

Methodists channel sizable donations: Foreign and domestic funds for counseling and storm relief

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United Methodist relief officials, chosen late last year by the U.S. to oversee a program to counsel hurricane victims that uses \$66 million donated by foreign nations, recently announced that the denomination received more than \$62 million from churchgoers during 2005 for storm relief and rehabilitation.

The \$66 million grant by the Federal Emergency Management Agency did not raise church-state issues, said Elliott Wright, a Methodist spokesman, because the FEMA funds were not from U.S. tax revenue but from foreign contributions.

About 90 percent of the \$66 million is being channeled in a two-year program through nine organizations, including the Salvation Army and Catholic Charities, that advise families and individuals about problems they face to recover from their losses.

The more traditional source of relief funds—church members—surprised UMC leaders. Year-end receipts from United Methodists themselves “pushed the figure far, far beyond what we anticipated in the late fall,” said treasurer Roland Fernandes of the General Board of Global Ministries, the agency that includes the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR).

All of the \$62 million has gone or will go to regional U.S. conferences from Florida to Texas and to Methodist church bodies in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua, Wright said.