

“For Such a Time as This” Pray. Fast. Act.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

“Created, loved and blessed by God and called to be a blessing to others, [we must seek] to protect human wellbeing and physical resources from harm and to work cooperatively to bring healing and hope in times of disaster within our community and beyond.”

ELCA Congregational Disaster Preparedness Guidebook¹

The United States and its territories are experiencing [extreme weather patterns](#) on a more frequent basis. Fast-moving wildfires in California fueled by intense winds forced tens of thousands of people to flee their homes resulting in more than 40 deaths and the destruction of more than 8,000 structures. Floods in West Virginia killed at least 23 people and hundreds of homes were severely damaged or destroyed. Last year featured a severe hurricane season resulting in 17 named storms that caused widespread destruction. Five of these hurricanes impacted the U.S., causing large-scale damage across Texas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.² This pattern is expected to become the norm as the effects of climate change become more profound.

The impacts of these disasters come with ancillary consequences such as health effects and changing the livelihood of survivors. For example, according to Lutheran Social Services of Puerto Rico, the “state of mental health in Puerto Rico is alarming. The hurricane combined with the plummeting of the local economy eroded the mental health of Puerto Rico’s people. The elimination of many good paying jobs, the closure of schools, cuts in people’s pensions and other factors faced by the island aggravate the anxiety and stress of the people accelerating the deterioration of their mental health to a point of crisis with a rise in [suicide attempts](#).”

There is hope. Churches and civic organizations are ready and eager to help but can be hampered by government bureaucracy. With better access to federal resources, these organizations can more effectively address the aftermath of disasters and assist in building resilience for future disasters. As people of faith, we are called to protect the wellbeing of our neighbors and bring healing and hope in times of disaster. Therefore, we call on all Lutherans to advocate for the following actions:

BETTER ALIGNMENT AND COORDINATION OF FEDERAL AND VOLUNTEER RESOURCES:

- Deploying the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Disaster Case Management Program (DCMP) so the coordination of cases can be supported by local Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) organizations;
- Appointing Leading Partners from its local VOAD to have access to FEMA DCMP and effectively support mental health treatment in disaster impacted areas; and
- Hosting a roundtable with FEMA and local VOAD members to ensure proper preparedness for the 2018 hurricane season that begins on June 1, 2018.

INCREASE FUNDING FOR AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS SUCH AS:

Communities: Department of Homeland Security (DHS): [DHS](#) has a vital mission: to secure the nation from the many threats we face, including disasters.

We ask Congress to increase the funding for DHS to assist communities severely impacted and overwhelmed by disasters by a minimum of \$6.7 billion.



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Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD): [HUD](#) partners with federal and state agencies to help implement disaster recovery assistance. The federal government passed legislation earlier this year to provide funding for mitigation by allocating \$28 billion to HUD’s Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program to repair homes, support businesses and rebuild infrastructure. It also designated \$12 billion to address future risks.

***For Fiscal Year 2019 (FY19), we call on Congress to ensure this funding is allocated.*³**

Wildfire Suppression: Department of Interior (DOI) and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA): [DOI](#) provides “federal and non-federal collaboration, including the use of technology to reduce wildland fire risk to communities and enhance firefighting safety and effectiveness.” The [USDA](#) is currently spending more than 50 percent of its budget to suppress the nation’s wildfires. The Administration’s budget proposal calls for 100 percent of the rolling 10-year average cost for wildfire suppression in the DOI and USDA.

We call upon Congress to ensure that this is adequate funding.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA): [FEMA](#)’s mission is to help people before, during and after disasters. Funding continues to be needed to equip emergency responders so they can be prepared for natural or manmade disasters. The Administration’s Budget proposes \$6.9 billion for the FEMA Disaster Relief Fund to ensure effective response to and recovery from emergencies and major disasters. This funding helps survivors get back on their feet while restoring essential community services and facilities.

For FY19 we request Congress to provide \$1.9 billion for FEMA Programs that award grants to State and local governments to help equip responders; and \$6.9 billion for FEMA.

LEARN MORE:

¹Congregational Disaster Preparedness Guidebook

http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Preparing_for_a_disaster_Congregational_Disaster_Preparedness_Guidebook.pdf?_ga=2.29706815.1462443837.1525807193-800047199.1525807193

²Lutheran Disaster Response

<http://www.elca.org/Resources/Lutheran-Disaster-Response>

³E&E News, “Budget deal a windfall for mitigating sea-level rise”

<https://www.eenews.net/stories/1060073457>

FEMA Public Assistance Program and Policy Guide

<https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/111781>

FEMA Strategic Plan 2018-2022

https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1521736077767-89fc0afeacb7a93bd7b6a1091aaeba2b/strat_plan.pdf

