



A Space to Breathe, An Opportunity to Heal

Tess understands grief.

She has experienced more heartache in the span of two years than most. Since September of 2021, she has lost her mother, her mother- and father-in law, her brother, and her brother- and sister-in law, the last of whom was her best friend since the age of 10.

Tess says, "Because my personality is that of a 'fixer,' I wanted to support everyone in my family through these losses... In truth, I was emotionally exhausted and overwhelmed."

In this, Tess is not alone. So many people experience the process of mourning, but there is no guide for managing the emotions that accompany that process. Grief is nonlinear, and healing is not a seamless journey.

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LUTHERAN CONGREGATIONAL SERVICES,
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Pastor Brandon Sees Unique Opportunity

Pastor Brandon Heavner of St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, PA, sees a unique opportunity for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) amidst these challenging times.

These days, he recognizes, there are fewer rostered clergy to serve congregations, with more congregants homebound or requiring assistance. The Lay Eucharistic Visitor Training (LEVT) program, provided by Lutheran Congregational Services, offers a way to both support those at home while also supplementing a pastor's normal visitation capabilities. This past January, Pastor Brandon accepted a role as a Lay Eucharistic Visitor Trainer for Lutheran Congregational Services.



Pastor Brandon Heavner

At Pastor Brandon's first LEVT training, held in January at Trinity Lutheran Church in Pleasant Valley, PA, he accentuated biblical foundations of Christian care. Reading from a letter written by a Church leader in 150 CE, he emphasized how this concept of care was practiced in the early church. Community members, for example, would share the leftovers of their communal meal with the orphaned, widowed, and infirm as an extension of Christian empathy and love.

Today, Lay Eucharistic Visitors continue to perform ministry in a similar vein for those who are ill or homebound. Just as the sacraments are celebrated in the physical church, it is the role of the gathered church to bring the sacrament to those who cannot convene in person.

"The LEVT program, at its core, strengthens our community of Christian care," Pastor Brandon says. "How do we care for the people in our midst with Christian love?"

One of the best ways, he explains, is through the Eucharist. What's more, the Eucharistic visitors also bring welcome social interaction for congregants who are isolated or alone. Social and emotional interaction make up a necessary part of health and spiritual care, something of which the Eucharistic visitors are keenly aware.

Pastor Brandon admires the collective wisdom of the congregants who feel called to serve as Eucharistic ministers. "There's something invigorating about being among fellow disciples of Jesus who are passionate about ministry in this particular way," he reflects. "The people who participate in this training really care about serving God and neighbor through ministry. That is one of the most rewarding things for me."

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Thrivent Choice Dollars

2022 Lay Eucharistic Visitor Training

Lay Eucharistic Visitor Training is a one-day training event.

May 7th, Reading
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

June 4th, Sellersville
St. Michael's Lutheran Church

September 10th, Conyngham
Christ Lutheran Church

October 1st, West Chester
Advent Lutheran Church

Training runs from
9:30AM – 4:00PM

Cost is \$30.00/per person

Oktoberfest
at St. Paul's Lutheran
in Glenside



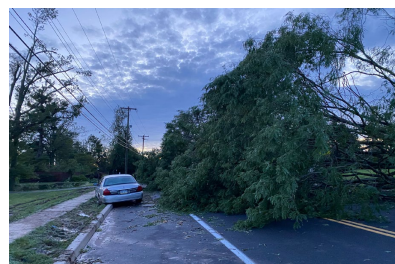
PROCEEDS BENEFIT
LUTHERAN DISASTER RESPONSE (LDR)
IN EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

Lutherans Respond to Ida

Even now, months after Hurricane Ida brought tornados to Ambler and Upper Dublin neighborhoods last September, it is hard to miss the blue tarps still on many roofs along Route 309. However, in addition to tornados, Hurricane Ida also brought devastating flooding.



The damage resulted in a major declaration for Individual Assistance from the federal government in Montgomery, Chester, Bucks, Delaware, Philadelphia, Northampton, York and Bedford Counties. Not since Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee in 2011 has Pennsylvania received a declaration for Individual Assistance, at which point there were 43,000 FEMA registrations. Following Ida, there are 78,000 FEMA registrations in Pennsylvania to date.



Recovery from natural disasters like Hurricane Ida often takes months or years.

Despite the widespread damage, thousands of families are well on their way to recovery with the storm finally behind them. This, in large part, is due to communities coming together – including many Lutheran congregations! – to get neighbors back on their feet.

Northeastern and Southeastern Pennsylvania Synods have both shared vital information about resources and disaster relief. These are just a few examples among many detailing the Lutheran response!

- Upper Dublin Lutheran Church in Montgomery County distributed over \$47,000 to families in need after the tornado.
- Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in Coatesville continues to welcome congregants from Messiah Lutheran Church in Downingtown to worship with them after Messiah's building was severely impacted by the storm.
- Volunteers from St. Michael's Lutheran Church in Sellersville helped clean out homes along the Perkiomen Creek, while Lutheran churches belonging to Berks County Community Organizations Active in Disaster are raising funds for a Sinking Spring family whose car was destroyed by flooding.

While many families have recovered, we know that hundreds have remaining unmet needs. Over 100 families are still in temporary shelter at hotels, while many others are awaiting the outcome of insurance claims and FEMA applications.

Lutheran Disaster Response – Eastern Pennsylvania (LDR) is leading the effort to provide coordinated services directly to these families. Along with its partners, LDR ensures disaster survivors have accessed all FEMA benefits available to them and assists households in creating their own recovery plans.

Finally, LDR has brought together local partners in the most impacted communities to create Long Term Recovery Groups. A “best practice” in disaster recovery, these groups are designed to ensure equitable distribution of resources, and each welcomes representation from Lutheran churches!

Thank you to everyone who reached out in the name of Jesus to help our neighbors recover, and thank you for your continued support of Lutheran Disaster Response – Eastern PA.

Our private Facebook group, **Journeys Through Grief**, is an online community for those who have lost a loved one.

If you or someone you know is coping with grief, please join our virtual online community by visiting Facebook.com/groups/JourneysThroughGrief.

A Space to Breathe, An Opportunity to Heal (cont.)

Feeling immobilized, Tess contacted grief counselor, Sylvia Havlish, M.Ed. Sylvia serves as a grief counselor with Lutheran Congregational Services and facilitates Journeys through Grief, a communal support group. Journeys through Grief offers bereavement services and counseling seminars to anyone in the community at no charge.

Sylvia's methods emphasize the power of human connection and the communal resiliency we all share. “It can be healing to be around others who are also grieving, because they truly understand the way you feel,” Sylvia explains.

Journeys through Grief aims to equip bereaved individuals with the tools they need to process and come to terms with loss. The goal is not to speed the mourning process, but rather to offer loved ones the chance to truly experience life again.

In Tess's experience, Sylvia and Journeys through Grief played a vital role in accepting her new reality after so many losses. “Within my first two weeks, I began to breathe again,” Tess later wrote in gratitude. “Over the last 6 weeks, I have utilized (Sylvia's) suggestions and given myself the opportunity to heal.”

UP FRONT WITH THE DIRECTOR



Together, we are extending the hope and love of Christ to those experiencing extraordinary pain and loss. Congregations, synods, social ministry organizations, and individuals work with Lutheran Congregational Services to serve others with kindness.

Collectively, we make and deliver hygiene kits and clean up buckets to communities affected by a catastrophic event; offer comfort to those who are grieving a loss; share friendship and communion with those who are alone and homebound. We walk with disaster survivors on their long road to recovery, knowing that many months may pass by before there are any real long term solutions for them.

Your continued support allows LCS to provide grief counseling and lay Eucharistic visitor trainings. You ensure that disaster response remains a priority in eastern Pennsylvania, thus laying the foundation to cultivate essential relationships with local partners. This makes a huge difference in our ability to lead when disasters like Ida do happen.

As a result of those partnerships and our leadership within the Pennsylvania VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster), Liberty Lutheran, our parent organization, received a grant of \$30,000 from The Philadelphia Foundation. This funding bolsters families in our region by providing immediate help for those impacted by Hurricane Ida, especially those who are still living in hotels or in other temporary locations following damages caused by the storm.

We are grateful for you, our family of faith, who graciously serve. We are also grateful for our partners, like UCC Disaster Ministries, The Salvation Army and local emergency services, who respond without hesitation when disaster strikes. And we are grateful for funders like The Philadelphia Foundation who know that giving their financial resources to support those in need is vital to their well-being.

Julia Menzo

Director of Community Outreach,
Lutheran Congregational Services



Lutheran
Congregational
Services

THE SERVANT

c/o The Lutheran Center
2354 Grove Road
Allentown, PA 18109



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A Friendly Reminder...



If you are a member of Thrivent Financial

and are eligible to direct Choice Dollars, you can designate your Thrivent Choice Dollars to any of the Liberty Lutheran Family of Services.

For just a few minutes online, you can offer hope and comfort to those who are going through challenging times.

Thrivent Choice Dollars will expire on March 31.

Visit Thrivent to make your gift today:
thrivent.com/what-we-offer/generosity/thrivent-choice.html

By directing Choice Dollars to us, you help provide over \$1.3 million dollars in Benevolent and Charitable Care.

