

Part Two: Response

LONG-TERM RECOVERY

EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL CARE

WORSHIP IN TIMES OF DISASTER

FROM RESPONSE TO RECOVERY

This section discusses how a community gets from responding to a disaster, to recovering from a disaster. This process is called long-term recovery and may last weeks to years. Referring back to the timeline of needs on page 43, the graphic indicates that long-term begins just shortly after the period when a community concludes the activities around emergency response. This long-term recovery phase is a period of sorting out remaining unmet needs, often paying particular attention to those of the most vulnerable in our communities. The goal is to “recover;” to return to a state of normal, though it may be a “new normal.”

For community-based disasters, such as a large scale apartment fire where a high percentage of renters do not have renters insurance, there may be needs for temporary housing and replacement of clothing and furniture. Unmet needs may go beyond what early response groups like local emergency management, American Red Cross and the Salvation Army would provide. It takes organizing on the part of local

congregations and other community groups to raise money, decide how to disperse funds, tabulate specific needs of survivors and manage material donations.

In the case of a larger scale disaster, a long-term recovery group is usually established by the community, often with outside assistance, in order to help its most vulnerable

residents through the recovery process. Some of the same roles and leaders described in the example of the large apartment fire would be filled by local organizations, but it is also likely that many outside groups including Lutheran Disaster Response, United Methodist Committee on Relief, Church World Service, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency would offer assistance to community leadership in establishing a long-term recovery program.

Long-term recovery groups determine and prioritize unmet needs. These needs may include housing, clothing, food, home repair, spiritual and emotional care and financial support. Sorting out these needs requires a holistic, integrated process of needs assessment, case management, fundraising and volunteer coordination. Long-term recovery also includes significant interaction with local governments because of issues related to building codes, permits and discussions about how to implement community strategies to prevent similar disasters in the future. The ultimate goal of the long-term recovery phase is to help people return to the balance of a new normal.

While groups outside the local community like the Federal Emergency Management Agency and larger disaster response organizations may provide expertise on how to develop a long-term recovery group, it is local leadership on the part of community organizations like churches, local food pantries, the local United Way and others that is critical to the success of a long-term recovery program. In addition to providing leadership to the long-term recovery group, there are several ways a congregation and volunteers can be involved in this phase. In fact, it is at this phase when volunteers are most needed. Some ways that a congregation can support long-term recovery include: recruiting volunteers, serving as the fiscal agent, providing meeting space or helping to manage donations.

No matter what the scope of the disaster or the recovery, congregations participating in a long-term recovery group should consider these important factors.

- How group decisions will be made
- Client confidentiality
- Volunteer safety and liability
- The possible existence of state or local voluntary organizations active in disaster
- Relationships with local and state emergency management
- Defining scope of work on properties that will be repaired
- How funds will be distributed

Consideration of these factors may result in the development of protocols like long-term recovery group bylaws, volunteer policies, homeowner agreements, etc. If a voluntary organization active in disaster is active in the area, leadership from that group may be able to provide valuable resources to the long-term recovery group.

If the disaster occurs well outside the boundaries of the congregation's local community, a congregation can coordinate volunteer work team trips to travel to the affected region. It is a long-standing Lutheran tradition to travel to other parts of the country to do this type of work. When volunteer teams do this, they are actively participating in this long-term recovery process! Congregations and volunteers interested in doing this type of work can contact Lutheran Disaster Response by visiting www.ELCA.org/disaster to learn about available work team opportunities.

Developed and run by Lutheran Social Service, Minnesota, "Camp Noah" is a program unique to the Lutheran Disaster Response network and is another way that volunteers can participate in long-term recovery. Camps are held in areas impacted by disaster providing grade-school aged children the opportunity and resources to bond, play and heal. Congregations can provide volunteers, offer space or financially support Camp Noah programs across the nation.

To learn more about long-term recovery, and to download a copy of the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster long-term recovery manual, visit www.nvoad.org. To learn more about Camp Noah visit www.campnoah.org.

See a List of Links and Resources on page 101.

EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL CARE IN TIMES OF DISASTER²

Previous sections of this guidebook described many practical steps that leaders and congregation members can take to protect lives and property, and to serve their neighbors in very tangible ways in time of disaster. Certainly disaster can cause the foundations of buildings to shake and can cause dramatic disruptions to power, economic and governmental systems. Disaster can also shake and disrupt very important core beliefs people have about God, faith and religion. This section is designed to help spiritual leaders in congregations continue to minister, accompany, witness and support those affected by disaster.

INTRODUCTION

Within the questions below lies the critical ministry of the church in the trying times of disaster.

When disaster strikes, people ask:

“Where is God in all of this?”

“Why did God let this happen?”

“How could God do this to me?”

If the event was caused or exacerbated by human neglect, mistake or deliberate action, it holds additional meaning in our hearts and minds and people ask:

“Why would someone do this?”

“How could someone let this happen?”

These and other questions hold deep spiritual implications and are connected to powerful feelings of mourning, anger, revenge and depression. No matter the cause, questions, cries and lamentations are raised continually:

“Where is God?”

“Where is God’s grace?”

“Why didn’t God protect us?”

In a letter commemorating the second anniversary of the tragedies of 9/11, the Rev. Stephen Bouman, former bishop of Metropolitan New York Synod, wrote, “The cross is God’s way of saying clearly to all creation: “In life and death, in the tragedy, passion and renewal of all existence, God is present all the way.” And so, too, as the church, we are present and active.

Since a congregation plays a strong role within the community, its leadership needs to be present and accessible in times of disaster. Church doors need to be opened and remain open. Rostered and other leaders need to be out on the street and

² Much of the content of this section is based on “Prepared to Care: by Gil Furst.

in the community, visible, accessible and bearing symbols that identify them with the church. Doing so illustrates that, just as the church was with the community before the tragedy, the church will be with it now.

Lutheran Disaster Response works through social ministry organizations and synods to organize the Lutheran response and coordinate with partners in disaster recovery work including government, emergency management and other faith-based and voluntary organizations. Since congregations are the most local expression of the work of Lutheran Disaster Response, they are an integral part. They report what is needed in their area, become locations of care and provide resources.

This chapter provides some guidelines on the how the church and congregation can be God's loving presence in disaster relief and recovery. While some among your leaders may be qualified to serve as social workers or psychologists, construction workers or case managers, it is important that rostered leaders continue to exercise their primary call and role as spiritual leaders. It is also vital that all who provide services be attentive to self-care and respite so they do not burn out. Recovery is not a short-lived sprint but a grueling marathon. Let your faith, compassion and professional training guide you.

Showing genuine care and concern is part of our everyday call as the baptized people of God. This chapter will build on the skills your church staff, leaders and members already possess by providing information on the unique emotional needs of victims, survivors and people impacted by disaster in the first hours, days, weeks and months after a disaster.

Late on the night of Feb. 9, 2011, a gas explosion leveled a city block and killed five residents of Allentown, including an infant. The next evening nearby St. Stephen's Lutheran Church opened its doors to people who wanted to gather in the sanctuary for information, conversation and prayer. This was announced through public media. The 40 or so people who attended included two from the local television station who, with permission, discretely filmed the event and, later that evening, began its news coverage with images of people gathered for discussion and then holding hands around the Christ candle and baptismal font while speaking the 23rd Psalm, and praying together. As a result the entire Lehigh Valley had a chance to glimpse light that shatters the darkness. The next week the city of Allentown held its community memorial service in St. Stephens' sanctuary, followed by a time for mutual comfort and conversation in the fellowship hall.

BEING WITH SURVIVORS OF A DISASTER

Disasters cause the loss of life, loved ones and valued possessions. When people have been traumatized, they need the support of someone who genuinely cares and is concerned about them. It is not necessary to have a degree or clinical training in mental health services to help these individuals.

When a disaster occurs, survivors will have many questions. The faithful can help survivors by giving witness to God's love and providing support without judgment. We are called to be with people in their suffering and confusion, to comfort and encourage them. Remember, it is not necessary to have all the answers, but it is important to accompany people as they try to make sense of what is going on.

What can you do?

- Listen
- Give witness to God's love
- Welcome without judgment
- Be sensitive to needs and concerns
- Be careful not to force your beliefs on them



You are called to be with people; to comfort and encourage them in their suffering and chaos. Your actions and compassionate involvement with the congregation and community members is critical. Your response will help shape your ministry and their recovery in the weeks, months and years to come.

As you care for others, be sure to take time to take care of yourself. You, too, are loved by God. As you care for yourself and your family you will also be better able to continue to help others. If you feel overly stressed or fatigued, contact your local synod office or Lutheran Disaster Response coordinator for additional guidance or support.

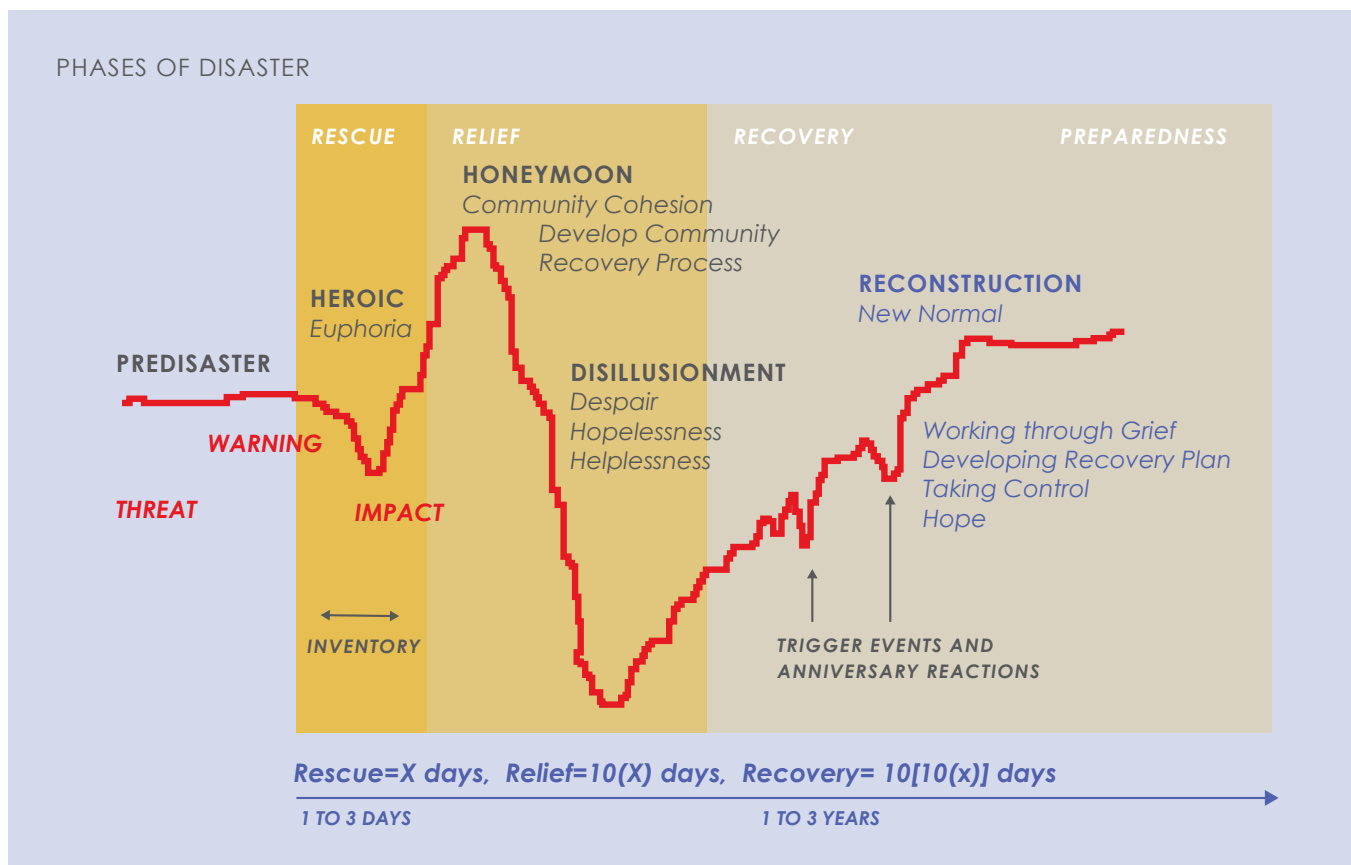
In February 2009, a plane crash occurred in the small community of Clarence Center New York. Zion Lutheran Church is located within a quarter of a mile of the crash site. The members of Zion opened their doors, offered food and drink, and spiritually nourished the first responders for a period of two weeks. With the assistance of other Lutheran congregations in the greater Buffalo, N.Y., area, the emotional and spiritual care operation was kept operational around the clock for that two-week period.

For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you (Isaiah 54:10).

STAGES OF DISASTER—A ROLLER COASTER OF EMOTIONS
 Keeping in mind the stages of disaster, timeline of needs and emotional phases of disaster recovery that were explained in the introductory section of this guidebook, let us explore in more depth what is often called the emotional roller coaster of disaster.

While the emotional reactions of individuals and communities are unique, they also tend to follow a predictable pattern. At a given moment, however, not everyone will be at the same position on the roller coaster.

As time passes, people become emotionally and physically tired. Snags in recovery develop. Weaknesses in the systems



become apparent. All these lead to a fairly rapid and steep drop into disillusionment, despair, hopelessness and helplessness. However, effective outside assistance that not only brings resources and additional manpower, but also respects and encourages survivors and their community to make informed decisions and to do what they can for themselves can help bring hope as the community recovery processes are developed. Gradually, people work through the grief, develop effective recovery plans, take more control of their own lives and eventually reach a “new normal.”

“VICTIM,” “SURVIVOR,” “PERSON IMPACTED BY DISASTER” OR “THRIVER”

Language is a tool for identity. In the aftermath of disaster, the way one uses language can be a means to process the trauma of the event.

When people experience trauma or a disaster, they feel vulnerable. Healing comes from the ability of people to reclaim their lives, including their abilities to self-determine and make decisions. The use of language is a major contributing factor in healing.

When speaking with people affected by a disaster, you will notice a variety of ways people refer to themselves as they tell their stories. Some call themselves “victims” because that is how they think of themselves at the moment and they want others to know of their pain, suffering and ongoing struggle. Others quickly state that they are “survivors” because they have endured a crisis and are moving to recover their lives. In other cases, individuals initially state that they are “victims,” and, as they move through the recovery process, they call themselves “survivors” or even “thrivers.” While it is important to empathize with those who have been impacted by disaster, those active in disaster response tend to encourage use of the term “survivors” in order to promote healing and recovery.

Prior to the flooding of 2011 in Athens, Pa., Roxanne had been an active volunteer in many organizations. After the flood she wouldn't even go back to look at the house and became withdrawn. Jerry, the local volunteer project coordinator, gently took her by the hand, walked her through the house and said, “We can fix this.” One week after her case was opened; Roxanne wanted to volunteer for long-term recovery coalition. Not only did Roxanne become a faithful volunteer holding a responsible position, she started to smile again and cheerfully helped other survivors as well as volunteers. Roxanne's house was completed in 2012.

A disaster can traumatize people to different degrees and in a variety of ways, depending on their experiences. Those offering support will seek to discern whether:

- Experience happened directly to the individual, such as having one's home destroyed
- Individual has been directly involved in recovery work, such as a first responder evacuating a family from their home, who might therefore experience a secondary trauma
- Lives in a neighboring community not impacted by the disaster and therefore feels a mix of emotions which might include relief as well as survivor's guilt
- Person repeatedly watched the event unfold on television
- Person is relating the event to a previous trauma which he or she personally experienced

It is also critical to understand that the impact of a disaster may be broad, deep, and often hidden. Language gives us clues and insights into the stories being told. The words people use can be an indication of how they see themselves and how they want to be treated or referred to. Be sensitive to their vulnerability and listen carefully to how their stories evolve and how they define themselves.

CRISIS INTERVENTION

Crisis intervention is done immediately after a crisis has occurred. It is not the same as grief counseling or psychotherapy.

Crisis Intervention: The process of providing immediate relief from the psychological pain of the tragedy or disaster so that the survivor can function well enough to get through the immediate aftermath.

It helps survivors take in what has occurred, understand their own reactions, decide what to do next, and begin to normalize their lives. Crisis intervention is done to help people regain a sense of normalcy and to return to or even improve their previous level of functioning.

You can help individuals by being a non-anxious presence to whom they can tell their stories and express what they are feeling. In addition, you can get training in what is called “psychological first aid” from a variety of organizations, including the American Red Cross. Be aware during crisis intervention that you are involved in doing emotional triage and that some people may need to be referred to mental health professionals.

Common reactions of individuals involved in a crisis include:

- **Immobilization:** numbness, inability to think or react.
- **Denial:** not being able to accept the reality of the crisis. Thinking, for example, that “It’s not happening.” “It’s a dream.” “I’ll wake up soon.”
- **Anger or anxiety,** which often masks vulnerability and fear.
- **A spike in adrenalin and a “can do” attitude.** These may dissipate as fatigue and the extent of the reality register.
- **Self-Doubt:** questioning of oneself. For example, “Did I really do all I could have to prevent or stop the disaster?”
- **Depression:** dejection that occurs after a trauma. The highest risk for suicide is when people start coming out of depression and have the energy and strength to make a suicide plan and carry it out. Even as a person’s emotions start to lift there may be slumps as obstacles, challenges or anniversaries are encountered.
- **Testing:** trying out new behaviors and feeling better about oneself and life.
- **Acceptance** of the fact that a terrible experience has occurred, but they have learned from it and are stronger and, perhaps, even better for it.

These reactions to crisis or grief do not necessarily happen in any set order, nor does every individual experience all of them. People may also find themselves fluctuating between reactions: at one moment accepting that something bad has happened and they will get through it, at another feeling very angry or depressed.

Remember: most people rebound by natural support. However, if the reaction significantly interferes with normal functioning, a referral to mental health counseling may be appropriate, especially in the case of depression.

LOSS

Loss comes with every tragedy or disaster. There may be loss of property or lives. Familiar landmarks or routines may be greatly altered. Friends may move away. Life as people once knew it has changed, sometimes very dramatically. The impact on the emotional and spiritual well-being of survivors can be enormous.

At some point, survivors may need help with the grief that comes with their losses. They will need support and understanding as they try to find ways to deal with the aftermath

of the crisis and work to establish a new sense of what is normal. Since their secure world has been shattered, they will need help dealing with that loss of security.

Grief counseling is done after the immediate aftermath of a crisis has lessened and the survivors are feeling the pain and hurt of the losses they have experienced because of the crisis. Grief counseling seeks to help survivors experience the pain and come to terms with their losses.

Some identify the stages of grief as:

- **Denial:** survivors who maintain there really is nothing wrong and that they are perfectly fine may be experiencing the denial stage of grief.
- **Anger:** strong feelings of anger are frequently encountered. They may be generalized against anyone, though especially against a perpetrator if one is suspected, or they may be specifically directed at a relief agency, the government, or people helping in recovery. The anger may be with God or the unfairness of the situation.
- **Depression** is both a common and expected reaction to loss and it can also be a serious symptom of grief. You need to make referrals to mental health professionals if the depression significantly interferes with a person’s daily living and recovery.
- **Bargaining:** thinking “I’ll ... (be good, make amends, etc.) if you just make this awful thing go away.”
- **Acceptance:** an attitude that frankly acknowledges the extent of the loss, accepts the limitations that have been imposed, and looks toward whatever recovery is possible.

Remember: survivors may experience aspects of all these stages, though not necessarily in any order. Sometimes they will fluctuate rapidly or cycle back through two or more.

The psalms and the book of Job give voice to anger in the face of grief and may provide comfort at this stage.

*How Long, O LORD?
Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?
Consider and answer me, O LORD my God!
(Psalm 13:1-3a)*

THREE PHASES OF RESPONSE

When a disaster occurs, it affects individuals in many ways. In most cases people who have been impacted by the disaster will go through three emotional phases following a disaster: impact, immediate response, and recovery.

IMPACT PHASE: Fear and disbelief

IMMEDIATE RESPONSE PHASE/RECOIL: Immediate reactions and the beginning of trying to regain control.

RECOVERY PHASES: Ups and downs as survivors begin to make sense of the crisis and find a new sense of what is “normal.” Hopefully these reactions will lead to an acceptance of what happened and moving forward into the future using the knowledge and coping skills learned from the crisis.

The following pages offer guidance for your self-care and leadership during each phase.

IMPACT PHASE

CARE FOR SELF:

During the time of the disaster, your first priority is the safety and security of yourself and your loved ones. Throughout this entire event and recovery, you will need encouragement, support and downtime or you will become exhausted, lose confidence and burn out. You cannot take care of others unless you take care of yourself.

- Assess your family and loved ones’ needs.
- Pray, read your Bible, and continue to do your devotions.
- Help reduce your body stress: eat nutritiously, rest and exercise.

CARE FOR THE COMMUNITY AS A SPIRITUAL LEADER:

Once you and your family are safe, consider the needs of others in your community and congregation. Depending on the size and structure of your congregation, you may enlist others to help to perform some of these tasks:

- **Follow directives of emergency management.** If you are told to stay off the streets, do so.
- **Assess the situation** and needs of your neighbors, members of the congregation and the community. As you are able, use other congregational leaders and members to assist in this effort. However, avoid clogging phone lines that may be needed to get vital assistance to victims.

- **Contact or arrange for contact with the following:**

Members of your congregation who were most likely to be directly affected by the disaster or tragedy.

Members who might need special help due to physical or emotional barriers.

Remember to ask members about the needs of their neighbors.

- Stay in touch with key leadership in your community, synod and Lutheran Disaster Response. They can provide a broader picture as well as bring aid into your community.

Emergency personnel. Ask to stay informed about the situation. Ask how you can help, whether there is information you can pass on, or support or relief you can provide to emergency workers.

Your synod office. Share what is going on with your congregation, community and what is going on with you.

The Lutheran Disaster Response coordinator and your Lutheran social service agency. Share your information, don’t hesitate to ask for additional support and guidance, and inquire whether and how you can be of assistance.

Make sure the information you are sharing with various key leaders is consistent and as current as possible. In the impact phase, things change rapidly and communication can be difficult.

If you do go out into the community, wear something that clearly identifies you and your role. Emergency personnel and others need to know who is on the streets and whether it is wise for them to be there. If they know who you are, they may also seek your services for specific situations.

Do not assume the problems will just go away. Recovery will take much support and time. Talk to your fellow pastors to see how they are doing.

Remember: You are not alone.

Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you (Psalm 33:22).

OUTREACH:

The focus of spiritual and emotional care during the impact phase is to attend to and relieve emotional pain and help individuals function, which includes helping them to find resources to meet their physical needs. Due to the chaos directly following a disaster or tragedy, there may be gaps in or duplication of aid. Some individuals may be afraid, confused, angry, or in a state of shock or denial. Some may feel compelled to attempt “heroic” acts.

Now is the time to:

- Let survivors know your role in the congregation. If you are a pastor, consider wearing a clerical collar or some other item that clearly identifies you with the congregation. Emergency response and other community leaders need to know who you are. Survivors need to be able to distinguish you from national and government services as well as from spontaneous volunteers who just show up and may or may not be trustworthy.
- Follow and encourage others to follow the instructions of local and national government agencies. If a crime was committed, the police or sheriff will be in charge of the scene and the response. If there was a natural disaster, emergency management, fire, police or the National Guard will be in charge.
- Direct survivors to needed assistance, particularly emergency services.
- Reassure survivors that they are safe, providing that is true. Otherwise direct them to safety.
- Let survivors share their stories. Focus on them.
- Take time to listen with sincerity and concern.
- Pray with victims, survivors, and others impacted by the disaster.
- If guilt is an issue at this stage, listen to what survivors are saying before reassuring them that the tragedy was not their fault. Realize, however, there is “reasonable” and “unreasonable” guilt. For example, a worker in a plant which exploded may have reason to believe that her actions did have something to do with the event. On the other hand, a child may think that if he had not argued with his mother that morning, the tornado would not have come.

CHILDREN

- Talk with children. They will need to know from you and other adults that it is safe to share their fears, doubts and faith. Be accepting of all their feelings even when you do not agree with them. Encourage them to express their feelings by drawing pictures or acting out their feelings in a safe place.

THOSE IN ACUTE DISTRESS

- Refer people in acute psychiatric distress to Red Cross or clinical mental health or victim assistance staff. Connect with emergency responders providing mental health services and victim assistance.

The goal of crisis response is to help anyone impacted by disaster to become healthy survivors who function well in their everyday lives. It is not to solve all the problems. Know your limitations. Victims, survivors, or others who have been impacted will never be the same, but they can be healthy and strong and even healthier and stronger because of the coping skills they learn in their recovery from the trauma.

I lift my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth (Psalm 121:1–2).

CHECKLIST FOR IMMEDIATELY AFTER IMPACT

- Assess and care for your needs and those of your family
- Follow directions of emergency management
- Help assess the situation, offering appropriate care to those you encounter

IMMEDIATE RESPONSE/RECOIL

This is the time when crisis intervention is most likely to be needed and grief counseling may begin. After a tragedy, individuals are overwhelmed; many of them are in shock. The most powerful tool in healing is for victims to tell their stories.

As soon as it is safe, walk through the affected areas and listen to individuals. You will not only help them in their healing process but will also be able to identify specific needs. Report the needs you hear to a Lutheran Disaster Response coordinator, emergency personnel or other designated helping services, as appropriate.

During the response phase, survivors are concerned about safety, though some may be in denial about the extent of their needs. Those whose homes have been damaged will concentrate on finding a safe, sanitary, temporary living environment.

You can expect to encounter individuals who are frightened, confused, angry or feel guilty or helpless. Some may feel that they have been or may be abandoned.

CARE FOR SELF:

Take time to talk with someone to relieve your own stress. You, too, have been impacted. Talk with a mentor or friend who will listen to you in a nonjudgmental way and will also honestly reflect back how he or she sees you are functioning.

- Continue to care for yourself by getting enough rest, nutrition, exercise and down time.
- Continue to care for your family.
- Continue daily prayer and devotions

CARE FOR THE COMMUNITY AS A SPIRITUAL LEADER:

For many reasons, members of your congregation need to share in the ministry of disaster recovery. Not only are their gifts and resources important, but it is also an opportunity to see the world as God sees it and experience God's Spirit working through and around them. Communicate the needs as well as important understandings and guidelines for disaster work with your congregation. Know your personal limitations. At this point, the response leadership team needs to start clarifying and prioritizing the needs and think through specific ways the congregation is able to help.

CHECK IN WITH CHURCH STAFF:

- How is your staff?
- What are their needs?
- Share needs or concerns with the synod office.

ASSIGN CONGREGATIONAL MEMBERS OR COMMITTEES TO ADDRESS EACH OF THE FOLLOWING:

- Conduct a damage assessment of the church property. Do not begin repairs until the damage is fully documented. Take pictures.
- Contact your insurance company.
- Assess the needs of the community around your church.
- Coordinate volunteers for transportation needs, clean-up work, food drives, hospitality, donations, etc.

- Relate to the media – unless this is a task you will undertake yourself.

STAFF AND RESPONSE TEAM LEADERS:

- Keep your church leaders informed.
- Stay in touch with other local congregational and community leaders.
- Determine whether you or the congregation needs additional assistance. You may wish, for example, to contact a retired pastor or ask pastors from other communities for support.

TOGETHER WITH THE RESPONSE LEADERSHIP TEAM AND OTHER MINISTRY LEADERS IN THE PARISH, IDENTIFY THE NEED FOR:

- Special worship or healing services, and plan them.
- Assistance with worship and Sunday school for the coming Sunday and weeks.
- Support and counseling for caregivers.
- Services to help special populations such as children, the physically and mentally challenged, the elderly, the home-bound, and others with special needs. (Children may need activities, child care or special counseling.)

AND DON'T FORGET TO:

- Work with your Lutheran Disaster Response leaders, your local ministerial alliance, interfaith recovery organizations, victim assistance, mental health agencies, and other organizations as they provide relief and support.
- Work with volunteers and committees to find out who needs your personal attention within your congregation.
- Stay open to needs. Do not be afraid to ask how you can help.

DURING THE RECOIL/EARLY RECOVERY PHASE:

- Listen to those who need to talk about their feelings and experiences.
- Let them know they are emotionally safe with you.
- Do not be judgmental.
- Do not try to change their feelings.
- Direct them to safe shelter and other services when appropriate.
- Do not say, "I know how you feel." Instead, try: "I don't know how you feel, but can you share with me what it is

DURING THE RECOIL/EARLY RECOVERY PHASE (cont.):

like?” or “I think I’ve had similar feelings, but can you tell me more about yours?”

- When in doubt, remember that silence can be golden. A physical presence is more important than carefully constructed theological statements.
- Be accepting of individuals’ feelings while helping them look at “unreasonable guilt” or possible misconceptions of the events leading to certain feelings.
- Work with survivors to help them regain control and authority.
- Identify and focus on positive reactions. Help them talk about what they have learned and how they are stronger and better.

An 81-year-old man talks about losing his family Bible with his family history in it. Although his kids bought him a new family Bible for Christmas this year, he says, “It’s new, it’s pretty, but it’s not my family Bible.” Losses and experiences such as these take time and love to fade. That is what we see the volunteers do every day: They share with the homeowners as they work together on their homes and new memories.”
— Jean Percy, construction coordinator for Lutheran Disaster Response.



CHECKLIST FOR THE EARLY DAYS AFTER

- Continue self-care
- Continue to stay informed
- Continue to assist with assessment within the congregation and community
- Use your skills to offer emotional and spiritual support

*Consider and answer me, O LORD my God!
Give light to my eyes... (Psalm 13:3)*

RECOVERY

During the recovery phases, those who have suffered losses begin to look toward the new future.

During these phases:

- Help survivors find healing by participating as much as possible in the recovery so that they can feel ownership of the decisions and changes that occur.
- Be aware that new needs will emerge. Some people who did not previously ask for help will find they have depleted their physical, financial, emotional and spiritual resources and need support to help them recover.
- The response of local churches becomes increasingly important as disaster response agencies leave.

Disaster response is confusing. It can be overwhelming and it goes on for months or years. A community-organized response gets the most help for the people who need it while giving you the support you need to continue your ministry. As always, work with Lutheran Disaster Response and keep the synod informed. Be involved with your ministerial alliance and support the ecumenical response.

Remember: Individuals who survive a disaster will emerge as different people. Life as they once knew it cannot return to what it was in the past. Therefore, it is important to help survivors look to the future and work to establish a new definition of what is normal in their lives.

CARE FOR SELF:

- Continue to care for yourself by getting enough rest, nutrition, exercise and down time.
- Continue to care for your family.
- Continue to talk with trusted mentors or friends in order to relieve your own stress and keep your priorities clear.
- Continue daily prayer and devotions

CARE FOR THE COMMUNITY AS A SPIRITUAL LEADER

Continue to use your skills to provide the support people need as they move from victim to survivor. The following can be used with one person or with a group of people. Make sure everyone knows the limits of confidentiality.

ENCOURAGE SURVIVORS TO TELL THEIR STORY

Disaster survivors need to tell their stories again and again. Their stories will change as they gain emotional control of their reactions. Consider asking survivors to relate their story with biblical narratives as a way of engaging faith and realizing God's presence in it.

To help survivors you can:

- Validate the legitimacy of their feelings and reactions.
- Let them know that God will be with them every step of the way.
- Seek appropriate help if their thoughts or actions put them or others in danger.

The following are common and normal spiritual and behavioral reactions to a traumatic event. People may have one, some, or all of the following:

- Anger at God
- Feeling distant from God
- Withdrawal from church
- Uncharacteristic church involvement
- Sudden turn toward God
- Familiar faith practices seem empty (prayers, scriptures, hymns)
- Church rituals and sacraments seem empty
- Belief that God is powerless
- Loss of meaning and purpose
- Sense of isolation (from God, church members, clergy)
- Questioning of one's basic beliefs
- Believing God is not in control
- Believing God does not care
- Belief that we have failed God

Be cautious about how you respond as you listen. Instead of "I know how you feel," try: "Can you tell me more?" Allow people to ask their "God Questions" such as "Why did this happen?" "Where is God?" "How could God allow such a thing?" These are also expressions of grief and mourning and, as such, need to be acknowledged more than answered. Avoid theologizing or offering platitudes. Accompanying people as they ask the difficult questions helps them to heal. It may also be helpful to remind the one with whom you are speaking that faithful people throughout the ages have asked the same questions and to share resources such as laments. While it is not necessary to refrain from expressing your conviction that God is still present, it is possible to do so without forcing this belief on the one who is struggling.

When in doubt, silence can be golden. The most powerful response may be that you are willing to just listen to things that people are afraid you will judge harshly, criticize or reject.

As it becomes appropriate, help survivors:

- Look to the future, see their options, weigh the consequences of each alternative and feel supported in their decisions.
- Be realistic with their goals and decisions.
- Find appropriate resources.
- Realize they can learn from this disaster. They may, for example, have developed new coping skills, they may be stronger, and they may now be moving toward a new definition of what is normal.
- Realize that God is present in every situation. Ask, "Where did you see God today?"

CHECKLIST FOR THE RECOVERY PHASES

- Continue self-care
- Continue to stay informed
- Continue to partner with leaders within and outside the congregation
- Continue to use listening and other skills for emotional and spiritual support

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with all of you (2 Thessalonians 3:16).

WORSHIP IN TIMES OF DISASTER

As noted above, disaster is a time of deep spiritual questions and an opportunity to claim and proclaim the gospel promise of presence, rebirth and renewal. Worshiping communities should make every effort to resume worship and spiritual care as soon as possible after devastation.

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP:

- Affirms that God is still operating.
- Affirms that the world is still open and we are not victims of fate.
- Affirms that human agents, as creatures made in God's image, share God's image and God's life-giving activities.
- Forms the shape, character and tone of those affected by the disaster.
- Is an act of embracing a new future. Worship is reality making, especially in its praise.
- Is an active step in proclaiming new life and the rebuilding of community.

WHO PLANS AND LEADS WORSHIP?

In most cases, the pastor or rostered leader, assisted by other congregational leaders, will plan and lead worship as in non-disaster times. However, if those leaders are impacted by the disaster and are prevented from leadership, worship can still happen. Seek assistance from other local congregations, conference, cluster or synod. A leader from a neighboring community may be able to help. If a designated leader does not emerge immediately, gather the community and seek the gifts of those gathered to lead singing, praying, Bible reading and proclamation.

WHERE AND WHEN TO WORSHIP?

If possible, meet for worship at the regularly scheduled time and place. Make provisions if the worship space is not usable: use an alternate space on the property or find another location for meeting. When seeking another location, it is best to find one place that can be utilized for a long time rather than changing locations frequently. Consider an informal or formal rental agreement with the alternate location if this is the case.

Also consider how the Christian community can and will gather as a whole. Community healing services or prayer vigils can be powerful. Regular worship may be combined with another worshiping community, as appropriate and as the opportunity arises.

GET THE WORD OUT

Current digital technology suggests that cellphones with connectivity to the Internet will be quick to resume service after a disaster. Social media will flourish. Radio will also be available. Hand-printed or copied signs may be your best local option for reaching those who are not able to access social media. Find any and all ways possible to announce worship services and opportunities for prayer to the community.

PLANNING

When planning worship after a disaster first ask, what do you have available? Printed resources are not essential. Trust



what is in the bones of the faithful and follow a basic and predictable format for Christian worship: gathering, proclaiming the word, praying, sharing the meal and sending into the world. Worship resources particular to times after a disaster are available at www.ELCA.org/Resources/Disaster.

- Choose biblical texts that speak a word of comfort and promise to those affected by disaster. Ask the community about Bible stories that resonate with their current situation.
- Consider including a time of lament that names the destruction and sorrow. All laments include a turn to promise and renewal in the gospel. Be careful about congregational responses. If a printed bulletin cannot be produced, use short and repetitive responses for the congregation.
- Include significant time for prayer. Consider offering prayer stations with laying on of hands and anointing so that the presence of God is not only spoken but felt.
- Sing songs that are known by the community and recall times of comfort and promise. If no bulletin is available, choose songs with easily sung refrains or songs known in the community “by heart.”

ONGOING SPIRITUAL CARE

Consider how the congregation can offer space and support for meditation and prayer outside of formal worship gatherings.

- Create a place for prayer and meditation away from the stress of the disaster.
- Consider offering a way for people to write down their prayer petition for others to pray.
- Find congregational volunteers who have the gifts of prayer and empathy who would be willing to welcome people into the space.
- Communicate the congregation’s availability for prayer or safe-space to the community.

FOR COMMUNITIES RESPONDING TO DISASTER OUTSIDE THEIR AREA

When a disaster occurs outside of your worshiping community, worship and prayer are essential to response because we are all joined together in our need and the promise of new life. This not only tunes the congregation into the need, it reminds the members of the necessity for preparedness and ongoing attentiveness to the community.

- Name places affected by disaster in the prayers of intercession in weekly worship.
- Send out prayer petitions after disaster on your congregation's social media and communication systems.

RESOURCES

Resources offered by the ELCA include hymn suggestions, litanies and prayers. Here are a few things to begin your planning.

THE SUNDAY SERVICE

- Name the impact of the disaster.
- Serve Holy Communion.
- Worship in the church as you are able or worship in temporary facilities.
- Pray for children, emergency personnel and for recovery.

SUGGESTIONS

- Remember that people will be at different stages of loss and recovery. Sharing stories helps people relate to one another. Carefully construct worship so that all stages are addressed with hope at one point or another.
- Tell about how this disaster affected you. Your personal witness will help others find words to express how it has affected them. Do not use others' stories without their permission.
- During the worship service, ask people to turn to their neighbors and share what the disaster has meant to them and how it has affected them.
- Use the children's sermon or sharing time to connect the hope and security we share in God's love for children.

BIBLE PASSAGES

- **(Psalm 100:5)** *"For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations."*
- **(Psalm 46:1, 7)** *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. . . The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge."*
- **(Romans 8:31)** *"What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us?"*
- **(Romans 8:37–39)** *"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*
- **(Psalm 55:22)** *"Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you."*
- **(Psalm 9:9–10)** *"The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you."*
- **(Psalm 23:4)** *"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."*
- **(Psalm 57:1)** *"Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, until the destroying storms pass by."*

Worship resources can be found at
www.ELCA.org/disaster/resources.

Conclusion

In times of disaster in our communities, people will seek the refuge of the church, because it is a community meeting place, because they may find shelter and food, or because they believe that God is there. People in our communities will likely come knocking on our doors whether or not we are prepared to open them. It is the hope that this guide can help leadership in congregations not only be prepared to open church doors, but be ready and willing to faithfully do so.

Congregational leadership that takes on the challenge of completing the worksheets in this guidebook will find that their efforts will lead to greater resiliency for all types of challenges, from meeting the needs of those affected by a local home fire, to serving as a warming shelter during a winter power outage, to offering worship to commemorate national catastrophes, to leading long-term recovery efforts after regional flooding.

Quick reference guides such as the resources in the appendix can be “pulled off the shelf” to assist decision makers when something happens and situations are chaotic. Basic checklists for preparedness and response can remind leadership of simple steps to take to secure life and property.

Congregations that take steps to be prepared are those that are most able to step out and meet needs of neighbors and

congregation members alike. The most vulnerable in our communities are often made even more vulnerable in disaster. In the case where a congregation can provide leadership for long-term recovery the most vulnerable in our communities are not left behind.

Finally, it is important to remember that a congregation is not alone. Not only are there resources from the Lutheran Disaster Response network to support congregations in being prepared and responding to disaster, but there are resources throughout our communities and indeed from around the country, both governmental and non-governmental, that are available to support congregations in their efforts at stepping up to serve communities in times of a disaster. **Thank you for your prayerful attention to disaster preparedness and response!**