

ELCA Southeastern Synod Disaster Preparedness and Response Plan



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ELCA Southeastern Synod Disaster Preparedness and Response Plan

Introduction

Our Synod knows what it means to be hit by disaster. Whether it is hurricanes on our coastlines, floods along our rivers, or tornados that randomly strike areas throughout our four states, we know that when disaster strikes, lives are changed. Disasters vary in size and magnitude in the loss of life and destruction of property. Long after the disaster has occurred and faded from the public awareness, the disaster continues to impact those affected in real and challenging ways. The church is called to respond in these difficult and confusing times. Our faith tells us that we are called to be good neighbors to those in need as in the parable of the Good Samaritan [Luke10:30-37]. In Matthew [25:40] we hear our Lord tell us that “Whatever you do to the least of these you do unto me.” Disasters leave many homeless. Jesus was often homeless. The church is called to respond and to respond well and effectively means we need to prepare.

This plan is the result of a collaborative effort of disaster response professionals within our Synod. It is our hope that through a collaborative effort within the Synod, its congregations and Social Ministry Organizations [SMOs] and our ecumenical and interfaith partners, we will be prepared to respond when disaster strikes within our synod bringing the hands and heart of Christ to a hurting community.

What is a disaster?

A disaster is a tragic event either natural or man-made that disrupts the normal routines of life causing human suffering, injury and sometimes death, loss or damage to property, businesses, civic structures, interrupting normal community function in which survivors cannot manage without spiritual and emotional assistance as well as monetary and physical help. Natural disasters most often experienced in the Southeast region are tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, and fires. There is also the potential for other disasters related to biological, chemical, or human acts of violence affecting large numbers of people. Pandemics also threaten to impact large communities rendering them in need of assistance.

Disasters place those who are most vulnerable at greatest risk. Priority is given to the needs of the elderly, the poor and children. Communities with limited resources require greater support in recovering from a disaster event.

There are three primary phases of disaster response. They are: rescue, relief and recovery. Progress through these phases within a disaster response varies in length depending on the scope of the disaster and the resources at hand. ⁱ

- Rescue phase – this phase is dedicated to saving lives and property. Emergency personnel, firefighters, law enforcement, first responders, emergency management technicians [EMTs], coordinate and respond in this phase.
- Relief phase – this phase focuses on creating safe and sanitary conditions for survivors and responders. In addition to those responders listed above, other organizations such as the health care system, relief agencies and faith based organizations including congregations may provide shelter, food, clothing, and health care for the survivors.
- Recovery phase –short term efforts are made to stabilize the community including the restoration of utilities and services, communication systems, and an assessment of damages. This is also a time where support services such as feeding programs and temporary repairs are done. Long term recovery includes the process of rebuilding as well as emotional / spiritual support and counseling. Long Term Recovery Committees [LTRC] are formed and work to meet the unmet needs of the community by weaving the resources of disaster response agencies, faith communities and governmental programs. Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster [VOAD] organizes or reactivates to implement plans to bring resources to bear.

The Church Responds – A Shared Ministry

The Southeastern Synod and its host of ELCA congregations in MS, AL, GA and in TN partner with Lutheran Disaster Response [LDR] and its affiliate social ministry organizations [affiliate SMOs] as well as other interfaith and ecumenical disaster response partners and agencies in responding to disasters within our synod.

The degree of involvement of the various partners and structures within the synod depend largely on the size and scope of the disaster and needs and resources of the affected congregations and community.

The Synod, along with its congregations, works together with its partners to be ready to respond in the event of a disaster.

Synod-

- The synod staff, in collaboration with LDR and affiliated SMO, works to provide communication, coordination and support in the immediate aftermath of a disaster.

- The Synod Response Team consisting of the Bishop, the Assistant of the Bishop and Dean for the affected area, the affiliate SMO Disaster Response Director and the Synodical Volunteer Disaster Response Coordinator respond to assess the impact of disaster and in collaboration with local congregation pastor and leadership establish an initial plan of response.
- Synodical Volunteer Disaster Response Coordinators will be recruited and trained to serve smaller geographic areas within the synod for assisting congregations with disaster preparedness and support disaster response. These coordinators serve the Synod and work collaboratively with the SMO disaster staff where available to facilitate disaster response.
- The synod staff maintains a continued presence throughout the response to provide for support, coordination of synod resources, including assignment of volunteer respite clergy for affected congregations.
- Deans provide for pastoral care to rostered leaders and maintain flow of communication to the synod.
- The synod maintains a committee for Disaster Preparedness and Response for evaluation of the disaster plan, preparation of after action reports evaluating disaster response efforts, development of resources, as well as training and recruitment of volunteer coordinators.
- The Synod raises awareness of the disaster response effort and encourages donations to support its funding.

Congregations-

- Congregations prepare for the impact of a disaster on the congregation as well as help families and individuals plan for the event of a disaster. All congregations are encouraged to have a disaster preparedness plan with a disaster preparedness and response team.
- Congregations are encouraged to develop disaster response teams within their congregation focused on meeting the physical, emotional, spiritual needs of their congregation and community. A copy of the plan is to be sent to the Synod office for communication and planning purposes in event of a disaster.
- Congregations are encouraged to participate with local ecumenical, interfaith and community groups organizing for disaster preparedness and response.
- Congregations may participate in disaster response in many ways. Assisting with relief and recovery measures such as feeding, housing volunteers, offering use of building for disaster services, providing space for a shelter, providing emotional spiritual care camps for youth and children or disaster recovery support groups for adults are just some of the ways congregations may respond.

Synod Disaster Ministry Committee

The synod established a Task Force for Disaster Preparedness and Response to support the implementation of- a synod disaster plan as well as for ongoing evaluation of the disaster plan. Other responsibilities included

preparation of after action reports post a disaster event, the development of resources, as well as the training and recruitment of Synodical Volunteer Disaster Response Coordinators beginning in 2006. The Task Force included the SMO directors of Disaster Response and Preparedness, Synodical Volunteer Disaster Response Coordinators, Synod staff and others identified within the synod with disaster expertise. In 2015, the Task Force became a committee within the Synod structure with the following charge:

This committee prepares for and responds to disasters within the synod. It reviews and makes recommendation for changes to the Synod Disaster Plan. It educates and maintains a roster of volunteer disaster coordinators to assist in congregational preparedness and response. It also shall educate synod members about disaster preparation and encourage such preparation in congregations. As appropriate, it shall work with other agencies and institutions. The committee is comprised of eight members; two from each state and is accountable to the synod council. Representatives from agencies and SMOs also participate in an advisory capacity.

The Synod Disaster Committee meets regularly at least quarterly to attend to this work. The Synod Disaster Committee may employ staff support to assist in carrying out its duties.

Celebrating the partners in this ministry

- **Lutheran Disaster Response [LDR]**

Lutheran Disaster Response collaborates with other disaster response organizations and religious entities in the United States and around the world. This enables the greatest stewardship of resources and maximum impact of response. We are a welcome partner because we respect the perspectives and strengths of others.

We recognize that every disaster is local. Because of this, we believe every response needs to be rooted in the community; we work to accompany that community from immediate relief through long-term recovery. In our international work we partner closely with companion churches and other Lutheran and ecumenical relief agencies to make sure local needs are being addressed and met. In the United States, we work through our extensive affiliate network and other partners to address these same concerns.

Lutheran Disaster Response strives to help the church continue to be church in the midst of disaster — following Christ's call to bring hope and healing to our neighbor in need. Some key areas of work include:

- *Providing emotional and spiritual care for people who have been affected by a disaster and for leaders who respond to a disaster*
- *Coordinating volunteers through our local affiliates*
- *Assisting refugees in a holistic way by meeting the varied needs of the community*

- *Promoting disaster risk-reduction by helping communities build their assets thereby reducing the effects of likely disasters*
- *Providing long-term recovery efforts by addressing the unmet needs months or even years after a disaster strikes*

Excerpt above taken from www.elca.org

LDR is a member of the executive committee of for Church World Service’s Emergency Response Program, the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster [NVOAD], and holds a statement of understanding with the American Red Cross.

LDR is housed at the ELCA Churchwide office in Chicago, IL. The mission of LDR is to seek to demonstrate Christ's compassion for people by promoting hope, healing, and wholeness for disaster survivors.

LDR responds to disasters through a national network of affiliated Social Ministry Organizations and Institutions. The Southeastern Synod and Lutheran Services in GA [LSG] are affiliates of Lutheran Disaster Response. Through these organizations LDR carries out its mission and objectives.

- **Synod based LDR Affiliate Social Ministry Organizations –LSG and the ELCA Southeastern Synod**

LDR accomplishes its objectives primarily through its affiliate social ministry organizations and institutions which includes ELCA Southeastern Synod and LSG. All LDR funding for disaster response programming flows through these affiliate organizations. For example, some of the services rendered by these entities include disaster assessment and the development of a recovery plan, rebuilding homes, support of interfaith recovery committee organization, case management, sponsoring emotional spiritual care recovery programs such as Camp Noah, God’s Can Do Kids, and other emotional- spiritual programs for children and adults affected by disaster. These organizations partner with other ecumenical and interfaith disaster organizations to achieve these goals and objectives.

Social Ministry Organizations are encouraged to be active participants in county, area, state or national VOADs as well as state and governmental sponsored disaster response planning organization activities such as Governor’s office for Faith based and Community Initiatives and Emergency Management Services for ongoing disaster response coordination and planning. At these meetings, coordination of disaster response programs of various faith traditions and the sharing of knowledge and resources to address disasters occurs. This is a critical place for building relationships for successful implementation of a response in the event of a disaster.

The SMOs work is supported by the Synod's Volunteer Disaster Response Coordinators who work on behalf of the synod and collaboratively with the social ministry organization to stretch their disaster response capacity.

The Synod works with other ecumenical and interfaith disaster response partners and wherever available, affiliate SMOs, to collaborate, plan, coordinate and implement an effective response using available resources at hand.

The Response Process

Preparedness

The strength of response is girded by the strength of preparedness. All congregations, organizations *and* agencies within the synod are encouraged to gear up for the event of a disaster in their vicinity and *within* the synod. Some specific tasks to be accomplished to be prepared include:

- Disaster Preparedness training conducted for congregations throughout synod; congregations prepare a disaster response plan and appoint a congregational disaster team to prepare for the event of a disaster. Each congregation is encouraged to provide a copy of the disaster preparedness and response plan as well as the disaster team leadership contact information to the Synod Disaster Committee. This information is shared with the Synodical Volunteer Disaster Response Coordinator and the SMO DR Director for that area.
- Increase congregational participation in community planning for disasters and local VOADS
- SMO, Synod staff, deaneries and deans review disaster preparedness plan and prepare for the event of a disaster
- Synod office staff *are* trained on startup procedures needed in the event of a disaster response, the establishment of processes for receipt and disbursement of funds to site, procedures for communication and web support of response, establishing *a* mechanism for receiving and *processing* volunteer calls.
- In collaboration with affiliate SMOs, develop protocols and process rapid startup of temporary initial Disaster Response base office
- Develop roster of synodical volunteer disaster coordinators throughout synod
- Develop and implement plan for partnering of congregations for hosting evacuees
- Complete asset mapping assessment of congregations and organizations within the synod for disaster response

At the time of the disaster and immediate aftermath

This phase is the rescue stage following a disaster 'first response'. At the disaster site this stage is primarily for "first responders" who are seeking to meet the immediate safety and security needs of survivors. While organizing efforts are being planned and information being gathered, no direct involvement occurs. Police, fire,

emergency medical teams and FEMA are the first responders. The American Red Cross is also mobilized here. During this phase the following tasks are undertaken:

- Pending size and scope of the disaster, the Bishop or his/her designee, is in communication with the LDR, the affiliate SMO Director of Disaster Response, where available, as well as the Synodical Volunteer Disaster Response Coordinator regarding plans for assessment and follow up. Synod office initiates conference call for day after assessment with these individuals as well as the involved pastors of impacted congregations and their respective dean and assistant to the bishop.
- Synod office becomes temporary communications center
- Procedures for receiving financial and material donations are activated by Synod office.
- Procedures for volunteer referrals implemented once volunteer reception centers are made available at disaster site.
- SMO directors of Disaster Response and Preparedness or the Synodical Volunteer Disaster Response Coordinator obtains procedures for referral, disposition of volunteers [including housing] and directions to the volunteer centers established by state and local EMS and/or VOADs near site and communicates this information to the Synod office and the affiliate SMO.
- The SMO Director of Disaster Response or the Synodical Volunteer Disaster Response Coordinator will notify the Synod Office of procedures in place at the disaster site for donations and specific needs.

Initial 'Early' Response

The Synod Response Team is activated. The Synod Response Team consists of the Bishop, the Assistant of the Bishop and Dean for the affected area, the affiliate SMO Disaster Response Director and the Synodical Volunteer Disaster Response Coordinator and the local congregation pastor and leadership. The tasks associated with this phase include:

- Onsite visit by full or partial Synod Response Team which may include the following [Bishop, SMO-DR Director, Assistant to the Bishop, Conference chair & Synodical Volunteer Disaster Response Coordinator]
- Assessment of disaster, needs and resources
- Develop a plan for disaster response
- Provide emotional, spiritual support - request to LDR for placement of disaster chaplains for emotional spiritual care and coordination depending on scope of disaster
- Initiate preparation for the placement of volunteer chaplains / pastors to affected congregations if indicated
- For large scale disasters, establish onsite office base and activate procedures for funding and communications such as cell phone and computer support and implement protocols for disaster response operations
- Housing sites for volunteers prepare to be activated
- In large scale disasters, staging areas for receipt of supplies and distribution sites prepare to be activated
- Donation needs are communicated to Synod by SMO-Director for Disaster Response or the Synodical Volunteer Disaster Response Coordinator to the Synod office for placement on web site and

communication via e-news.

- Pending size and scope of disaster: Request to LDR churchwide to provide funding for a LDR Coordinator to staff the site for the initial *three* month of response. This assigned LDR Coordinator would work with local disaster response leadership of Volunteer Centers to facilitate flow, work, and housing of volunteers and provide onsite guidance and direction to the response.

Relief

This is also known as the “short term recovery phase”. Assessment continues along with distribution of materials needed. Case management, training becomes a priority. Funding of food, healthcare, housing, emergency short term needs may be needed here. Volunteer coordination begins to take shape as well as the program of response. Some of the activities in this phase include:

- Volunteer housing in congregations and established camps as available and needed
- Volunteer Coordination: The Site DR Coordinator works as liaison to the Volunteer Center for volunteer placement and housing
- Emotional/Spiritual Support: Depending on size and scope of disaster- a pastor for Emotional Spiritual Care and Coordination may be requested to be assigned to site. The Dean continues to provide close check on rostered leadership and provide conduit for communication to and from Synod office to rostered leaders; the Assistant to the Bishop for that area works with the dean and congregation’s rostered and lay leadership throughout this phase; In absence of an assigned pastor for emotional spiritual care and coordination , the Assistant to the Bishop, in consultation with congregation pastor and dean, determine where volunteer pastors are assigned to support congregational pastors and staff and volunteer chaplains at disaster sites. Where available, the affiliate SMO works with our ecumenical partners to bring additional resources to bear within the affected community.
- Synod office- Bishop’s designee screens volunteer rostered persons [clergy and lay] offering to provide pastoral care support prior to being assigned.
- Donation needs are communicated to Synod by SMO-Director for Disaster Response or the Synodical Volunteer Disaster Response Coordinator to the Synod office for placement on web site and communication via e-news.

Long Term

During this phase recovery operations are in full swing and resources have been developed locally to orchestrate the response. Congregations step back into a partnership or supporting role resuming congregational life as before. Some of the tasks in this phase include:

- Housing volunteers continues
- Volunteer management transitions from volunteer reception centers to the volunteer management provided through the LTRC. During this time, development of a process for coordination of volunteers and

housing may be needed. This may be done through staffing support to congregations providing housing or via the affiliate SMO that then interfaces with the construction coordination provided by the LTRC.

- Assist in the development and participate in LTRC and at unmet need tables
- Emotional / Spiritual care continues for congregational leadership and DR workers by Assistant to Bishop and Dean, volunteer respite clergy and chaplains during transition.
- Emotional - Spiritual care programming begins such as Camp Noah and God's Can Do Kids, Disaster Recovery Support Groups.
- Communication is essential throughout this phase as funding and supplies will be a continued need long after the spotlight has shifted away from the disaster. SVDRC continues to send information to the Synod office to report needs and recovery stories to be shared to the synod at large and LDR via e-news.

Funding the Response and Handling Monetary Donations and Gift Cards

The Synod funds disaster preparedness accomplished through volunteers and small grants and donations. Funding for the disaster response is a shared enterprise. After a disaster, donations of funds are received into the Synod office, into congregations in the affected areas, into the affiliated SMO for that area as well as directly to LDR. The Bishop may institute a special appeal to fund disaster response pending need. The affiliate SMO may do likewise. After the assessment of the disaster and needs are identified, grant applications are made to LDR for funding indicating partnership support for the overall response from congregations, synod, other faith partners as well as the affiliate SMO.

Any donations received by the Synod for disaster response are allocated as a designated fund for the purpose of disaster response. For funds designated for specific disaster locations, those funds will be allocated only to support that area's recovery. Funds given for the work of disaster ministry in the Synod may be allocated for disaster preparedness work within the synod as well as disaster response.

Donations received by congregations for the purpose of disaster response are to be handled as designated funds for disaster response and allocated accordingly. Recording of gifts and receipts to the donors are essential. Congregations are encouraged to follow ELCA Best Practice for handling funds. Gift cards are often received after a disaster. Each card and its amount is to be logged in as a donation and logged out when disbursed as done with regular designated monetary gifts.

Funding Unmet Needs in the Long Term Recovery Process

Funding for most "unmet needs" of disaster survivors begins with FEMA registration, followed by a case management assessment of an individual family's needs and resources. Funding for unmet needs occurs within the case management process whereby a family's case is presented for funding at a meeting to address unmet needs – these are usually unfunded needs that will require donations and / or volunteer labor and materials. This

meeting is often referred to as the Unmet Needs Table of the Long Term Recovery Committee [LTRC]. The Long Term Recovery Committee is responsible for the administration of long term recovery for a community that has been impacted by a disaster.

Congregations may send representatives to this unmet needs committee or table to provide funds for disaster recovery of families in their community from their designated disaster funds.

The Synod designates the Synod Disaster Committee to work with the various LTRC unmet needs tables to recommend allocation of synod disaster funds as they are available.

ⁱ *Disasters: Prepare and Respond*. Province IV of the Episcopal Church.