

# Thrive

Your Impact on  
Lutheran Disaster  
Response



Lutheran  
Disaster Response

# *“Endurance produces character, and character produces hope”*

(Romans 5:4).

*Dear friend,*

We often tell you that Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) shares hope, healing and renewal with those impacted by disasters. We see this hope in everyone involved in disaster response — survivors, volunteers, partner organizations and you, our faithful donors. In the pages ahead, we want to share some stories with you — stories of faith, fellowship and hope.

One theme you’ll see in this issue of “Thrive” is the evolving focus of LDR in the United States. LDR will expand the focus of its domestic initiatives by prioritizing both relief and recovery responses from ELCA synods and congregations so they can holistically accompany people impacted by disasters. It will also emphasize building the resilience of synods and congregations, focusing specially on racial equity and community organizing to ensure that we reach the most vulnerable.

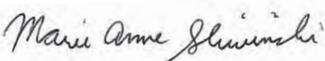
Our biggest international crisis is Russia’s war against Ukraine. Your outpouring of generosity allows us to respond swiftly to the resulting humanitarian and refugee crisis through numerous partners in Eastern Europe. Together, we are touching thousands of lives and sharing hope with them.

This fall also marks five years since hurricanes Maria and Harvey devastated Southern states and the Caribbean in 2017. LDR has accompanied hurricane survivors on their difficult journey of recovery, and they have shown incredible endurance. Over the past five years, your generous gifts have made and continue to make an enormous impact on survivors of the 2017 hurricane season.

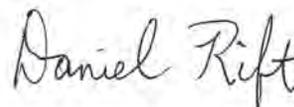
These long and enduring responses are made possible by community partners in the United States and around the world. Companion churches, ELCA synods and social ministry organizations are valued partners in ministry and help carry out our shared vision of resiliency, equity and renewal. We are so grateful for these lasting relationships.

At the root of our work is resilience — in the face of natural disasters, war, refugee crises and civil unrest. God has blessed us with a resilience, formed in faithful community, that extends this work around the world. Hope based in faithful community shows us what our work is all about. Together, we share hope with our neighbors, and they share hope with us.

*With gratitude,*



Marie Anne Sliwinski  
Senior Director  
Building Resilient Communities



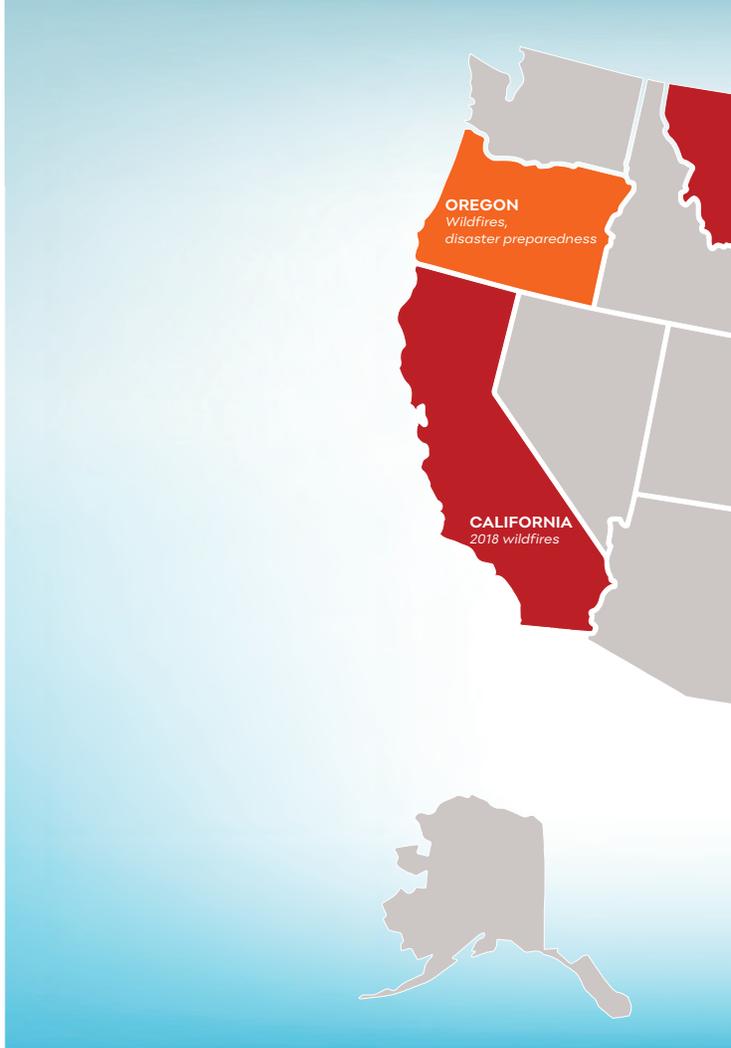
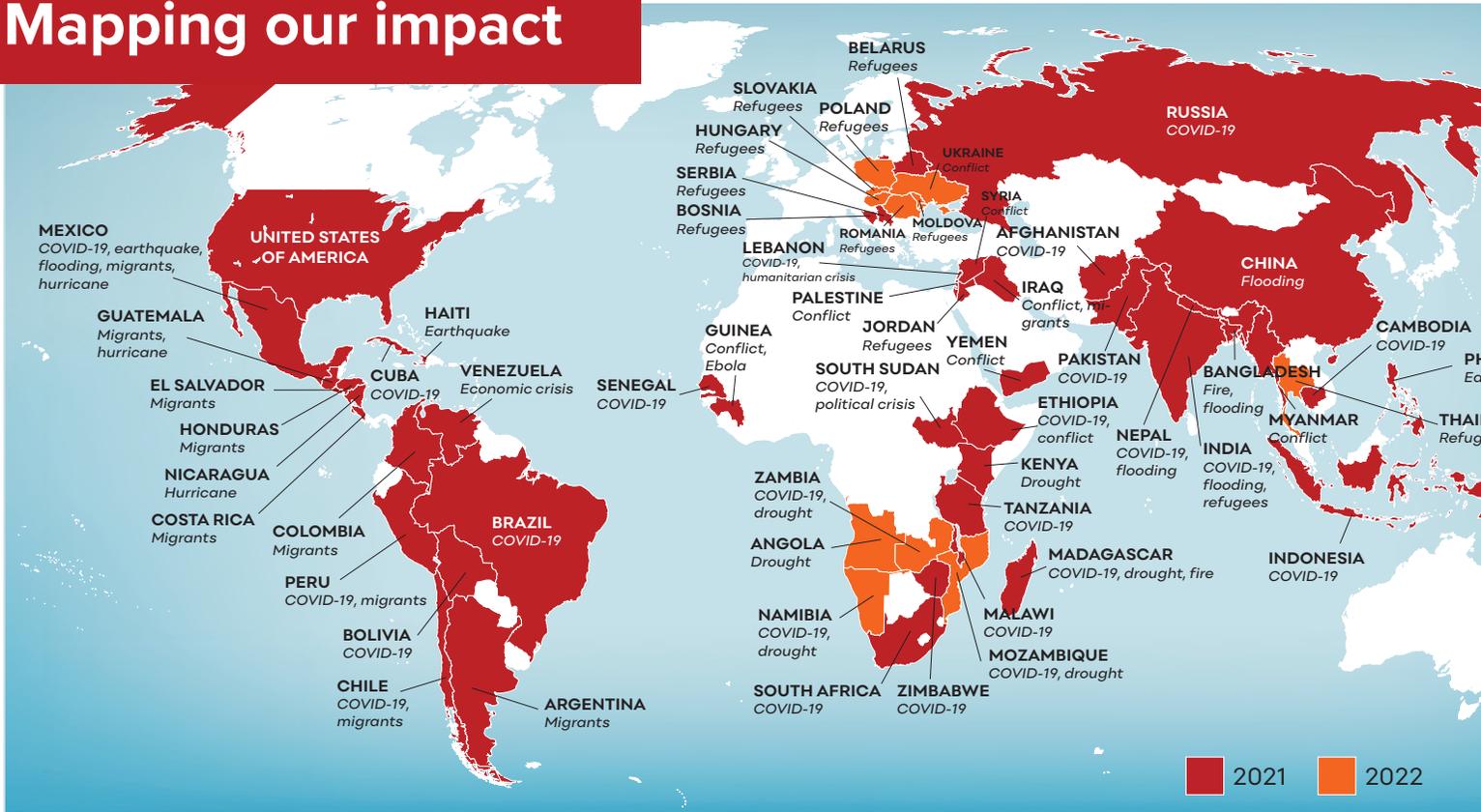
The Rev. Daniel Rift  
Director, ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran  
Disaster Response Fund

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# Mapping our impact





## *Lutheran Disaster Response*

is present in communities before and during disasters and remains long after disaster strikes, accompanying survivors on the road to recovery. We look back at the lasting impact of your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response.

### WESTERN OHIO TORNADOES

On Memorial Day, western Ohio was hit by a line of destructive tornadoes. Lutheran Disaster Response supports the Pathways to Home Ownership program, which builds homes on donated property and assists renters affected by the tornadoes as they buy for the first time.



### MIDWEST FLOODING

In the spring, several Midwestern and Southern states experienced severe flooding. In September, South Dakota was also impacted by heavy floods. We worked with many partners throughout the Midwest and Southern states to provide relief and long-term recovery assistance to survivors in these areas. We continue to accompany communities in rebuilding and repairing homes and replacing the belongings of flood survivors on impacted tribal reservations.

THREE YEARS 2019

## HURRICANE DORIAN

Hurricane Dorian, a Category 5 storm, hit the Bahamas in September. We continue to work with survivors, rebuild homes in Grand Bahama and provide pastoral care. LDR also works with Church World Service in Haitian migrant communities to ensure that they are included in relief and recovery efforts. The partners offer disaster preparedness training to over 900 migrants.



## COVID-19 PANDEMIC

COVID-19 was first identified at the end of 2019. Lutheran Disaster Response was one of the first organizations to respond, providing personal protective equipment to medical workers in China. Since then, LDR has responded to the pandemic with over \$4 million in more than 50 countries and 40 states and territories.

## MIDDLE TENNESSEE TORNADOES

On March 2-3, a series of tornadoes swept through Middle Tennessee. The Southeastern Synod and In Spiritus provided immediate relief and are still involved in long-term recovery in the area.



## BEIRUT EXPLOSION

On Aug. 4, a warehouse explosion in the port of Beirut, Lebanon, caused widespread damage to the city. Through ACT Alliance, the Middle East Council of Churches and the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees provided immediate relief to survivors and rehabilitated homes impacted by the blast.

## EASTERN AFRICA FLOODING

In Kenya and Tanzania, flooding throughout the spring caused widespread damage to homes and agriculture. In Kenya, Lutheran Disaster Response supported the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church and ACT Alliance as they assisted families with immediate relief and livelihood recovery. In Tanzania, Lutheran Disaster Response supported the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, which provided immediate relief to communities affected by the flooding.

## HURRICANE LAURA

Hurricane Laura was a Category 4 hurricane that made landfall in Louisiana in August. Our partner Lutheran Social Services Disaster Response is accompanying survivors as they rebuild their homes and lives.

## HURRICANE SALLY

Hurricane Sally hit Florida and Alabama in September. The Florida-Bahamas Synod and the Southeastern Synod provided relief to impacted communities in the Florida panhandle and Baldwin County, Ala., respectively. In addition, the Florida-Bahamas Synod is currently providing long-term recovery and home repair assistance to survivors.

## HURRICANE ETA AND HURRICANE IOTA

The two strongest hurricanes of the 2020 season made landfall in Nicaragua about two weeks apart, in November. Lutheran Disaster Response is coordinating efforts with our companion churches and ecumenical partners to support long-term recovery efforts across Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua.



## WESTERN WILDFIRES

The wildfire season of 2020 was one of the worst ever, with record-breaking fires in California, Colorado and Oregon. We are working with the Oregon Synod and Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains for relief and long-term recovery, including emotional and spiritual care.

### EARTHQUAKE IN HAITI

A high-magnitude earthquake hit Haiti on Aug. 14. Church World Service, with support from LDR, offered immediate support in Pestel, including psychosocial care, hygiene items and temporary shelter. In the long term, LDR is working with local partners to rebuild homes and water infrastructure, provide cash assistance, offer psychosocial care and restore the livelihoods of survivors. Affected communities are also being trained in disaster preparedness and mitigation.





## COLORADO FIRES

On Dec. 30, the Marshall Fire spread through Boulder County, Colo., becoming the most destructive fire in state history. LDR supports the relief and recovery efforts of local Lutheran churches and their impacted communities. These churches provide emotional and spiritual care for wildfire survivors, assist survivors in finding resources and work with other external partners to address community needs.



## KENTUCKY TORNADOES

After tornadoes swept across western Kentucky on Dec. 10-11, LDR worked with Church World Service to support undocumented families in the area. LDR also provided immediate relief and is working with local partners to coordinate volunteers for long-term recovery.



In 2017, a series of major hurricanes devastated the Caribbean and southern United States. Hurricane Harvey came first, in August. Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria arrived in September. **Lutheran Disaster Response raised over \$15 million from generous donors, allowing an immediate, robust response from Texas to the U.S. Virgin Islands.** Five years later, the impact of your gifts continues.

### Hurricane Harvey — Aug. 25, 2017

Hurricane Harvey made landfall in Texas and Louisiana as a Category 4 hurricane. In Texas, over 48,000 homes were damaged. Hurricane Harvey was the wettest tropical storm on record in the United States — in the Houston metropolitan area, most locations experienced over 30 inches of rain. The rain caused severe flooding and breached levees. About 25% of Harris County, where Houston sits, was submerged.

**A grant from Lutheran Disaster Response helped a community partner develop a holistic case management program. The biggest needs of survivors were home repairs and securing furniture and appliances, though case managers also helped clients identify resources for legal assistance, emergency utility assistance, and emotional and spiritual care.**

Among the many accompanied were Burmese and Cambodian communities. These families are often underserved after disasters because recovery systems are ill-designed to help them effectively. Many government agencies lack the language resources or connections to the community needed to provide critical support.

### *A neighborhood of renewal*

Chris\* was recently discharged from the Army and had finally reunited with his wife and three children in Victoria County, Texas, when Hurricane Harvey arrived. Evacuated from their home, they stayed with family in San Antonio for more than two weeks. Upon their return, they found the roof of their mobile home caved in and almost everything inside ruined.

Chris received some Federal Emergency Management Agency assistance for repairs but not enough to address the extensive damage. Without a roof over their heads, the family were forced to move from place to place — various apartments, an RV, homes of family members — without any permanent solution.

Then a case manager funded by LDR accompanied Chris and his family through the recovery process. With the case manager's help, Chris applied for a house in Hope Meadows, a neighborhood of new homes for survivors who had lost theirs in the hurricane. This allowed the family to stay in Victoria County. They closed on their home in June 2020. The grant from LDR also helped the family meet utility expenses, pay back taxes and obtain appliances for the new house.

Navigating the journey of renewal can be daunting. Disaster case managers are an invaluable resource for clients such as Chris, providing guidance, resources and accompaniment. Like them, LDR walks alongside survivors through the recovery and renewal process, no matter how many years it takes.

*\*Name changed for privacy.*

### *Your gifts*

- Served **805** households.
- Served **2,253** people.
- Impacted **10** counties.



Chris and his wife closed on their new home in June 2020.

### Hurricane Maria — Sept. 20, 2017

Hurricane Maria, a devastating Category 5 hurricane, ravaged the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, both of which were still reeling from Hurricane Irma two weeks earlier. Puerto Rico experienced winds over 100 mph, flash flooding and an electrical blackout that lasted for months.

From the onset, your generosity made it possible for Lutheran Disaster Response to work with local Lutheran social service organizations, among other partners, to provide immediate relief to communities in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

Through the Caribbean Synod, 21 churches in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands received funds to rebuild and repair their buildings. These churches faced challenges, such as finding contractors after the hurricane, yet all necessary repairs have been finished over the past five years.

**Your gifts helped fund efforts to provide emotional and spiritual care to survivors, promote disaster-risk reduction to build community resilience and address the unmet needs of survivors through case management and long-term recovery efforts. LDR partners also coordinated volunteer groups housed at Eduardo Roig Lutheran Camp in Dorado. Volunteers from the mainland U.S. arrived in droves, ranging in age and skill level, to help rebuild homes and churches.**

### *Your gifts*

- Served **2,935** households.
- Served **6,425** people.
- Repaired **700** houses.
- Hosted **1,137** volunteers.
- Impacted **21** municipalities.

### *The journey to a new home*

Over 25 years ago, Mayra began building her wooden home in Dorado, Puerto Rico. She added onto it over the years, room by room, as her family saved and took out loans for construction. The house had withstood many hurricanes since Mayra started building it, but the wooden house was no match for the 100 mph winds of Hurricane Maria.

“In all this time and all the hurricanes that have passed, we have felt them here,” Mayra said. “But Maria was something else. When we started to feel the winds or how things banged against the house, we knew the storm was hitting us hard.”

Before the hurricane even made landfall, officials were warning those with wooden homes to take shelter elsewhere. Like thousands of houses in Puerto Rico, Mayra’s home was completely destroyed — everything was gone except the floor.

“It was very hard,” she said. “You’re left with nothing.”

Now, five years after Hurricane Maria, Mayra is almost ready to move into her new home, thanks to the generosity of her family, her friends, her church and nonprofit organizations including Lutheran

Disaster Response. Between securing land, finding construction materials and waiting on contractors, this has been a slow process, and Mayra is thankful to have been able to stay with her mother during it. Mayra’s new home is concrete, as are most new buildings in Puerto Rico. It will fare much better against future storms.

Mayra’s house is a testament to the community collaboration required to rebuild after a disaster. The money for the doors and windows came from a Lutheran church in Pennsylvania. Lutheran Disaster Response helped supply new furniture and appliances as well as the building materials, such as concrete and plaster, that will fortify the house against future hurricanes. Much of the construction was performed by contractors and volunteers of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Mayra’s cousin is an electrician, and as soon as he finishes wiring the house, Mayra will finally move in.

Mayra’s journey shows the resilience of disaster survivors — neighbors supported by your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response. Through these five years she has stayed positive, grateful and faithful.

*“But [Hurricane] Maria was something else. When we started to feel the winds or how things banged against the house, we knew the storm was hitting us hard.”*

*Mayra outside her new home.*



## *Powerful partnerships*

Lutheran Disaster Response works in partnership with congregations, synods, Lutheran social ministry organizations and other partners in the United States and around the world. With their deep knowledge of local needs and how to address them, these partners help us work in ways that are relevant and effective for each community. Through these partnerships, we accompany survivors from the time a disaster strikes until communities are rebuilt.

This work is made possible by the Lutheran Disaster Response network. We are particularly grateful to:

- The Caribbean Synod
- The Southwestern Texas Synod
- The Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod
- The Florida-Bahamas Synod
- Lutheran Social Services of Puerto Rico
- Lutheran Social Services of the Virgin Islands
- Upbring/Lutheran Social Services Disaster Response
- Lutheran Services Florida
- Inspiritus
- Liberty Lutheran/Lutheran Congregational Services

## Building hope out of ashes

Wednesday, Jan. 13, 2021, started like any other evening for Chanchala Midha and her family. Chanchala, the breadwinner for a household of seven, provides for her husband, their two sons, the sons' wives — one of whom was eight months pregnant — and her infant granddaughter. They live in a densely populated neighborhood in the heart of Kolkata, India, and were busy with their evening housework when they heard desperate screams. Chanchala ran outside and saw the streets filled with fire and smoke.

A massive fire raged through her neighborhood, decimating at least 40 homes in its path. Chanchala recalled how quickly the flames engulfed her home and her neighbors': "We could see our households are burning in front of our eyes, which was very much unbearable to see. We lost everything, and everything burnt into ashes." Among the items she and her family lost were "our medical documents, ID cards, ration cards, important family documents, food materials, sleeping beds, household items, TV, refrigerator — everything has totally burnt. We had no idea what to do."

The fire broke out around 7 p.m., and the local government was quick to provide temporary shelter and food to everyone affected by the fire that night. A nearby college campus served as the emergency shelter. Initially these facilities and provisions were sufficient, yet it soon became apparent that much more would be needed for dozens of families who had lost all their possessions.

With a grant from Lutheran Disaster Response, Lutheran World Service India Trust (LWSIT) organized a robust effort to distribute basic necessities to the affected families. Chanchala and her family received food items, clothing, blankets, bedding, a mosquito net, kitchen utensils and a wide variety of hygiene items.

Lutheran Disaster Response remains in communities such as Chanchala's long after initial relief efforts run out and the headlines change. In India and around the world, your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response support disaster survivors as they work to rebuild.

As for Chanchala and her family, they have found hope in the ashes because of the support she received in the wake of the fire. Reflecting on that support, Chanchala explained, "I pray to God to bless you abundantly so that more people can live life with hope."



Chanchala Midha receives relief items from LWSIT.

## Dreams for the future

The murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer in 2020 sparked months of civil unrest throughout the Twin Cities. Children in North Minneapolis who watched their community being ripped apart needed help to process this life-altering chain of events.

To address the trauma inflicted by Floyd's murder, police violence, civil unrest and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Lutheran Disaster Response supported Camp Noah, a program of Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota. In August 2021, Camp Noah and community partners held a weeklong event at a Lutheran church in North Minneapolis, a predominantly Black community.



*A participant at Camp Noah in North Minneapolis.*

LDR is a longtime partner of Camp Noah and has supported its events around the country, including in Oregon and California after recent wildfires, in Ohio after the 2019 tornadoes, in Kentucky after the 2021 tornadoes and in Nebraska and Michigan after severe flooding. Celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, Camp Noah has grown into a nationally acclaimed resiliency and preparedness program for children of elementary school age whose communities have been impacted by natural disasters or other calamities. For the past 25 years, Camp Noah has shared hope and healing with over 16,000 children throughout the United States and Puerto Rico.

Camp Noah provided a safe, supportive and fun event for children in North Minneapolis to learn resiliency skills within the familiarity of their communities. Local volunteers, chosen to reflect the diversity of participants, and a team of certified staff accompanied campers through a process that enabled them to reflect on the impact of civil unrest, police brutality and racism on their lives.

Campers learned ways to relax, stay safe and recognize that they have hopes and dreams for the future. One volunteer at the North Minneapolis camp said children “wanted to come back daily. In fact, one girl was even in tears on the last day because camp was ending.”

The North Minneapolis camp received positive feedback from parents. In a postcamp survey, 100% of parents said that they felt safe sending their child to Camp Noah, that their child felt good about themselves and their future, and that they would recommend Camp Noah to other parents. Camp Noah is planning to partner with community organizations in North Minneapolis to host a second event in August 2022, addressing social issues that continue to affect local children.

Your support provides people of all ages with the emotional care they need to process disasters, ranging from tornadoes to wildfires to civil unrest.

Volunteers from Pozdisovce, Slovakia.



## *A warm welcome for refugees*

When war came to Ukraine in February 2022, the Lutheran congregation in Pozdisovce, Slovakia, just 26 miles from the Ukrainian border, found itself on the front lines of the humanitarian response, providing much-needed assistance to people who had fled the violence. Led by the Rev. Denisa Kuruc Vargova, the congregation quickly mobilized. “We were getting donations from all over the region,” Vargova said. “Not just Slovakia, but the Czech Republic, France, Germany.” In addition to cash assistance, she said, people sent clothes, diapers, food, medical supplies and other goods. After the mayor of Pozdisovce donated a storage facility, the church set up a staging area to shuttle supplies to the border crossing, where volunteers staffed a welcome tent for refugees.

Volunteers have been arriving from across Slovakia, Vargova said. The church has a small guesthouse it can offer to those who help out at the border for a few days. The welcome tent, located on the Ukrainian side of the border, before people cross the official checkpoint, offers snacks, drinks, playthings for children and information about transportation and accommodations. Refugees can rest at the welcome tent before continuing their journey.

“The first week after the war started, I was so depressed,” said one volunteer, who identified himself as “an IT guy from Bratislava.” “I felt like I couldn’t do anything, and I was looking for some way to help. Doing this feels like I’m doing something.”

Amid the long hours and distressing news, life continues. On a Saturday in May, Vargova and her fiancé, Andrej Kuruc, were married. Afterward, they got right back to showing God’s love through their work with refugees.

# UKRAINE CRISIS: YOUR IMPACT THROUGH

Your gifts of nearly **\$11 million** to support relief for  
are already at work.\*

*Thank you!*

## EXAMPLES OF RESPONSE PROJECTS

- Cash support for refugees and displaced people
- Emergency items such as beds, blankets and shelter
- Food, clean water and hygiene items
- Protection and safeguarding of vulnerable individuals and groups
- Psychosocial care, pastoral support
- Gender justice and the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse



### **POLAND**

Partners: International Orthodox Christian Charities, L'Arche, Lutheran World Federation, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland

### **CZECH REPUBLIC**

Partner: Lutheran World Federation

### **SLOVAKIA**

Partners: Lutheran World Federation, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia

### **HUNGARY**

Partners: ACT Alliance, RGDS-Phiren Amenca, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary

# UGH LUTHERAN DISASTER RESPONSE

those impacted by the crisis in Eastern Europe



## LITHUANIA

Partner: L'Arche

## UKRAINE

Partners: International Orthodox Christian Charities, L'Arche, Lutheran World Federation, German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine

## MOLDOVA

Partner: Church World Service

## ROMANIA

Partners: International Orthodox Christian Charities, Lutheran World Federation, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Romania

\*Map is current as of 8/26/2022.

Your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response  
make possible all this work and more.

*Thank you!*

**Stay  
engaged**

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Twitter and Instagram.  
[blogs.elca.org/disasterresponse](http://blogs.elca.org/disasterresponse)

**Ways to  
support  
Lutheran  
Disaster  
Response**

**ONLINE**

[ELCA.org/disaster](http://ELCA.org/disaster)

**BY MAIL**

Write a check to Lutheran Disaster Response and send to:  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
ELCA Gift Processing Center  
P.O. Box 1809  
Merrifield, VA 22116-8009

**BY PHONE**

Call 800-638-3522 to make a donation with a credit card.  
Operators are ready to assist you Monday through Friday,  
8 a.m.-5 p.m. Central time.

*Gifts designated for a specific disaster are  
used entirely (100%) to assist survivors.*



Lutheran  
Disaster Response