

# Thrive

Your Impact on Lutheran Disaster Response



2024

LWF/ Anatolyi Nazarenko



Lutheran  
Disaster Response

*“Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.”*

—1 Peter 4:10

*Dear friend,*

We have long recognized the importance of a holistic approach to disaster response, where people can use their individual gifts to serve their neighbors. Whether that gift is construction, counseling, education or prayer, it takes all of us to help our neighbors recover, whether they live in our community or on the other side of the world.

As you will see reflected in the stories ahead, Lutheran Disaster Response accompanies communities with and through the strength of trusted partners. With such a dynamic network, we are in communities after a disaster hits and in the years of recovery. But we also assist in mitigation and preparedness to help equip communities for the future. Lutheran Disaster Response is faithfully committed to accompanying our neighbors around the world, which shows the strength of our partnerships.

This multipronged approach to the entire disaster cycle enables us to be present in 51 countries, including the United States. It's how we form deep relationships and build trust with our partners. Your support for this work is crucial in making a difference for countless lives — not only those who have been impacted by disaster but those who know that a crisis could strike at any moment.

Over two years have passed since Russia invaded Ukraine, and even as we continue to accompany impacted people and communities in Central and Eastern Europe, we've been watching a humanitarian crisis escalate in Gaza and the occupied territories and supporting our partners in the region. In this issue you'll also read about our responses to wildfires and migration. These situations require different types of assistance, but Lutheran Disaster Response is equipped to provide them all.

Thank you for your continued support for Lutheran Disaster Response. Together, with our many and varied gifts, we can accompany our neighbors around the world.

*In Christ's service,*



Maryn Olson  
Director  
Lutheran Disaster Response



The Rev. Daniel Rift  
Director, ELCA Service and Justice Giving  
ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response

*On the cover: A girl in a train station that was retrofitted into a school in Kharkiv, Ukraine. Similarly, Lutheran World Federation, a partner of Lutheran Disaster Response, will be converting air raid shelters into schools.*

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# Mapping our impact



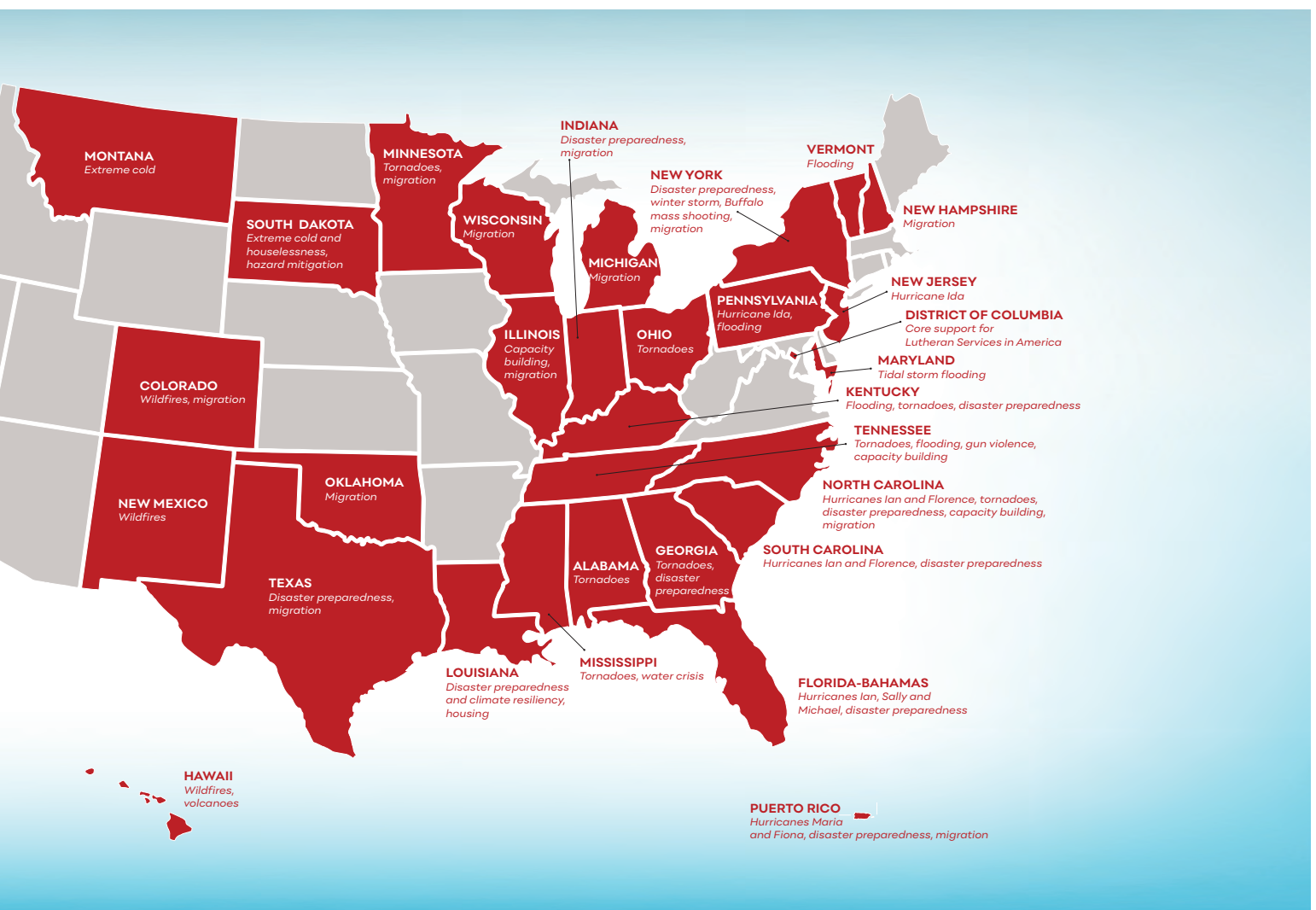


# In 2023, Lutheran Disaster Response supported work in

**51** countries  
(including the United States)

and

**34** U.S. states  
and territories.



## *Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR)*

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



### WESTERN KENTUCKY TORNADOES

After tornadoes swept across western Kentucky in mid-December, LDR began working with the Indiana-Kentucky Synod to provide long-term support for people impacted by the storms. The synod collaborated with partners to repair and rebuild homes and install septic tank systems.

THREE YEARS 2021

## 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, with priority given to people with preexisting vulnerabilities, primarily older adults on low fixed incomes.



## COLORADO FIRES

On Dec. 30 the Marshall Fire spread through Boulder County, Colo., becoming the most destructive fire in state history. LDR supports 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.

# TWO YEARS 2022

## RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

On Feb. 24, Russian forces launched a full-scale invasion into Ukraine, producing a mass refugee crisis. LDR is supporting partners in eight Central and Eastern European countries, including Ukraine. LDR is supporting programming to assist refugees with short- and longer-term housing, schooling and community integration, including employment.



## HURRICANE FIONA AND HURRICANE IAN

September brought damaging storms including hurricanes Fiona and Ian. Fiona inundated Puerto Rico with rain beginning on Sept. 18. Ian made landfall in Florida on Sept. 28, with near Category 5–strength winds, and caused catastrophic, life-threatening flooding. LDR continues to support partner synods and community organizations that have moved from immediate relief to assisting with long-term recovery.



## EASTERN AFRICA DROUGHT

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 disasters. LDR is currently offering similar support to partners in Malawi and Ethiopia.



### TÜRKIYE-SYRIA EARTHQUAKE

Two earthquakes of magnitude 7 or greater struck Türkiye and Syria in early February, causing widespread destruction. In the region, LDR is supporting ACT Alliance, the Lutheran World Federation and other partners in responding to the earthquakes, especially as they support Syrian refugee communities in Türkiye.

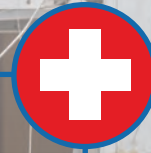


### SOUTHEASTERN SPRING TORNADOES

In the southeastern United States spring is always an active time for severe storms and tornadoes. In response to the storms of 2023, LDR is accompanying communities in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, North Carolina and Mississippi by providing construction materials and supporting construction management, disaster case management and community outreach efforts.

## MAUI WILDFIRES

In August multiple wildfires broke out on the Hawaiian island of Maui. Exacerbated by strong winds, the fires destroyed homes, businesses and lines of communication and killed over 100 people. Thousands of people had to evacuate and lost their homes. LDR is involved in response and long-term recovery by partnering with Kihei Lutheran Church, the Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement and Pacific Health Ministry.



## MIDDLE EAST CRISIS

With the massacre on Oct. 7 and the resulting conflict between Israel and Hamas, a severe humanitarian crisis continues to deepen in the Holy Land. LDR is supporting partners in the region, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, Augusta Victoria Hospital and L'Arche Bethlehem, which are providing for the immediate needs of displaced people (medical support, emergency education support and more).

## *The dedication of volunteers*

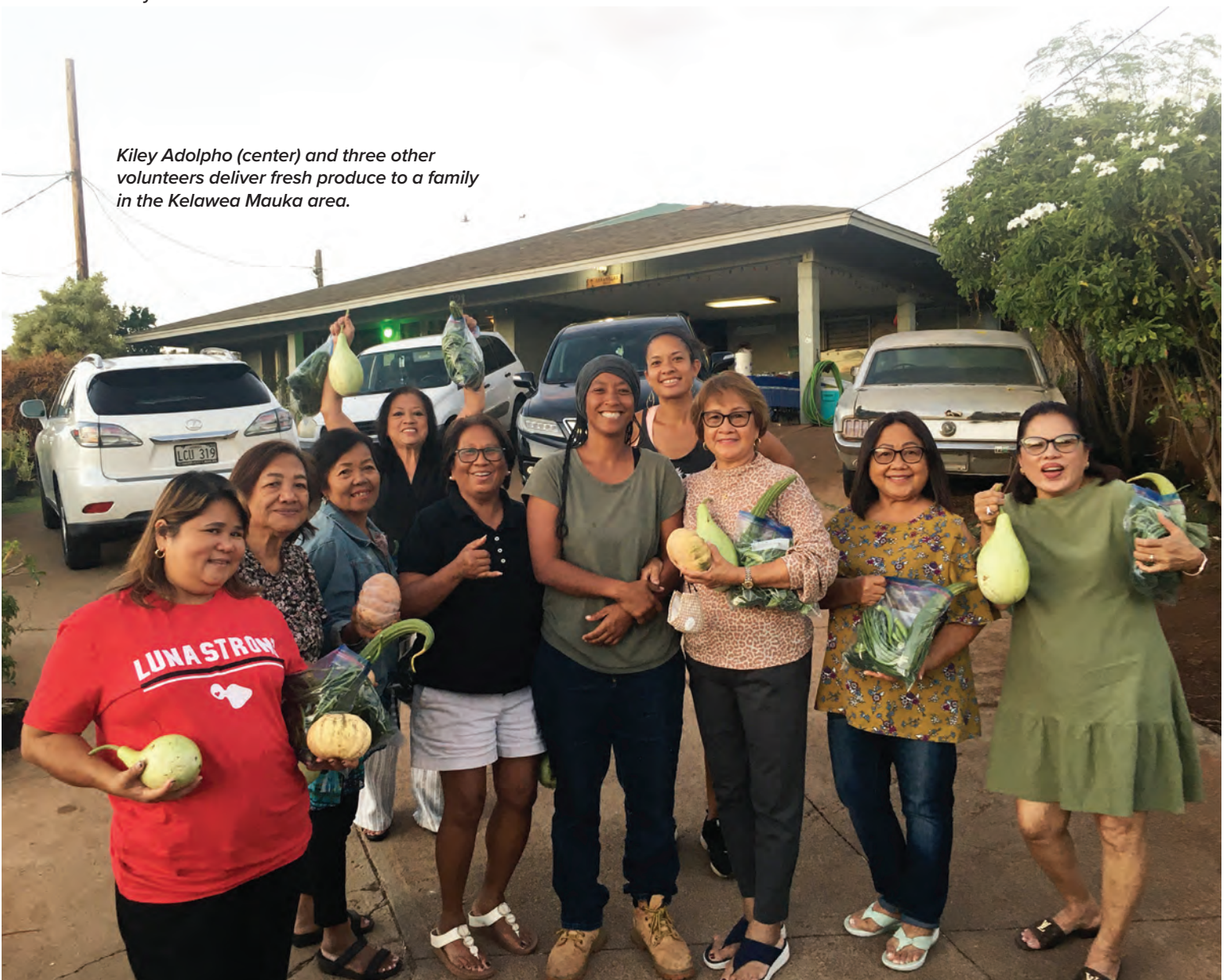
Until wildfires struck Maui in early August 2023, Kiley Adolpho worked as a teacher. After seeing the community need in the city of Lahaina, which was almost completely burned down, she took a leave of absence from teaching to dedicate her time to volunteering.

Kiley works at the Kelaweia Mauka Community Hub, one of the community resource centers that arose after the fires to provide food, clothing and other personal items to people who have lost their homes. Kihei Lutheran Church, the only ELCA congregation on Maui, partnered with the Kelaweia Mauka hub to assist survivors. Kihei Lutheran quickly started receiving donations, which it shared with the hub.

With support from Lutheran Disaster Response, Kihei Lutheran purchased food and other products for Kelaweia Mauka. It also bought a large van, which enabled volunteers to deliver items door-to-door to people throughout the community, often serving hundreds of individuals in a day.

The Kelaweia Mauka hub is run completely by volunteers, including Kiley, who manages it. Some volunteers are wildfire survivors themselves who receive small stipends from the government to volunteer at such community hubs.

*Kiley Adolpho (center) and three other volunteers deliver fresh produce to a family in the Kelaweia Mauka area.*



Kiley remembers one of the regular beneficiaries, Ms. Tasaka, saying, “I can’t believe you are still coming, and so late after your workday. You guys work so hard for us. ... One day I’ll cook for you.”

Many of the people served by the Kelaweā Mauka hub, such as Ms. Tasaka, are *kūpuna* (elders) who are especially vulnerable to the effects of the wildfires. Even in homes that didn’t burn down, deadly toxins remain in the air and ground. Some *kūpuna* residents were unwilling to leave, whereas others moved into a hotel. But, after several months, they were asked to leave the hotel, and some had nowhere to go except their still-toxic homes.

“Hearing these similar expressions from many of our people brings much concern to the reality of Lahaina’s need,” said Kiley. The community needs access to potable water, medical and mental health support and modifications to houses to prevent toxins from reentering homes.

Volunteers at the hub are worried about ongoing assistance for wildfire survivors because some organizations that came into the community immediately after the fires have since left. But thanks to generous donors, Lutheran Disaster Response is positioned to maintain support for Kihei Lutheran Church and the Kelaweā Mauka hub, ensuring that they can continue to serve the Lahaina community.



Kiley Adolpho and Ms. Tasaka.

## *A community of safety*

Haitham's life in the Dheisheh refugee camp is far from ideal.

The overcrowded camp, located in the West Bank, is frequented by Israeli soldiers. Haitham's intellectual disability is not apparent at first glance, which means that when he's challenged or stopped by soldiers, he may not understand or respond well to commands. His mother worries that one day he'll be shot by soldiers, who often target young men on the streets.

In this environment Haitham needs the protection he gets from being part of the L'Arche Bethlehem community.

"If the community did not exist in his life, he would spend his time wandering in the streets of the camp, putting himself at many risks in the process," his mother says.

In response to the ongoing violence and increased political and security tension in Gaza, Lutheran Disaster Response has provided critical support that reduces the risks faced by people such as Haitham.

In the West Bank, support from Lutheran Disaster Response has enabled the L'Arche community (known in Arabic as "Ma'an lil-Hayat," or "together for life") to operate amid increased military control and heightened political tension. Members and staff endure hours-long commutes on public transportation, with security checks and restricted movement, just to reach the community.

Regular schedules and activities are crucial to people living with disabilities, including those who participate in L'Arche programs. For them, workshops and meals in two different facilities are essential sources of support, connection and community.

Amid the high tensions of war, Haitham's mother sees L'Arche as a sanctuary for her son and others like him: "He is surrounded by people that love and care about him, people that make him feel like a decent human being."

Your support for Lutheran Disaster Response means that people with disabilities and staff can reach workshops safely and that staff can continue to provide care in the most difficult circumstances. It means that people such as Haitham can live safely and with dignity.



*Haitham is a member of the L'Arche Bethlehem community, which is supported in part by Lutheran Disaster Response.*

**Lutheran Disaster Response is working with partners in the Holy Land to provide:**

- Immediate needs for those displaced by the war throughout the region, including shelter, food and water, clothing, basic necessities and household supplies.
- Medical supplies for hospitals and clinics.
- Accommodation and food for hospital staff so they can continue working, and for patients and families who are unable to travel for treatment.
- Mental health support and trauma-healing interventions.
- Emergency education support, which enables schools to continue operating even when students' families cannot pay school fees, and which provides school meals at a time of high food insecurity.
- Support, including food and livelihood support, for people living with intellectual disabilities.

## *A home away from home*

Natalia fled Ukraine in May 2022 with her five children, one of whom was pregnant. Her husband, son and son-in-law stayed and joined the army. “Since then, my life has been torn in two,” she said. Natalia and her children ended up in Moldova, where they live in a hotel-turned-refugee-shelter. Church World Service (CWS), a partner of Lutheran Disaster Response, is engaging host communities in Moldova and ensuring that refugees have the resources necessary to integrate into the community.



*Natalia and her family, refugees from Ukraine, settled in Moldova.*

Natalia enrolled her children in an educational center for refugee children, where they are involved in various activities and have the opportunity to learn and play with other refugee children. She keeps busy by caring for her youngest children, who aren't in school yet; participating in weekend and evening activities at the center; and volunteering at a distribution center for refugees. She is making a home for her family in a new country.

In October, after the family arrived in Moldova, Natalia's daughter gave birth to a baby girl, and Lutheran Disaster Response supported her access to the necessary medical care. The following spring, Natalia and her family briefly visited Ukraine and were reunited with her family who had to remain behind. This was a joyful time for all, and the first time the men of the family had gotten to meet Natalia's first granddaughter.

The refugee program in Moldova is working with thousands of Ukrainian refugees, primarily women and children, to help them acclimate to their host communities. In addition to the education center that Natalia's children attend, CWS provides livelihood training, medical support and other immediate needs, and manages a center for victims of gender-based violence.



*Church World Service, with support from Lutheran Disaster Response, operates a children's center in Moldova for refugees.*

Simon Chambers/ACT Alliance

*Thanks to your gifts* to Lutheran Disaster Response, we can continue supporting our partners in Central and Eastern Europe for years to come.



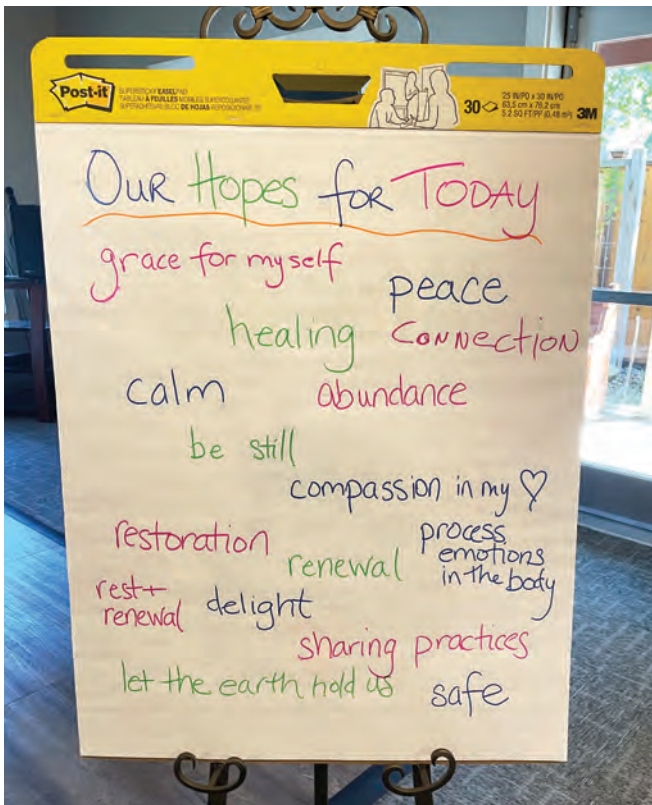
*At a retreat, disaster case managers and navigators had the opportunity to practice self-care and reflect on their work.*

## *Caring for the caregivers*

In recent years Lutheran Disaster Response has grown its training program, ensuring that people around the country have the tools to address various aspects of disaster response. These include workshops for topics such as developing long-term recovery groups, disaster case management and emotional and spiritual care. In Oregon, Lutheran Disaster Response hosted a “Care for the Caregivers” retreat for disaster case managers, zone captains and navigators working with people who were impacted by the devastating 2020 wildfire in the Rogue Valley. Some responders were affected by the fires as well but had little time to process their own needs. The work can be emotionally draining, so the retreat gave them a chance to practice self-care, reflect on their work and feel the gratitude of others for their dedication to survivors.

“While the facilitators offered guidance, it took everyone’s willingness to fully participate and match the energy to accomplish an experience truly worthy of the ‘retreat’ title,” one participant shared. This participant-focused, collaborative approach allowed attendees to make the most of the experience.





Throughout the day-long retreat, participants engaged in activities and exercises that helped them examine their feelings and process trauma. In the final session they reaffirmed their identities and focused on their purpose and future growth. Through meditation, group conversation and somatic movement (a way of moving that focuses on the internal experience), participants were given the space to process their experiences in disaster response and to release the stress of their work.

Workshops and trainings, offered by Lutheran Disaster Response and supported by your generosity, meet a crucial need for communities. Whether they come after a disaster or before it strikes, the importance of being prepared and ready to respond — and of taking the time to slow down and process what has happened — cannot be overstated. This much was clear at the retreat in Oregon.

“It was amazing,” one participant shared. “I felt so cleansed from worry when I left. I felt love.”

In late 2023, Lutheran Disaster Response co-hosted two disaster response trainings, in Malaysia and Indonesia. Participants had the opportunity to use past disasters as examples to address both response needs — food security, temporary shelter, sanitation — and such operational considerations as developing budgets and evaluating practices. Both workshops addressed topics such as assessing disaster risk, identifying community needs and coordinating with other organizations. International humanitarian aid standards and cultural and religious sensitivities were incorporated into the trainings, ensuring that responses would be tailored to specific contexts but still aligned with global practices.

The workshop in Malaysia was held with the Lutheran Church in Malaysia and focused on organizing the church’s disaster response mechanism in a country where monsoons often trigger flooding and landslides. In Indonesia, a country that faces frequent earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanoes, the workshop provided training for the trainers. It built up a network of disaster responders throughout the 14 churches of the Indonesian National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation, helping them to quickly mobilize when a disaster hits. These trainings were just the beginning: both groups are planning workshops to continue assessing and building their disaster-response capacity.



## *Ministering to migrants*

Active in the AMMPARO network, the Migration Ministry of the Iglesia Luterana Mexicana (ILM) has provided crucial support for a network of shelters in Mexico City and in other border cities across Mexico.

The combined capacity of these migrant shelters is inadequate for the unprecedented number of migrants who find themselves stranded in Mexico and in need of emergency humanitarian assistance. During the first five months of 2024, more than 1 million people from 177 different countries were on the move throughout Mexico. Each shelter can respond to only some of the needs of the migrants who come knocking at its doors.



Since 2023, ILM's Migration Ministry — supported by AMMPARO through your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response — has been offering psychosocial support to all migrants who request it, specifically in the Casa Fuente shelter, where a trained psychologist visits every week and provides care to migrant families, mainly women and children.

“Often we are overwhelmed by the number of people waiting to enter our shelter,” says Beatriz Fuentes, director of Casa Fuente. “We rely on alliances with other civil society organizations and churches like the ILM that support us with workshops and with the psychologist so that, together, we can provide the best service.”

Marcela Lopéz, ILM's psychologist, recognizes the unique challenges faced by migrants. “It's important for migrants to maintain a close relationship with where they come from, with the social and historical conditions of the territory where they are, and their personal aspirations.” Most migrants arrive disheartened and exhausted. Having someone listen to them fosters trust, even if they have only one chance to talk with a psychologist.

Marcela recalls the case of an elderly Venezuelan woman, named Martha, who traveled to Mexico with her entire family of six. There was no legal way for her to continue her journey north. Given her age and health complications, Martha decided that her best option was to return to her home country. “Thanks to my conversation with Marcela, I was able to make the right decision for my future,” reflected Martha with gratitude.

AMMPARO partnerships, funded in part by your generosity to Lutheran Disaster Response, show our solidarity with migrants. The unprecedented number of migrants stranded in Mexico is likely to grow due to U.S. border policies. Migrant families hoping to apply for asylum at the U.S. border may have to rethink their plans. As they face an uncertain future, the accompaniment provided by ILM's Migration Ministry and shelters such as Casa Fuente will be more important than ever.

**The ELCA AMMPARO strategy, partially supported by Lutheran Disaster Response, accompanies migrants around the world through protection, advocacy, representation and opportunities.**



*ILM staff meet with a migrant they are supporting in Mexico City.*

# Thrive

Your Impact on Lutheran Disaster Response

## Stay engaged

[ELCA.org/disaster](http://ELCA.org/disaster)

Follow Lutheran Disaster Response on Facebook and Instagram.

## Ways to support Lutheran Disaster Response

### ONLINE

[ELCA.org/disaster](http://ELCA.org/disaster)

### BY MAIL

Write a check to Lutheran Disaster Response and send to:

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

ELCA Gift Processing Center

P.O. Box 1809

Merrifield, VA 22116-8009

### BY PHONE

Call 800-638-3522 to make a donation with a credit card.

Operators are ready to assist you Monday through Friday,

8 a.m.-5 p.m. Central time.

Your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response equip us to respond to these disasters and others, even those that don't make the headlines, whenever and wherever they strike.

*Thank  
you!*



Lutheran  
Disaster Response