

# Faith-based disaster management expert named to federal post

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—An expert in public-private collaborations and disaster management has been named the new director of the Department of Homeland Security’s Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

Marcus T. Coleman, 35, held the role as an interim from 2017 to 2018 and was a special assistant for it from 2013 to 2016. He was appointed by the Biden-Harris administration and began as director on Aug. 2.

The DHS Partnership Center works with the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, reestablished by President Biden, to foster relationships between faith-based organizations and the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. It focuses particularly on “all-hazards preparedness, emergency and disaster response and recovery, safety, security, and human trafficking,” according to a statement from Jaclyn Rothenberg, a FEMA spokesperson.

Coleman, who recently has co-led a practice focused on behavioral science and communications, co-developed guides and courses for emergency managers to engage with faith-based groups and build their religious and cultural literacy. He has also been an adviser to the Diversity in National Security Network.

Coleman’s predecessor in the office, David L. Myers, welcomed the appointment.

“President Biden could not have appointed a better prepared and more capable leader than Marcus Coleman to direct the DHS Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships,” said Myers, director of the office from 2009-2017, in a statement.

“The country and the president will be well served by Marcus’ years of experience at the Center, his expertise in emergency preparedness, and his robust network of trusted relationships with faith-based, civic, and government partners.”

## **Faith leaders voice support**

Other leaders from a range of faiths, including Dallas megachurch pastor Bishop T.D. Jakes, said Coleman’s past work prepares him for his new responsibilities.

“We at The Potter’s House look forward to continuing our longstanding relationship with Marcus as he embarks on this new role that is critical to the safety and security of houses of worship as well as to our work in aiding and building communities,” Jakes said.

Debra Boudreaux, executive vice president of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, noted Coleman’s support of interfaith climate emergency initiatives. Gabriel and Jeanette Salguero, co-founders of the National Latino Evangelical Coalition, recalled his work with their organization in natural disasters such as hurricanes in Florida and Puerto Rico and Superstorm Sandy in the Northeast.

Coleman, a member of a Baptist church in Washington, D.C., was a featured speaker at the COVID-19 Church Online Summit presented early in the pandemic in March 2020 and hosted by the National Association of Evangelicals and Wheaton College’s Humanitarian Disaster Institute.

“I think the best resource that’s available that churches should be seeking is accurate and validated information, at this point,” Coleman said at the time, referring participants to elected officials and local and state governments. “They are providing some of the immediate sources of information on different relief packages, not just for people within your congregation but for the communities that you serve.”