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

## Study guide

# After the media leaves, Lutherans stay

*What does disaster response look like years later?*

By Robert C. Blezard

Everyone in the ELCA can be proud that Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) has earned respect, admiration and gratitude for its approach and dedication to helping people whose lives have been shattered by events beyond their control. We all share in the mission of LDR with our prayers, volunteering and financial contributions. The money we give LDR is used wisely, efficiently and effectively to get people back on their feet.

### Exercise 1: Time of vulnerability

People whose lives are disrupted and whose homes and property are destroyed by disasters experience enormous vulnerability. Uprooted from their routines and removed from the security and safety of their homes and possessions by circumstances beyond their control, they often feel powerless, alone and afraid for the future.

- Can you remember a time when you felt vulnerable, alone and afraid? Can you share it with your group? How did you get through?
- If you had someone who came alongside you and helped you, describe the feeling of assurance you had from that person. If you went through it alone, describe how that felt. Would you have liked to have had someone with you?
- Based on your experiences of vulnerability, imagine and describe what victims of natural disasters go through.
- How does LDR help? Why is it such a worthwhile ministry?

### Exercise 2: The victim

Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan teaches us about loving our neighbor as ourselves. Most of the time we think about the actions of the compassionate passer-by, but we can also gain wonderful insights by focusing our attention on the victim. Read Luke 10:25-37 and discuss:

- Just to set the stage, what is the lawyer's question that initiates the discussion? How does Jesus' response lead to the parable of the good Samaritan?



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## Study guide: **After the media leaves, Lutherans stay** *continued*

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- Now turning to the victim, what do we know about his identity? His nationality? Profession? Faith? What do we know about his character? His values? Was he a good guy? Was he liked? Did he have a family? Who were his friends?
- Because we don't know much about the victim—only that he was beaten and robbed and left for half-dead—isn't it easy for us to imagine he is an ordinary person exactly like us? Just like the people in your congregation?

Focus your imagination on what it might have been like to be that beaten and robbed man. As you do, reread verses 30-35, aloud or to yourself, casting yourself as the victim, as in the following modified version: "I was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when I was attacked by robbers. They stripped me of my clothes, beat me and went away, leaving me half-dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw me, he passed by on the other side. So, too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw me, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where I was; and when he saw me, he took pity on me. He went to me and bandaged my wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put me on his own donkey, brought me to an inn and took care of me. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' "

- How did retelling the story in the first person change your perceptions? How would you have felt to be attacked, beaten, robbed and left for half-dead? What emotions might you have experienced?
- How did reimagining the story affect your understanding of the Samaritan? What might you have thought and felt if you were the victim?
- What do the people who are assisted by LDR have in common with the man who was beaten, robbed and left half-dead? In what ways are they ordinary people like you, your family and your congregation members? How might victims of natural disasters and political upheaval feel to receive assistance from LDR?
- For what reasons might you term LDR a "good Samaritan" ministry? Why is the organization deserving of our prayers, volunteer efforts and financial contributions?
- Turning to the overall sweep of the parable, what is Jesus teaching us about loving our neighbor as ourselves? In what way are victims our neighbors? In what ways is LDR loving our global neighbors?



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- What was the lawyer's question (verse 25) that started the whole discussion? What was Jesus' bottom line response? What are we to go and do?

### Exercise 3: Our neighbors

Tornadoes, floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, tidal waves and wildfires are the kinds of disasters that LDR responds to around the world.

- What natural disasters are you at risk for in your state or region, or closest to your state or region? When disaster strikes, how is assistance organized and given to affected neighbors? If you were asked to help with prayers, volunteering and money, would you? Why or why not?
- Working with its partners, LDR does help in these situations. Why is that a good thing? How could you help?

### Exercise 4: LDR and you

- Generally speaking, what do you and your congregation know about the work of LDR? How do you stay informed? If you don't stay informed, why not? How could you and your congregation become better informed? Why might it be beneficial to do so?
- Does LDR do work that is worthwhile and worthy of your support? Why or why not? Do you or your congregation support LDR with prayers, volunteerism and financial contributions? Why or why not? Is there a leader in your congregation who could encourage or organize better financial support for LDR? Could you?

### Exercise 5: God's work. Our hands.

What does the ELCA's expression "God's work. Our hands." mean to you? In what ways does it apply to everything that we do as a church? How are the mission, purpose and work of LDR especially apropos to "God's work. Our hands."?

### Exercise 6: God's work. Your hands.

As with the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy on the northeast coast or Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf of Mexico, cleanup and rebuilding efforts may continue even many years after the disaster. To help, many congregations, synods and Lutheran organizations participate in mission work trips to make a difference.

- Why is it valuable to work hands-on and face-to-face with those who are affected by disaster? What do we learn from firsthand experi-



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ence that we can't through reading or watching a video?

- What does it mean for victims of disaster to see us and get to know us? What does it mean for us?
- Have you participated in such a trip? Why or why not? How can you or your congregation get more involved in disaster response?

### **Exercise 7: God's work. Our checkbooks.**

Because of constraints of time and distance, as well as physical limitations, not all of us can participate in a disaster-response mission trip. But we can still help with our prayers and our monetary contributions.

- How and why are financial gifts to LDR essential to the mission and work that we all support?
- Do you give, and does your congregation have any organized way to provide financial gifts to LDR? If so, is it enough? If not, what can you and your congregation do to remedy that situation?

### **Exercise 8: Displacement disasters**

Of course, it's not only natural disasters that can uproot people from their homes and dispossess them of all they have worked for. Political unrest, economic deprivation and war can also bring people to places of vulnerability and great necessity. LDR works to help these victims in places around the world, including the Middle East, Central America and South Sudan.

- If tornadoes and floods are natural disasters, why would it be appropriate to describe war, economics and political unrest as man-made disasters? What do displacement and dispossession from these man-made disasters have in common with strife caused by natural disasters? How is it different?
- Unlike hurricanes and earthquakes, describe the ways in which man-made disasters have predictable and preventable causes? How can God's people, working for peace, justice, economic equality, help prevent or reduce the harm caused by man-made disasters? For what reasons is it important that God's people work not only to help victims of man-made disasters, but also to help prevent or reduce the harm caused by them?

# After the media leaves, Lutherans stay

## What does disaster response look like years later?

By Wendy Healy

Among the first to respond to a disaster and the last to leave the site, Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) has a reputation for serving communities even when other agencies have packed up. Working mostly behind the scenes, it's able to respond so readily through an extensive network of partnerships around the world.

In this way, LDR is often misunderstood. "The LDR office is not operational—meaning that our affiliates do the work," said Stadie, who provides training, assistance and guidance to partners in the United States. He and Joe Chu, associate program director, are known for saying: "The heroes are the ones on the ground."



Photo: FEMA

A homeowner in Nichols, S.C., surveys flood damage from Hurricane Matthew in 2016. The floodwater remained for three days.

"We often joke that long after the media's gone, Lutherans are the ones leaving the building and turning off the lights," said Michael Stadie, LDR-U.S. program director.

Last year LDR worked on 47 relief and recovery projects in 29 countries, distributing almost \$6.6 million. Without its worldwide partners, LDR wouldn't exist since there are only five full-time staff working out of the ELCA churchwide office.

Those affiliates include partners, social ministry organizations and synods, for which the organization provides training, consultation, assistance and funding. For example, Stadie and Chu traveled to Lutheran Services Carolinas last spring to train around 30 case managers in aiding flood victims of 2016's Hurricane Matthew.

LDR also works globally with such organizations as the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Lutheran World Relief (LWR), Church World Service (CWS) and companion churches.





A man sits between ruins at Brighton Beach in New York City. After about two months, parts of damaged homes were still strewn on the beach as a consequence of Hurricane Sandy in fall 2012.

Photo: Alex Potemkin / iStock

“Meeting the needs of people according to what *they* need, and utilizing *their* resources and gifts is a hallmark of how the ELCA engages with people around the world,” said Y. Franklin Ishida, director for Asia Pacific with ELCA Global Mission who oversees recovery work in Nepal after the country’s 2015 earthquake, one of LDR’s biggest projects.

### **RESILIENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY**

LDR’s sustainability is intrinsic to the way in which it responds to disasters. After the 9/11 attacks in New York, it continued to help those affected for seven years, phasing out its New York affiliate in 2008. Area pastors also report that counseling is continuing for first responders in their ongoing healing from the trauma at ground zero.

“This shows that we don’t forget people and communities impacted by disaster,” Stadie said. “That’s why we’re in it for the long haul—we don’t forget them.

“LDR can stay in assisting those impacted by disaster because of our understanding of the incarnation of Christ. We see Christ in those who are impacted by the disaster, following Matthew 25.”

Sustaining help for those in need is a building block of the Lutheran faith, said Mark A. Anderson, assistant to the bishop in the Northeastern Iowa Synod. Anderson, also a victim of flooding in 2008, organized a synodwide collection this year of supplies for future flood

cleanup needs. “This is a Lutheran thing and goes back to the Reformation, when Martin Luther said it was the church’s responsibility to care for people,” he said.

Each of the synod’s 150 congregations was asked to fill one bucket with cleaning supplies, but Anderson predicted that the response might be as many as 10 per church. The flood buckets, he said, will be stored at churches throughout the synod and distributed for the next flood.

“Before any of us, it is the people saving people,” said Prabin Manandhar, LWF country director for Nepal. “That happens not when you have [a] resilient building—that happens when you have resilient people.”

“This is a Lutheran thing and goes back to the Reformation, when Martin Luther said it was the church’s responsibility to care for people.”



Hurricane Matthew devastated the southern half of Haiti. In some cities 80 percent of the houses were destroyed or damaged.

Photo: Thomas Lohnes / DKH / ACT Alliance

Stadie attributes this resiliency and sustainability to the ELCA's strong partnerships around the world. In the United States, he said, the social ministry organizations affiliated with LDR know who the local coordinators are, making it easier to facilitate help on the ground.

This was especially true in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, when Lutherans were able to add value to the disaster relief and response efforts because of their network of people and agencies in the region. "After Katrina, there was a diaspora of sorts, but we had the resources because Lutherans knew where the other Lutherans were working in the region and around the country," Stadie said.

While LDR's work on Katrina is complete, in 2017 the organization is assisting in old and new disasters alike, both abroad and at home. LDR is at work in many regions, but there are six areas currently receiving its most significant responses.

### HURRICANE MATTHEW

Florida, North Carolina and Georgia were hit hard by flooding when Hurricane Matthew dumped rain in September and October 2016. Nearly a year later, LDR is still working with Lutheran Services Carolinas after the agency was awarded the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) disaster case management contract.

Sharei Green, LDR program communicator, said the work mostly includes guiding people through the assistance process to get their homes rebuilt. "It's assessing whether people have insurance, asking if they had flood insurance, and helping them sort through the paperwork associated with getting FEMA assistance," she said.

The disaster work actually started early—as

the hurricane was forming in the Atlantic Ocean. "Social ministry organizations and synods started working together via phone calls before the hurricane even hit," she said.

In Haiti and Cuba, where Matthew's damage was more severe, LDR-International has allotted \$150,000 in funding so far. Through the Cuban Council of Churches, \$50,000 was awarded, and another \$100,000 to Haiti through ACT Alliance, which was split equally from LWF and CWS to provide food and shelter.

### Lutherans happy to help

"I try not to make disasters, but they keep happening," said Jerry Lynn, a volunteer disaster coordinator for the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod.

The member of Berkeley Hills Lutheran Church in Pittsburgh coordinated volunteers last spring from six area congregations: Berkeley Hills; Christ, Beaver Falls; Emmanuel, Etna; First English, Pittsburgh; Hebron, Blairsville; and Faith, New Florence. The 15 volunteers partnered with members of the Catholic dioceses of Pittsburgh and Greensburg, as well as the Byzantine Catholic Archeparchy of Pittsburgh, to help renovate houses damaged by August 2016 flooding.

The Lutherans planned the service project as part of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation this year, said Kim Rapczak, pastor of Christ Lutheran. "I think it's great to have people participating like this," she said. The area is often flooded, she added, because the Monongahela and Allegheny rivers meet to form the Ohio River.

Rapczak said 160 businesses and homes were affected and Lutherans were happy to do something practical to help.



Photo: Patsy Lynch / FEMA

The remains of a home in Union Beach, N.J., after Hurricane Sandy swept through the area.



Photo: J.T. Blatty / FEMA

Debris cleanup lines the street after severe flooding in Zachary, La., in 2016.

### HURRICANE SANDY

Five years after Hurricane Sandy hit the Northeast, volunteers are still working through Lutheran Social Ministries of New Jersey to help rebuild homes. New Jersey was especially hard-hit, Stadie said, and many people lost their homes on or near the shore. “Our affiliate is doing volunteer management in rebuilding,” he added. “Believe it or not, there are people who are just now getting their homes rebuilt.”

Alex Elefante, disaster recovery coordinator for Lutheran Social Ministries of New Jersey, said that over the past five years, more than 4,400 volunteers have worked tirelessly to renovate and rebuild homes. While Elefante estimated that the volunteers have worked on 354 houses, another 27,000 still await repair.

“We’re making progress, but it’s slowly happening,” and wouldn’t be possible without the volunteers, he said.

### LOUISIANA FLOODING

The ELCA happened to be meeting for the 2016 Churchwide Assembly in New Orleans when devastating rainfall flooded Louisiana. “We were actually there when it happened in the Baton Rouge/Lafayette area, and a member of the assembly stood up and asked if we could pray for those who lost their homes,” Stadie said.

LDR did more than pray, helping to assess the situation and working with Upbring (formerly Lutheran Social Services of the South) to provide aid. More than 150,000 applications have been filed with FEMA for assistance.

### SOUTH DAKOTA TORNADOES AND FLOODING

Two years later, LDR is still working with Lutheran Social Services of South Dakota to help Native Americans recover from tornadoes that caused flooding on reservations in 2015. This was the first time that tribal lands got a federal declaration apart from that of the state, Stadie said, adding, “LDR is in conversation with our local partners on long-term recovery.”



Photo: Jeannie Mooney / FEMA

This abandoned barn in Roscoe, S.D., was overtaken by floodwater in 2015.





Photo: Paul Jeffrey / ACT Alliance

In Sanogaoan, Nepal, ACT Alliance provided a cash grant to help Saru Shrestha establish a shop selling tea, snacks and sweets to earn money to support her family.

### NEPAL EARTHQUAKE

Nearly \$2.1 million has been given to LDR companions and partners in Nepal, which was hit by a 7.8-magnitude earthquake in April and again by a similar one in May 2015. Green said work includes rebuilding more than 270 homes and nine schools, restoring water and sanitation systems, improving livelihood, and providing job-training and income-generating projects like bee-keeping and farming.

LDR is working with LWF-Nepal, LWR, United Mission to Nepal and Shanti Nepal, a primary health care and resource center.

At Shanti Nepal, Green said recovery work includes upgrading facilities for disaster preparedness, expanding the maternity ward, constructing new emergency and outpatient departments, and adding new emergency equipment and an ambulance.



Photo: Paul Jeffrey / ACT Alliance

A woman rests from stacking cement blocks in Sanogaoan that will be used to build new homes.

### GLOBAL MIGRATION CRISIS


LDR's work with partners around the world in the migration crisis focuses mostly in the Middle East, Central America and South Sudan, Africa.

Drought, famine and civil war in South Sudan are affecting more than 7 million people. More than 100,000 people have fled their homes this year alone. LDR helps distribute food and provide water, sanitation and psychosocial support.

The ELCA is currently constructing the Lutheran Community Center in the country's capital of Juba to provide education and health services. With support from ELCA World Hunger ([elca.org/hunger](http://elca.org/hunger)), the LWF is increasing food production through development of new agricultural practices and training women and youth on the skills to earn a living.

LDR is also serving victims of chronic violence, poverty, environmental displacement and lack of opportunities in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala through the ELCA's AMMPARO strategy (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities; [elca.org/ammparo](http://elca.org/ammparo)).

"This strategy is unique among U.S. churches and provides a holistic whole-church response," said Mary Campbell, program director. The initiative encompasses accompaniment, awareness-building and advocacy at every moment of the migrant journey. This includes serving arriving migrants as they transition to a new phase of life, and accompaniment of companions who work with migrants deported back to their countries of origin.

All LDR staff agree that helping those in need is what Lutherans are called to do. "Because Lutherans are at work in communities and in the congregations, we walk with people every day through their lives," Stadie said. "LDR is just another way for us to walk with people. Our disaster response is a natural outreach of being the church. We were there before the disaster and we'll be there after." 

"Because Lutherans are at work in communities and in the congregations, we walk with people every day through their lives. LDR is just another way for us to walk with people. Our disaster response is a natural outreach of being the church."



People wake up after sleeping in the open at a camp for more than 5,000 internally displaced people in Wau, South Sudan. Most of the families here were displaced by violence early in 2017.

Photo: Paul Jeffrey / ACT Alliance

## Need was up in 2016

Lutheran Disaster Response's (LDR) work is only possible through generous gifts. Much of the financial response comes after disasters are reported in the news, said Daniel Rift, ELCA director for world hunger and Lutheran disaster appeal. Giving can vary from year to year depending on the severity of the disaster and the extent of the news reporting.

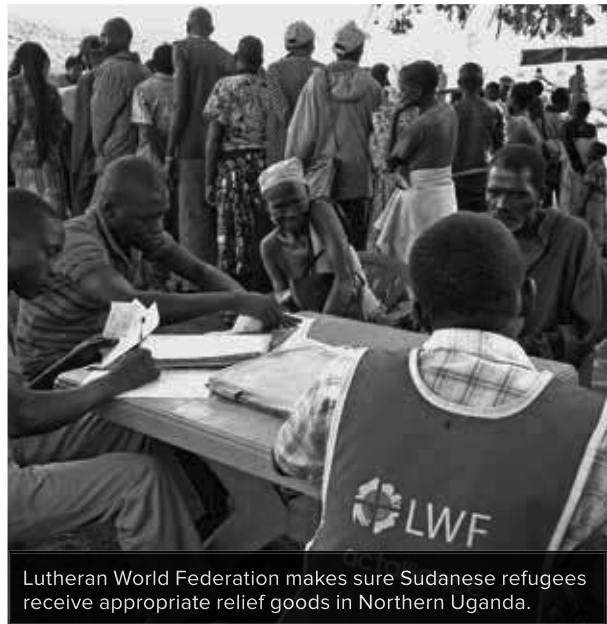
Last year was a tough year, he said, because the presidential election dominated the news. Need was up, especially after flooding in the South, where Federal Emergency Management Agency applications were four times the norm, he added.

Michael Stadie, LDR-U.S. program director, called 2016 the "year of the forgotten disaster." With the media focused on the election, it was easy to forget disaster giving, he said, adding, "A lot of the money that comes in does so because of what's on CNN."

Sharei Green, LDR program communicator, agreed: "The biggest thing I've seen is the smaller things, especially in the disasters that don't make the news or that people don't see."

LDR is at work, however, even when donations are low, she said. Still, it managed to raise enough last year to respond to nine major disasters.

To learn more, visit [elca.org/ldr](http://elca.org/ldr).



Lutheran World Federation makes sure Sudanese refugees receive appropriate relief goods in Northern Uganda.

Photos: C. Kästner / LWF

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