

## Disaster Response:

### Using the Gifts of Discipleship

Disasters turn our world upside down. Disasters change lives.

That's true whether the disaster is due to wind, water, fire, acts of violence, or something else.

Those who pass through a disaster find themselves in a new place. Life is not the same. It is not unusual to feel vulnerable, displaced, confused, disoriented, scarred, and wounded.

Church, are we ready? Are we ready to be the tangible hands, ears, eyes, and voice of a loving Christ?

## Called and Sent

God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble.  
Therefore we will not fear,  
though the earth should change,  
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;  
though its waters roar and foam,  
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.  
"Be still, and know that I am God!  
I am exalted among the nations,  
I am exalted in the earth."  
The Lord of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our refuge.  
Psalm 46: 1-3, 10

In baptism, God calls and sends us:  
**to live among God's faithful people,**  
**to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper,**  
**to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,**  
**to serve all people, following the example of Jesus,**  
**and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.**



Indeed, God calls and sends us to be the church ... before, during, and after a disaster. Thanks be to God that the very One who has created all that exists, the One who has redeemed us in Christ, is the One who sends the Spirit to give us courage to face the hour and respond with compassion.



# Disaster Response for Congregations: 101

Response after a disaster moves through different phases. In each phase, there are unique opportunities for congregational involvement. The key is to work with others in your community to have a coordinated response. Opportunities vary based on the type and scope of the disaster.

## What happens after a disaster?

First Response: includes search and rescue

Focus: Led by police, firefighters, and other rescue squads

- Keep out of the way of search and rescue efforts
- Let trained personnel do their jobs
- Stay safe
- Pray

## Relief

Focus: Immediate care of basic human needs

- Seek out local partners to address:
  - Temporary shelters (Red Cross often oversees)
  - Meals
  - Clothing
  - Spiritual Care

## Short and Long-term Recovery for those affected persons and communities

Focus: Restoration to a “new” normal

- If the disaster is federally declared emergency, then the disaster response falls under FEMA guidelines. FEMA works with volunteer agencies to coordinate a response through VOAD (See text box on this page.)
- Consider ways to accompany those who have been impacted as they develop and implement plans for the future

## Mitigation

Focus: Preventing future disasters or reducing their impact

- Learn lessons from this disaster and educate others
- Promote sound construction and community infrastructure for all people

## Preparedness

Focus: Get prepared to handle an emergency or disaster

- Develop a disaster response plan for yourself and your congregation (See Rapid Response Team)
- Train congregational leaders in disaster response

## Key Points to Remember

- Every disaster is unique
- Every disaster is local
- Listen to those in the midst of the disaster to identify needs and to request specific assistance
- No matter the plan, be ready to use Plan B (Actually, Plan G or M or S may be needed.)
- Seek out partners to collaborate

### DISASTER PARTNERS

**FEMA** (Federal Emergency Management Agency)

**VAL** (Voluntary Agency Liaison): FEMA staff assigned to assist volunteer agencies who are responding to a disaster and to coordinate disaster relief activities.

**VOAD** (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster): Organizes voluntary agencies to coordinate, collaborate, communicate and cooperate on disaster response.

**Lutheran Disaster Response** (LDR): A Lutheran partnership ministry of the ELCA with the mission to demonstrate Christ's compassion for people by promoting health, healing and wholeness for disaster survivors. LDR distributes funds and works through local social ministry organizations (SMO) to implement services.

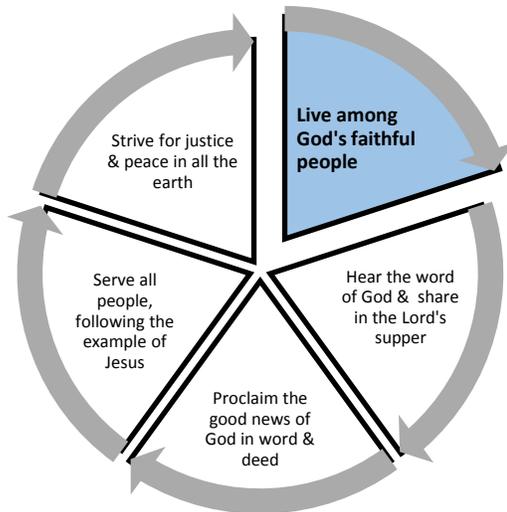


## Disaster Response Model for Congregations Rapid Response Team (RRT)

<b>Roles:</b> Ideally, there is at least one person per role. The first three positions need only one person. If need be, the same person can share several roles. <i>(adapted from the National Incident Framework)</i>	<b>NAME(S)</b>
<b>RRT TEAM LEADER</b> <i>[Incident Commander]</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain an active RRT team at all times</li> <li>• Notify team when they need to be on alert and activate team as needed</li> <li>• Coordinate the RRT efforts</li> </ul>	1 person
<b>COMMUNICATION</b> <i>[Public Information Officer]</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gather and maintain accurate information about the disaster</li> <li>• Communicate updated assessments of the situation, specific needs, and ways to respond</li> </ul>	1 person
<b>LIAISON</b> <i>[Liaison Officer]</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Represent the RRT at community meetings concerning disaster response</li> <li>• Collaborate and coordinate with partners in disaster response</li> <li>• Communicate the latest developments in disaster response with the RRT</li> </ul>	1 person
<b>NEEDS</b> <i>[Planning Section]</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a system to track needs of congregations</li> <li>• Seek ways to respond to the needs of congregation and the community</li> <li>• Work with disaster response partners to meet needs of those in the impacted area</li> </ul>	Team of 3+
<b>DONATIONS</b> <i>[Administration &amp; Finance Section]</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a system to direct and re-direct those who want to donate goods and money</li> <li>• Maintain updated list of warehouses in the local impacted area for donated goods &amp; gift cards</li> <li>• Provide a system to receive and track financial contributions</li> <li>• Provide a system to thank donors of money, goods, and services</li> </ul>	Team of 3+
<b>VOLUNTEERS</b> <i>[Operations Section]</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep an updated list of those coordinating volunteers in the impacted area</li> <li>• Develop a system to receive and direct offers for volunteers and services</li> </ul>	Team of 3+
<b>LOGISTICS</b> <i>[Logistics Section]</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare RRT command post site for the disaster response and maintain it during its use</li> <li>• Maintain adequate telephone lines and internet access</li> <li>• Assure resources (human, financial, and material) are available for operations</li> </ul>	Team of 3+



## POST-DISASTER: What does it mean to live among God's faithful people?



They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers ... All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.

—Acts 2:42, 44-46 NRSV

### Before a disaster:

- Create a Rapid Response Team (RRT) within your congregation; or alongside partner congregations
- Pray and discern your congregations gifts, skills, and passion ... before a disaster is near
- Update the list of your homebound members and those with special needs
- Back-up and protect your congregational records
- Create a plan of communication with your congregation, including ways for individuals and families to check-in about their safety
- Communicate, communicate, and communicate these plans with your congregation
- Encourage the congregation to build relationships with their neighbors, making sure those neighbors who are at risk have taken proper precautions.
- Learn more via on-site and online training (offered by Red Cross and others)

### During a disaster

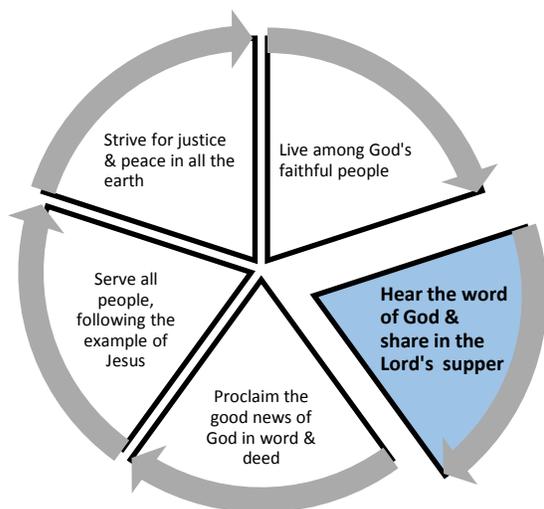
- Follow the instructions of the local and state civil authority
- Do not try to be a hero
- Communicate a consistent message with those who are overseeing the disaster

### After a disaster

- Assure your safety and that of your family
- Survey the needs of the congregation, especially the elderly and those with special needs
- Encourage members to check in with their neighbors
- Keep your congregation updated about the situation and each other
- Assess damage to your property
- Communicate your findings with the church-at-large



## POST-DISASTER: What does it mean to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper?



And he said, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"

– Mark 4:9 NRSV

The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

–1 Corinthians 11:23b-26 NRSV

### Before a disaster

- Call the church to pray
- As long as it is safe, gather around God's word and share in the Lord's supper—perhaps offer an shortened service
- Provide time for mutual encouragement
- Use social media to offer prayers and provide support

### During a disaster

- Follow the instructions of the local and state civil authority
- Do not try to be a hero
- Communicate a consistent message with those who are overseeing the disaster

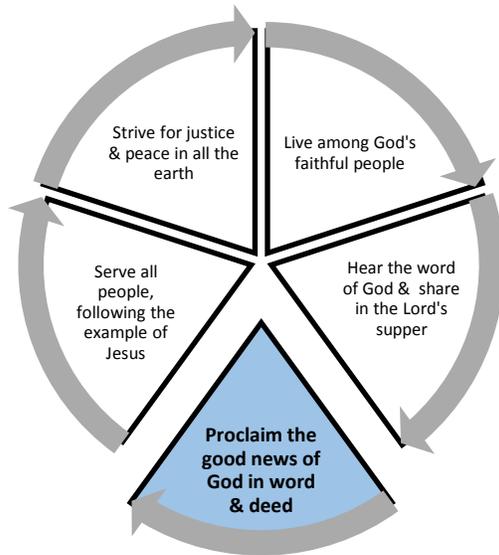
### After a disaster

- Allow time to breathe
- Trust in God's care ... despite it all
- Gather in prayer as often as you can
- Return to the routine of regular worship as soon as possible ... even if that means gathering at an alternative time and space
- Find ways to care for the caregivers
- Claim a verse from scripture to become your North Star

*Be still, and know that I am God!  
I am exalted among the nations,  
I am exalted in the earth.  
-Psalm 46:10*



## POST-DISASTER: What does it mean to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed?



“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

–Matthew 5:14-16 NRSV

But in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you.

–1 Peter 3:15 NRSV

### Before a disaster

- Notify the Rapid Response Team (RRT) when they need to be on alert
- Activate the Rapid Response Team as needed
- Clarify the roles of the Rapid Response Team with those who are available
- Recruit additional volunteers who might want to assist

### During a disaster

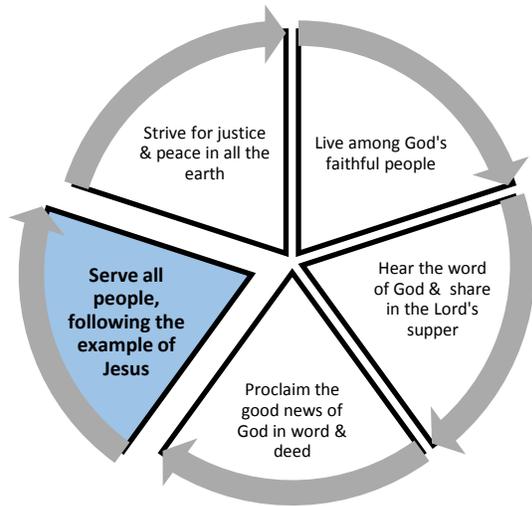
- Follow the instructions of the local and state civil authority
- Do not try to be a hero
- Communicate a consistent message with those who are overseeing the disaster

### After a disaster (using the Rapid Response Team model. See expanded duties on page 3.)

- Communication Team (from RRT)
  - Gather and maintain accurate information about the disaster
  - Communicate updated assessments of the situation, specific needs, and ways to respond
- Needs Team (from RRT)
  - Develop a system to track needs of congregations, neighbors, and community
  - Provide updated and current list of immediate needs
- Donations Team (from RRT)
  - Provide a system to direct those who want to donate goods and re-direct donations
- Volunteer Team Leader (from RRT)
  - Develop a system to receive and direct offers for volunteers and services



## POST-DISASTER: What does it mean to serve all people, following the example of Jesus?



[Jesus] got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him...

So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

—John 13:4-5, 14-15 NRSV

### Before a disaster ... when it is near

- Activate your congregation's Rapid Response Team (RRT)
- Assist with area preparedness plans to assure safety
- Assure the safety of your congregation

### During a disaster

- Follow the instructions of the local and state civil authority
- Do not try to be a hero!
- Communicate a consistent message with those who are overseeing the disaster

### After a disaster

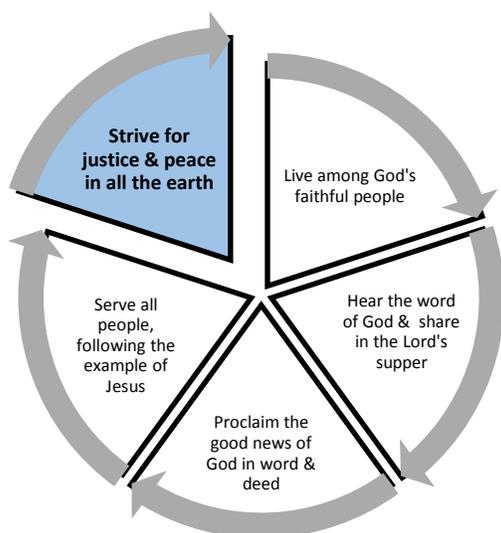
- Visit the impacted site, providing a public Lutheran presence
- Recognize and empower members of your congregation in their relief and recovery efforts
- Secure and release funds for immediate relief ministries
- Partner with another congregation or agency in your response. Options might include:
  - Open your church facility to provide free meals
  - Use your facilities to house volunteers
  - Adopt the first responders and deliver snacks for them
  - Volunteer and provide hospitality at your local volunteer center for there will be compassionate volunteers who will leave the comfort of their homes to help
  - Provide books, children, and learning stations for children at long-term shelters
  - Help those who were impacted to answer and file required federal, state, and local forms

*See, I am making all things new.*

*-Revelation 21:5*



## POST-DISASTER: What does it mean to strive for justice and peace in all the earth



Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?'

Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'

-Matthew 25:42-45 NRSV

What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

-Micah 6:8 NRSV

### Before a disaster

- Educate yourself about the inequities and injustices in your community
- Become acquainted with those local agencies who promote positive change in your community

### During a disaster

- Follow the instructions of the local and state civil authority ... do not try to be a hero!
- Communicate a consistent message with those who are overseeing the disaster

### After a disaster

- Recognize pre-disaster inequity and injustice within a community are often times magnified during response and recovery
- Become a champion for those who have no voice
- Volunteer to assist those who were impacted to complete the legal and insurance forms which follow after a disaster
- Research and understand the issues
- Make a long-term commitment to bring appropriate change in policy
- Celebrate the ways your local community responds to the needs of all people
- Recognize the slow process of recovery and provide listening sessions for those who need to vent their frustrations

*Do not remember the former things,  
or consider the things of old.  
I am about to do a new thing;  
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?  
-Isaiah 43:18-19 NSRV*

