



How can your congregation serve the community after a disaster?

Congregations can take an active role in the community in the wake of disaster. Our facilities, people, and communication systems can be vital components of a quick response to people in great need.

The following is a list of ideas to spark conversation and action in your congregation. Think about what your congregation already does well. Then consider how these gifts can be best utilized in the wake of a disaster.

Lutheran Congregational Services serves as Lutheran Disaster Response – Eastern Pennsylvania covering the counties served by the Northeastern and Southeastern Pennsylvania Synods. Contact us for resources, consultation and information on local disaster response and preparedness at 610.770.9205 or info@lutherancongregationalservices.org.

During and immediately after a disaster:

- 1) Urge members to check on their neighbors and vulnerable members of the community and of their congregation.
- 2) Find out and distribute information about where to get help immediately and in the short term including phone numbers of the local municipality, the Red Cross and Lutheran Disaster Response – Eastern PA. If a FEMA declaration is made for individual assistance, distribute FEMA contact information so that community members can get an identification number within 60 days so that they can qualify for assistance.
- 3) Provide hospitality for first-responders and people immediately affected by the disaster. If possible, open the church building as a place to wash up, use the telephone or internet, get a hot meal especially for those who have lost electricity, rest from the elements, and more.
- 4) Offer written prayers for people who are suffering and open the sanctuary for prayer and meditation.

After the disaster:

- 1) Arrange to share meals or food supplies with those who need them.
- 2) Provide meeting space for community planning and leadership for local, long-term recovery teams.
- 3) Collect cleaning supplies that will be needed for recovery. Recovery organizations regularly distribute "Cleanup Buckets." Supplies are often quickly diminished after a disaster and need to be replaced. Find out more information about the contents and the delivery of "Cleanup Buckets" at www.lutherancongregationalservices.org.
- 4) Do not collect clothing or other items unless you know what is needed and how the items will be distributed. Please do collect funds which can be donated directly to local rebuilding efforts, to Lutheran Congregational Services for eastern Pennsylvania's response (www.lutherancongregationalservices.org) or to the national Lutheran Disaster Response (www.elca.org/disaster).
- 5) Warn people to be careful and be prepared to watch out for scams. Keep your congregation informed about the possibility of those who will take advantage of people desperate to clean up and rebuild.
- 6) Offer a safe place, leadership and resources for folks to talk, pray, and cope with suffering and loss. Contact us for devotional materials for survivors and volunteers.
- 7) Build volunteer teams to serve in local disaster response. Teams are utilized for a day or longer- depending upon the need and availability. Fill out and submit the volunteer forms on our website so that we can best match teams with needs in our area. We can also connect you to other volunteer organizations who are locally responding to disasters.

- 8) Get prepared to house and support recovery workers and begin doing so as soon as they arrive in the area. Communicate to us your willingness and resources for hospitality to get connected with the recovery efforts.
- 9) Consider hosting a volunteer, preparedness or response workshop at your congregation. Contact us for resources and more information.
- 10) Listen for who may be underserved. Think of what can be done. Do what you can to meet the need while advocating for unmet needs through larger volunteer agencies and efforts.
- 11) Provide for childcare services or babysitting so adults can have a break or and can focus on what they need to do and children have relief from the stress of cleanup.
- 12) Check on whether other churches have been damaged. Offer your worship or educational space for interim use.

To be prepared for next time:

- 1) Make sure that more than one person has the log in and password information for changing the church website, answering machine greeting, facebook page and more. Work through your procedure for cancelling worship services or other activities. Teach congregational members to get congregational information in various centralized communication locations: answering machine messages, website, facebook pages, group text messages, etc.
- 2) Help build networks for the vulnerable people in the community who are likely to be more adversely impacted by limited mobility, utility shut-offs, etc. Match up vulnerable people with other members of the congregation who are geographically close to them.
- 3) Find out how emergency response works in your community. Build relationships, gather contact information and distribute the information to members of your congregation so that you are ready for the next disaster. Consider adding a page to your congregational directory that includes emergency contact information.