



Region 1 Disaster Preparedness and Response
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
GOD'S WORK. OUR HANDS.

REGION 1 HAMMER & DANCE

July 22, 2020

United for Ministry in the Days of COVID-19.

The Social Service Agencies
and Synods of Region 1.

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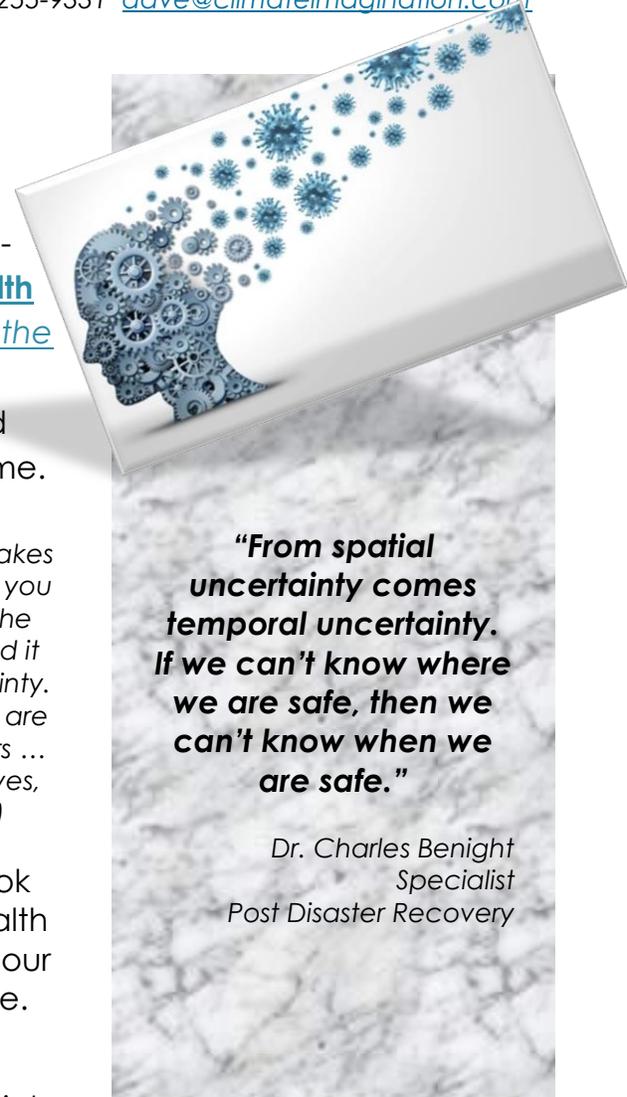
A July 17, 2020 article in the [Atlantic](#) addresses long-term mental health concerns stemming from the coronavirus pandemic. "**[This Is Not a Normal Mental-Health Disaster](#)** *If SARS is any lesson, the psychological effects of the novel coronavirus will long outlast the pandemic itself.*"

The article lays out a variety of observed and anticipated impacts people are, and will, experience for years to come.

"A pandemic, unlike an earthquake or a fire, is invisible, and that makes it all the more anxiety inducing. "You can't see it, you can't taste it, you just don't know," says Charles Benight, a psychology professor at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs ... "You look outside, and it seems fine." (But) from spatial uncertainty comes temporal uncertainty. If we can't know where we are safe, then we can't know when we are safe. When a wildfire ends, the flames subside and the smoke clears ... But pandemics do not respect neat boundaries: They come in waves, ebbing and flowing, blurring crisis into recovery." ([Article quote.](#))

For the next few weeks, the "Hammer and Dance" will look at the long-term effects of the coronavirus on mental health concerns. These affect our clients, our congregants, and our own wellbeing – and they will be with us for years to come. What is our calling in the midst of these realities?

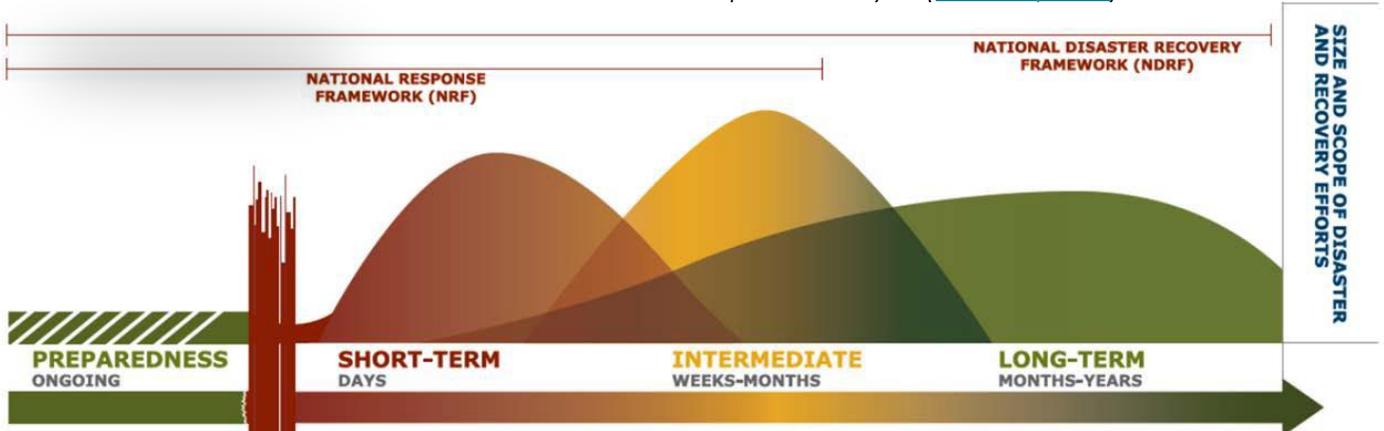
Dave Brauer-Rieke



Mental Health Impacts and COVID-19



“Depression, anxiety, PTSD, substance abuse, child abuse, and domestic violence almost always surge after natural disasters. And the coronavirus is every bit as much a disaster as any wildfire or flood. But it is also something unlike any wildfire or flood. “The sorts of mental-health challenges associated with COVID-19 are not necessarily the same as, say, generic stress management or the interventions from wildfires,” says Steven Taylor, a psychiatrist at the University of British Columbia. “It’s very different in important ways.” ([Article quote.](#))



The April 29 issue of the “Hammer and Dance” included this graphic depicting a typical disaster recovery curve. We may think in terms of re-establishing housing or fixing bridges and infrastructure when we think of “recovery.” However, people’s lives can be shattered in many ways. Our current global pandemic is resulting in forms of anxiety and varieties of both personal and social instability that will have long lasting effects. Furthermore, these mental health concerns will not necessarily be restricted to self-contained ‘disaster geographies.’ We are all affected.

“Dislocation” can be geographic, cultural, emotional, financial and spiritual. As we watch the impacts of the coronavirus on our lives today it seems certain that we will experience all of the above.

- What effects are you seeing in your own life? What has it taken to regain focus, hope, understanding and direction? (And yes, we’re all still most certainly in progress here!)
- For synod staff – how are your pastors, deacons, missionaries, and lay leaders coping? Who is responsible for exploring their experiences of dislocation with them?
- For pastors and congregational leaders - how are members doing? Beyond the budget and ZOOM worship, how will we address the varieties of Mental Health stresses our congregants experience?
- For LCSNW and LSS of Alaska – clients of all sorts are experiencing cultural, class and privilege specific versions of these same stresses. You’re doing amazing work, and you also know you can’t do all you wish. How do we expand our work to include these deepening concerns?
- For our families – suffering job uncertainty, school uncertainty, too much togetherness stresses and no answers. What is our opportunity as “Church” to engage people in their places of need?

Coming issues of the “Hammer and Dance” will deal with these questions in a more paced fashion. It would seem to be another layer of the COVID-19 onion. Let’s think together.

