

SACRED PLACES

THE MAGAZINE OF PARTNERS FOR SACRED PLACES • FALL 2011

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Creating a Friends Group— What Are the Options?

Church Restoration Group

Over the course of one year, St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Fort Pierce, FL, was hit by two hurricanes and a tropical storm. The church and its related school, St. Andrew's Episcopal Academy, experienced serious issues with multiple buildings. To help manage and mitigate damage, St. Andrew's brought in Church Restoration Group (CRG), a firm whose work focuses on disaster response and preparedness for historic religious structures. At St. Andrew's, the severely damaged roof was quickly stabilized, but CRG's most immediate priority was the school building. Matt Beahm, Facilities Consultant for the firm, explains, "It was essential to get kids back into their classes as quickly as possible. We were striving to return a sense of normalcy to the lives of the children in the community." Thanks to CRG's help, St. Andrew's was the first private school in Fort Pierce to reopen after the storm. CRG was then able to turn its attention to finishing repairs to the stabilized roof.

Church Restoration Group has more than 25 years of experience working with historic sacred places, and has restored approximately 500 National Register properties. Beahm, who has a background in disaster planning and architecture and has worked for the firm for over ten years, explains that what makes CRG unique is the company's ability to "understand the unique nature of historic buildings and how to conduct historically sensitive work while also fixing the problems brought on by natural disasters." Beahm's skills, and those of the mitigation managers and crews that work with CRG, are complemented by the talents of the conservator and preservationist on staff. Together they have the knowledge and experience necessary to take action immediately after a disaster strikes a historic religious structure.

One of Beahm's talents, clearly evidenced at St. Andrew's, is the ability to prioritize projects after a storm. He bases his decisions on both the level of damage and the repair costs for each project. After Hurricane Ike hit Galveston, TX, Partners for Sacred Places brought in CRG to help assess twelve places of worship that were affected by the storm. Beahm's on-



Workers at St. Andrew's Episcopal Academy clean computers that were damaged by natural disasters. Photo courtesy of Church Restoration Group.

the-ground assessments allowed congregations to rebuild based on a list of ranked priorities, ensuring that the most essential projects were taken care of first. Due to the nature of hurricanes, CRG is able to estimate where they will most likely make landfall and mobilize in advance of the storm. In any project, they begin their mitigation work quickly in order to save as much of the fabric of the historic building and its contents as possible. In the case of Galveston, CRG was able to be in place at the earliest possible moment, making a real difference for the historic structures there.

Though CRG can help once disaster has struck, Beahm noted how important it is for a congregation to prepare before an emergency situation. CRG can walk congregations through the process of risk identification and response through one-on-one meetings or company-sponsored training workshops and seminars. CRG also recommends an online disaster preparedness program called Riskkeeper, which guides congregations through a risk management and disaster preparation process. The program enables a congregation to store vital documents and photographs online in case of an emergency, and also guides the creation of an emergency response team, a list of key service vendors, and a fire detection checklist, among many other things. All of the information a congregation will need if disaster strikes is stored in one safe, easily accessible place. Church Restoration Group is there to help every step of the way.

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