

COAD (Community Organizations Active in Disasters)

Background: Floyd and Clark Counties experienced severe flooding on August 4th and September 20th. There was very significant damage to homes and many families unable to recover without outside assistance. A disaster response was organized rather late in the process with some very key players (Salvation Army, United Way, the Baptists, and the Methodists). Some financial grants were received and enabled work teams to gut out houses, remove mold, and replace furnaces and water heaters. (Phase One). Because both local and state governments were slow on getting information to FEMA we did not get a disaster declaration, and therefore did not get the funding that accompanies such a declaration. There is still work to be done, but given the lack of funds a Phase Two may not happen. The group is exploring what might be done to clean out clogged drainage areas that are contributing to flooding. This must be coordinated with the county environmental folks, but may represent an opportunity for youth and adult work teams.

Formation of the COAD

Given the amount of damage and difficulty of this disaster the decision was taken to form a COAD that will cover Clark, Floyd, and Harrison Counties. Eventually we hope to include Washington and Scott Counties. A COAD is a way for communities to organize Before a disaster – to identify resources, call up plans, and to develop good working relationships with municipal emergency departments to facilitate the FEMA process. It provides a way to coordinate case management and avoid duplication of services. Plans are to meet in early February to write By-Laws and begin to formalize the work.

I am pleased to continue to attend the meetings and represent the cluster as the COAD gets organized. Ideally it would be wonderful to develop a call up disaster response team among our churches for local responses. There is an ecumenical group (Hands of Hope) organized out of Graceland Baptist Church in New Albany. They have a trailer with muck out equipment (power washer, etc) to respond to disasters. I will get more information on that group.

The Future

As this develops it will be good to know what Presbyterians feel they can bring to the table. The more organized and engaged we are, the more opportunity to take advantage of PDA funds and support when large disasters hit. We should also look at getting training for folks interested in disaster response. Hopefully, we can draw from participants in the Katrina Mission Trip.