

Upper Susquehanna Synod Disaster Recovery Plan As of May 2, 2017

Goals

The Upper Susquehanna Synod (USS), through synod staff, congregations, and pastors will respond, through a ministry of service, to natural and/or man-made disasters occurring in the territory of the synod. We will do so with the assistance, collaboration, and support of Lutheran Disaster Response and Diakon Lutheran Social Services, LDR's lead agency for disaster response in this synod.

The USS is not, and does not have the capacity to be, first-responders in the event of an emergency or disaster. This important duty is best left to those who have been trained as first-responders. If first-responders request our assistance we will do our best to provide it, within the limits of our capacity. Because we are not first-responders, this plan is termed a "disaster recovery plan" and not a "disaster response plan".

The USS is committed to the ministry of disaster relief and recovery. Our goal is to be committed to long-term disaster recovery, beginning immediately after the first-responders have done their jobs and continuing for as long as we are able to be effective.

Types of Disasters

The type of disaster most likely to occur in our area is flooding; therefore, flooding will be the primary scenario for which we prepare. The 1972 floods resulting from Hurricane Agnes, and the 2011 floods resulting from Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee, loom large in the minds of the local population. Their after-effects are still being felt throughout the region. In 2011 many people, who felt safe from the potential of flooding because they had weathered 1972 and other subsequent floods, found themselves unexpectedly affected by rising floodwaters. Part of this had to do with levees and flood walls being built in other communities, such as Wilkes-Barre, that pushed floodwater further downstream. This illustrates an important lesson: no matter how prepared you think you are, you can never anticipate or plan for every potential problem. But by being prepared, you may be better able to respond to those unexpected events.

While this plan is primarily intended for flood response, it may be adapted as necessary for other disasters such as forest fire, earthquakes, chemical leaks, hazardous materials spills, nuclear reactor fallout, or infectious diseases.

First Steps

When a disaster has occurred, or is expected to occur, the Bishop and staff, including the Assistant to the Bishop, the synod's Director of Communications, and the Diakon Disaster Relief Coordinator, meets at the synod office to assess the situation.

Communication, preferably by cell phone, is made with the six Conference Deans, informing them of an upcoming disaster recovery meeting. This meeting should happen as soon as possible, preferably on the

same day on which the disaster is identified. This meeting will happen via conference call, to save travel time, minimize travel risks, and keep the deans as close as possible to ministry needs and sources of information within their own communities and conferences. The conference call will utilize the synod's freeconferencecall.com account.

If internet service is not available at the synod office, the conference call could be based from another location, such as the residence of the Bishop or the Diakon Disaster Response Coordinator, or a congregation. If internet service is not conveniently available, the conference call could be arranged via landline or cellphone.

Timely and accurate information is both essential and difficult to obtain when a disaster initially occurs and in its immediate aftermath. The bishop and staff will share with the deans their knowledge of what is happening and what they believe the needs are, and then ask the deans to report on what is going on with the congregations, pastors, members, communities, and social ministry organizations of their conferences.

Responsibilities of Synod Leaders

The **Bishop** shall oversee the overall recovery effort, ensure that the other leaders are aware of and carrying out their duties, and offer the encouragement of the gospel to disaster victims and responders.

The **Assistant to the Bishop** shall be the point of contact at the synod office for all disaster recovery efforts. The Assistant will give and receive regular updates about disaster relief and recovery efforts to the bishop, director of communications, Diakon disaster response coordinator, and deans.

The **Director of Communications** will publicize how the congregations, members, pastors, and communities of the synod are being affected by the disaster, and what assistance is being sought.

The **Diakon Disaster Response Coordinator** shall be the liaison among Lutheran Disaster Response, the synod's disaster recovery efforts, and other community and state disaster VOADS (Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster), and shall be an active participant in both the synod's and LDR's efforts.

The **Deans** shall be the point of contact for pastors, congregations, and members within their conferences. Deans shall give regular updates about needs and recovery efforts to the Assistant to the Bishop.

The **Synod Treasurer** shall establish a designated fund for the disaster in the synod's treasury and shall administer all finances generated in response to the disaster, in cooperation with the synod's office manager.

The **Office Manager** shall assist the synod treasurer in administering the finances generated in response to the disaster. She shall also assist the bishop and assistant to the bishop in sending "thank-you" letters to those who donate funds.

Guidelines for Communications

The Director of Communications will send information about the disaster and the synod's response to it through the synod communication channels, especially electronic communication. This shall include special updates; the *USS Ark* and *Headwaters* e-newsletters; the synod Facebook page; Twitter; and the synod website, which shall also include the creation of a special section about the disaster on the synod website. This special section on the website will then serve as the "go-to" location for people to look up any disaster-related information. When normal conditions prevail, the current USS Disaster Recovery Plan shall be listed under the "For Congregations" tab on the USS website.

The Assistant to the Bishop will compile (from the Diakon Disaster Response Coordinator, deans, pastors, and other sources) and send to the Director of Communications information about the disaster, the type of help that is needed for synod members to best respond, and helpful people to contact. (S)he also will be in contact with other Assistants to the Bishop in the synods of ELCA Region 8, and other interested synods and church bodies, informing them of what type of help is needed; this shall include volunteering at the site of the disaster, items needed for donation and where to direct them, and financial contributions to the designated fund.

The Bishop will write a pastoral letter regarding the impact of the disaster, and be in contact with pastors who have been personally affected by the disaster.

Information about the disaster shall be updated as often as necessary.

Synod leaders should be in frequent communication with each other, and with Lutheran Disaster Response, throughout the disaster recovery operation.

Contact information for synodical disaster recovery leaders as well as other disaster response information is available in the synod staff Dropbox in a folder marked "Disaster Response Plan."

Visiting the Site of the Disaster

As soon as travel can safely be arranged, the Bishop, Assistant to the Bishop, and Diakon Disaster Response Coordinator shall visit the site(s) of the disaster. They shall arrange meetings with the local pastors and social ministry organizations to hear their stories, assess their needs, and offer the synod's support. They shall also tour the affected areas and talk with the local population. The most effective means of support is to contribute to local efforts that are "closest to the ground."

They shall make at least one follow-up visit, or more if necessary, to attend to pastoral needs and offer a ministry-of-presence for those living in the aftermath of the disaster.

The Assistant to the Bishop and the Diakon Disaster Response Coordinator shall take pictures of what they witness to tell the story of the disaster throughout the synod, and beyond, and for use in synod communications.

Collecting Needed Supplies for the Disaster Area

The Diakon Disaster Response Coordinator, in the initial meeting with the local pastors, shall assess which supplies are needed to be purchased immediately; and using an initial grant from Lutheran Disaster Response, shall purchase and deliver these materials.

The Bishop and Assistant to the Bishop shall also purchase and deliver any supplies that are needed immediately. These purchases shall be reimbursed from the designated fund.

The Director of Communications shall distribute lists, through synod communication channels, of items that are needed at the disaster site. The Assistant to the Bishop shall coordinate, with the Deans, the best means of collecting and delivering these items. It may be best for individual congregations to collect and deliver the items, or it may be best to collect them at a central location, and then have one church deliver them. The strategies may differ throughout the synod, depending on local factors.

The supply needs at the disaster site will likely change as the recovery continues, so the Director of Communications will send updated requests for needed items as the lists of these requests become available.

“Cleaning Buckets” (also known as “Flood Buckets”) are one useful resource that is available from the “Mission Central” warehouse in Mechanicsburg, PA and its “HUBS” throughout Pennsylvania, and operated by UMCOR and the Susquehanna Conference of the United Methodist Church. Information regarding this ministry, as well as the contents of “Cleaning Buckets” can be found at the following website: <http://www.missioncentral.org/>

In the past, Messiah Lutheran Church, South Williamsport, PA, had a supply of “Cleaning Buckets” on hand.

Recruiting Volunteers for Disaster Response and Relief

After the First-Responders have done their job, volunteers from congregations throughout the synod may be requested. The Assistant to the Bishop and the Diakon Disaster Response Coordinator, with guidance from pastors and other congregation leaders from the affected area, will coordinate the recruiting of volunteers from the synod’s congregations and from other synods.

The Assistant to the Bishop shall be in contact with the other synods of ELCA Region 8, and with Lutheran Disaster Response, to share information about recruiting volunteers. Volunteer efforts may also be coordinated through other ministries and organizations, such as Agape Ministry in Bloomsburg, or United Churches of Lycoming County. If necessary, plans should be made for the housing and feeding of volunteers traveling from a distance.

The Diakon Disaster Response Coordinator shall be in contact with federal, state, and local Emergency Management Agencies, the Red Cross, and other emergency response organizations of which he becomes aware. The Coordinator shall assess what kind of support the synod may offer, and report this to the Assistant to the Bishop and to Lutheran Disaster Response.

All volunteers shall have had a tetanus shot within the past five years.

Another excellent resource for recruiting volunteers is **Group Mission Trips**. Group Mission Trips has the resources and expertise to quickly recruit volunteers from thousands of churches in Pennsylvania and neighboring states, and send them to a disaster area. Particularly, a “**Big Day of Serving**” can be organized with as little as a month’s lead-time, for volunteers to come for a one-day service event. As of 2015, Keith and Kim Sawyer, members of First Lutheran Church, Mifflinburg have been involved with coordinating Group Mission Trips and Big Day of Serving events (Kim can be reached on her cell phone at 570-713-4577 or emailed at kksawyer@dejazzd.com). More information can be found at <http://groupmissiontrips.com/> or <http://thebigdayofserving.com/get-involved/bring-the-big-day-to-your-town>.

Annual Emergency Drill

At the discretion of the Bishop, an announced annual drill may be scheduled to test the functionality of this disaster recovery plan, update contact information for personnel and agencies, and review planning efforts.

In preparation for this drill, deans should keep an up-to-date list of the contact information of the pastors in their conference, including office, home, and cell phone numbers, and email addresses. Pastors should keep up-to-date information about their local emergency responders.

Follow-Up Evaluation

Those synod leaders, and other appropriate people, who were involved in responding to the disaster shall meet within three months of the occurrence of the disaster for a follow-up evaluation of the synod’s disaster response.

Guidelines for the synod’s Disaster Response designated fund

The Upper Susquehanna Synod will rely on pastors to tell us of the disaster response needs in their own community. The synod will distribute funds through pastors and congregations, and rely on them to assess what are the appropriate needs in their local community.

A pastor should make a request for a specific need, with a specific dollar amount. While requests can be made over the phone or in person, they must also be submitted in writing for accountability purposes (a simple e-mail will suffice). The synod will send the money to the congregation, and will specify on the check the person or purpose for which it is being requested. The pastor or a congregational leader can then distribute the money. All funds must be used only for disaster response or recovery purposes.

Requests to aid a specific family, person, or other disaster response purpose should come through only one pastor. If requests for the same situation come from more than one pastor, the synod will ask that those pastors be in contact with each other to determine who is most appropriate to submit the request. Subsequent requests to aid a specific situation will be considered; such requests should come through the same pastor who submitted the previous request.

Our priority will be to respond first to the needs of our churches and congregation members, then to the needs of others in the community as requested by the pastor. Pastors may also request funds that they or their congregation may use as a discretionary fund for disaster response. It is our expectation that these funds will only be used for disaster response. Remaining funds should be returned as soon as possible to the Upper Susquehanna Synod.

We hope this procedure will satisfy the need for accountability, as well as minimizing the amount of “red tape” in quickly responding to those recovering from a natural disaster.

This fund may also be spent at the discretion of the synod’s disaster response leaders, especially the Bishop and the Assistant to the Bishop, for disaster response purposes.

The Bishop and Assistant to the Bishop shall write a “thank-you letter” to all those who make a financial contribution to the designated fund. These letters shall be mailed by the synod’s Office Manager as soon as possible after receipt of the funds.