



## REGION 1 HAMMER & DANCE

June 17, 2020

**United for Ministry in the Days of COVID-19.**  
The Social Service Agencies  
and Synods of Region 1.

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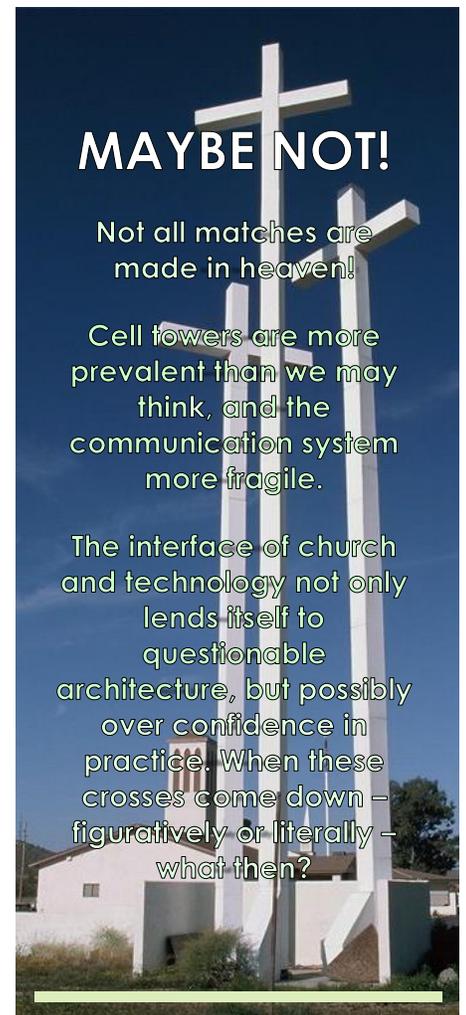
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In a May 26, 2020 op-ed piece in The Hill Craig Fugate, former administrator of FEMA under Pres. Obama, claims that emergency communications will be the next challenge of COVID-19. What would happen, in our intensely wired response to COVID-19, if the internet went down? Do we have something else in our playbook? (Your stomach may be churning at this point!)

Furgate's article is about much more than this, but let's just go with the 'church based' question. I have two things on my mind. One, the focus of last week's "Hammer and Dance" was over-lapping disaster complications. Let's think a little more about that relative to communications. Two, communications are always vital in disaster response scenarios, and the U.S. is not in a good place communication wise, says Furgate. How about your agency, your congregation or family? If the 'net' goes down are you still networked?

The topic for this week then is "communications." If the lights go off and the cell towers are down – what then?

*Dave Brauer-Rieke*



### MAYBE NOT!

Not all matches are made in heaven!

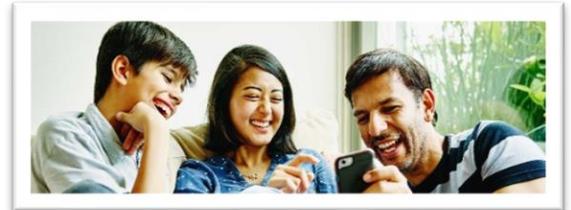
Cell towers are more prevalent than we may think, and the communication system more fragile.

The interface of church and technology not only lends itself to questionable architecture, but possibly over confidence in practice. When these crosses come down – figuratively or literally – what then?

# Not Rocket Science

We absolutely live in times that beg for adaptive leadership. However, not every challenge is adaptive. Disaster preparedness and response work, in fact, is a highly 'technical' process. Not technical in the difficult sense, but technical as in "not adaptive." We know what to do to be disaster ready. We have the tools and the paths for preparation are all laid out. We just need to do it!

**Where are the kids?** When the sirens go off, or the ground starts to shake, our first thought may be "Oh no! Where are the kids? Are they okay?" The kids may be at school (in the old days) or out playing, or down at a friend's house observing social distancing.



Just because your family may have cell phones doesn't mean your worries are over. School shootings taught us that young people often texted their parents, or friends, in distress hiding underneath their desks. Parents showed up at schools. Nobody was ready for that. Friends posted things on Facebook. Tweets flew. Chaos ensued.

Perhaps the easiest and most important thing a church can do in disaster preparedness is help families create a plan. Who calls who? Do you have a meet up spot in case the phones don't work? Are you dependent on busses for transportation, or what do you do when you have a flat tire?



And, of course, family preparation is not *just* about communication. Is a family "two weeks ready" in case of a crisis? Is there food and water (and toilet paper!) in the house in case supply chains are disrupted? It's not rocket science. Congregations can have fun and 'do good' by helping member families and those in the community make a plan.

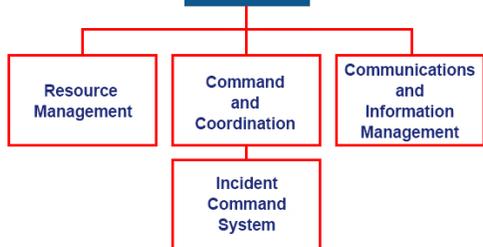
**How are our members doing?** Do churches have 'phone trees' anymore?

During floods or earthquakes, landslides or rapidly moving wildfires, emergency teams and sheriffs' offices want to know where people are. If they can check with a church and leaders there can say "we're all good" that allows them to go help others in need.

Congregations also benefit from dependable communication lines for their own regular ministries, pastoral care and rapid response as we've discovered with the COVID crisis.



Again, of course, congregation disaster preparedness has to do with much more than just phone trees. With COVID-19 we've experienced questions of business continuity and leadership. Church and Social Service Agencies alike have asked how to maintain needed services and support to vulnerable clients and members in rapidly changing circumstances. What does our insurance cover and what doesn't it? Disaster preparedness for congregations, camps, offices of all sorts, schools and AA groups is vitally important. Congregations can do plans, especially now that they're thinking about it!



## Synod Offices and Social Service Agencies

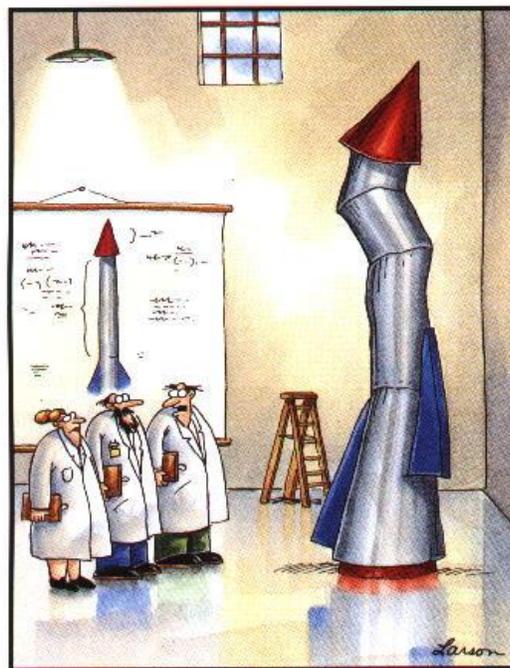
The bottom line is this. In times of disaster we can't afford to have Synod Offices or our Lutheran Social Service Agencies be a weak link in the disaster response chain. Too much is at stake!

Any significant disaster, requiring quick, decisive action, is going to be a government/military operation. FEMA doesn't know a Bishop, from a Director from a CEO from a Ward Superintendent. FEMA just wants to

know who's in charge. That would be the "Command and Coordination" function as seen in the chart above.

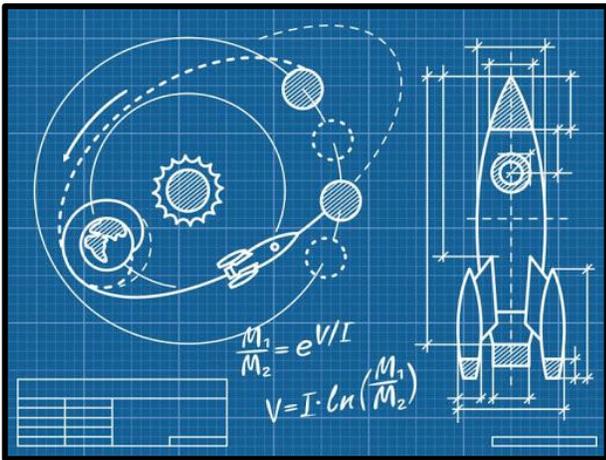
- Bishops, you're "**Commanders!**" Who makes 'the call' when it needs to be made?
- FEMA needs to be able to access "**Resources**" – things like food supplies/banks, emergency generators, doctors or counselors. Have you done any asset mapping recently?
- Who's in charge of **PR and Communications** for your synod or agency? One voice, one contact, one consistent, dependable message going out overseen by one person on your team. Who?
- And 'boots on the ground.' "**Incident Command.**" Who connects to VOADs? Who knows what's going on at the MARC, where the hot spots are, where gaps are showing up? (Don't know what a MARC is? We all have much to learn.)

The point here is not this particular list. Rather, the point is that if your Social Service Agency or Synod wishes to be disaster ready, we have some work to invest in. Again, this is not rocket science. It is not adaptive work. There are systems and resources in place to get us ready. We just need to put our noses to the grindstone and check off the boxes.



"It's time we face reality, my friends. ... We're not exactly rocket scientists."

# Your Synod-Agency Disaster Team



To be prepared to work with FEMA during a major disaster, or Lutheran Disaster response, or ecumenical partners and non-profits, the following would be most helpful.

1. The formation of district or congregation Disaster Preparedness Teams. This work benefits from synod support and encouragement.
2. There are some Agency or Synod internal tasks to attend to. For example, do you have a business continuity plan? Are lines of authority clear in case core leadership is ill, or otherwise inaccessible? How many days cash on hand do you have? What are the procedures for accessing otherwise inaccessible designated funds? What about insurance? Undoubtedly you already have many of the pieces in place. The need now is to look at them through a disaster planning lens.
3. How might your system mesh with that of FEMA, state agents or the larger church? Are you an LDR affiliate? Do you know the disaster specialists from other denominations?

Disaster preparedness work for Synods and Agencies generally happens in two phases.

- The first is the work of a **Disaster Preparedness Team**. They tackle the opportunities listed above in a "task force" kind of mode. They do their work and then done.
- A second phase, or task, is the development of a **Disaster Response Team**. This group would include your "FEMA Link" personnel and those ready to kick in gear in the event of an actual disaster. They are more of a ready to go resource than a work group.
- And three, while not a "phase" it may be the **Preparedness** team who supports congregation as they prepare, and/or you may wish to bring in other leaders.

While staff in both our Social Service Agencies and our Synods – not to mention pastors and leaders in congregations – are more than busy, many of our lay leaders are not. Many in early retirement have great gifts to give, but are still staying close to home and want to be supportive. Drawing them in for disaster preparedness work could be just the ticket!



# COVID Considerations

Each of the five states of ELCA Region 1 has seen slight upturns in the number of COVID cases this past week. However, counts and consideration are much more nuanced than they were a month or two ago. We're all watching the following:

**Infection Rates:** Washington, Idaho and Montana all have infection rates of 1.02-1.04 meaning that each person who is infected infects 1.02 other people. This means that the infection is increasing, but slowly. Alaska has a rate of 1.28 and Oregon 1.18 which is high enough to be of concern.

**Positive COVID Test Results:** Alaska (1.3%) and Montana (1.5%) have low rates of positive COVID test results. Sick people are always tested, so the lower the rate of positive testing the higher the probability that enough people are being tested to know what's going on in the general population. Test results of 3.6% to 4.0% in Washington, Oregon and Idaho suggest more testing is needed.

**ICU Headroom:** When we talked of "flattening the curve" our concern was for the availability of intensive care hospital beds. None of our states have experienced a lack of beds. Currently Idaho is the closest, but only using 11% of their capacity. There are no concerns here.

**Contract Tracing:** Contract tracing and testing are two methods states are now able to employ to keep closer track of the coronavirus. Washington has only about 45% of the contract tracers their infection rates suggest they need. Oregon is at 82%. All other state have 100%.

In all states there is now enough contact tracing to be able to localize hot spots. Large portions of all states are doing well with their infection rates. Raw numbers alone do not tell the whole story. We do well to consider what percentage of our states' infections come from processing plants, prisons or senior care facilities. When there are such hot spots the virus may be easier to contain.



## Things to Watch

The statistics quoted here are from [COVID ACT NOW](#). You can check anytime for updates. Better, often times, are your own links to your own state's statistics. However, these are prime indicators and worth your review. [COVID ACT NOW](#) also shows risks by county for ever state.

Many are concerned about whether infection rates will spike due to demonstrations. While most demonstrators are seen wearing masks and observing social distancing, neither of these two precautions alone can assure safety. As in a church prolonged proximity to large numbers of people in any circumstance increases risk of infection. We should begin to see possible impacts of demonstrations in a week or two.

There is also an expectation by experts that we may well see a 'second wave' of infections this fall and winter. Congregations that choose to open should hold in mind the possibility that they may need to return to a more cautious practice at any time – especially this coming fall.