



Lutheran Disaster Response

the CATALYST

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LEAVING A LEGACY

THE PEERCYS REFLECT ON THREE DECADES OF SERVICE

After 27 years of service to communities around the country impacted by disasters, in December 2023, Dale and Jean Percy retired from Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR). Their work with LDR physically took them to 49 of 50 states (Wyoming is the only state they didn't have an opportunity to respond in). The impact of their work influenced the design and implementation of long-term recovery systems, inspired the creation of community-based response

“God has brought healing, courage and strength, hope, and love to God’s people through you as servants of the Gospel. I give thanks to God that you have served so generously and selflessly, often at great sacrifice.”

- ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, ELCA

organizations, and created the foundations of recovery work that will last far beyond their nearly three decades of service.

Continued on page 2



Rev. Allison Parvin, Jean and Dale, and Rev. Morgan Gordy during a training in Mississippi.

Inside this Issue

SHARING GOD’S HOPE, HEALING AND RENEWAL WITH PEOPLE WHOSE LIVES HAVE BEEN DISRUPTED BY DISASTERS.



We are a church that is a **catalyst**, **convener** and **bridge builder**.

Because we recognize that every disaster is local, Lutheran Disaster Response collaborates and partners with other disaster response organizations and religious entities.

We believe every response needs to be rooted in the community, and we work to accompany that community from immediate relief through long-term recovery.

Inside: Celebrating the legacy of Dale and Jean Percy, the Community of Practice Gathering, and looking ahead to the National VOAD conference.



ELCA.ORG/DISASTER

LUTHERAN DISASTER RESPONSE

LEAVING A LEGACY

Continued from page 1

Dale and Jean were entrepreneurs before they met each other, both owning their own construction businesses. In fact, it was an encounter on a shared job site that led to their decades-long romance. The skill set, craftsmanship, and reputation for quality of both Dale and Jean led to contracts for wealthy homeowners building large-scale residential homes. Despite their success, however, the Peercys felt there was more they could be doing for people. So, they turned to their shared passion for Christ and explored different ministries within the Lutheran church that would take them as a couple. That search led them to Lutheran Disaster Response.

Their work in disaster long-term recovery and rebuilding officially started in 1997. Leon Phillips, then Director for LDR, hired them through Lutheran Social Services of the Virgin Islands and asked them to deploy to the Virgin Islands for six months. Their work would be in response to Hurricane Marilyn, which had impacted the island two years earlier. Marilyn caused severe damage to the islands and in particular, St. Thomas where an estimated 80% of homes and businesses were destroyed, and at least 10,000 people were left homeless. While many volunteers had visited prior and helped to repair and rebuild residential homes, the Peercy's role was to help churches rebuild from storm damage. When not actively working on the churches, they assisted in St. Thomas and St. Croix with volunteer and construction coordination. It was there that one of the cornerstones of the eventual trainings they would create was developed.

“One of the biggest things we had to do was earn their trust,” said Dale, “and it didn't happen right away.”

Community members were leery of who they were and why the Peercys were there. In response, the Peercys diligently embedded themselves into the community, building connections and relationships, and doing their work with empathy, character, and integrity. “Trust building is something that I think changed our lives on how we look at walking with people,” Dale continued. Jean agreed. As business owners, building trust had always been a part of their lives, “but I think that the work we did there opened it up a lot clearer,” she said.



Dale and Jean Peercy in the Virgin Islands, circa 1997.

The trust-building with the Peercys often transcended language. While working with volunteers in St. Thomas, Dale found himself in a house with a strange design sense. For him, everything felt out of place. The homeowner spoke no English, and in response to Dale's perplexed look, moved the furniture. “There were big holes in the floor,” Dale revealed. “They were placing furniture to cover the holes.”

Dale and his team went to fix the issues, and quickly discovered that there wasn't a 45-degree angle in the house. When cutting plywood, Dale had to cut all four sides to get them to fit correctly. At the end of the day, with just a few finishing touches remaining, Dale pointed to the floor and gestured, *how does it look?*

“I can never tell this story and get through it,” Dale said. He composed himself, and after a moment said that the homeowner, “threw his arms up over his head and danced across the floor.” Dale smiled. “So, yeah. No English. But we sure could communicate.”

After the Virgin Islands, the second phase of their careers took them to South Dakota, Texas, and North Carolina. It was during this period that the Peercy's work coordinating rebuilds and volunteer management

Continued on page 5

Welcome to Our COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Dear friends of LDR,

Happy New Year!

When I lived in Namibia, one of the customs I grew to appreciate was how people would intentionally greet someone with, “Happy New Year!” the first time they encountered the person after January 1, whether that was on January 2 or sometime in April. There is something so fresh and hopeful about imparting good wishes for the year ahead to each person we encounter. So, to each of you: *Happy New Year!* May this year be one of great hope and possibility in your life and ministry.

Much of the United States is suffering through significant weather events now, making the beautiful joy of Christmas and light of New Year’s Day seem incredibly distant. But as people of faith, we are called to carry the light of that Christmas star into the darkest corners of our world, our communities, and our neighbors’ lives. As you move more fully into 2024, I invite you to take to heart these prophetic words from Howard Thurman, a Black theologian, author and civil rights activist:

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flock,
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart.

~ “*The Work of Christmas,*” by Howard Thurman, in *The Mood of Christmas and Other Celebrations* (1973)

Thank you for doing the work of Christmas every day. I am grateful for you!

MARYN OLSON
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COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE ONLINE GATHERINGS



JOIN THE COMMUNITY

Join our recurring domestic Community of Practice Calls. Discussions are open to all, and are segmented by region for ease and local networking. To be added to a recurring meeting invitation, contact Sean Coffman at Sean.Coffman@ELCA.org

EASTERN REGION

Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, West Virginia

Discussions are held quarterly, on the third Thursday of the first month of the quarter from 9:00 – 10:00 a.m. Eastern time.

MIDWEST REGION

Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin

Discussions are held quarterly, the last Wednesday of the quarter from 1:30 – 2:30 p.m. Central time.

WESTERN REGION

Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming

Discussions are held quarterly, on the third Thursday of the second month of the quarter from 11:00 a.m. – noon Pacific time.

SOUTHERN REGION

Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia

Discussions are held quarterly, on the second Wednesday of the first month of the quarter from 3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. Central time.



GATHERING COMMUNITY

THE LDR ANNUAL GATHERING RETURNS TO MINNESOTA

In November, Community of Practice members joined Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) in downtown Minneapolis for two days of learning and connecting. The first gathering since 2021, the event provided opportunities to meet new LDR staff, learn about the future vision for LDR, and provided opportunities for local, regional, and national

true for recovery, which is why effective collaboration is so essential in responding to disasters and supporting whole community recovery. Thank you for being part of the LDR community.”

Attendees also heard about new grants, learned about changes to the education and networks programs, and had an opportunity to meet with LDR’s newest program, Initiatives, which focuses on unconventional disasters.

Unable to attend the gathering this year? You can find the presentations from the gathering in our LMS at <https://collabornation.net/login/LDR>.

“I felt very well-informed. The staff did a great job of clarifying the new LDR structure, opportunities, and challenges. I think we had great conversation and it was well-facilitated.”

- Gathering attendee

colleagues to connect. Hosted at Central Lutheran Church, the agenda was centrally focused on LDR itself, and attendees heard from each program within Lutheran Disaster Response national office.

Maryn Olson, LDR’s director, opened the session with an overview and reminder of the work LDR performs throughout the world. Maryn also shared about integrated collaboration between other Building Resilient Communities programs, including ELCA World Hunger and AMMPARO. “Disaster is bigger than all of us — bigger than any individual, organization, or community,” she said. “The same is



Members of the LDR Community of Practice at Central Lutheran Church.

LEAVING A LEGACY

Continued from Page 2

started to gain notoriety among national disaster response organizations and the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD). Their care and compassion for those volunteering their time continued to stand out as well. Each experience affirmed for the couple that they were in the right place. “It was like God already had a plan for us,” said Dale. “All we had to do was walk it through. And it turned out to be just a wonderful experience all the way around.”

From South Dakota, the couple moved to Texas, where Rev. Gilbert Furst, the second director for Lutheran Disaster Response, asked them to work on a new interfaith response – what is commonly referred to today as a long-term recovery group. “Gil said he didn’t really know how it was going to

“Looking back over these past 27 years, we have no regrets of this road that we’ve traveled.”

- Jean Peercy

work because it was a new thing they were trying for disaster response,” said Jean. The Peercys weren’t concerned by the new approach, however, because they had a lot of experience coordinating individuals coming from different faiths and volunteer groups. But the intention behind the interfaith response was their first experience working with anything like it.

“It was neat,” Jean reflected on the experience, “because people in the communities felt it didn’t matter whether you had faith or what church you went to, these people were coming in together and working to make people whole. And people looked at it as the whole church coming together to work. For us it was very impactful because it was a witness to what we were really supposed to be doing.”

Their call to witness deepened in 2001 when the couple traveled to Houston in response to Tropical Storm Allison. Heavy rainfall and flooding in June left over 30,000 people homeless after the storm. Unfortunately, focus on the storm and those impacted was completely lost on September 11, when terrorists attacked the United States. The Peercys, however,

remained in Texas, helping manage what little funds did arrive for recovery. They focused their work on the less fortunate, to the dismay of many who thought they shouldn’t be working in certain neighborhoods. Our work “became a witness to other people that it’s not that you just care about those who have,” Jean said. “You care for all of them.”

“We all do this for that one person that is suffering as a survivor, that is in pain or trouble, or that needs a helping hand,” she added. “If we lose track of that, then we might as well go home because we’ve lost it all.”



Jean and Dale accept gifts from partners during a LTRG training in Mississippi.

Through 2001, the Peercys continued their work, moving from impacted community to impacted community, helping with rebuilding efforts and volunteer coordination under the new interfaith model. That’s when Gil called and said to Dale and Jean, “I want to know what you two have been doing.” Dale laughed and asked what he had heard. Gil shared that the Peercy’s work had prompted calls to LDR from denominations around the country asking where they were working and if they were available to help in a particular community. “What is it you’re doing,” Gil asked, “that nobody else is?”

While hands-on training had always been a part of what the Peercys did with volunteers, this conversation with Gil led to a significant transition

Continued on page 6

LEAVING A LEGACY

Continued from page 5

for the Peercys. Moving forward, they would be asked to train responding organizations how to establish long-term recovery groups, and how different components within the group intersected and worked with each other. Gil asked the Peercys to design a flow chart that showed the intersections of case management, volunteer management, donation management, and more.

In 2003, the flow chart was presented by the Peercys at a National VOAD conference. “All of a sudden,” Jean said, “they started talking over our heads. But it sounded like they were happy.” She laughed, “It was very humbling.” Without realizing it, the Peercys had put on paper, and into practice, a much-needed coordination system for multiple agencies responding to a disaster. Everyone agreed that’s the way it should be, “and that’s where Dale and I started to change,” said Jean.

National VOAD approved the flow chart, and the Peercys started training responding agencies. “We had four hurricanes that hit Texas, and so we would fly from place to place with this little piece of paper, telling people how to do the work,” Jean said. “And that was a hard transition for us.” Used to being on the front lines of response, the Peercys now found them-



Jean and Dale Peercy celebrating retirement with the LDR Community of Practice.

selves in conference rooms and lecture halls speaking to groups of people. “We did our work knowing what the survivor needed and being able to supply those needs, whatever that was,” said Dale. “Now it’s teaching leadership. We needed to know what *response people* needed, not only survivors.”

From conference rooms in Texas to auditoriums in Indiana, the Peercys traveled from community to community, sharing their tools, inspiring the creation of new community response organizations, and sharing their message of serving the needs of those less fortunate. At one point, the Peercys were teaching over 250 people in a day. It wasn’t all roses, however. “I was tethered to a podium, and they were trying to film us,” Jean laughed. “I don’t tether well.”

Slowly, the Peercys began to see a decrease in requests for their help leading or teaching about long-term recovery. “The stuff we did in ’04,” Jean said, “they didn’t do. And then in ’05 when we were doing the trainings, they had the capacity to respond themselves, and they didn’t need us anymore.” Dale added that in some places, like Indiana, they didn’t have to go back. “We had built resilience there,” he said. Jean nodded and agreed. “And that is a feeling of accomplishment,” she said.



Dale and Jean teaching multiple LTRGs in Hazard, Kentucky.

Imagining what's next for LDR, the Peercys are excited about the organization's future. "We know the world is changing, and disaster response is changing," said Jean. "We're not saying we can't keep up with the changes," she laughed, but LDR "has younger minds and younger new ideas coming up. Our work is tried and tested and will likely last forever, but how that's presented in a newer and different generation is exciting to think about." Dale nodded and agreed. "We just don't want to lose sight of that one person that needs help," he added.

"And that's why we're retiring," Jean said. "Because when you've built something on the ground that can be replicated when others need it, you've worked yourself out of a job," Jean said. "Looking back over these past 27 years, we have no regrets of this road that we've traveled."

As the Peercys neared retirement, ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton crafted a commendation recognizing their contributions to Lutheran Disaster Response, and the impact Dale and Jean had on so many:

"God has brought healing and wholeness, courage and strength, hope, and love to God's people through you as servants of the Gospel. I give thanks to God that you have served so generously and selflessly, often at great sacrifice," Eaton wrote to the Peercys. "I count it a privilege, therefore, on behalf of all your partners in the Lutheran Disaster Response ministry to express my sincere gratitude for your faithful service. As you enter a new chapter in your life in Christ, I join all who celebrate what God has accomplished in your life to this day and eagerly anticipate the Spirit's unfolding of God's promises for your life in the days to come."



IN NEED OF TRAINING FOR LONG-TERM RECOVERY?

Has a disaster impacted your community, and are you unsure what steps to take to establish a long-term recovery group? Contact Seam Coffman for personalized mentorship, an online workshop, or in-person training.



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JOIN US IN PHOENIX

CONNECT WITH LDR AT THE NATIONAL VOAD CONFERENCE

Save the date! You're invited to join Lutheran Disaster Response at the [2024 National VOAD Conference](#). The event will be held at the [Hilton Phoenix Resort at the Peak](#) May 6-9, in Phoenix, Arizona.

LDR national staff will be on hand to say "hi," and host a network dinner on Wednesday, May 8th.

We look forward to seeing you in Phoenix!

Save the Date

DATE May 6-9
WHERE Phoenix, AZ
WHAT NVOAD Conference

 National
Voluntary Organizations
Active in Disaster

What to Expect



The theme of the 2024 National VOAD conference is "United in Service," and aims to minimize and alleviate the effects of disasters, encourage cooperation, communication, coordination, and collaboration, and enhance service delivery to affected communities.

Get in Touch

THE LDR NATIONAL DIRECTORY

Have a question, a project that may qualify for funding, or need training or specialized mentorship? Lutheran Disaster Response would love to hear from you. This *National Directory* provides the contact information for the entire LDR support team. Unsure who to contact? Send your question to [Maryn Olson](#) or [Sean Coffman](#), and they'll connect you with the correct program and individual.

LEADERSHIP

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GRANT SUPPORT

DOMESTIC GRANTS SUPPORT

The Lutheran Disaster Response Grants team is eager to help support your work in the field. From collaborative conversations about your proposed project and funding needs to guidance through the application process to financial and final report support, the Grants team is ready to help answer questions and provide advice.



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PROGRAM SUPPORT

INITIATIVES PROGRAM

The Lutheran Disaster Response Initiatives program supports climate resilience, hazard mitigation, and unconventional disaster response projects among local and international partners. Within the ELCA's territory, regional resiliency representatives steward this work under the supervision of the program director. Outside the ELCA's territory, the program director works alongside the global area desks and LDR director to identify and strengthen partners and projects.



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COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE | TRAINING & NETWORK ENGAGEMENT

From self-paced training opportunities via our online learning management system to online video-based workshops, to in-person, just-in-time training, the Lutheran Disaster Response Training and Networks team is excited to support, consult, and mentor synods, congregations, and social ministry organizations preparing or responding to a disaster. The team also maintains a recurring schedule of partner spotlights and Community of Practice gatherings to deepen local relationships, share best practices, and find support to overcome challenges that may occur in the field.



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STAY IN TOUCH

Stay in touch with Lutheran Disaster Response on social media, joining our email listserv, and visiting our online Learning Management System.

