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\$100 million contract aids Catholic Charities' work

by Dennis Sadowski by Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON

The expertise honed by years of resolute follow-up work with natural disaster victims has landed Catholic Charities USA a five-year federal contract potentially worth more than \$100 million.

The contract with the Department of Health and Human Services is the first the Alexandria, Va.-based agency has received from the federal government.

Father Larry Snyder, president of Catholic Charities USA, said the contract will allow the agency to step in immediately in the days after a natural disaster strikes anywhere across the U.S. or its territories to ensure that victims' basic needs are met and to follow up on individual cases for up to 18 months.

"When you look at case management, that's where Catholic Charities excels," Father Snyder told Catholic News Service July 31.

The contract governs disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, floods and earthquakes provided a federal disaster declaration is issued. It calls for the agency to organize national, regional and local teams to respond quickly and to work with disaster victims to meet their immediate needs as well as long-term needs in putting their lives back together.

The contract's total value will depend on the number of disaster declarations. Under the contract's terms Catholic Charities could receive up to \$103 million for its services by 2014. As a prime contractor, Catholic Charities will be able to subcontract with local agencies for the services disaster victims need and all necessary follow-up.

The plan calls for deploying teams of responders who can oversee individual cases within 72 hours of a disaster declaration.

"This is the first time we have that missing piece that complements the federal (initial emergency response) effort," Father Snyder said. "It's a recognition that Catholic Charities has a real expertise of helping people get back on their feet."

Catholic Charities' work in securing long-term shelter and meeting other needs of victims in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005 and Gustav and Ike in 2008 helped land the contract, Father Snyder said.

In particular, he explained, it was the agency's work with victims of Gustav in Louisiana and Ike in Texas under a federally funded pilot program that demonstrated the value of case-management services.

Under the pilot program Catholic Charities and its subcontractors continue to assist storm victims in both states, he said.

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The unmet needs of Hurricane Katrina storm victims led Catholic Charities to reconsider how it responds with disaster aid. Father Snyder said the agency began talking with victims and emergency responders to determine how its effort worked and where it fell short. Now, he explained, the agency offers disaster preparedness training and guidelines on how to maintain contact with people who are receiving assistance.

What Catholic Charities learned after Katrina led to the success it had in the aftermath of Gustav and Ike, Father Snyder said.

"The message we got was that the faithful expect the church to be engaged and visible. That is exactly what we've tried to do here, develop a network to respond to disasters.

"It's a model that's dependent on local agencies being involved as well," he added. "While we have the contract, it means we'll be partnering with our own Catholic agencies across the country and also with other community organizations to provide this case management."

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