



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

## ELCA REGION 1 HAMMER & DANCE

March 9, 2021

**United for Ministry in the Days of COVID-19**  
Lutheran Social Service Agencies, Synods  
and ELCA Church Members Together

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**M**arch is a personal anniversary for me. It was March 2020 that I began work as the ELCA Region 1 Disaster Preparedness and Response Coordinator. What have we done over the past year?

The Umatilla River had flooded its banks on February 8, 2020. Lutherans were already on the scene when I started my job and I'm anxious to tell you all that's happened. See page 2.

I actually started March 22. Congregations were just closing their doors at that time due to COVID-19. Nobody knew what this all meant and how long it would last. Despite the ongoing sense of uncertainty and frustration we still live with, our church's response has been pretty amazing. Let me tell you why on page 3.

Wildfires rocked the states of California, Washington and Oregon this past fall. Alaska Natives continue to experience forced migrations due to a warming Arctic Ocean. These are current Climate Change fueled disasters. Read more on page 4.

These disasters you know. How we - and all of us together as Lutheran Disaster Response - have been engaged you may not. Let me share our wonderful work with you.

*Dave Brauer-Rieke*



### ***In this issue:***

- [Flood Response](#)
- [COVID Response](#)
- [Wildfire Response](#)
- [Divine Disaster Response](#)
- [No Going Back](#)

# “That’s a lot of water!”

**W**e think of water as blue. Flood water is not blue. It carries mud and silt, refuse and debris into homes, barns, churches and businesses. It was Friday February 7, 2020 that the Umatilla River overflowed its banks. More than 50 people had to be helicoptered to safety. Five hundred, sixty eight people have been identified who suffered damage to, or loss of, their homes.

Similar floods were experienced in 1965 and 1996/1997. This flooding, however, has been the worst experienced in recent memory. The damaged reach from Pendleton to Walla Walla WA. It impacted farmers, residents of the Confederated Tribes and people all in between.

Responding to disasters is always a community effort. Farmers cleared roads. Neighbors checked in on each other. Sheriff's offices and fire rigs were out as soon as possible. And a MARC (Multi-Agency Resource Center) was soon set up in Pendleton. One of the volunteers serving there was Pr. Travis Larsen of Peace Lutheran in Pendleton. You were there through Pr. Larsen. You, along with the United Way, the Methodist Church, Pr. Larsen, staff from St. Anthony Hospital & many others were getting people food, housing, hope and direction. It all matters.



Our immediate response to disaster is always important, but it can take years to recover. Charlene Larson of the Oregon Synod Disaster Response Team and ORVOAD\* (Oregon VOAD) has helped establish a Blue Mountain

Recovery group spanning state lines. Pr. Joel Ley of Christ Lutheran in Walla Walla has been working with an 'Unmet Needs' Table to help those falling thru the cracks while others assist families with FEMA grants and state aid. What happens when the only bridge to you home or farm is taken out? Who pays? How do you get home?



**One year after the flooding there is still a lot to do. Many people have been helped. Others wait their turn.**

**Lutheran pastors are among those in local leadership. Lutheran lay members are plowing roads and serve in local government. Joe Chu, of Lutheran Disaster Response U.S., (LDR) has consulted with these leaders, sometimes weekly and sometimes monthly as needed. And as Lutheran Disaster Response has worked quietly behind the scenes in this way, they have also donated \$10,000 to help fund a local case worker who walks with families in need.**

**Lutheran Disaster Response could help because of your financial donations. They could consult because the Oregon Synod has a Disaster Response Team ready for action. Lutheran Disaster Response chose to support a local case worker because Charlene Larson was connected with ORVOAD and they said this was the need.**

**Lutherans are there because we care. Lutherans can help because we know and love our neighbors. We are them.**

**Together we are Lutheran Disaster Response. Thank you!**

\*'VOAD' stands for Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster.



*Alaska is the #1 State in the Union in getting vaccines into people's arms. 25% of Alaskans have their first shot and 16% their second. Way to be!!*

### **How have Lutherans been "Lutheran Disaster Response" during the days of COVID-19?**

- **We have found ways to worship and stay centered in challenging times;**
- **Congregations have refrained from public worship out of love and respect for others;**
- **Our clergy, bishops and lay leaders have gathered weekly or monthly by ZOOM for mutual support & guidance;**
- **Through this newsletter, and other social media, we have shared informed about health guidelines and needs;**
- **In the midst of racial injustice and political upheaval we have stayed engaged, visible and peaceful;**
- **Lutheran Disaster Response U.S. has invested \$125,000 through Region 1 to support ministries of synods and congregations in their efforts to provide COVID relief. You have used this money for food pantries, cooked meals, daily necessities and more.**

**Together we are Lutheran Disaster Response. Thank you!**

## **When Helpers Can't Help**

The human spirit is strong. People help each other. They really do! One thing we've learned from the Coronavirus global pandemic, though, is that when we're all at risk at the same time it's hard to know what to do!

Our Umatilla River Flood response has been severely hampered by the COVID-19 crisis. We've had to figure out to "see people" when volunteers can't leave home or go on site. And church has been hampered, too. But think of all we've done in the last year to make church possible. We have been resiliency in action!

What, though, do we mean by "church" – that which we've done? We mean worship, yes. Now done on ZOOM. We mean care of our members, yes. Now done more on the phone and less face to face. But more to the point, we mean we mean making responsible decisions for the sake of others. We mean guarding public health through the example we set, and we mean fulfilling our Christian vocation in the civil realm in oh so many ways.

Every disaster brings with it a call to Christian ministry. We have been called to flex, to adapt, to sacrifice and to inspire. We have been called to counsel patience and embody hope. We have been called to find our place in speaking truth, honoring authority, and respecting the vocation of physicians, CDC spokespersons and local health teams are trying their best to forge a way forward. How are you doing with all of that?

We know, now, that there will be no "return to normal." The Gospel always beckons us forward into the new and not yet experienced. We will worship again in sanctuaries with communion rails, but we will never again not be virtual. We will again grasp hands to share the peace, and in so doing be reminded once again of the importance of incarnate grace. Feed the hungry. Tend the sick. Visit those who are in prison.

There is no time when helpers cannot help. There are only times when we must think again of how to do so. "This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes."

# The Inferno

California, Oregon and parts of Washington caught on fire this fall. According to the Salem, OR [Statesman Journal](#), "Labor Day 2020 was that moment. Severe drought, extreme winds and multiple ignitions fueled the most destructive wildfires in state history. Roughly 1.07 million acres burned during the 2020 season, the second-most on record ... From 2015 to 2019, which included some major wildfire years, Oregon lost a combined 93 homes ... This year, 4,009 homes burned down."

Response to disasters of this magnitude are painful and demoralizing. In Oregon there was an immediate and significant need for temporary housing, food and daily necessities. Meeting as ORVOAD Lutherans, United Way, the Red Cross and others met to coordinate a caring and timely response.

In Washington WAVOAD has been working in a similar fashion. Through VOADs, not only major concerns are addressed, but issues such as the need for water troughs for cattle escaping pasture lands during the fire. Any and all needs get placed on the table in VOADs, hoping that some partner might be able to respond. Six troughs were donated and set on various highways.



As FEMA declarations are made counties create Long Term Recovery Groups (LTRGs) which help lift up case managers to work with survivors.

Lutheran Disaster Response helped identify

NeighborWorks Umpqua in Roseburg as people who could provide case managers. And then Lutheran Disaster Response helped train those same case managers.

The Oregon Synod Disaster Team has been integral to the creation of LTRGs in Oregon. There are now eight such teams active in Oregon. And they have been a conduit for the work of LDR. The work continues and you are there.



**Lutherans across Region 1 have made financial contributions for wildfire recovery – both through our synods and other response agencies. You are generous people!**

**In addition to the wildfire work just discussed, Lutheran Disaster Response has also granted cash for wildfire relief through the Oregon Synod - \$20,000 worth. LDR is a careful steward of your gifts. While they consult and support freely, they only entrust your financial offerings in the U.S. to synod office and Lutheran Social Service Agencies.**

**Part of the work of Region 1 Disaster Coordinator Dave Brauer-Rieke this year will be to help synod and LSS Agencies who do not have a "Statement of Understanding" with LDR create one. This will allow us all to be more responsive and present in times of need. We are a Region which will be experiencing more disasters in the years to come, and we'll want to align our resources.**

**And Disaster Teams ... It's time to invest as congregations and synods in preparation and response capacity. There is work to be done and we need each other, because ...**

**... because Together we are Lutheran Disaster Response. Thank you!**

# Divine Disaster Response: Biblical Reflections



## 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent, March 14, 2021 – [John 3:14-21](#) – **Receive**

*“And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”* The lifting up was a gift. Moses was

a gift. Life upon looking was a gift. Even the bite of the serpents, though leading to death, was a gift. Disaster can lead to life. We must reckon with our brokenness. We must acknowledge our part in pain if there is to be healing. So see, grieve, and receive.

## 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent, March 21, 2021 – [John 12:20-33](#) – **Welcome**

*“Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”*

When the outsider and the outcast appear, the time has come. This is the most certain sign, for Jesus is the one who *“draws all people”* to himself.

## Palm/Passion Sunday, March 28, 2021 – [Mark 11:1-11](#) – **Wave**

*“Then Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.”* Jesus does not

just ride his donkey into the city. His destination is the temple - that which was to transform the politics of the state. The temple was a pebble God had intended to send out ripples of healing for all the world. It had, however, made itself the center not the source. Jesus will have much to say about this in the week to come, and it will cost him his life.



## Easter Sunday, April 4, 2021 – [John 2:13-22](#) – **Rise**

*“So the women went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”* Mark's Gospel ends in confusion.

How can it be that the witnesses never witnessed? Resurrection takes time. Trauma does not heal overnight.



# Vaccination Eligability by State

Availability of vaccines and the rates of vaccinations are picking up. That's good news! The truth about how long it will take for everything to be "back to normal" again is unknown. That's frustrating news. Congregations, however, seem to be ready to engage considerations around next steps. Is it time yet?

Your state's vaccination information can be found here.

- [Alaska](#)    [Washington](#)    [Oregon](#)
- [Idaho](#)    [Montana](#)



[As of Monday, March 8, 2021 the New York Times reports that:](#)

- **Alaska** has vaccinated 426,715 people or 25% of its population. 16% are fully vaccinated.
- **Washinton** has vaccinated 2,657,880 people or 19% of its population. 10% are fully vaccinated.
- **Oregon** has vaccinated 1,420,125 people or 18% of its population. 10% are fully vaccinated.
- **Idaho** has vaccinated 594,115 people or 17% of its population. 9.8% are fully vaccinated.
- **Montana** has vaccinated 411,145 people or 21% of its population. 11% are fully vaccinated.
- **Nationally** the U.S. has vaccinted 116,378,615 people or 18% of the population. 9.5% are fully vaccinated.



## No Going Back

As congregations return to face-to-face worship, what will we choose to keep?

- Gone are the old days of taking cassette tapes and a bulletin out to shut ins. Will we continue to share worship on Facebook or ZOOM?
- The ZOOM platform allows for easy meetings and has advantages for Bible Studies or education at home. It would be a shame not to build on this.
- Have your musicians been making music with "Band-in-the-Box," or have you found new musicians willing to do virtual music? People like to help!
- What about communion practices. Will those who have been celebrating the sacrament virtually want to continue the practice?