

Southeastern Synod Disaster Response Committee
September 11, 2020

Synod Council Action Requested:

1. Approve Chris Mallette (St. John's, Knoxville TN), Al Kates (All Saints, Lilburn, GA) and Pr. Morgan Gordy (Christ Lutheran, Nashville, TN) to serve as members of the committee.
2. Approve officers: Pr. Katie Pasch, chair; John Boettner, vice-chair; Pr. Tom Clark, recorder

Rationale: It has been the practice for the committee to recruit its own members (at least 2 people from each state) and to choose its own leaders. The Synod Council approves the choices made. This has worked well and ensures that strategic areas of the synod are covered.

Meeting Dates: From January 2020 – August 2020 we met for our regularly scheduled meetings on the 2nd Tuesday of each month (3 pm Eastern/2 pm Central) to share information about recovery and rebuilding across our four states. As Hurricanes Marco and Laura threatened to bring damaging winds and flooding to the Gulf Coast and farther inland to Mississippi and Tennessee, we met August 23, 24 and 27 with Pr. Jill Henning and Bishop Kevin Strickland to prepare our response. Representatives from Inspiritus and Lutheran Disaster Response met with us. Fortunately, we did not need to act, but we will be as vigilant for the next emergency. At our September meeting we will discuss using funds designated for these hurricanes to help congregations in Louisiana and Texas.

Activities: The Disaster Response Committee assists our 160 congregations and the communities they serve to prepare for and respond to disasters or emergencies. The committee coordinates the training and response for the Southeastern Synod. We partner with Inspiritus, Lutheran Disaster Response, VOADS (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster) and response agencies of our ecumenical partners to provide volunteer teams and monetary and spiritual resources to help a community recover and rebuild after a disaster. Conference deans, pastors of congregations and congregation coordinators serve as contacts to help us respond.

While the COVID pandemic presents us with many challenges, disaster response and recovery continue. Currently, we are responding to two disasters. On March 3, 2020, tornadoes swept through multiple counties over a more than 50-mile path that included Davidson and Wilson Counties in Tennessee. There were 5 deaths in Davidson and Wilson County and one death in Benton County. The damage is estimated at over 1.5 billion dollars. In Wilson County, 1307 residential and commercial structures were damaged, 170 destroyed and 201 sustained major damage. On April 12, 2020, tornadoes caused damage in the Bradley and Hamilton County areas of Tennessee. There were 17 injuries, damage to over 1500 structures and over 300 million dollars in losses.

Beth Smith (Disaster Response Volunteer Coordinator in Middle Tennessee and Chattanooga) participates with the Davidson County and Wilson County long-term recovery groups to determine unmet needs to individuals and families whose homes were damaged or destroyed in the March tornadoes. Construction managers are in place in both counties. She and Pr. Morgan Gordy are offering Emotional and Spiritual Support groups on Zoom and have written a grant for proposal for a two-year recovery, March 2020 -- March 2022. They estimate a total budget of \$87,175 and are requesting \$50,200 from Lutheran Disaster Response and \$8200 from the SES Disaster Response Committee for the recovery phase in addition to the \$12,775 already allocated and spent for the relief phase.

In Mississippi Pr. Stacey Parvin is working with the long-term recovery group in Jones County to respond to 100 clients needing help after the December 2019 and Easter 2020 tornadoes. In 2019 fifty homes sustained major damage and eleven were destroyed. There were 14 fatalities and 333 destroyed homes in the Easter tornadoes. They are grateful to have had no new disasters.

Our congregations continue to reach out and minister to needs in their communities. Saint John's in Donelson, TN has begun rebuilding after the nave was destroyed in the March tornadoes. Meanwhile, they are donating school supplies and food to families as school begins. Faith Lutheran, Lebanon, TN has a hospitality site ready for volunteers when it is safe for work to resume. In Nashville congregations are working with Disciples of Christ congregations to provide a food box ministry, *Farmers to Trunks*. Since mid-July 1300 boxes of fresh produce have been distributed weekly to families affected by the growing hunger crisis. Pr. Morgan Gordy hopes that this ministry will grow into a year-round distribution beginning in September. She may need to request funds for police to assist with traffic.

In May the Southeastern Synod Disaster Response Ministry received a \$35,000 Food Insecurity Grant from Lutheran Disaster Response. We matched those funds with \$15,000 from our own resources. Eighteen congregations in our four states are using this money to distribute food to people in need. We also received 30 gallons of hand sanitizer and 9,000 masks from Georgia Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters for use in Georgia congregations. VOADS in other states have also made those resources available. We will continue to request those materials when they are available.

On Saturday, August 29, Pr. Morgan Gordy and Vice-Chair John Boettner led a four-hour training webinar for the 18 new congregational disaster coordinators. These coordinators will lead their congregations in forming a preparedness plan and implementing it in the event of a disaster. They will also be a vital part of the communication system for the synod staff and the committee in the event of a disaster. Pr. Gordy and LDR Trainers Jean and Dale Percy have developed a two-hour Emotional and Spiritual Care webinar for lay and rostered leaders. The presentation focuses on grief work during and after a crisis and is ready for use in other parts of the country. Pr. Gordy hopes to make it available to leaders in the SES possibly in October.

Pr. Morgan Gordy, and Pr. Hope Knobler completed the Sphere and Core Humanitarian Standards Orientation Training offered by LDR, Sphere and LWR. This course was conducted online June 15-August 7th.

I am relatively new to this committee, a member since October 2019 and chair since May 2020. I am inspired by and grateful for the gifted and experienced volunteers who serve on our Disaster Response Team and for our partners, Inspiritus and Lutheran Disaster Response. I give thanks for the generosity of individuals and congregations that makes our response possible.

Grace and peace,

**The Reverend Katherine Pasch
Southeastern Synod Disaster Response Committee Chair**