

Thrive

Your Impact on Lutheran Disaster Response



Lutheran
Disaster Response

“‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these”

(Mark 12:30-31).

Dear friend,

When we reflect on the work of Lutheran Disaster Response, we see a recurring theme of relationships. Relationships are at the very core of our shared work and are what drive us to do what we do together.

Relationships — with people impacted by disasters; with partners and companions; with other ELCA ministries; and with you, our supporters — multiply the impact of Lutheran Disaster Response. These relationships enable your gifts to reach more people before, during and long after a disaster.

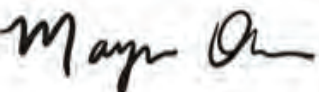
Our relationship with Jesus guides this work. Led by Christ’s actions to care for our neighbors, Lutheran Disaster Response accompanies people on the margins and walks with them through crisis situations.

Generous support for Lutheran Disaster Response in 2022 exceeded that of any time in the past 25 years. Because of your faithful support, we are responding to disasters in 43 countries and 26 U.S. states and territories. Your ongoing commitment is key to continuing this work.

From the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War to increasingly volatile weather and the ever-growing global migration crisis, the stories in this issue of “Thrive” show the value of relationships and the effect our shared work has on individuals impacted by disasters in the United States and around the world.

Thank you for your support for Lutheran Disaster Response’s ministry to and with those whose lives have been disrupted by disasters.

In Christ’s service,



Maryn Olson
Director
Lutheran Disaster Response



The Rev. Daniel Rift
Director, ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran
Disaster Response Fund

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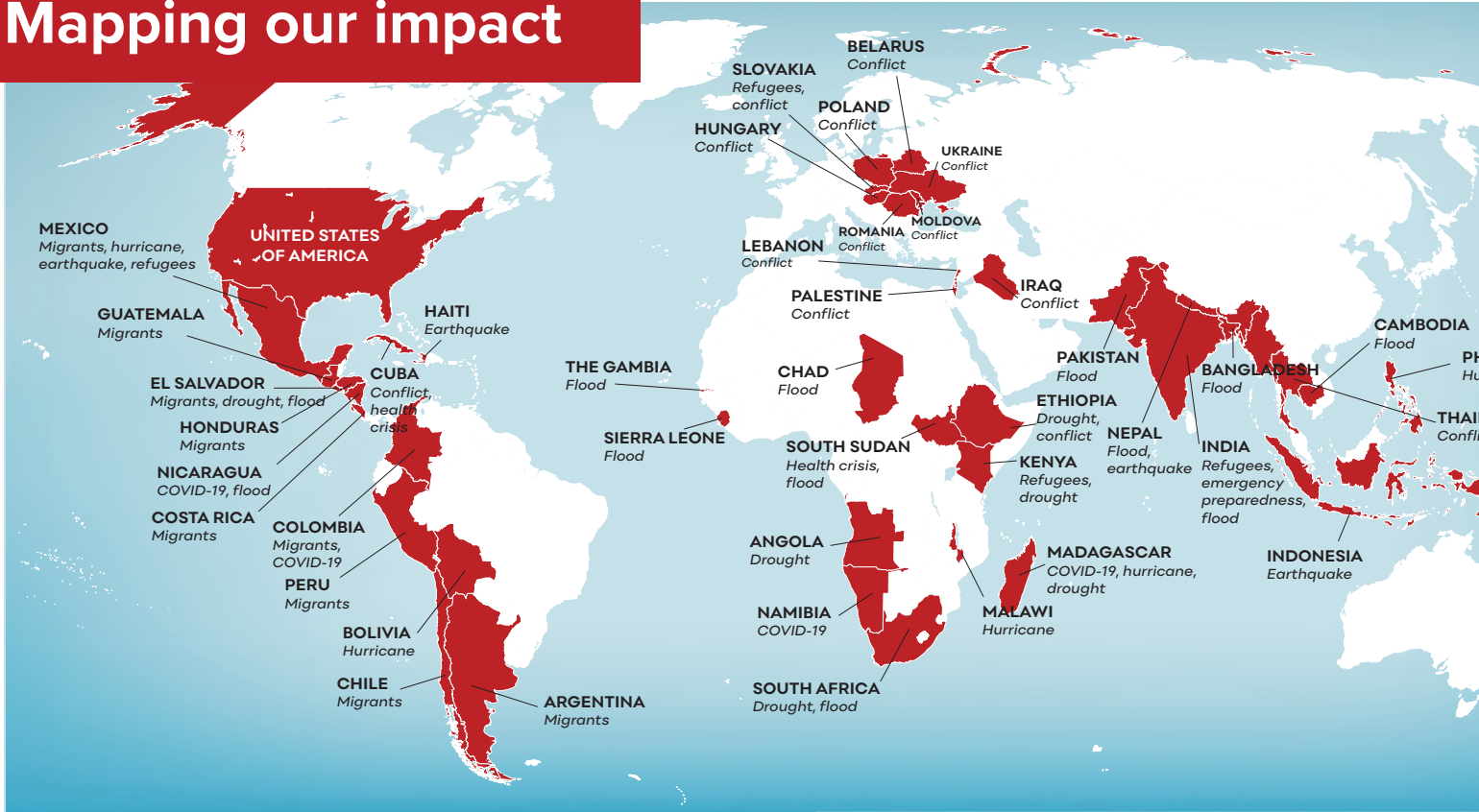
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Mapping our impact



Paul Jeffrey/Life on Earth



Paul Jeffrey/Life on Earth



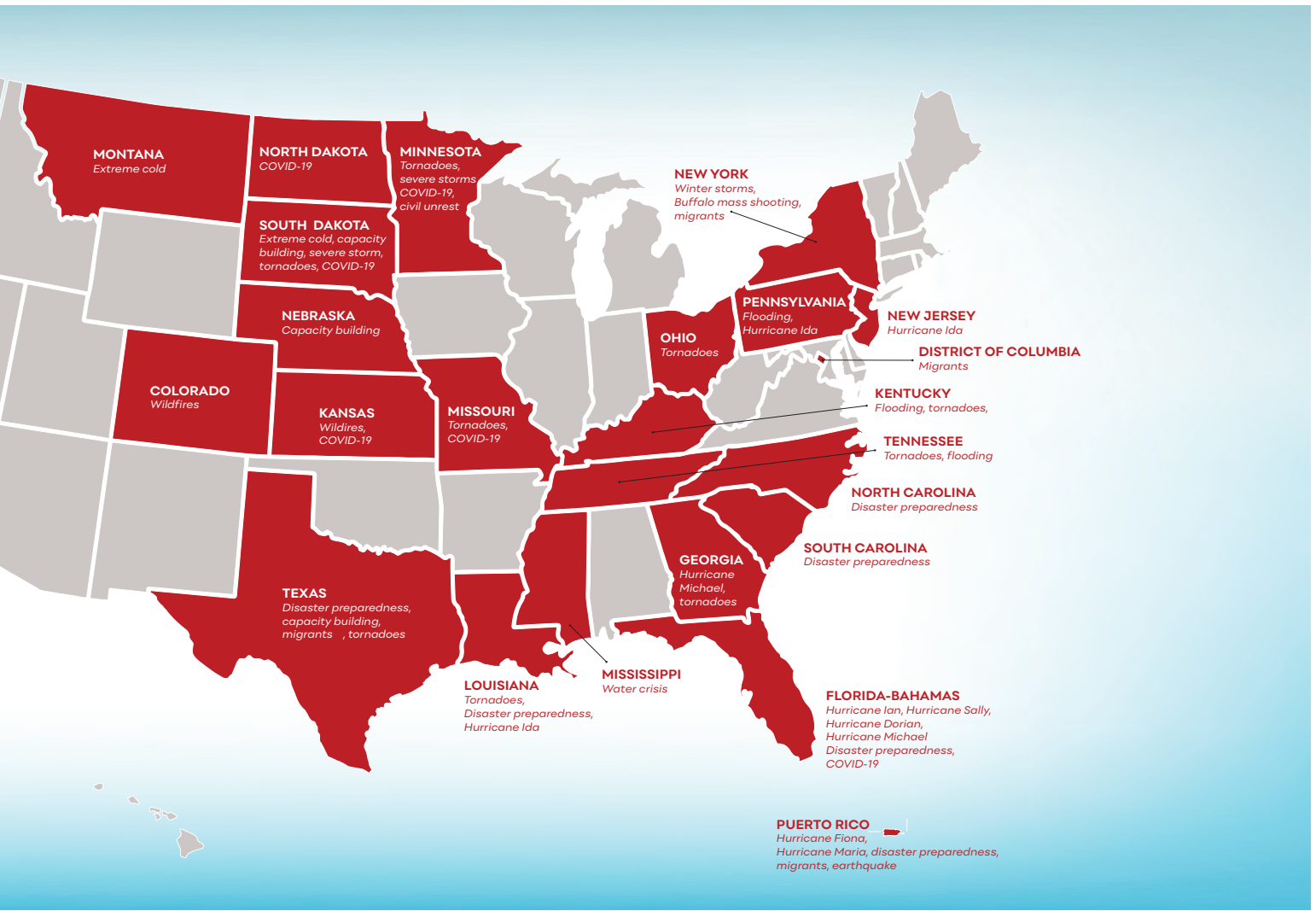


In 2022, Lutheran Disaster Response was working in

43 countries
(including the United States)

and

26 U.S. states
and territories.



Ongoing Responses

Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR)

is present in communities before and during disasters and remains long after a disaster strikes, accompanying survivors on the road to recovery. We look back at the lasting impact of your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response.

HURRICANE ISAIAS

In August, Hurricane Isaias moved up the U.S. East Coast. Although it weakened to a tropical storm, Isaias still caused devastating flooding in eastern Pennsylvania. LDR is providing continuing support to Lutheran Congregational Services, which is repairing homes and replacing appliances in the Eastwick neighborhood of Philadelphia.



HURRICANE SALLY

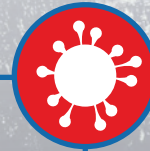
Immediately after Hurricane Sally hit Florida and Alabama in September, LDR financially assisted the Florida-Bahamas Synod as it provided food, water and cleaning supplies. LDR funding also supported local partners that worked to replace damaged roofs and address other construction needs in the Florida Panhandle. Additionally, the Southeastern Synod continues to engage in roof repair efforts for the Mobile-Washington Band of Choctaw Indians community in Alabama.

THREE YEARS 2020

WESTERN WILDFIRES

The record-breaking wildfire season of 2020 devastated the western United States, with major fires in California, Colorado and Oregon. LDR supported communities through local partners that helped survivors secure permanent housing, assisted with rental payments and identified community resources.

It supported the Oregon Synod by providing immediate aid and hosting a Camp Noah trauma care program for youth impacted by the wildfires.



COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, LDR offered support to global companion churches in 50 countries and to partners in 40 U.S. states and territories. Relief included food, medical supplies, cash-based assistance and psychosocial care.

EARTHQUAKE IN HAITI

A high-magnitude earthquake hit Haiti on Aug. 14. Church World Service, with support from LDR, provided immediate assistance in Pestel, including psychosocial care, hygiene items and temporary shelter. In the long term, the Lutheran World Federation is offering cash-based assistance to families, providing seeds to farmers and holding disaster risk reduction training.



KENTUCKY TORNADOES

After tornadoes swept across western Kentucky Dec. 10-11, LDR began working with the Indiana-Kentucky Synod to provide long-term support for people impacted by the storms. The synod is collaborating with local partners to repair and rebuild homes and install septic tank systems.

COLORADO FIRES

On Dec. 30 the Marshall Fire spread through Boulder County, Colo., becoming the most destructive fire in state history. LDR supported the relief and recovery efforts of local Lutheran churches and impacted communities. These congregations provide emotional and spiritual care for wildfire survivors, assist them in finding resources and work with other external partners to address community needs.



HURRICANE IDA

Hurricane Ida made landfall in the United States on Aug. 29 and moved through the southern U.S. and into the Northeast. In Pennsylvania, LDR partner Lutheran Congregational Services is repairing homes, prioritizing those with preexisting vulnerabilities.

RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

On Feb. 24, 2022, Russian forces invaded Ukraine, producing a mass refugee crisis — the largest in Europe since World War II. LDR is supporting partners in eight Eastern European countries, including Ukraine. Initially partners provided refugees with immediate support and supplies such as food, blankets, water and hygiene kits. In the long term they are supporting refugees with community integration and finding them employment, schooling and permanent housing.



KENTUCKY FLOODING

Beginning July 27 a line of severe storms dumped record amounts of rain on eastern Kentucky, overflowing rivers and creeks onto streets and neighborhoods. The flooding has destroyed hundreds of homes and other buildings and infrastructure such as bridges and roads. LDR is collaborating with the Indiana-Kentucky Synod and other local partners to respond.

HURRICANE IAN AND HURRICANE FIONA

September brought damaging storms including hurricanes Fiona and Ian. Fiona inundated Puerto Rico with rain. Ian made landfall in Florida on Sept. 28 with near Category 5-strength winds, dumping record amounts of rain and causing catastrophic, life-threatening flooding. LDR continues to support partner synods that have moved from immediate relief to assisting with long-term recovery.



DROUGHT IN AFRICA

Many countries across Africa are experiencing severe droughts. LDR is supporting an ACT Alliance appeal to address the humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa. Implementing partners are providing food aid, safe and accessible water, psychosocial support, livelihood improvement strategies and risk reduction for climate-induced disaster. LDR is offering similar support to partners in other countries affected by drought, including Angola, Rwanda and Tanzania.

Hurricane Michael: 5 years later

In October 2018, Hurricane Michael rapidly intensified, becoming the first Category 5 hurricane to hit the Florida Panhandle and the first to make landfall in the contiguous United States since 1992.

Lashon Turner and her five children were among the many families whose homes were damaged. The hurricane blew the roof of their house off. “I was surprised the whole house stayed up during the hurricane and that only the roof was damaged,” Lashon said. Initially the family used contractor bags to provide some shelter, but those got weighed down by water and fell into the house when it rained.

Her family finally got short-term, income-based housing, but it was cramped for the six of them. In 2021 she was approached by a Lutheran Disaster Response partner that, through the Florida-Bahamas Synod, was repairing homes damaged by Hurricane Michael. For Lashon, it wanted to go one step further and build a completely new house.

When she learned she’d be getting a new home, she broke down in tears: “It was my first very own house.”

Several organizations, including the Florida-Bahamas Synod, worked together to make the house a reality. The three-bedroom, two-bathroom home was constructed in four days in a true community effort. Local businesses donated building materials or offered them at a discount. The church across the street from the property provided meals and lodging. Every day, 20 to 30 volunteers came to build the house, fix meals and offer other support.

For Lashon, one of the most important aspects of the new house is that it’s just a mile from their old home. The Turners can stay in their close-knit community, where neighbors feel comfortable walking right into the house, especially when Lashon is cooking. She is now excited to use her new kitchen for the cooking business she started.

“It’s truly been a blessing to us and our family,” she said. “I don’t know where we would be without [LDR]. I tried to get help and it’s hard on your own.”

Your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response ensure that survivors such as Lashon are not alone during the journey of recovery.



Lashon Turner's home was damaged by Hurricane Michael.



Volunteers in front of Lashon Turner's new house.

Refugee families settle in Hungary

As the Russia-Ukraine War continues, millions of Ukrainian refugees are settling in neighboring Eastern European countries. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary (ELCH), an ELCA partner supported in part by your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response, is assisting refugees to integrate into their host communities.

Erzsó and her husband fled to Hungary after the Russian invasion. While her husband found a job in Budapest, Erzsó's job search is on hold because she just gave birth to their first child. Financial support from ELCH is helping them get by until the baby is older and Erzsó can find employment. In the meantime, she continues to volunteer with ELCH and help others in need.

Annie and her family were also accompanied by ELCH, which helped them secure a new home after they had issues with the landlord at their first apartment. Now that they are settled, her two children can go to school regularly and she can prepare for the birth of her next child.

ELCH supports thousands of Ukrainian refugees such as Erzsó and Annie. Immediately after Russia's invasion, ELCH churches welcomed fleeing Ukrainians, offering food, clothing and temporary shelter. After those needs were met, ELCH began helping refugees find housing, employment and schooling. As the war continues, so does the work of ELCH and the support of Lutheran Disaster Response.

“Thank you very much for all the help so far. We are glad that there are such good people to help us.” —Annie

The generosity of Lutheran Disaster Response donors makes all this work possible. Lutheran Disaster Response is committed to accompanying partners in Ukraine and Eastern Europe for years to come.



Erzsó, her husband and their baby.



Annie and her family.

Native-led responses to weather extremes in Rapid City

In fall 2022, Lutheran Social Services of South Dakota and the South Dakota Synod lifted up the voices and concerns of Indigenous leaders in Rapid City. The Indigenous community's message was clear and dire: the new temperature extremes of winter and the nationwide housing crisis caused the deaths of unhoused relatives the previous winter and posed the same risk for 2022. In response to this crisis and acting in alignment with the ELCA's "Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery," Lutheran Disaster Response provided funding to two Indigenous-led organizations in Rapid City to mitigate the impact of weather extremes on human life.

Oaye Luta Okolakiciye (translated as moving forward in a sacred way) is a Lakota-led nonprofit that operates a day center, harm reduction programming and addiction recovery services grounded in traditional Lakota spirituality. With a Lutheran Disaster Response solidarity grant, Oaye Luta Okolakiciye expanded its meal service at the day center and provided climate-appropriate winter clothes for its community.



Wambli Ska converted a bus into a mobile warming center.

Wambli Ska is a Native-led nonprofit affiliated with Woyatan Lutheran Church in Rapid City. It provides youth leadership development, community meals, traditional conflict mediation work and more. In winter 2021-22, Wambli Ska and Woyatan converted the nonprofit's space into an emergency shelter, but leaders determined they could not offer the space without interrupting other essential programming. Through a partnership with Lutheran Disaster Response, Wambli Ska expanded its meal program and provided a mobile warming center made from a converted bus. The bus provided hot meals and shelter for over 330 people during the winter.

Cultural resilience on Rocky Boy's Reservation

The severe winter of 2022-2023 added another layer of challenge to the work of Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, a native ministry on the Rocky Boy's Reservation in Montana. Like all ELCA-affiliated Indigenous ministries, Our Saviour's is a leader in developing community, climate and cultural resilience — key elements of culturally informed capacity-building and hazard mitigation work. The congregation's work in the community includes lending its space for traditional ceremonies, revitalizing the Cree language and providing care packages for community members undergoing in-patient treatment for substance abuse disorder. These activities require a safe indoor gathering space in the increasingly harsh winters of the Montana plains. Lutheran Disaster Response, in partnership with ELCA Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations, ensured that Our Saviour's cultural resiliency work could continue over the winter.



Students in a Cree language course at Our Saviour's.

Your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response help deepen our relationships with Indigenous communities. LDR accompanies our Indigenous neighbors not only with words of solidarity but with resiliency-building actions.



“The Lord is by our side, always.”

Margaret and other women in her Chimvu, Malawi, deanery (a small group of congregations) meet weekly to discuss and respond to community needs, such as rising costs or lack of farming materials. Chimvu is a rural village located in southern Malawi, about an hour’s drive from Blantyre, a city of nearly 1 million people. From early February through late March, Cyclone Freddy ravaged Malawi, Mozambique and Madagascar, causing significant loss to Margaret’s community. Although the heaviest rains lasted for only a few days, they came in the evening and washed away everything including food storage, clothing, crops, livestock and, worst of all, people. The rains continued for weeks, causing further devastation to communities that were already struggling to feed and support each other.

Food was a particular challenge. Margaret asked, “How can we continue to meet and help if we ourselves don’t have any food?” Lutheran Disaster Response worked alongside the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi (ELCM) to distribute food to Chimvu and several other communities across southern Malawi. ELCM plans to continue walking alongside affected areas for the long haul.

Meeting this basic need — meals for families — will go a long way in helping Margaret and the other women in the Chimvu deanery back on their feet so they can work toward rebuilding their community and generating a sustainable livelihood for all.

“The Lord is by our side, always,” Margaret shares confidently. She is most looking forward to worshiping together again inside their church building. It was newly built prior to Cyclone Freddy, but one wall was destroyed in the heavy rains. Parishioners continue to gather outside but are eager for the day when they can worship together inside their beloved hall.

Margaret stresses the importance of faith amid disaster:

“Individually, we know it is difficult to grow spiritually, but when we continue to meet together and share, we know that our spiritual life will grow.”

With your support, Lutheran Disaster Response can make a little — even a bag of food for a family in the wake of disaster — go a long way to bring physical and spiritual nourishment when disaster strikes.

The numerous impacts of climate change are apparent throughout Africa. Some areas, like the Horn of Africa, are experiencing extreme drought. The lack of rain is affecting peoples’ livelihoods, especially those working in agriculture. Diminishing water supplies also force people (usually women and girls) to travel farther to collect water for their families, taking time and energy away from farming, income-generating activities and schooling. Other countries in Africa have had torrential flooding in the last several years due to unusually high amounts of rainfall or intensifying cyclones such as Freddy.

Lutheran Disaster Response is addressing humanitarian needs across the continent due to drought, flooding, conflict or other disasters. In addition to immediate and long-term relief, communities are acknowledging that extreme weather will only become more prevalent and are taking steps to mitigate the effects of climate change.



Lutheran Disaster Response is accompanying the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi in the aftermath of Cyclone Freddy.

AMMPARO

The AMMPARO (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities) strategy is the ELCA's commitment to holistically accompany people throughout their migration journey. The journey includes traveling to and resettling in another country or returning to their countries of origin. While the work of AMMPARO began in the United States and Central America, it has expanded to include South America and beyond. It is partially supported by Lutheran Disaster Response.

A space for our neighbors

“Taking in people is something we’ve always done,” said the Rev. Tom Terrell, pastor of Christ Lutheran Church in Chicago. On a Sunday in May, he learned about the migrant families sleeping on the floor of the local police station.

“I sent messages to all my church council ... that I think we need to open our building [to migrant families],” he said.

By that evening, all the council members responded with a resounding, “Yes, absolutely.” Pastor Tom went to the police station with his alderwoman and came back with three families. The next day they brought back another family, and then another arrived. Now five families — 14 people total — are staying at the church. Four of the families are Venezuelan and another is from Honduras.

Pastor Tom and the congregation didn't go into this ministry with a fully formed plan. At first he thought the families could sleep on the floor of the church gym. But as he walked around the building, he realized there were rarely used meeting rooms and a nursery that could be used to give each family private space. The families also cook their own meals in the church kitchen, which grants them an additional sense of agency.

The congregation formed a team to look after the needs of the migrant families. One person takes the lead on health care and medical appointments — one of the mothers is pregnant — and another team member who is an attorney works on the immigration process.

“It’s just incredible, the outpouring of love and welcome in this community,” said Pastor Tom. Nobody knows what is next for these families because of the uncertainty of the U.S. immigration process. As they wait, Pastor Tom is helping the adults find jobs and enroll the children in summer classes. AMMPARO is now helping Christ Lutheran Church find semipermanent housing for the families. Until then, Pastor Tom and his congregation are prepared to continue hosting the families.

“These are good people,” he said. “They are our new neighbors.”



In Mexico, Central and South America, AMMPARO companions accompany in-transit and returning migrants. In 2022:

- **12,587** people received short-term assistance.
- **4,582** people received individual case management.
- **564** people received psychosocial care.
- **319** people received skill-based employment training.
- **283** people received small business training.
- **270** people received seed capital for small businesses.



Migrant ministry opens its doors

Aug. 5, 2022, was a memorable day for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile (IELCH) and its migrant ministry program.

It was the day that Bishop Izani Bruch presided over the dedication of IELCH's first Centro de Atención al Migrante (Migrant Service Center) in the Belen (Bethlehem) congregation, together with church members, ecumenical partners, other faith-based organizations for migrants and municipal government officials.

The new staff team of IELCH's migrant ministry, led by the Rev. Jan Meyer, were confident that opening the center would enable them to better accompany the growing population of migrants in the San Bernardo neighborhood, on the south side of Santiago.

Their hopes were confirmed right after the dedication service and ribbon-cutting ceremony ended.

The newly unveiled sign over the church's front entrance attracted the attention of some passersby. One was a migrant woman from the neighborhood who immediately made an appointment to come back and meet with staff the following week.

Shortly thereafter, Pastor Jan and Stephen Deal, ELCA regional representative, sat down for lunch at a neighborhood restaurant. Their waitress turned out to be a Venezuelan migrant. They told her about the dedication of the IELCH's migrant center right around the corner. She knew many migrants from Venezuela who would be interested and promised to be a messenger of this "good news."

Since August 2022, the word has spread. In its first six months of operation, IELCH's migrant center, with financial support from Lutheran Disaster Response, served hundreds of migrants, principally women and children from Venezuela and Haiti, with nutrition and hygiene assistance, psychological attention, legal advice, service referrals and spiritual counseling.

Your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response
make possible all this work and more.

Thank you!

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engaged**

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*Gifts designated for a specific disaster are
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