



**Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

October 9, 2011

Dear Partners in Sharing God's Love and Hope,

Bishop Zeiser and I are sending this communication to update you on current conditions and our work in response to the flooding and other damage from Hurricane Irene, Tropical Storm Lee, and the record breaking rains that followed.

One of the biggest frustrations is that the effects of these storms have been felt across such a large area and in so many scattered and isolated communities. Of the 14 counties in our synod, apparently Carbon is the only one without significant impact. Elsewhere whole towns were inundated.

What have Lutherans been doing in response? Many individuals and congregations have reached out to their neighbors in remarkable ways. Many others are donating cleaning supplies and funds. Still others, wishing they could do something more hands on and specific, are frustrated with the lack of organized response. So we are putting a lot of effort into helping communities organize and into setting up long term response.

While initially it is necessary and useful to help folks clean out their ruined materials, deconstructing someone else's property needs to be done with great care. Who really owns the property and can give permission? What about safety for the residents and those doing the work? With so many in need, how do you determine who will receive aid and in what order? Those are just a few questions that must be addressed during response. When so many are scrambling to respond to such great need, it becomes all the more important to form and renew partnerships in order to coordinate our response so that it is effective, efficient and wisely carried out. We Lutherans are known for long term recovery. People count on us to be team players, to bring skills to the table and to hang in there for the long haul.

As the Lutheran Disaster Preparedness and Recovery Coordinator for Northeastern Pennsylvania, let me say that the response from our partner, FEMA, has been impressive. As of September 30, over 32,000 inspections had been conducted, a total of \$69 million dollars had been approved for individual assistance, and most of that had already been distributed. What you may not know is that behind the scenes there are

FEMA VALs – Voluntary Agency Liaisons – working with many partners to help communities organize their immediate and long term recovery efforts.

In recovery work it is essential that we work *with* survivors and their local communities. This takes time. Each area was impacted differently and each has unique characteristics, practices, and resources. Some don't want outside assistance. The good news is that our work in preparedness is paying off. Those areas where we put in great effort to set up Long Term Recovery committees and VOADs (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster) are getting organized fairly rapidly. The other good news is that the partnerships with voluntary agencies and ecumenical organizations that we have been building are also paying off. We are keeping one another informed, dividing up the work, and supporting one another in our efforts.

So what are we focusing on at the moment? We are—

- helping counties and communities set up Long Term Recovery Committees;
- working with FEMA and our VOAD and interfaith partners to determine what services are needed and where;
- meeting with pastors and deans of the affected area, paying attention to their needs;
- posting current opportunities for volunteers and donations on the Lutheran Congregational Services website; and
- setting pieces in place for the long term recovery activities of taking applications for assistance, assessing properties, enlisting and coordinating volunteers, housing volunteer groups, and providing emotional and spiritual care such as Camp Noah.

### [How can people help at this stage?](#)

1. Encourage anyone impacted by Irene or Lee to access as many resources as they can.
  - a. Tell or help them register with FEMA (800-621-3362).
  - b. If they receive an application labeled an SBA (Small Business Administration) loan, it is essential that they fill it out and return it, even if they don't want or don't think they will qualify for a loan. If they qualify, it offers very low interest. If they do *not* qualify, they become eligible for other assistance from many other sources, including from us Lutherans. If they don't fill out the form, they may lose out on significant help.
  - c. Encourage them and even offer to take them to the Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) in their county. Do this soon, since the DRCs close rather quickly. This is one stop shopping for many kinds of information and assistance.

2. Donate funds and cleaning supplies. These are needed now. Household items and clothes will be needed later and in very limited quantities. Funds may be sent to Lutheran Congregational Services, 1923 Hanover Avenue, Allentown, PA 18109 and should be designated 2011 Flood Relief. Also consider donations to The American Red Cross and The Salvation Army, partners involved in immediate response. Go to [www.lutherancongregationalservices.org](http://www.lutherancongregationalservices.org) and scroll down to “Clean-up/Flood Buckets Needed” for information about cleaning supplies.
3. Volunteer with local groups and prepare to volunteer with Lutheran Disaster Response Northeastern PA. Go to [www.lutherancongregationalservices.org](http://www.lutherancongregationalservices.org), scroll down the column on the left to “Disaster Response,” click the link for “Frequently Asked Questions,” scroll down that page to “How Can I Help?” and click the link in the second bullet, “Volunteer to assist in recovery from local disasters.” Or call Dianne Fox (610-428-4598) for current opportunities or to register with LDR-NE PA.
4. Provide care for the caregivers. Pray for those who are leading response efforts. Reach out to pastors and others who are dealing with survivors. Encourage responders to care for themselves and offer to assist with or pick up some of their tasks. It is a common phenomenon that within a few years after a major disaster, there is a high turnover of pastors and other professional helpers in the affected area.
5. Make quilts and prepare to volunteer for Camp Noah. Our hope is to offer many of these camps for children within our synod during the coming year. Go to [www.lutherancongregationalservices.org](http://www.lutherancongregationalservices.org), scroll down the column on the left to “Disaster Response,” and click the link for Camp Noah.

While we are not in control of the weather, we have God’s promise that the Spirit will work with us to let the love made clear through God’s Son shine through even the thickest clouds encountered in life. May you be warmed and energized by that love. May we all be given wisdom, courage and resources for the days and years of work to come.

Your partners in sharing the Good News,

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