



Church Workers'

Quick Reference Guide

for Disasters and Pandemics





© 2020 The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
1333 S. Kirkwood Road
St. Louis, MO 63122
888-THE LCMS • *lcms.org*

Cover photos (top): LCMS/Erik M. Lunsford
Cover photos (bottom): Getty Images

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Emergency Congregation Preparation for a Disaster that Is 8–48 Hours Away from Striking (Hurricanes, Forest Fires, Floods, Pandemics, etc.)	2
Three Stages of a Disaster Response: Rescue, Relief and Recovery	3
Four Steps for Your Church’s Response	3
1) Assessing Damage and Addressing Immediate Needs	
2) Creating an Action Plan	
3) Funding the Response (and Helpful Hints for Handling Donations and Grants)	
4) Communicate, Communicate, Communicate	
Ideas for Quick Responses with Your Church	5
Being an Active Listener to People Who Are Hurting	6
Self-Care and Well-Being in a Time of Tragedy	7
Spiritual Coping Strategies	
Emotional Coping Strategies	
Mental Coping Strategies	
Physical Coping Strategies	
Congregational Planning for Pandemics	8
Communication	
Telephone	
Email	
Church Website and Social Media	
Worship and Prayer	
Pastoral Care	
Leadership	
Community Outreach	
Discussion Questions for Debriefing Your Members	10
Prayers, Scriptures and Hymns for Use During a Tragedy	10
Additional Resources	13
LCMS Affiliated Disaster Relief Organizations	13

Introduction

The purpose of this quick guide is to provide a concise resource during extraordinary times. In short order this guide will offer suggestions as to how the church might respond. At the very least, it will serve as a discussion starter and conversation piece that can guide and inform you as you lead your congregation in times of great distress and reach out to the community in which the members live and work.

Emergency Congregation Preparation for a Disaster that Is 8–48 Hours Away from Striking (Hurricanes, Forest Fires, Floods, Pandemics, etc.)

- Have your council assign a member of the congregation to serve as the congregation’s disaster response coordinator. This person should be acquainted with local emergency management leadership. He or she will coordinate and guide the congregation through its preparation and response.
- Have a contingency plan in the event that you become a victim of the storm. The Synod or district office may be of help.
- Train ushers on what to do in case of an emergency such as a fire or medical emergency.
- Train Sunday school and day care staff for emergencies and disasters.
- Determine the special needs of people in your congregation (vision, hearing and physical impairments, heart conditions, etc.) to help prepare for special evacuation procedures when disaster strikes.
- Develop a plan to check on members to assess needs after a disaster.
- Help your members learn what to do — be calm, heed warnings, follow instructions of public safety or emergency management leaders, be safe and know how to help each other.
- Designate a group to call shut-ins before a storm and to follow up afterward. In the event of an evacuation, this group could call the local county emergency

management office to tell them of those needing special transportation.

- Be prepared to resume worship services immediately even in temporary or damaged facilities.
- Know how you will publicize the fact that church services will be held. Many people will be listening to the radio. This may be the best method for getting the word out. Also publicize pastoral care.

To begin, consider the following questions:

- How would we communicate without the internet, cell phones or telephones?
- Do we have a list of emergency contact people, their addresses and phone numbers?
- Have we determined who could be most affected by the various types of disasters in our region?
 - Those on low-ground
 - Those near woods
 - Those near beaches, rivers, lakes, etc.
- What facilities and grounds are we responsible to oversee and maintain, including cemeteries?
- On what technology or devices do we rely, and how can our emergency plan provide for contingencies?
- In case the building is damaged, where might we meet for services?
- What additional considerations might we make if there also is a school or childcare center on campus? (Evacuation, taking shelter in the building, contacting parents, etc.)
 - Be in communication with your district president, district disaster response coordinator and LCMS Disaster Response.



Three Stages of a Disaster Response: Rescue, Relief and Recovery

What Happens During a Disaster? (Rescue)

A disaster may strike with or without warning. In the moments, hours and days surrounding a disaster, the concern is for safety and preservation of life. Those affected by disaster seek temporary relief and assistance — often provided by agencies such as the American Red Cross and the Salvation Army. Local emergency management agencies are often strained to carry out their tasks. Respected community leaders, including clergy and other church leaders, help victims deal with the reality of danger and guide survivors to assistance.

What Happens After a Disaster? (Relief)

The relief process begins in the days following a disaster. Concerns for safety, security and sanitation remain high priorities. FEMA, local emergency management offices and the American Red Cross remain active with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and faith-based organizations that are beginning to participate.

The LCMS district disaster response coordinator (DDRC) and district disaster response team (DDRT) in your area will bring Lutheran ministry partners, local Lutheran leaders and community leaders together to share information and organize a systematic approach to a cooperative response to meeting the immediate and long-term needs of the community. Local congregations are already active at this stage, offering basic life necessities like food, water and shelter. Contact the American Red Cross for shelter information. At the same time, Lutheran congregations often work in conjunction with other local churches to help meet their community’s needs for basic life necessities. Plans are implemented for the coordinated distribution of clothing, furniture, appliances and other donated items.

What Happens in the Long Term? (Recovery)

The long-term response to disaster focuses on the future. During the recovery phase, homes are being rebuilt and/or repaired. Unmet needs are assessed and met appropriately by both faith-based and community action committees.

Depending on the scope and scale of the disaster, recovery may take three to five years. During the recovery phase, outside support begins to diminish. Lutheran congregations play an essential role in sustaining the recovery in their communities. Organized and trained volunteers, including Lutheran Early Response Team (LERT) members, are engaged in the repair and rebuilding process and require support from local congregations.

Four Steps for Your Church’s Response

Assessing Damage and Addressing Immediate Needs

It is important to assess and meet needs efficiently and effectively. Time is of the essence! The following questions can be helpful for a church’s disaster response leadership team:

- What areas have been affected?
- Is it safe to remain in those areas?
- Who has been affected? Who lives or works there?
- Has the disaster affected the water or food supply?
- Is additional shelter necessary?
- Have hospitals, pharmacies or doctor’s offices been compromised?
- Will homebound people be without oxygen or medication?
- Have any members been hurt or killed by the disaster?
- What are the unmet and underserved needs in your community?

Creating an Action Plan

One of the greatest enemies following a disaster is disorganization. The way to combat this disorganization, at least at the congregational level, is to create an action plan. An action plan is defined as:

A method of brainstorming based upon knowledge gained from visiting the community in which a congregation decides how it might best (and realistically) provide Word and Sacrament ministry through disaster relief efforts within its community.

The action plan should ideally be conducted in conjunction with a representative of LCMS Disaster Response. These individuals are trained to help congregations arrive at the best decisions when responding to disasters in a community. Left alone it is easy to have very grandiose plans (“*We can rebuild the whole city!*”) or to have your plans fizzle before you get started (“*We couldn’t agree so we decided not to do anything*”). LCMS Disaster Response can help you determine the best solutions for your situation. Congregations sometimes need an outside eye to help determine which relief plans are the best, are feasible, and will help and not hurt that congregation in the long term.

Here are some simple steps for your congregation to consider when responding to a disaster. What is wonderful about an action plan is that aspects of this plan can be discussed before a disaster. This is an excellent way for



your congregation to consider how it might best support its members and community following a disaster.

Steps to Creating an Action Plan

1. Get in touch with members following your “call plan.”
2. Assess the needs of your own members.
3. Assess the needs of people in your community.
4. Assess the spiritual needs of your members and community.
5. Assess the unmet needs of your members and community. Unmet needs are those not covered by insurance, personal funds, etc.
6. Brainstorm ideas of how to assist following a disaster. Get all ideas listed.
7. Assess those ideas. Determine which of the brainstorm ideas are:
 - a. Feasible (Ask whether this can be accomplished.)
 - b. Financially sustainable (Ask whether you will pay for it yourself or seek grant money from the LCMS or another agency.)
 - c. Allow a congregation’s involvement (Ask whether this is a project that your congregation could actually implement.)
 - d. Related to Word and Sacrament (Ask how this project is related to the church’s ministry of Word and Sacrament. More often than not, the connection is not clear at first. That is because the church’s work is truly unique in this world. However, the question your congregation needs to answer is, “How could we bring our ministry of Word and Sacrament through this project?” Perhaps that would mean the pastors and/or elders perform pastoral care visits. Perhaps this would entail the distribution of specialized devotionals and Bibles. This could allow additional ways that congregation members would be directly involved in one-on-one scenarios providing Christ’s love and mercy to people. The church’s ministry of Word and Sacrament is very broad and far reaching. Be creative in finding ways to incorporate the Gospel to speak to people who have been hurt by this disaster. Christ truly has something to say at this moment in time, to these people. What is that message and how could you, as the church, bring that message? And by what means would that message be brought?)

Funding the Response (and Helpful Hints for Handling Donations and Grants)

Helpful Hints for Handling Donations and Grants

1. In order to protect you and the congregation, a committee of no less than three members should be established. The pastor should not be a member of this committee, but should serve in an advisory capacity only.
2. A separate financial account for disaster relief should be established following the accepted practice of the congregation with double signatures required for the disbursement of funds. The authorized signers may include the existing church financial officers but *should not include you*.
3. The pastor should request to be provided by the church with a discretionary fund not to exceed \$300, which would require accurate written documentation for all funds disbursed. This protects the integrity of the pastor and his office.
4. All donations and grants must be receipted and recorded in written form on the day they are received. Letters of acknowledgment should accompany all receipts for grants or donations, specifying the intended use of the grant or donation. A personal note from the pastor may accompany this letter.
5. The LCMS district office should be notified in written form of all donations or grants received with documentation of their use or intended use. If there are unused or unneeded funds (undesignated), please make them available to the district or Synod office so that others in need may be assisted as quickly as possible.

The granting process for LCMS Disaster Response includes completed applications for both emergency disaster grants and long-term domestic grants (lcms.org/disaster). First contact the district office for funding before applying for an LCMS grant. The district may have separate requirements for grant applications.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

- Be in communication with your district president, district disaster response coordinator and LCMS Disaster Response.
- Communicate what the church is doing with its members via a phone tree and an instant messaging service.



- If the news media, district office or Synod communications team contacts you, be ready to talk about the work that your congregation is doing in the name of Christ serving the community.
- Immediately after the disaster, be confident to tell volunteers to wait until you have a plan in place.
- Immediately after the disaster, if you are not ready to receive truckloads of donated relief supplies, be confident to tell people to wait or refer them to another organization such as the local Goodwill that is taking donations of clothes, water, blankets, etc.
- Before you communicate to the media, disaster victims or your congregation, ask yourself the following questions:
 - Do my words offer Christian hope?
 - Do my words provide safety or security?
 - Do my words mitigate (lessen) future stress?
 - Will my words reduce symptoms of stress?
 - Will my words be comforting?
 - Will my words bring about a new normal?
 - Am I promising something that I can't personally deliver?

Ideas for Quick Responses with Your Church

There are many ways that individual Christians within your congregation can learn to help following a disaster. These ways can vary greatly and also depend upon the abilities of God's saints.

Here are a few suggestions of ways you and your congregation can provide assistance following a disaster.

Prayer — It is vital for the Body of Christ to help in this way. Ask all members to pray for Christ's mercy and for Christ's wisdom. Especially involve elderly members and shut-ins who have truly lived the faith and suffered in their lives for it. Also, seek the advice of elders and other aged members of the faith whose spiritual insights prove invaluable during times of hardship. Their words can prove to be of great comfort for the community and provide an anchor during time of instability.

Outreach — Select individuals to go into disaster areas to assess the needs of those affected by the disaster. These individuals should first make contact with the people affected and gauge their specific needs. When it comes time for your congregation to sit down and decide how it will help

in the community, these prior outreach trips are invaluable.

Always keep in mind, a congregation should help provide needs based upon what its **neighbors/community** have voiced. A congregation should not provide help based upon what the **congregation** thinks the community needs. Sometimes the two can be very different.

Pastoral care committee — A pastor cannot operate alone following a disaster. Have a group of elders or other dedicated members join the pastor in providing spiritual support to those who have been injured, hospitalized or homebound. This is an excellent opportunity to have a deaconess or other respected female member of the faith accompany the pastor and help those who have been injured or care for elderly females who are homebound and feeling alone.

Hospitality committee — Gather a group of individuals willing to organize clothing and meals for survivors. It is vital the congregation take these meals to where the survivors are located. Do not expect people who have just gone through a disaster to travel five miles for a dinner! Consider "setting up shop" in or near the devastated neighborhood with portable grills and see the people flock around. They will very much appreciate the quick food break enabling them to get back to sorting through their homes.

Quilters — You can provide warm blankets to hospitals, homes and people who are lacking any type of comfort. Blankets are very often needed immediately following a disaster.

Building committee — You may be able to prepare temporary lodging in a sanctuary or other church facility for those who have lost their homes. Contrary to our own gut reactions, there is nothing scripturally wrong with using church facilities for those who have been through a natural disaster. Very often church cafeterias, gymnasiums and even sanctuaries are the only facilities large enough in a community to house large numbers of people following a disaster.

Donations committee — Gathering food and other items following a disaster is a great challenge. Where to house such items and how to transport them requires a proverbial army of volunteers. Congregations should also remember that the greatest donation during a disaster is money. This may sound odd, but more often than not, people do not want hand-me-down clothes following a disaster. We have probably all been involved in food or clothing drives in which the only items provided were the "junk" other people did not want. Nothing makes disaster victims have low self-esteem faster than to receive junk in their time of need.

Consider purchasing prepaid gift cards or debit cards to be used at local stores for the purchase of clothing, food or school supplies. Such donations truly make a much-needed difference in the lives of people and also renew a sense of pride and self-worth in victims. If the congregation desires



to gather specific donations (jackets, blankets, etc.), make sure those donations are truly needed. Winter coats are rarely needed in Hawaii or Haiti! Make sure what you are gathering is truly needed. Do not assume what you are collecting is needed.

Debris removal — Following a disaster, many people try to salvage as much from their homes as possible. When everything has been lost, anything becomes a treasure. Scraps of letters, torn sections of pictures — which would look like trash to most of us — become prized treasures for someone following a disaster. It is always good to offer assistance to a homeowner who is going through his or her property. But do so knowing this is a very personal act and that you may be going through very personal items. It is also good not to throw away any items without first confirming with the homeowner. What may seem like trash to us may have financial, personal or great sentimental value to the homeowner.

Keep the following in mind when performing debris removal:

- Ensure the home is safe, the electricity is off and the floor is stable. Beware of nails and other sharp objects.
- Do not do anything without the signed release of liability of the homeowner. Doing work that is not asked to be done could affect the homeowner's insurance claim.
- Do not throw anything away without first speaking with the homeowner.
 - Ask your volunteers to sign a release of liability in case of injury.
 - If you use teenage volunteers, have their parents sign a release of liability and do not allow them to do work that could harm them, such as operating chainsaws or removing moldy debris.

Transportation volunteers — One key for disaster victims to get back on their feet is to resume their normal life as quickly as possible. Consider letting a victim borrow an extra vehicle so he or she may get to work in order to continue earning a paycheck. Or find individuals willing to drive people to work, doctor's appointments or school. Retirees are especially able to provide this service to victims.

Day care/babysitting — Congregations need to check with their local governments regarding the rules of operating a day care, but providing assistance with children during a disaster is vital. It is simply not safe for small children to be around disaster areas. In addition, it is sometimes difficult for parents to salvage through their homes if one of the adults needs to watch the children. If the family consists of a single parent, salvaging through a home could be even more cumbersome. Consider having older women or other

mothers from the congregation provide a temporary day care or babysitting service free of charge to those affected by the disaster. This free time allows parents to get driver's licenses that were lost, order new credit cards or simply make a trip to the bank.

Wi-Fi and computer service — Today many financial transactions and other functions of life are conducted online. For those accustomed to daily Wi-Fi, the loss of electricity and other infrastructure makes computer access difficult. If your church has Wi-Fi and a computer or if your school has a computer room with functioning internet, consider opening your doors so people may have access to it.

Being an Active Listener to People Who Are Hurting

Caring through Christ

The deep human needs and psychological scars left after a disaster require care beyond the restoration of physical needs. Putting lives back together requires real care, hope and love. Counseling, understanding and direction are needed to enable persons, especially children, to cope with grief expressed as anger, guilt, loneliness and turmoil. We give care through effective listening. William J. McKay, author of *Beginnings: A ChristCare Group Experience Group Member Guide* by Stephen Ministries, offers these points in a session titled, "Listening as an Act of Love": "Listening means paying attention to the other person — real attention, the kind that drops everything else and ignores distractions to focus on what the other person is saying and feeling."

McKay continues to define the task of listening by highlighting six important facts:

1. Listening is hard work. Your full attention and focus are on the person speaking.
2. Listening is an important way to show care. Giving your time and effort says to the other that they are valuable to you.
3. Listen to more than just words. Notice facial expressions, body language and tone of voice.
4. Listening involves talking too. Say just enough to demonstrate attention and encourage the other person.
5. Listening also involves a response, such as asking appropriate questions. Ask open-ended and clarifying questions. The goal of listening is to draw out the other person, not to find solutions or smooth over a problem.
6. Listen with patience and care to help the other discover solutions to problems.



Tell Me About ...

A simple way to start a conversation is to use these three words: “Tell me about ...” By using those simple words, you can ask questions that allow the person to answer with ease and confidence and without a “yes” or “no” answer. Example: Tell me about your family, dog, car, home, illness, etc.

It is important to remember that if you are not a licensed professional counselor knowing when and to whom to refer an individual or family for additional counseling is paramount.

Self-Care and Well-Being in a Time of Tragedy

In the aftermath of a tragedy, the importance of our spiritual, emotional, mental and physical (SEMP) well-being can easily be overlooked. Using the “SEMP Paradigm of Care,” here are a few simple coping strategies that may help relieve some of the apprehension and uncertainty that often accompany traumatic events. In a crisis, you will either react to the event or act to cope with the event. In stressful situations, often people react rather than act. Reacting can lead to increased anxiety, doubt and fear. Acting constructively lets you take responsibility for your own well-being and choose effective coping strategies.

Spiritual Coping Strategies

1. Spend time in **prayer**. Try to dedicate time each morning and evening in a quiet place away from distractions.
2. Sing **hymns or spiritual songs**. Try to remember the lyrics and melodies of favorite hymns or songs. Meditate on them or sing them aloud. Write them down from memory.
3. Read or recite **Scripture verses**. Try to read or recall favorite Bible verses and recite them aloud. Meditate on them and commit them to memory.
4. Join in **fellowship** with your family and/or faith community. Talk to and be with a fellow pastor, your family or church friends. Don't separate yourself from fellow believers. Attend worship, Bible study and related faith-based organization gatherings. Surround yourself with other believers.
5. Read **devotional materials** appropriate to your circumstance. Find a good inspirational book, read the catechism, review helpful tracts or read Bible studies.
6. Reach out to **faith partners**. Find that special person who shares the same commitment to Christ. Join them in activities and study. Spend time with them. Set up a daily or weekly get together.

Emotional Coping Strategies

1. **Reach out to people who care**, identifying your feelings and fears. Talk out your thoughts and feelings with loved ones.
2. **Spend time in enjoyable activities with friends and family**.
3. **Write out your feelings**. You're dealing with an abstract but very powerful loss — the loss of expectations and assumptions. There is a grief process that accompanies loss. That process consists of stages of shock, denial, bargaining, anger, depression and acceptance. These stages are not smooth and orderly. They surface, retreat and resurface in a disorderly fashion. It helps to recognize which stage of grief you are experiencing. We base much of our lives on the belief that life is reasonably predictable and controllable. We live our lives based upon our expectations for the future. When our beliefs and expectations are challenged or removed, we lose our equilibrium and our world is shaken. You know from previous crises in your life, however, that you will eventually regain your equilibrium.
4. **Recognize anger as a secondary emotion**. Anger is often a surface emotion that covers up a deeper emotion such as fear, hurt or feelings of powerlessness. When you find yourself feeling angry, search for the deeper emotion and work with it instead. Write about it. Talk about it.
5. Be cautious **not to take out your anger on friends and relatives**. It will be much harder for them to be emotionally supportive if they are feeling attacked by you. Snapping at them will cause you to feel worse about yourself. As stated in No. 4 above, talk with them about the emotions which underlie your anger and ask for their cooperation and support.

Mental Coping Strategies

1. **Get the facts** about the problem from reliable sources rather than relying on the rumor mill to provide information.
2. Recognize that **you have time** to form a plan and that you may never have to activate it.
3. **Talk it out**. Brainstorm your problem-solving ideas with your loved ones to get their input and ideas.
4. Give your thoughts a break from constantly thinking about the “what if” that scares you. **Shift your focus** to the here-and-now needs of your loved ones, activities you enjoy and the things you need to get done.
5. **Structure your time**. Large segments of unstructured time will tempt your thoughts to center endlessly around what troubles you most, and in doing this, your interpretation of what is happening will become more catastrophic and less objective.



- 6. **Remind yourself of your abilities and strengths.** Self-statements such as, “I can handle this uncertainty,” will get you back in touch with the fact that you’re steering your own ship. You are not a bottle tossing and turning on life’s seas.
- 7. **Set short-term goals.** What are some things that you want to accomplish in the near future?

Physical Coping Strategies

- 1. **Adequate rest** is the foundation of stress management. Establish a routine and get to bed at a reasonable hour.
- 2. **Exercise** is excellent for stress management and will also help you sleep better if it’s done several hours before bedtime. Talk to your doctor before starting any exercise routine.
- 3. **Eat well-balanced and regular meals.**
- 4. Choose activities that allow you to relax in your off-work time (fish, read, quilt, paint, hunt or whatever you like to do).
- 5. **Avoid alcohol and drugs** as a means to cope.

Congregational Planning for Pandemics

Basic preparations for communication, worship, pastoral care, leadership and community outreach.

Although pandemics occur infrequently, it’s important for every congregation to have a plan in place in the event of an emergency. This resource is a guide to assist your congregation in preparing for a potential flu pandemic.

There may be factors unique to your community that this resource can’t foresee, but it will help you in making basic preparations for communication, worship, pastoral care, leadership and community outreach.

Communication

In the event of a pandemic, it’s important to be able to communicate rapidly with all members of your congregation, especially those who are at high risk. These include anyone living alone, such as the elderly, single parents and those with small children. Congregations, districts and circuits should also have a plan in place to check on pastors, especially those in remote areas.

Public health officials may discourage people from gathering in groups, such as at church. In addition, many of the usual ways we communicate (e.g., telephone, email) may be over-taxed and unreliable. Therefore, the best way to guarantee the fullest communication possible is to set up and practice many different ways of communication.

You may wish to identify members of your congregation who have particular expertise in information technology. These people may be helpful in preparing your congregation to use different methods of communication. At a minimum, it’s important to be able to communicate by telephone, email, website and social media.

This may mean that you have to develop a few new ways of communicating as you prepare for a possible pandemic. You may find that these new methods can be applied right away to enhance your congregational life.

Telephone

Start out by researching your options for teleconferencing. Conference calls permit large groups of people to communicate at the same time from their homes and/or businesses. Your local phone provider may offer options for conference lines and group calls.

You may also be able to find free conference call services online or through local or national companies. Usually you only pay for the services when you actually use them. But if you wish to pursue this option, you should arrange for an account ahead of time. They will be swamped with new requests if a pandemic happens.

Automated calling services are available as well. Do an online search for “voice broadcasting service,” and you’ll find a number of commercial vendors.

Text messaging services often remain operational during times of crisis or tragedy, even when it’s not possible to make regular calls. Encourage members to learn how to text.

Many congregations have prayer chains that are passed along over the phone. You can expand this concept to create a congregational calling tree to use for inquiring after the well-being of your members and for sharing information.

Email

Today, email is one of the most popular forms of communication. Request that congregational members provide an email address, and ask for their permission to use it to share important information. Encourage any members who don’t have an email address to set up a free account and learn how to use it.

Create email lists of all your members so that you can send messages to everyone simultaneously. Many congregations send a version of their newsletters electronically to save on postage costs.

Assure members that you will only use their email addresses as specified in the permission statement to which they have agreed. Remember that the “polite” way of addressing group emails is to include the list of recipients in the “blind copy” or “bcc” field, so that the list of addresses is kept private and isn’t longer than the content of your message. Your information technology savvy members can assist the congregation in drafting a privacy policy.



Church Website and Social Media

If your church has a website and is also present on social media platforms, be sure to take full advantage of those tools as well.

Place any notices in a prominent, immediately visible location on the home page of your website with a link to a blog article or webpage that lays out the full details of your plan and contingencies.

These announcements should also be sent out on any official church social media platforms, such as your Facebook page, Twitter account or Instagram account. In those posts, link people back to your webpage, mentioned above, for more information. After email and texting, social media will be the fastest way to spread the news. It also allows your members to easily spread the word using their own personal networks.

Worship and Prayer

In the event of a pandemic, people may be asked to stay in their homes and public gatherings may be discouraged. Even so, the members of Christ's Body, the Church, yearn for the solace and comfort of the Divine Service — both to hear the Word of God together and simply to be strengthened by the presence of their fellow Christians. The need for this mutual Christian consolation is all the greater in times of fear and crisis. As such, effort should be made to continue holding regular services whenever possible, only canceling as a matter of last resort. Leaders should take suitable precautions and encourage sound hygiene behaviors to limit the spread of infection.

No remote or electronic means can ever provide a satisfactory substitute for this; they can, however, be your next best resort in times of necessity. All major social media platforms offer live-streaming services. Look into Facebook or YouTube specifically, as they offer the most robust, yet easy-to-use tools for this. In addition, recorded videos or video streams can be uploaded to many of the same social media and communication channels you will already be putting in place. Even posting the lectionary readings and prayers for that Sunday on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter can be a significant contribution to the spiritual lives of your homebound members.

For some congregations, existing channels of communication for homebound members can be adapted to serve the wider membership. For others, where “gathering” the congregation into a single electronic format is not possible, efforts should be made to reach as many as possible with whatever can most closely imitate a live, physical gathering. Note: Holy Communion by electronic means is neither necessary nor advisable (see the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations' *Opinion on DVD Consecration*: lcms.org/dvd-consecration).

The Lord has commanded that we all “call upon” His name “in every trouble” (Small Catechism, Second Commandment: catechism.cph.org/en/10-commandments-second.html). The simple prayer “Lord, have mercy” is the

most fitting touchstone for every Christian. In particular, the Litany is the church's prayer when calamity strikes and we do not know what else to say (“The Litany” can be found on Page 288 in *Lutheran Service Book*: lcms.org/litany). It is ideal for families and other small gatherings and is time-tested. Finally, it is for just such occasions that Christians have learned to pray “Our Father,” even when alone, knowing that the whole communion of saints prays together as one body joined together in Christ, who has promised to remain among us (**MATT. 18:20; 28:20**). LCMS Worship has other resources for times of calamity that can be found at lcms.org/disaster-worship-resources.

Pastoral Care

As with corporate worship, it is difficult to envision any satisfactory substitute for face-to-face pastoral care. Pastoral letters, however, are as old as the New Testament. Emails, podcasts and videos can be efficient ways for the pastor to speak comfort to the congregation generally and individually, with speed and without violating quarantines or direct physical contact.

Pastors have an obligation and duty to their flock, in ordinary times of sickness and death, to visit, commend, bury and comfort the bereaved; the demands in a pandemic may greatly increase, as may the personal danger to those who give aid in every form. Pastors, leaders, medical workers and every Christian will benefit from reading Martin Luther's letter to Pastor John Hessl¹ on questions about serving during a plague outbreak — including when to stay or flee. Though 500 years old, in many ways Luther's observations and advice retain their value, since he experienced frequently what we have come to consider rare.

Leadership

Preparing for a pandemic also means creating contingency plans for leadership roles. Congregations and districts should work together to prepare succession plans for leadership on the congregational and Synod levels in the event that leaders succumb to the flu or are unavailable for lengthy periods of time. This may involve clarifying who is to function in certain roles if the people in those roles cannot do so. Some form of succession should be determined for every ordained or commissioned leader.

The shape of these succession plans can be different from place to place. At a minimum, they should include:

The conditions under which succession occurs (e.g., incapacitation of a leader);

¹ Martin Luther, “Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague,” in *Devotional Writings II*, vol. 43 of Luther's Works, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 119–38. on questions about serving during a plague outbreak — including when to stay or flee. Though 500 years old, in many ways Luther's observations and advice retain their value, since he experienced frequently what we have come to consider rare.

The method of notification; and
The level of authority assumed by successors.

Succession plans should also be three deep — that is, they should detail not just one person who succeeds another, but someone to succeed that individual as well. On a congregational level, this may include designating other area pastors to assume responsibility for a congregation if its pastor is incapacitated. This may also include preparing sermons ahead of time in case another pastor or elder has to fill in if the congregation's pastor becomes ill.

You should also make basic decisions about which congregational services are essential and should be maintained throughout a time of emergency, and which congregational services can be suspended until the emergency has passed.

On the congregational level, lay leaders should be identified to assume responsibility over various functions in the event that professional staff members are unavailable. Lay leaders should be designated to assume responsibility for office, maintenance, computer and communication functions in an emergency.

Congregations should also provide products to help contain the spread of illness, such as hand sanitizer, tissues in the pews, cleaning of pews and other surfaces after services, and so on. Consider providing latex gloves to protect the volunteers who will be doing the cleaning. These are just some examples of the precautionary measures you can take. More can be found on the CDC website.

Community Outreach

While a pandemic may require members of the congregation to quarantine themselves in their homes for a period of time, the congregation and its facilities may also be of great benefit to the wider community. Hospitals, clinics, public health agencies and disaster-response organizations may be able to use your facility to serve the community. Your church may be able to serve as an immunization site, a spill-over facility for a hospital or a disaster service center.

Prepare a description of your facilities (i.e., a list of rooms, offices, kitchens, bathrooms and other details of your building). Reach out to emergency-management officials in your community and offer to let your facility be used during a crisis.

Encourage church members to think about how to serve one another by focusing on the doctrine of vocation.

- **Start at home** — Who are the members of your family who are at the highest risk of sickness or are unable to leave their homes due to community spread? You need to do their shopping for them as they should not be going out to get groceries and medications.
- **In the church** — We need to identify the people in our congregation who are in the higher risk categories who do not have family to shop for them. Church

members who are in good health and under 60 were asked to volunteer to do shopping for these folks.

- **In our community** — Church members should check with their neighbors and see if any of them needed this kind of help. Consider contacting the mayor or if you live in a small town and let him know about this service.

Discussion Questions for Debriefing Your Members

Following a local, regional or national disaster, LCMS Disaster Response uses the following 10 basic questions to stimulate healthy reflection and discussion among disaster survivors. These simple questions also may prove helpful when debriefing responders, congregations, schools or the community. It is generally beneficial not to debrief survivors and responders together in order to allow survivors ample opportunity to fully express their experience.

1. What did you experience during the disaster (or the response)?
2. How were you personally impacted by the disaster?
3. What sustained you during the disaster (or the response)?
4. What is sustaining you now?
5. What role does your faith have in the midst of the disaster?
6. What were your thoughts at the time about the presence of God?
7. What are your thoughts now about the presence of God?
8. How have you shared your own material and spiritual resources since the disaster? (Sharing helps survivors move from being victims to being victors.)
9. Where are gaps in the delivery of relief and recovery services?
10. What do you need right now?

Prayers, Scriptures and Hymns for Use During a Tragedy

Do not hesitate to invite people to come together for a brief service. You may be amazed at how many come and the great comfort this service can provide to your members and the community. The service may be used as a “prayer vigil” hosted in your sanctuary.



Psalm

Ps. 4:1–3, 8	Answer me when I call, O God
Ps. 5	Let all who take refuge in you rejoice
Ps. 6	O Lord, deliver my life
Ps. 11	In the Lord I take refuge
Ps. 23	The Lord is my shepherd
Ps. 27:1, 3–14	He will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble
Ps. 31:1–5	Into your hand I commit my spirit
Ps. 42:1–6a	I shall again praise God
Ps. 46	God is our refuge and strength
Ps. 77:1–2, 7–15	In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord
Ps. 91	My refuge and my fortress
Ps. 121	My help comes from the Lord
Ps. 130	Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord

Scripture Reading

Job 19:23–27	I know that my Redeemer lives
Is. 25:6–9	He will swallow up death forever
Matt. 11:28–30	I will give you rest
John 11:17–27	I am the resurrection and the life
John 14:1–6	Let not your hearts be troubled
Rom. 5:1–8	Suffering produces endurance
Rom. 8:1, 31–35, 37–39	If God is for us, who can be against us
Rom. 14:7–9	He is Lord of the dead and the living
2 Cor. 1:3–4	Comforts us in all our afflictions
2 Cor. 4:16–18	Affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory
1 Thess. 4:13–14	We do not grieve as others do
Titus 3:4–8a	He saved us according to his own mercy
1 Peter 1:3–7	Trials test the genuineness of faith
1 Peter 4:12–13	Christ shares in your fiery trial

Hymns

“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” (LSB 656, 657)
“Amazing Grace” (LSB 744)
“Entrust Your Days and Burdens” (LSB 754)
“Have No Fear, Little Flock” (LSB 735)
“I Know That My Redeemer Lives” (LSB 461)
“I Leave All Things to God’s Direction” (LSB 719)
“I Am Jesus’ Little Lamb” (LSB 740)
“Jesus Lives! The Victory’s Won” (LSB 490)
“Jesus, Refuge of the Weary” (LSB 423)
“Let Me Be Thine Forever” (LSB 689)
“Lord Jesus Christ, with Us Abide” (LSB 585)
“Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word” (LSB 655)
“Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart” (LSB 708)
“My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less” (LSB 575, 576)
“Oh, How Great is Your Compassion” (LSB 559:1-3)
“O God, Our Help in Ages Past” (LSB 733)

“Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me” (LSB 761)
“Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted” (LSB 451)
“When in the Hour of Deepest Need” (LSB 615)

Prayers

In time of disaster

Have mercy, most merciful Lord, on all those who suffer in this time of disaster. In Your mercy and according to Your will, supply their physical needs, give them hope and comfort in the midst of their distress, and grant them faith in the One who suffered for us, Jesus Christ. Guide, equip and strengthen all who work to bring healing and relief. Swiftly restore civil order and peace. Use this time and these events to humble us before You, to lead us to repent of our sin, and to seek Your mercy and love, which never fails; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

After a catastrophe

Almighty God, merciful Father, Your thoughts are not our thoughts and Your ways are not our ways. In Your wisdom You have permitted this disastrous *fire/flood/earthquake/plane crash/terrorist attack/other* to befall us. Keep *name(s)* and all of us from despair and do not let our faith fail us but sustain and comfort us. Direct all efforts to attend the injured, console the bereaved and protect the helpless. Deliver any who are still in danger and bring hope and healing that we may find relief and restoration; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (*Pastoral Care Companion* [PCC], Concordia Publishing House [CPH], St. Louis, 2007, Page 515.)

During an epidemic or ongoing stress

Almighty God, heavenly Father, give us grace to trust You during this time of distress. In mercy put an end to the *epidemic/plague/other* that afflicts us. Grant relief to those who suffer and comfort all who mourn. Sustain all medical personnel in their labors and cause Your people ever to serve You in righteousness and holiness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen. (PCC 515)

For children in crisis

Father in heaven, You see Your children growing up in a sinful and corrupt world. Give *name(s)* strength to remain steadfast in *his/her/their* holy faith and keep *him/her/them* in Your tender care. Show *him/her/them* the truth of Your Word, shield *him/her/them* from all evil and lead *him/her/them* in the way *he/she/they* should go; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (PCC 386)

As we mourn those who have died

Dearest Father, death has robbed us of those we love. Your promise of the resurrection gives us hope but our hearts feel torn and our spirits feel empty as the dearest memories now bring the deepest pain. We need Your peace. Give us

the strength that sustained You in the death of Your only Son that we may have strength in our days, purpose in our calling and comfort in our afflictions. Gather our loved ones into Your arms that we may be reunited one day, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son. Amen.

Following an act of terrorism or persecution

Gracious God, heavenly Father, You know the shock and sorrow that the events of these days have spread across the land. We are helpless before the evil that afflicts us and therefore cry out to You for comfort, shelter and protection. Mercifully embrace the frightened in Your love, empower the weak with Your strength, restrain the wicked by Your might and preserve the righteous in Your grace, giving us Your peace and turning tragedy to triumph; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (PCC 515)

For comfort

Dearest Jesus, during these days we may feel like no one understands our needs, anxieties or heartache. Only you know the depths into which we have plunged; only You can reach us, sustain us and lift us up. We pray that you, who forsook comfort for the cross, would not forsake us but would gather us to Yourself and hold us fast, that we may know Your lasting comfort and peace. Amen.

For strength

Lord Jesus, You came to earth as a helpless child, setting aside the fullness of Your power to redeem frail humanity. You know the weakness of our mortal flesh through Your own suffering and death. Our afflictions drain us of energy and empty us of enthusiasm. According to Your Word, perfect Your power in our weakness, support us in Your mighty arms and grant us strength to follow where You lead and to live according to Your Father's will; for You live and reign with Him and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

For protection from despair

Heavenly Father, God of hope, protect me from all thoughts of hopelessness and despair. So much has gone wrong and help seems so far off. Open my eyes to always see Your never-failing love in Jesus Christ. Please place before our eyes the never-failing love of Jesus, which we see in His suffering and death on the cross in our place. Allow us to always remember that You love us beyond measure. In every darkness and difficulty, help us to trust You and Your promises, so that we may live in hope. Amen.

Called to suffering

Lord Jesus Christ, You have promised that You would not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear. Right now, we are suffering greatly, we have lost much and our lives seem turned upside down. It is hard to see any good that may come out of this. But allow us to know that You have called us to endure this pain and that You truly will not allow us to be left alone, You will not allow us to fall into despair. Give us strength right now to endure what we are

facing, fulfill Your promise before us and before our eyes that You truly will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear but, through Your Son Jesus, Who will always provide the right measure of comfort, strength and consolation during these days. Amen.

Loss of home

O Lord, my house in this world is gone. Gone is the earthly roof over my head, gone are the walls that protected me, surrounded me and gave me security. Gone are all the possessions and reminders of my past. I ache knowing that I have been uprooted and thrown about so greatly. Grant me shelter for my physical body. Comfort me by Your dear Son Jesus that my confidence may rest in the shelter He is for me. Allow me to find peace, knowing that You are my eternal dwelling place, You are my mansion prepared for me in heaven. If it be Your will, let my home be rebuilt and in all things, allow me to be content. Amen.

For loss of daily work

O Lord, You find pleasure in our labors. Ever since creation You blessed the work of our hands and the sweat of our brow. Be with us as we struggle with unemployment, financial worries and the loss of purpose in our life. We pray that You would restore all of us speedily to gainful employment so that we may honor You through our vocations. Until then, do not allow false pride to prevent us from accepting the assistance and generosity of others. Through this receiving, allow us to see what it means to truly rely upon You for all things. Amen.

For rescue workers

Merciful father, we commend to Your keeping all who work to bring rescue and relief especially *names*. Give them courage in danger, skill in difficulty and compassion in service. Sustain them with bodily strength and calmness of mind that they may perform their work to the well-being of those in need so that lives may be saved and communities restored; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (PCC 516)

Time of Pestilence

O God, You desire not the death of sinners, but rather that we turn from our wickedness and live. Graciously behold Your people who plead to You and spare us. Withdraw the scourge of Your wrath and be moved in mercy to turn away this pestilence from us; for the sake of Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Additional resources may be found in the *Pastoral Care Companion* (CPH, 2007), *Lutheran Service Book: Agenda* (CPH, 2006), *Bringing God's Comfort and Peace in Tragedy* by LCMS Disaster Response, *Spiritual Care Companion for Times of Disaster* by LCMS Disaster Response, and at lcms.org/disaster.



Additional Resources

Spiritual Care Companion for Time of Disaster *(also in Spanish)*

This thorough companion is for any spiritual caregiver who spends more than a few minutes talking with victims. Are you looking for disaster-appropriate and extensive Scripture readings, hymns, prayers or blessings all in one place? Look no further. The quick reference guide at the beginning helps direct you to exactly what you need. (Softcover, 48 pages)

Mercy in Action: A Guide for Pastors in the Midst of Disaster *(also in Spanish)*

When a natural or man-made disaster occurs, how should the church respond? This resource assists pastors in considering what to do before, during and after a disaster in their community. It also makes the case for why the church should respond and offers suggestions for doing just that. (Softcover, 100 pages)

Trusting in His Love *(also in Spanish)*

Tough times and difficult situations often drive us to question why things happen or whether God is good. This devotional booklet helps readers instead turn to God's Word, where we find His love through our Savior, Jesus Christ. (Softcover, 12 pages)

The Mercy of God in the Cross of Christ edited by Rev. Dr. Ross Johnson

This book of essays reflects the very heart of Jesus. The unique offerings, from a wide variety of contemporary theologians and practitioners, reflect the intersection of the theology and practice of mercy. This resource lays the foundation for a distinctly Lutheran understanding of service and remind us of the great opportunities we have to be Christ's hands and feet in a world of need, while confessing boldly His great love for us. (Hardcover, 539 pages)

Mercy in Action: Essays of Mercy, Human Care and Disaster Response edited by Rev. Dr. Ross Johnson

This book contains time-tested, Christ-focused essays that outline why mercy is at the core of who we are as Lutheran Christians. Some of the essays may be familiar; they were previously published by the LCMS World Relief and Human Care. Some are quite old — such as those by Gerhard, Chemnitz and Luther — and have been translated. Others are new essays on important issues. Old or new, they all proclaim the mercy of Christ. (Softcover, 441 pages)

Bringing God's Comfort and Peace in Tragedy

This easy reference guide is intended for volunteers or others who may be looking for a few appropriate Scripture passages, blessings and prayers. It can be quickly unfolded by a team leader for devotions or for that helpful guidance on keeping the right mindset while responding to a disaster. (Quadfold, 1 page)

The Lord's Mercy Endures Forever *(also in Spanish)*

This book offers 40 devotions — each of which includes a Scripture passage, a meditation, a prayer and a hymn — that are focused on bringing God's comfort to those who are struggling after a disaster or crisis. Although this resource is distinctly Christian, it is intended for anyone who is suffering from the brokenness of this world. (Softcover, 94 pages)

Worship resources for times of disaster

lcms.org/disaster-worship-resources

Hymns in times of disaster

lcms.org/disaster-hymn-resources

To obtain copies of these printed resources at no cost to your congregation, email disaster@lcms.org or call the LCMS Church Information Center at 888-843-5267 (THE LCMS).

LCMS Affiliated Disaster Relief Organizations

LCMS Disaster Response: lcms.org/disaster

Offers an extensive variety of materials, training, response, coordination and support to LCMS districts and congregations after a tragedy

Camp Courage: lcms.org/disaster

A VBS-style ministry to children whose community has been affected by a disaster or tragedy

District Offices of the LCMS: lcms.org/districts

Contact your district office to connect with your district disaster coordinator and/or Lutheran social-service organization

LCMS Recognized Service Organizations:

lcms.org/rso

Check to see if there is an LCMS RSO in your area that can help

Orphan Grain Train: ogt.org

Focuses on transportation of donated goods and portable disaster-relief facilities

Shepherd's Heart Disaster Response Ministry:

facebook.com/ShepherdsHeartMinistry

Focuses on tree removal after hurricanes and tornadoes

Lutheran Church Charities: lutheranchurchcharities.org

Primarily focuses on comfort dogs, flood response and chainsaw teams

Disaster Care Ministry: bslc.360unite.com/disaster-care-ministry

Flood buckets and general disaster relief available

Mercy in Action Disaster Resources: mercydisaster-resources.org

Focuses on chainsaw and hurricane relief



888-THE LCMS (843-5267)
lcms.org/disaster
disaster@lcms.org
 [LCMSDisasterResponse](#)

