follows:

- LEAD: Coordinates compassionate responses to natural disasters and in engaging clergy and lay leadership in addressing the impact of disasters on their church communities.
- LEARN: Manages and presents disaster preparedness training and information to foster collaborative opportunities for ongoing education.
- SERVE: Coordinates assistance and grants for disaster relief and forms partnerships with relief agencies to serve the needs of the most vulnerable.
- HEAL: Coordinates financial aid, shelter, and assistance to alleviate human suffering in the aftermath of natural disasters.

Summary:

The year 2023 saw the commission actively engaged in disaster preparedness. Despite a rather active storms during the year, there was no immediate concerns within the diocese. Challenges in workshop participation led to investigating innovative approaches for better information dissemination. The commission's alignment with Diocesan Mission Priorities demonstrates its commitment to leadership, learning, service, and healing. Looking forward, the commission remains dedicated to its mission, preparedness efforts, and serving the diocese in times of need.

Respectfully Submitted: James Hayes, Director, Disaster Relief, Recovery, and Preparation Commission