



Being the Church in a Post-Katrina World

A Grassroots Report from the New Orleans-Baton Rouge Area Clergy
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
February, 2007

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Background

Hurricane Katrina hit the Louisiana/ Mississippi coastline on August 29, 2005. Hurricane Katrina was the costliest and one of the deadliest hurricanes in the history of the United States. It was the sixth-strongest Atlantic hurricane ever recorded and the third-strongest hurricane on record that made landfall in the United States.¹ Some 90,000 square miles were declared federal disaster areas – roughly the size of the United Kingdom. ²

Generous Support

Thank you to those who have sustained us with your prayers, your financial gifts, your volunteer labor, and your other gifts.

Current Situation

There has been much progress over these last eighteen months, but there is much to be done to rebuild lives, congregations, and communities. It is humbling to have received the overwhelming outpouring of love and prayer. Yet, some areas still look like a war-zone; and fatigue has settled in as people come to terms with an uncertain future. We ask for your continued support.

PART 1 – UNMET NEEDS

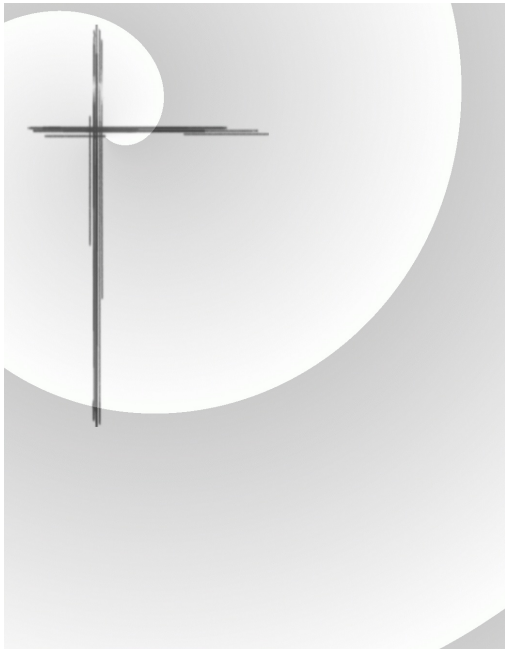
The unmet needs in our communities continue to be staggering. Thus, the ELCA clergy and lay leaders in New Orleans and Baton Rouge have tried to identify unmet needs facing our communities. Primarily, we are concerned about supporting our local ELCA congregations so we might be able to respond to the current mission opportunities.

The current policy of Lutheran Disaster Response does not release funds to be used for church re-building, pastors, staff or programs. Consequently, some of our congregations are facing the possibilities of closing, despite the mission opportunities which follow disaster. There are many needs, but these are primary:

1. The urgency of the current situation needs to be proclaimed, communicated and grasped!
 - a. Release funds now. Please do not wait until congregations close their doors!
 - b. Release skilled and unskilled volunteers for mission trips now!
 - c. Release prayer now!
2. Support of all aspects of local ELCA congregations in the impacted area is desperately needed, including:
 - a. Buildings
 - i. Rebuild church buildings damaged by the hurricanes
 - ii. Develop the church site as a vibrant center for mission, spiritual strength, and care
 - b. Staff
 - i. Provide financial support for pastors and staff as new configurations of shared ministry develop to address the changing population and needs
 - c. Ministry
 - i. Support a new consortium in metro New Orleans as the ELCA's public witness is strengthened, reflecting the presence of Jesus Christ in the midst of struggle and pain
3. Communication is essential and needs to be sustained
 - a. Bear witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ (throughout New Orleans, even to satellite sites)
 - b. Publicize ELCA presence to the local community
 - c. Keep the unmet needs of the Gulf Coast area on the radar screen
 - d. Improve communication with partner agencies and ministries of the church

¹ National Hurricane Center, NOAA.gov, Tropical Weather Summary, 2005.

² The Brookings Institution Metro Policy Program, "New Orleans After the Storm," October, 2005.



Thank You

to our brothers and sisters of the ELCA
who have sustained us
since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita
with your prayers, financial gifts,
volunteer labor, and other gifts.

Ways To Help Today

- ❖ Continue to pray for those working, living, and serving in the devastated areas and others who face disaster.
- ❖ Send skilled and unskilled volunteers through Lutheran Disaster Response. Contact: 866-709-0888
- ❖ Become a Mission Partner with a hurricane-impacted congregation or one which is reaching out in the impacted area. (See Gulf Coast Synod Website: www.futurewithhope.org.)
- ❖ Support long-term recovery efforts on the local level by sending materials and money for rebuilding. (See Gulf Coast Synod Website: www.futurewithhope.org)
- ❖ Support local outreach efforts to assist individuals and families to continue their recovery from the disaster (appliances, kitchen kits, mattresses, etc).
- ❖ Come, visit, stay in our hotels, eat the cuisine, and help our economy.
- ❖ Come to New Orleans and pray. A self-guided prayer pilgrimage is being developed with routes to drive, stopping for prayer at key sites. (Watch the Gulf Coast Synod Web site for more information: www.futurewithhope.org.)
- ❖ Bring your conferences and seminars to New Orleans.
- ❖ Find ways to do business with the businesses of Louisiana and Mississippi.
- ❖ Support efforts to bring affordable housing to New Orleans and the surrounding areas.
- ❖ Adopt a school in Louisiana or Mississippi.
- ❖ Learn more about the poverty exposed by the disaster, and develop strategies to lessen poverty and its injustice.
- ❖ Seek out hurricane evacuees residing in your community and offer support.
- ❖ Train your faith community in disaster response. Be prepared.

PART 2 – PARTNERSHIP WITH LUTHERAN DISASTER RESPONSE (LDR)

Background

As novices at disaster response, the local pastors, lay leaders, and congregations looked to the ELCA's Lutheran Disaster Response for leadership.

The Mission for Lutherans Disaster Response is to demonstrate Christ's compassion for people by promoting hope, healing, and wholeness for disaster survivors.

Sequence of Delivery for Lutheran Disaster Response

The ELCA Lutheran Disaster Response received donated funds designated for disaster response. LDR worked in Louisiana through the local affiliated Lutheran Social Services of the South in Austin, TX to implement its response. The funds have been used in four areas:

1. Emergency Hardship Grants (\$300-500 for individuals and families distributed immediately after the disaster)
2. Spiritual and Emotional Care
3. Volunteer Coordination
4. Long-term Recovery

Time Line in Louisiana (New Orleans Area)

August 29, 2005 Hurricane Katrina hits
September 24, 2005 Hurricane Rita hits

ELCA Response

The generous outpouring of love, money, resources, volunteers, and prayer is immediate!

Synod Response

Immediate Bishop Blom sends an appeal to the Conference of Bishops for funding for clergy and church staff who lost their income source due to hurricanes. He receives an overwhelming response.

October 27, 2005 Bishop Blom and synod staff meet with ELCA clergy and lay leaders to discuss future ministry and mission in the area. (Bishop Blom had made several visits to this area by this time.)

 Much support, visits, and prayers follow.

Fall, 2005 A Synod Web site is launched to communicate disaster response. (www.futurewithhope.org)

ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson's Visits

September 22, 2005 Bishop Hanson meets with the some ELCA pastors in Baton Rouge. (Not all can travel to Baton Rouge due to the intensity and complexity of those first weeks following the hurricane and the approaching Hurricane Rita. New Orleans is still inaccessible.)

Year Two

February 22, 2007 Bishop Mark Hanson visits New Orleans and meets with clergy, AIMS, and lay leaders.

Meetings With Lutheran Disaster Response/Chicago Staff in Louisiana

September 22, 2005 LDR director Heather Feltman accompanies Bishop Mark Hanson on his visit and meets with ELCA pastors. (A summary of ELCA congregations initial needs and vision for mission is given to both Bishop Hanson and Heather Feltman.) During the next twelve months, Heather visits one ELCA church and has no meetings with ELCA clergy or lay leaders.

Year Two

September 19, 2006 LDR Meeting #2: Heather Feltman meets with ELCA clergy. Several LSSS and LDR staff accompanies her.

Lutheran Disaster Response/Lutheran Social Services of the South

September 12-15, 2005 Devastated Area is visited
LSSS Meeting #1: Mark Minick, Dale Peercy, Jean Peercy, and a few ELCA clergy meet. (Many of the clergy are still not able to return to their homes due to the devastation and rescue efforts.)

September 13, 2005 LSSS training is held for ELCA local clergy and leaders on volunteer management. Several ELCA congregations make plans to host volunteers for relief and long-term recovery efforts.

October, 2005 Volunteer groups begin staying in churches. Negotiations begin between local ELCA congregations and LDR concerning volunteer sites, staffing, and funding. Key cooperative work begins with the Missouri Synod's volunteer sites.

November 15, 2005 Louisiana Coordinator #1: Michigan resident Rose Gorman is introduced at deanery. (Begins in October and is contracted through winter.)

December 4, 2005 Introduction of LDR's new Volunteer Site Operations Coordinator/ Missouri Synod Pastor Dave Buss to ELCA congregational leaders. He commits to improving local LDR operations for volunteer sites.

December 13, 2005 Introduction of Spiritual Care team: Contracted chaplain/counselors from Florida. (Contracted on limited basis.)

January, 2006 Louisiana/Texas Coordinator #2: ELCA Pastor Tom Minor, a Texas resident, is assigned. (Is released in fall of 2006.)

Spring, 2006 LDR-LSSS Case Management sites open in Baton Rouge and New Orleans. (Katrina Aid Today)
Plans are launched for Camp Noah.
Work with volunteer groups becomes LDR-LSSS's strong point.

Summer, 2006 Louisiana Coordinator #3: Harold Ray, a Baptist retired military chaplain, relocates to New Orleans for job. (Is released in November, 2006.)

June 1-3, 2006 LSSS Meeting #2: A reception is held at the Gulf Coast Synod Assembly so hurricane-impacted individuals might get better acquainted; LSSS provides their first financial report to those in the impacted area. Camp Noah director is introduced.

- June 5-9, 2006 Retreat for clergy and spouses is held in Aspen, CO.
- July 5, 2006 LSSS contracts LA resident and ELCA clergy Walt Ehrhardt, Ed.D. to join full-time LCMS deaconess, Dr. Loraine Rathman for emotional/spiritual care team in LA.
- August 21-24, 2006 LSS Disaster Response is formed. A retreat is held in Houston, TX for the entire LSSDR staff serving LA, MS, and TX. Shortly after, the first listing of LDR staff in Louisiana is provided to congregations.

Year Two

- September 19, 2006 Several LSSS staff attend meeting with Heather Feltman and local ELCA clergy.
- December 14, 2006 LSSS Meeting #3: Kurt Senske, CEO of LSSS meets for the first time with clergy and lay leaders to discuss "Lessons Learned."
- January 9, 2007 LSSS Meeting #4: Kurt Senske, CEO of LSSS and Sam Sipes, president of LSSS, meet with clergy and lay to discuss "Moving Forward."
Louisiana Coordinator #4: Jessica Vermilyea, a Louisiana resident, is introduced.

Ongoing Response

We recognize and affirm the current response of Lutheran Disaster Response as it

- ✦ coordinates volunteers gutting and rebuilding homes
- ✦ assists long-term recovery through case managers
- ✦ provides spiritual and emotional care

LSSS Statistics for the States of Mississippi, Texas, and Louisiana

(from August 29, 2005 – December 31, 2006)

Volunteers	19,497
Volunteer hours worked	984,700
Value of volunteer labor	\$16,739,900
Camp Noah	34



PART 3 – LESSONS LEARNED

One cannot live through such devastation and participate in the rescue, relief, and long-term recovery response without gleaning insight. In order to be good stewards of the insights gained through this tragedy, the following comments are offered in this grassroots report so the ELCA's response might be strengthened in future disasters.

Suggested Changes to the Current ELCA's Disaster Response

1. **First Response**
It would be beneficial for Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) to re-claim the ELCA identity as a first responder. The theology of the cross reminds us we are called to meet people in the pain, not after the situation has been cleaned up by others. In doing so we become a visible witness to the compassion of Christ.
 - a. The local pastors and congregations are the ELCA's first responders. Every disaster is local; thus, immediate, sustained, and direct communication is essential with the local expressions of the church as they respond to a disaster.
 - b. Support the grass-roots first response efforts of congregations and pastors by releasing funds and staff immediately after the disaster -- not just \$300 per family in the LDR hardship grants for a limited period of time. (Unfortunately, not many of the impacted congregations had money in a pastor's discretionary fund or outreach fund to assist with immediate response. Yet the needs were enormous.)
 - c. Send pastors and pastoral care staff immediately and consistently! (Consider utilizing the tremendous resources of campus ministry and outdoor ministry staff. Whoever comes needs to be flexible and understand the ministry of presence.)
2. **Support Pastors and Staff**
It would be beneficial if the ELCA could set aside some disaster funds to financially support pastors who lose their income and housing due to the disaster. (Currently, no money is available from LDR for this.) Gulf Coast Synod Bishop Blom sent an appeal to the Conference of Bishops for financial assistance, and the response was extremely generous.
3. **Support Rebuilding of Churches**
It would be beneficial if the ELCA could set aside some disaster funds to financially support rebuilding church structures in viable areas. (Currently, no money is available from LDR for this.)
4. **Support Congregational Mission**
It would be beneficial if the ELCA through LDR could release grants or funding for congregations engaged in local disaster response efforts and mission.
5. **Expand Decision-Making**
It would be beneficial to restructure Lutheran Disaster Response so decisions do not rest in the sole office of an Executive Director, but would include an advisory board. This change might then include an appeal process.
6. **Long-term Partners**
It would be beneficial for Lutheran Disaster Response to send staff or long-term volunteers to walk with the local clergy through the disaster response. Maximize the Lutheran response and presence in the local community by expanding the current on-site leadership already established. This is especially true in solo pastorates. Katrina has taught how essential it is to have a disaster leadership team on location. A disaster response cannot be managed from long-distance, be it Houston, Austin, or Chicago. The opportunity is to be incarnational!

7. Core Principles of Collaboration, Coordination, Communication, and Cooperation
It would be beneficial if Lutheran Disaster Response would adopt core principles to work with local congregations and communities modeling collaboration, coordination, communication, and cooperation. Hopefully, the local Lutheran Social Service agencies would embrace and model these same basic principles.

PART 4 – SUMMARY

If in five years,

the ELCA and Lutheran Disaster Response lifts up its ministries in the New Orleans area by saying, “Look, we are still responding in the New Orleans area through rebuilding of individual homes”, but the ELCA has closed 3-5 of its congregations because there was no concerted effort to strengthen the present opportunity for mission, then that statement is one of repentance rather than victory.

If in five years,

we experience another disaster and ignore the local congregations in the response, then the lessons from Katrina have been lost. (Over 200 accumulated years of living in New Orleans is represented in four local clergy, yet their insight and experience has been largely untapped.)

Please act now!

We recommend a two-pronged approach

1. **Act now** for those still involved in mission and ministry in the Gulf Coast area. Find the ways to direct the amazing resources of the ELCA to be a visible and public witness as the Gulf Coast area recovers.
2. **Act now**, learn critical lessons from the Katrina disaster response, and make appropriate changes to improve Lutheran Disaster Response for the future.

RESOURCES

God in the Raging Waters: Stories of Love and Service Following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita

by Bishop Paul Blom, edited by Pastor Kathy Haueisen

Augsburg Fortress (web site: www.augsburgfortress.org)

Voices of Faith in the Midst of the Storm

by New Orleans area ELCA clergy and AIMS, edited by Pastor John McCullough-Bade

Future with Hope Press (web site: www.futurewithhopepress.org)

FOR FUTURE CONVERSATION

- Deans: Pastor Robin McCullough-Bade, Interim at Lutheran Church of Our Saviour, Baton Rouge, LA
Pastor Sean Ewbank, Hosanna Lutheran Church, Mandeville, LA
- Area Clergy: Pastor Stan Eckermann, St. Paul Lutheran Church, Baton Rouge, LA
Pastor Walt Ehrhardt, Ed.D. Pastoral Counselor, Consultant to Synod Bishop, Mandeville, LA
Pastor Lisa Gaye, St. Mark Lutheran Church, Metairie, LA
Pastor Bob Hildebrandt, Metairie, LA
Pastor Patrick Keen, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, New Orleans, LA
Pastor Anton Kern, Hosanna Lutheran Church, Mandeville, LA
Pastor John McCullough Bade, Baton Rouge, LA
Pastor Jim Shears, Gethsemane Lutheran Church, Chalmette, LA
Pastor Barb Simmers, Peace Lutheran Church, Slidell, LA
Pastor Ron Unger, Christ the King Lutheran Church, Kenner, LA