

# connections

Working Together to Grow the Kingdom

LEADERSHIP NETWORK®

www.leadnet.org

2626 Cole Avenue, Suite 900 | Dallas, TX 75204 | 800.765.5323 | 214.969.5950 | 214.969.9392 Fax | client.care@leadnet.org

## A Shelter from the Storm

### OPENING ITS DOORS IN TIMES OF CRISIS

#### FEATURED CHURCH:

Gulf Breeze United  
Methodist Church

#### LOCATION:

Main  
Campus and Community Life

Center in Gulf Breeze, Florida; Worship at the Water  
in Pensacola Beach, Florida

**ESTABLISHED:** 1955 Main Campus; 1999

Community Life Center; 2002 Worship at the Water

**SERVICES:** 7 weekly services in 3 venues

**AVERAGE ATTENDANCE:** 1,400 at Main

Campus; 1,000 at Community Life Center; 100 at

Worship at the Water

**M**ulti-site churches face many challenges. How to keep the membership connected. How to manage several facilities in different locations. How to keep growth strong.

But these challenges pale in comparison to the recent hardships overcome by Gulf Breeze United Methodist Church in Gulf Breeze, Florida. When Hurricane Ivan struck in September 2004, the typical trials of running a multi-site church suddenly took a backseat to much more pressing challenges.

#### COMING TOGETHER

Hurricane Ivan decimated the region Gulf Breeze UMC serves. Pensacola Beach, home to its Worship at the Water, was especially hard hit. In the aftermath of the storm, 170 of the church's families were left

homeless. Pastor Mac Fulcher reports that today, many months later, a significant number of roads haven't yet been rebuilt. Numerous families still live in campers in their former homes' driveways. People continue to face emotional and financial strains.



When Hurricane Ivan struck Florida, many of Gulf Breeze's families were left homeless.

But back on September 16, 2004, no one was thinking of the future. Finding safety and shelter were the main concerns. Gulf Breeze immediately became both a spiritual and physical sanctuary from the storm.

Mac says the church simply opened its doors and asked "What can we do to help?" The members came together as never before. The first Sunday following the hurricane, in fact, Gulf Breeze UMC held a memorable worship service at the Main Campus. Even the lack of electricity couldn't keep the members from joining together to give thanks and consider how best to help those hardest hit by the storm.

"We went door to door to see what our neighbors needed," Mac says. "Church members whose own

homes were torn apart were out there helping others in the community.”

At one point, 150 families were living at Gulf Breeze’s Community Life Center. Many work teams helping in the rescue, recovery and clean-up efforts also used the church as an overnight shelter. And the church worked with the American Red Cross and Federal Emergency Management Agency to feed 2,000 workers each day—free of charge.

## CHURCH MEMBERS WHOSE OWN HOMES WERE TORN APART BY THE HURRICANE WERE OUT HELPING OTHERS.

### LONG-TERM CHALLENGES

Although the community’s physical wounds began to heal, Gulf Breeze UMC’s leadership feared the hurricane could have devastating long-term effects on the church and its members.

Gulf Breeze UMC didn’t even collect an offering at its first few worship services after the hurricane. They realized that many members were facing unprecedented financial strains. Mac says the leadership worried whether they would have to lay off staff members due to insufficient funds.

But that didn’t happen. Not by a long shot. Despite the very real adversity it faced, Gulf Breeze UMC

### WHAT LEADERSHIP NETWORK MEANS TO ME

Leadership Network helped shift our way of thinking so that our church can run more successfully. They helped us move from a centrally focused structure to having specific ministry people at each campus. Listening to what others have been through, learning how to best handle finances and getting together to talk about what works is so valuable. Hearing that we are doing the right thing, even though it isn’t the easiest path, encourages us all to keep going.



—Mac Fulcher, Pastor, Gulf Breeze UMC

## WORSHIPPING ‘OUTSIDE THE BOX’

*Gulf Breeze’s three locations offer something for everyone. The Main Campus is known for its traditional offerings. The Community Life Center attracts people with its “rock and roll” contemporary services. And*



*Worship at the Water (right) draws folks looking for a less formal type of worship. That’s*

*a good thing since Worship at the Water meets at a local bar. Actually, it’s a restaurant and a bar. Mac likes to joke that they share God’s word under the “Cold Beer” sign. So how did this unlikely worship site come about?*

*The church wanted to hold an outdoor service on Pensacola Beach but the town board objected. After learning of this road block, the owner of Flounder’s Restaurant and Bar offered his location for free. Worship on the Water was born.*

*This unique location has helped the church minister to some special people. One young man, a runaway, stumbled upon the church one Sunday morning. Church members convinced him to stay for breakfast and invited him to attend the service.*

*God personally touched the life of the young man that day. Moved to tears by the Father’s Day service, the runaway returned home to his father that very day.*

*“That’s what makes it all worth it,” Mac says.*

finished 2004 in the black—without making any personnel cuts. In fact, on the church’s 50th anniversary, just seven months after the storm, Gulf Breeze UMC exceeded its goals for a new capital campaign.

### GIVING THANKS

Mac attributes this success, in part, to the way the church opened itself to the community.

“Before the hurricane, Gulf Breeze had a good reputation,” Mac says. “After the storm, it went to great. We just reached out to anybody who had needs.”

The church’s central philosophy to ministering and sharing God’s word has also helped get it through tough times.

“We go to where the people are, rather than getting them to come to where we are,” Mac says. **LN**