

Lamplight

A Newsletter of the US Disaster Program



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

Issue #21 | Oct 2013

A Note from Katie

Hello everyone,

The recent flooding in Colorado and other parts of the country reminds me once again that the hazard you think you're preparing for isn't necessarily the one that's going to occur. Colorado was in the midst of a drought; fires were burning, and it seemed possible that, again this year, many homes would be lost to the blazes. But then it began to rain and rain and rain.

This illustrates why it's important to approach preparedness by thinking about a variety of potential hazards instead of planning for a return of the most recent disaster or focusing on the one that's most likely to happen. The Church in Colorado was able to respond quickly to this unexpected crisis because it has a very strong missional focus, centered on many Jubilee centers across the diocese. They have relationships with other churches and non-profits that partner in these ministries. They have volunteers that are actively engaged. These are assets that can be mobilized in any disaster, whether the crisis is well anticipated or unprecedented.

The preparedness planning tools, such as the [*Comprehensive Preparedness Planning Guide for Congregations and Parishes*](#), in the [Resource Library](#) of our website, help your congregation think through this all-hazards approach to planning. We invite you to use the materials and to let us know about your experiences.

Please keep all those who are responding and recovering from disasters in your prayers.

Peace,



In this Issue:

Diocese of Colorado:
Congregations Helping in Recovery after Unprecedented Floods

Diocese of New York: Using Social Media When Phones and E-mail Fail

News:

More News on Flooding in the Diocese of Colorado

Heavy rains that began late on Thursday, September 12, have caused severe flooding and catastrophic damage across a wide swath of the Front Range of Colorado's Rocky Mountains. Episcopal Relief & Development is working with the Episcopal Diocese of Colorado to respond. [Learn more.](#)

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:

Tornado Response
Diocese of Oklahoma

Colorado Congregations Helping in Recovery after Unprecedented Floods

In the wake of Colorado's catastrophic mid-September flooding, congregations throughout the Episcopal Diocese of Colorado have been helping to muck out houses, provide food and shelter to displaced people, and connect homeless and undocumented people to resources.

During the week of September 9, Colorado's Front Range, from Colorado Springs to Fort Collins, experienced heavy rains and catastrophic flooding that caused 10 deaths and destroyed more than 18,000 homes. Parts of Boulder County received up to 17 inches of rain, more than the region typically receives in a year.

The Ven. Russell Oechsel and the Very Rev. Michael Bamberger visited clergy and residents in the affected areas in late September as part of Episcopal Relief & Development's Partners in Response program. The program provides technical support to dioceses that are responding in the initial weeks after a disaster. Oechsel is the diocesan disaster coordinator for the Episcopal Diocese of Texas and Bamberger is diocesan disaster coordinator for the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles. They toured the diocese with the Rt. Rev. Robert O'Neill.

Before the rain hit, the region had been experiencing severe drought and forest fires. It wasn't prepared for a massive flood event.

Oechsel said that congregations that already had relationships with ecumenical outreaches that fed and sheltered vulnerable people were quick to mobilize after the flooding. The Diocese of Colorado has a large number of jubilee ministries that were able to respond to the vulnerable people they serve.

The diocese reported several examples of parish responses.

- St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church in Estes Park hosted a dinner to gather the community and to offer an opportunity for those who've been displaced by the flood to share a meal with neighbors.

Flood Response Diocese of Pittsburgh

Volunteer Opportunities:

Dioceses of Easton, New Jersey, New York

Find volunteer opportunities and registration information for Hurricane Sandy-impacted areas at 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

- Prince of Peace Episcopal Church in Sterling established a Facebook page as a way for neighbors to share information. It also helped provide food assistance to Cooperating Ministries of Logan County, a Jubilee Ministry.
- St. Aidan's in Boulder has already been working with partner Boulder Outreach for Homeless Overflow to provide overnight shelter for the homeless.
- Common Cathedral in Longmont, a worshipping community of homeless people and area residents, worked to account for all 35 homeless members. And they set about replacing tarps and sleeping bags that were lost when the river along which many lived overflowed.

Oechsel said that several congregations did a particularly good job of securing their own sites quickly so they could then respond to the needs around them. Many made efforts to check in with their members to assess their needs.

The Diocese of Colorado is now assessing how it will support long-term recovery in the state. Vulnerable groups, such as homeless people, those who did not own their homes, and those who are undocumented, would ultimately benefit from case management to help connect them to resources, Oechsel said.

How To: Using Social Media When Phones and E-Mail Fail

In the [August issue of Lamplight](#) we explored how Holy Apostles Parish in New York City [ramped up its existing feeding program](#) after Hurricane Sandy. Today we return to Holy Apostles for tips on using social media after a disaster.

When Yvonne Cassidy set up the social media program for Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen in New York City, she envisioned using it for fundraising, for increasing the ministry's volunteers and supporters and for getting the word out about the 30-year-old ministry.

She didn't think of it as a disaster response tool.

But after Hurricane Sandy hit the East Coast, including much of New York City, on October 29, 2012, Facebook and Twitter became the main means for the soup kitchen to communicate with its volunteers, other agencies and the wider community,

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.

Episcopal Diocese of North Dakota

All Saints Episcopal Church in Minot is coordinating with volunteers to rebuild flooded homes.

Episcopal Diocese of Texas

The diocese and Calvary Episcopal Church are working with its ecumenical partners in Bastrop to rebuild homes destroyed by the fires in the fall of 2011.

New Resources for Disaster Preparedness and Response:

[Preparedness Planning Guide for Diocesan Offices.](#) **How to create a disaster plan to protect diocesan staff, records and assets.**

[Volunteer Curriculum: Ready to Serve with Compassion.](#) **Activities to orient volunteers responding to disaster.**

Download more resources for preparedness and response from Episcopal Relief & Development's [Resource Library.](#)



Contact Us:

Katie Mears, Director
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said Cassidy, the soup kitchen's development officer.

Barbara Ballenger, Training
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She offers the following insights for mobilizing a social media network after a disaster:

Start building a social media community now

"Social media is only as effective as the people in the social media community," Cassidy said. "Building a community in the first place is the key to the whole thing."

Facebook is free, and it's simple to set up a page for your parish or outreach. Encourage parishioners and volunteers who have Facebook to "like" it. That means they will receive any updates you put on the page. To maintain a useful Facebook page, you don't have to post information all the time, Cassidy said. "Just put up what's relevant. Be driven by what you have to say."

She generally uses Holy Apostles' Facebook page to tell people about the food they serve, to provide information about volunteering and to share stories about the people who use their services.

After a disaster, get the word out

Holy Apostles' Facebook page wasn't quite a year old when Hurricane Sandy hit, Cassidy said. It had about 1,500 fans at that time. While she didn't know exactly who they were or whether they were local, she said she took a chance and posted the need for donated sandwiches when food started to run out at the soup kitchen.

She provided her cell phone number for people who had questions. While posting a personal number isn't recommended for social media, in this situation she knew there would be few avenues available for people to call and ask direct questions.

She was able to post updated messages based on people's questions. Additionally, the Facebook posts allowed other service organizations to contact the soup kitchen and coordinate needs.

Keep requests clear and simple

The request for sandwiches, with clear instructions and images of what the soup kitchen did and didn't want, helped ensure that it received what it needed. Cassidy said she made sure people knew not to send in their leftover Halloween candy in order to keep the meals healthy. But the soup kitchen did welcome the desserts and healthy snacks that contributors added



to their donations.

Ask people to "share"

Cassidy asked Facebook fans and Twitter followers to share the information about the need for sandwiches with their networks. Sometimes people need to be reminded to do that, she said.

"As a byproduct, we got a real surge in our likes and our followers," she said. "We have about 3,000 (fans) now, a few hundred of whom came from that experience."

That means that the number of people who are aware of and supporting Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen continued to grow long after the need for home-made sandwiches passed. And should another disaster strike, even more people will know how to help.

Visit [Episcopal Relief & Development's Resource Library](#) to download a [printable copy of this article](#).