

# Lamplight

A Newsletter of the US Disaster Program



*"Be dressed, ready for service and keep your lamps burning."* — LUKE 12:35

Issue #23 | December 2013

A Note from Katie

Hello everyone,

*Being at the ready to receive Christ with a "lamp trimmed and burning" is a key theme of the Advent season. And it's a reminder of what the Church is called to be year round: a body that responds to the needs of the vulnerable around us with the love and concern with which we welcome Christ among us.*

*The US Disaster Program wishes you all the blessings of Advent and the upcoming Christmas season. And we invite you to join us as we pray for all who are recovering from disasters and all who are responding in the name of Christ.*

Peace,  
Katie



## In this Issue:

**Diocese of Pittsburgh: Supporting local disaster response**

**Diocese of New Jersey: Including advocacy in response efforts**

## Join "Ready to Serve":

Offer your services to your vulnerable neighbors after a disaster. [Sign up here](#) to be called upon to volunteer.

## Current Disaster Response Projects:

**Blizzard Response**  
Diocese of South Dakota

**Flood Response**  
Diocese of Colorado

**Flood Response**  
Diocese of Pittsburgh

## Volunteer Opportunities:

**Dioceses of Easton, New Jersey, New York**

Find volunteer opportunities and registration

## Church responds to flooding in Appalachian community in the Diocese of Pittsburgh

While large-scale weather events such as Hurricane Sandy leave a wide path of destruction, they also result in a proportionately large response effort. Government assistance arrives. News reports of the disaster prompt people to travel great distances to volunteer. Celebrities hold fundraising concerts. Donations come from all over.

Intense, localized storms, on the other hand, can cause just as much devastation for community members, but their comparatively small scale can

make recovery even more difficult. Smaller populations don't always qualify for FEMA assistance. The news doesn't make it past the local paper. And isolated communities often must rely on their own members and limited resources to manage rebuilding efforts.

This is when the assets and the relationships of local churches and community outreach groups are especially important. The Rev. Deacon Ann Staples, deacon-in-charge of St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Northern Cambria, PA, knows this first-hand.

On Labor Day weekend this year an unprecedented five inches of rain fell in less than an hour in Northern Cambria, a struggling former coal town on the edge of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh. Several homes flooded, as did the town's elementary-middle school. Flood water also inundated the community's only daycare center, an outreach of the non-profit Coal Country Hangout Youth Center, of which Staples is executive director.

After an exhausting week of cleanup, the 82-year-old deacon gave a report on the flood at a Commission on Ministry meeting in the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh.

"Somebody told me later that I looked like the wrath of God," she said. "That was the first time anyone had heard about the flood. They took it on right then and there."

Donations to rebuild the daycare center, which serves financially struggling families in the area, began to come in from throughout the diocese. It was suggested that Staples also contact Episcopal Relief & Development's US Disaster Program, which in turn provided support for some of the reconstruction.

In this small Appalachian community, the churches have long worked together to support vulnerable community members, especially youth and families. Staples founded The Coal Country Hangout Youth Center 16 years ago along with St. Paul's Presbyterian Pastor Marty Cartmell.

Geographically isolated and economically deprived, Northern Cambria has struggled with poverty since the collapse of the coal industry it was founded on. More than 14 percent of the population lives below the poverty line in Cambria County where the town is located.

The Coal Country Hangout Youth Center offers a teen program in addition to the daycare and preschool, serving more than 6,000 children and youth in the

information for Hurricane Sandy-impacted areas at [relief.episcopalny.org](http://relief.episcopalny.org).

### **Diocese of Bethlehem**

Volunteer opportunities include indoor and outdoor repair of flood-damaged homes in the Diocese of Bethlehem, PA. Contact The [Rev. John Major](#) for information on how to sign up.

## **Current Disaster Recovery Projects:**

### **HELP NOW!**

#### **Episcopal Diocese of Bethlehem**

Trinity Episcopal Church in West Pittston is working with ecumenical partners in Northeast Pennsylvania to support neighbors affected by flooding as a result of Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee in September 2011.

#### **Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut**

The Diocese of Connecticut is supporting Ben's Lighthouse, a ministry of Trinity Episcopal Church in Newtown, which is working to promote the long-term health of the community's children, youth and families and to nurture a culture of non-violence and caring.

#### **Episcopal Diocese of Easton**

The Diocese of Easton is hosting volunteer groups to repair homes damaged by Hurricane Sandy and construct new ones where existing homes cannot be repaired.

#### **Jericho Road**

A neighborhood-based, home-building organization is working to revitalize Central City, a New Orleans neighborhood recovering from Hurricane Katrina and decades of disinvestment.

#### **Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana**

Case managers are supporting affected communities as they adapt to the financial, emotional and social changes caused by Hurricane Isaac and the oil spill.

#### **Episcopal Diocese of New York**

The Diocese of New York is working with volunteers and young people from Episcopal Service Corps to rebuild homes on Staten Island following Hurricane Sandy.

#### **Episcopal Diocese of New Jersey**

The Diocese of New Jersey is working with parishes statewide to identify those falling through the cracks and creating parish-based programs to meet needs following Hurricane Sandy.

region. It provides recreational space, computer labs and cultural enrichment programs on the contributions of the coal region.

The non-profit is an ecumenical outreach, which draws volunteers from several churches, including St. Thomas Episcopal. With so many groups invested in the outreach, restoring the center was a community effort. One resident held a toy-drive for the daycare. Teens from the upstairs hangout center helped haul debris to the curb. The Lion's Club held a Spaghetti Dinner fundraiser.

The daycare program was able to reopen exactly four weeks after the initial flood, Staples said.

"People help out all the time," she said. "Whatever you need, they do it."

## Include Advocacy for Vulnerable People in Disaster Response

For congregations in the Episcopal Diocese of New Jersey, responding to the needs of vulnerable people affected by Hurricane Sandy has meant a long-term commitment to rebuilding homes, bolstering feeding programs, providing case management and connecting people to services.

But it doesn't end there. The diocese also advocates for government policies and programs that ensure vulnerable people make a full and sustained recovery.

"When we're talking about social transformation and relationships, this is how we're relevant to the community," said Keith Adams, disaster recovery coordinator for the diocese.

For example, when the State of New Jersey asked for public comment about how it would distribute federal community block grant money to assist storm survivors, the Episcopal Diocese of New Jersey spoke up.

Under the original proposal, 70 percent of the funds would go to supporting homeowners and only 30 percent would assist renters. But in reality, Adams said, renters make up more than half of the people affected by the hurricane, and they often have fewer supports to aid in recovery after a disaster.

Diocesan officials joined more than 100 other organizations in signing on to a position letter that called for the funding to be distributed more equitably. The state ultimately dedicated 40 percent

## Resources for Disaster Preparedness and Response:

Visit Episcopal Relief & Development's on-line [Resource Library](#) for numerous case studies and best practices in disaster response on the diocesan and congregational level.



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of the funds to assisting renters.

Adams suggests several ways that congregations and dioceses can weave advocacy efforts into disaster response.

### **Mobilize your social media network**

Effective advocacy is a multi-pronged effort that requires the voices of individual constituents, as well as the involvement of bishops and other diocesan leaders. As Hurricane Sandy's impact on already vulnerable people became more and more apparent, the diocese encouraged members to call their legislators about increasing funding for affordable housing and upping New Jersey's minimum wage.

Adams said that he used the diocesan Facebook page, as well as e-mail and Twitter to alert congregations about upcoming legislation.

### **Get diocesan leadership on board**

Even before Hurricane Sandy hit, the Diocese of New Jersey already had a long history of advocacy, Adams said, with the bishop taking the lead. As a diocesan-wide effort, advocacy issues can be coordinated, strategized and networked, so that individual voices are amplified and strengthened.

### **Network with groups that serve the vulnerable**

The diocese worked with an affordable housing group to advocate for the change to the community block funding and to call for more affordable housing to be constructed in post-Sandy rebuilding efforts.

"Because we were already a part of the affordable housing group and were advocating for that population, it was immediately on our radar," Adams said.

Connecting with organizations such as diocesan jubilee networks and VOAD (Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters) committees also helps to alert advocates to issues more quickly.

### **Educate on the root causes of vulnerability**

As congregations take on response efforts, such as expanding food programs or hosting volunteers, members often become far more aware of the personal stories of vulnerable people. People begin to see the wider issues at play. Disasters can be a catalyst for the Church to engage more widely on the root causes of poverty and injustice.

"People have a tendency to compartmentalize

disasters," Adams said. "But the issue of how we are trying to get justice for people who can't get justice for themselves, that's a 365-day job for the Church."

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