

- [Learn About Us](#)
- [Explore Our Work](#)
- [Get Involved](#)
- [Find Resources](#)
- [Give to Mission](#)
- [Connect with Us](#)

The Church Responds to Its Neighbors After South Georgia Tornadoes

Joy K. Kitanga*

It was bright and sunny on Holly Road, which leads into Paradise Village, a trailer park in Albany, Georgia. But the damage caused by recent tornadoes has left the trailer park dark and filled with grief. Families and friends come to search through the debris, hoping to find those who are missing or their personal belongings. The community was once full of life, but today people are displaced throughout South Georgia.



Photos by Joy Kitanga

The night of January 22, when the most recent tornado struck, some residents of Paradise Village found temporary refuge at El Faro United Methodist Church in Albany. However, the next morning, El Faro lost its power, and Pastor Haroldo Vicente, lay leader pastoring El Faro, sought assistance from the Rev. Thad Haygood of Albany First United Methodist Church. Albany First UMC became a temporary shelter during the power outage. Once a generator was found and connected, the families were able to shelter back at El Faro UMC more comfortably.



Photo by Joy Kitanga

January 25, Cathy Earl, director of disaster response and U.S. partner relations of the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR); Bishop R. Lawson Bryan of South Georgia Conference; Luis Morales, South Georgia disaster response coordinator; Allison Lindsey, disaster relief representative from the South Georgia Conference; Dr. Nita Crump, district superintendent of the Southwest District, and superintendents of nearby districts gathered to assess the disaster and plan for response.

The challenge and hope of South Georgia

South and Central Georgia have been affected by three storms in four months: Hurricane Matthew in October and the January 2 and 22 tornados.

"This community has been affected twice in less than a month," Morales said. "They have not had a chance to finish cleaning up and recovering from the first tornado. And this one [January 22 tornado] was three times worse."

Noting this is her first experience dealing with a large-scale disaster, Lindsey sees the strength in the church's community outreach. "The strength is in the local church," she said. "It is in the United Methodist members, the laity and the clergy in our local churches, who come together to be the hands and the feet of Christ."



Photos by Joy Kitanga

There are groups of churches coming together in neighboring Georgia districts and from other conferences, reaching out in different ways, she added.

"The South Georgia Conference has invited UMCOR to partner with it in disaster response and recovery ministries... and the local churches and communities have already begun to help many take their next steps toward recovery," Earl said.

Bishop Bryan is grateful for the help UMCOR provides in assessing the disaster in Albany and sees hope in the human resources – "getting people together" – responding in this time of need.

*Joy K. Kitanga Program Area Liaison-Communication