



New Strategies for Disaster Response

Disasters don't wait until we're ready. Lutheran Congregational Services and our partners continue to lead the way, helping communities prepare and respond to storms like those that hit our region this summer.

We're navigating with new rules and less funding from traditional sources, and wanted to share with you an update on what's happening.

Update on Federal Disaster Response Strategy:

If you've been reading the last several issues of *The Servant* you know that Lutheran Disaster Response has been following the actions of the FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) Review Council. The FEMA Review Council is a presidential federal advisory committee established in 2025, and co-chaired by leadership from the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Defense.

The final report from the FEMA Review Council was issued in May 2026 and includes recommendations to overhaul the nation's approach to disaster preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation with a strategy that shifts more responsibility to local jurisdictions.

While the most sweeping changes will take acts of Congress, some states that have had disasters in the last year have not been approved for disaster declarations,

and the federal disaster workforce is down about 17% since January 2025. It is widely anticipated that federal disaster declaration approval will become increasingly difficult to obtain.

Pennsylvania Responds

Here in Pennsylvania, Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) – Eastern PA, our fellow members of PAVOAD (Pennsylvania Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster), the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA), and County Departments of Emergency Management, are working to prepare for the new changes by more intentionally working together to prepare for and respond to disasters.

As for our government partners, on August 4, 2026, Governor Shapiro signed an executive order designed to update training standards and develop a surge workforce that can mobilize to support communities when disasters strike.

In addition, PEMA continues to work with LDR and our partners in PAVOAD to communicate more effectively and coordinate our efforts.

Together, we have also implemented some new tools such as SLACK, a communication tool that allows us to

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unclutter communication with one another and also allows us to provide real time information on needs in the field.

An Example of how we are working together after the July 2026 Storms

Pennsylvania experienced a number of localized severe storms starting July Fourth weekend when heavy winds and rains pummeled counties from Blair to Monroe. Bad storms have continued through August. The storms that caused the most destruction as of today's writing, were microbursts that struck neighborhoods in south and west Philadelphia on July 11.

Over 900 households reported some kind of need from those microbursts. Power outages meant loss of cold and frozen food. Many 100 plus-years-old sycamore and oak trees that once provided shade were uprooted or snapped, crushing roofs, cars, sidewalks.

While it is unlikely this event will qualify for a federal disaster declaration, individual households unable to address storm related damage on their own need our support. Local community partners, The City of Philadelphia, PEMA, and VOAD partners like Lutheran Disaster Response – Eastern PA, have come together to call households and knock on doors, cut up downed trees, assess roof damage, replace food, and provide financial assistance.

Lutheran Disaster Response – Eastern PA has taken the lead in:

- **Reaching out to local Lutheran congregations to ask them to help spread the word to their communities about resources available.**
- **Helping families apply for Pennsylvania's Disaster Recovery Assistance Program, a new Pennsylvania grant program that provides up to \$20,000 to households that qualify.**
- **Leading efforts to problem solve around areas for which there are currently no resources available (removing the very largest trees that fell on private property).**
- **Identifying families that will require long-term support for the most expensive unmet needs including sidewalk and roof repairs.**

Volunteers and donations make this work possible. Contributions to Lutheran Congregational Services allow us to build volunteer networks, lead coordination efforts and establish systems for communication. Volunteers provide extremely valuable services like knocking on doors, making calls and helping people apply for resources.

Lutheran Congregational Services is extremely grateful for your donations, volunteer time, and prayers as together we work beside our neighbor and lift up those who face the greatest barriers to disaster recovery.

Learn more!

Contact Julia Frank at JFrank@libertylutheran.org
or visit: <https://libertylutheran.org/liberty-life-services/disaster-response/>



Lay Eucharistic Visitor Training



SATURDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2026

9:30AM-4:00PM

St. Michael's Lutheran Church,
Sellersville PA

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2026

9:30AM-4:00PM

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church,
Kingston PA

Scan the QR code below
to learn more and register.



Pastors, please direct those from your congregation who wish to register, to complete the application at LibertyLutheran.org/LEVT, or email the completed registration form to Julia Frank at JFrank@libertylutheran.org

Liberty Lutheran's Advent Devotional

Each year, Liberty Lutheran and Lutheran Congregational Services, invites people from all corners of the Liberty Lutheran family of services and communities, to share their reflections during the church season of Advent.



Like most of November and December, Advent is time when we prepare for Christmas. But the experience of Advent and the experience of "regular life" during this time, couldn't be more different.

While we find ourselves very aware of how many shopping days are left until Christmas, Advent's themes are hope, peace, joy, and love. Many people find the observance of Advent a welcome spiritual practice in the midst of what often becomes a very busy season.

We invite you to join along this year in the practice of daily devotional reading this Advent!

Lutheran congregations in eastern PA will be mailed a copy of the guidebook, and more copies can be requested by congregations or individuals. In addition, the devotions are available electronically online.

Keep an eye out for more information coming soon on our Facebook page @LCSMission, and by email.

Mark Your Calendars



October 17, 2026

3:30PM-5PM

**Trinity Lutheran Church,
Lansdale**

MLK Day of Service

January 18, 2027

**United Lutheran Seminary,
Philadelphia Campus**

- Assemble hygiene kits
- Learn about relief hubs

Email HShilanskas@gmail.com
for more information.





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Hope in Action

When disaster strikes, people need more than help—they need hope. Our special video highlights the powerful work of Lutheran Disaster Response and the people who step forward to bring comfort, compassion, and practical support to communities in crisis. Watch and see how faith becomes action when it's needed most.



Scan the QR code or visit
<https://bit.ly/4v0xLnd>
to watch.



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