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**ROCKY MOUNTAIN SYNOD ELCA**

**DISASTER RESOURCES**

**FIRE**

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# FORWARD

This packet has been created by members of Christ the Servant Lutheran Church, Louisville CO; Trinity Lutheran Church, Boulder CO; St. Paul’s Peace Episcopal-Lutheran Church, Las Vegas NM; and Rocky Mountain Synod, ELCA clergy and staff.

The purpose is to support communities and individuals who may experience a fire disaster. We’ve included context from congregations that have experienced such disaster, so that others can more knowledgeably grab what makes sense in their circumstances.

**Keep in mind that every member, including those leading the response effort, are disaster survivors, even if some are less directly impacted than others**. Take care of yourselves and each other. Offer and accept help and emotional support.

The Rocky Mountain Synod, ELCA (RMS) can be your first stop for support. Members of CTS, Trinity, and St. Paul’s Peace will be happy to spend time answering your questions and listening to your stories.

“May the Lord bless you and keep you…and give you peace.”

# **CONTEXT FOR LEARNINGS**

## **MARSHALL FIRE: December 30, 2021 – Boulder County Colorado**

### What Happened:

On December 30, 2021, hurricane-force winds spread the Marshall Fire over 6,000 acres in a matter of hours. This fire was the most destructive in Colorado history, destroying 1,084 homes, several businesses, and displacing over 30,000 residents who live in Louisville, Superior, and surrounding rural areas (Daily Camera, 1/30/2022). [Christ the Servant Lutheran Church](https://www.ctsonline.org/) (CTS) is the only Lutheran Church in Louisville Colorado. Of CTS’s 653 members, over 205 adults and 130 children (126 households) evacuated their homes on December 30. At CTS, 13 members’ homes, including Pastor Stephanie Lord’s family home, were destroyed. Approximately 50 members had smoke and wind damage. At least eight members experienced significant damage and were displaced from their homes for months. [Trinity Lutheran Church](https://trinityboulder.org/) is in Boulder Colorado, just west of Louisville. Of Trinity’s 400 members, 19 households were evacuated; 4 members’ homes were completely destroyed; 3 families returned home within a few days, and 2 families had smoke/ash and external burn damage.

### Broader circumstances:

Boulder County is primarily a well-to-do population as part of the Denver Metro area. While Superior and Louisville were deeply impacted, access to housing and other resources remained available within 20 minutes of the fire zone.

CTS is blessed to be a vital congregation and is financially secure. Our building was not damaged although it is within blocks of the fire zone on three sides.

## **HERMIT’S PEAK/CALF CANYON FIRE: April 6 to August 22, 2022 - Mora, San Miguel, and the edge of Taos Counties, New Mexico**

### What Happened:

The largest Wildfire in New Mexico history, The Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon (HPCC) Fire burned 341,471 acres, in Mora, San Miguel, and the edge of Taos Counties, threatening wildlands and wildlife, homes and businesses, agricultural resources, and even the lives of those who live in this Hispanic majority region. The fire raged with record winds for weeks, with evacuations moving families and households from Las Vegas south for shelter to Glorietta pass, and families from the Guadalupita and Mora areas northwest to Taos: both locations 50 miles from home. Many people had to leave livestock and historic family properties behind.

St. Paul’s Peace Episcopal/Lutheran Church is located in the heart of Las Vegas, NM. It is one of the oldest buildings in the area, with a very small congregation (30ish.) While all of our congregational members were affected by some aspect of evacuation (some for weeks!) and/or smoke and various levels of property damage, thankfully, no one lost homes. That is not true for our neighbors in Mora and San Miguel Counties. St. James Episcopal Church is located in Taos County. Its congregation has 150 or so parishioners, many of whom were in the evacuation zones, but thankfully no property loss. St. James coordinated community volunteers to provide food and meals and other immediate needs for the evacuation shelter in Taos, under the guidance and direction of Taos County OEM, for **six weeks.** St. Paul’s started working with Neighbors Helping Neighbors (NHN), a community volunteer response in Las Vegas, in July, as well as joining the Mora/San Miguel Long Term Recovery Group (MSM-LTRG).

### Broader circumstances:

First igniting on April 6, 2022, growing until June 24, and not being declared 100% contained until August 21. Mora and San Miguel counties lost 650+ homes in the fire, with substantial damage from monsoon season floods following. Almost 2 years later, we are still meeting basic needs such as water (desperate for well drilling and repair), in some case food and sustenance, hay for livestock, heat/firewood; many are still in temporary housing in the form of hotels or staying with family members or friends. The long-term economic impact of this fire is **still** being determined.

At the end of the FEMA registration period, about 3,700 registrations were received between the two counties. The HPCC Claims office has +/- 6100 claimants as of 3/13/24. With the county populations being 27,000 for San Miguel County and 4,200 in Mora County, that is almost 20% of our total population with significant loss.

# **WHAT YOU CAN DO PRIOR TO A DISASTER**

* **Is your membership directory up to date?** If you needed to contact members following a disaster, do you have current emails, phone numbers and addresses?
  + *CTS Learning:* Having cell numbers and email addresses for all adults in a household makes disaster communication easier.
  + *Trinity Learning:* We found it most helpful to text those in evacuation zone. They are getting lots of phone calls from family, etc. Trinity Staff were out of state and still able to do this reach out remotely.
  + *St. Paul’s Learning:* Texting, phone tree and emails were highly important. Because we are in such rural areas, physical address and mailing address are frequently different. it is important to have all the info, especially during the evacuations, to be able to help account for those in very outlying areas.
* **Do you need to develop or update policies addressing how to respond if there is damage to your church building and other property?**
  + *Marshall Fire Learning*: Particularly understand replacement costs.
  + *HPCC Fire Learning:* Look now for insurance riders that may be needed for flood or other natural disaster topics. Not all are covered as a standard.
* **Have you recently (and regularly) reviewed and updated your insurance for your church building and other property? At minimum take video/pictures of interior inventory.**
* **Do you have experts on disaster response, supporting trauma survivors, mental health, insurance etc., in your congregation who could be called on to respond?**
  + *St. Paul’s Learning:* In a very rural community, with a small congregation, it is important to know who the local community resources are ... share efforts rather than duplicate them.
* **Are there improvements your congregation could make to your church building or property to minimize damage if there is a disaster?** Fire, tornado, water damage due to flood or hurricane, other considerations? Extreme weather continues to happen...
* **Could you provide information to members on preparing for disasters and creating evacuation plans?** Disaster preparation tips can be found on the FEMA website at <https://www.ready.gov/>.

# **TIPS FOR THE FIRST FEW DAYS AFTER A DISASTER**

* **Pull church leadership together immediately** to structure activities that you perceive are immediate and to find/assign helpers.
  + *CTS Learning*: Identify an overall point of contact for survivors and helpers to gather information and/or to direct to specific resources while you are setting up structure. This contact can, and likely will, evolve.
  + *Trinity Learning:* We found that as survivors felt vulnerable, it was best if this contact could be someone they already “knew” in the congregation.
  + *St. Paul’s Learning:* Knowing who is in the “needs help” areas, v. those in the “I can offer help” areas was important.
* **Check on members most affected by the disaster as soon as possible** to learn status and immediate needs. Word of mouth and social media may be initial methods to determine who has been most impacted by the disaster. Keep in mind that internet, phone service, and cell phone coverage may be sketchy or non-existent.
  + Were there fatalities?
  + Were there injuries? How can your faith community support members who may be in the hospital or need ongoing medical care?
  + Was there home and/or property damage? How many individuals and/or families are permanently or temporarily displaced?
    - Does everyone have a place to stay?
    - Does everyone have food, clothing, diapers, medications, and other necessities?
    - Be aware of community-based shelters and the possible need to provide transport to get to them.
  + Were pets and/or livestock lost or displaced?
  + Were businesses/jobs damaged or lost?
  + *CTS Learning*: The CTS Council made these initial calls within the first two days. They called and emailed those who could have been in the disaster area based on zip code.
  + *CTS Learning*: People may not have answers yet to impact, but they appreciated deeply the connection. You’ll need to repeat the calls in another week or so.
* **Do some disaster survivors have unique needs that need to be addressed?** For example, disaster survivors may:
  + Have physical disabilities or health issues and need adaptive equipment or medications replaced immediately.
  + Have mental health issues, substance abuse, other addiction and/or trauma histories that will be exacerbated by the disaster. These survivors may need mental wellness support immediately.
  + Have been experiencing child abuse, domestic violence, or elder abuse which may be exacerbated by the disaster. These disaster survivors may need safety planning and victim services.
  + Not use English as their primary language or may be Deaf so interpreters will be needed
  + Not use the US banking system and stored cash in their home that was destroyed so may need assistance with food, clothing, diapers, medications, and cash donations etc.
  + *St. Paul’s Learning:* Many folks were displaced for weeks. US Mail was not able to be picked up with ease because of closed roads. Creating an ID plan to have “runners” be allowed to pick up and deliver was an unexpected need.
* **Was your church or other property damaged in the disaster**?
  + What immediate steps need to be taken?
  + Who will work with the insurance company?
  + Where will you gather for prayer and worship if your building is not available?
  + *CTS Learning*: While our building was not damaged, there were no utilities. Members of our Facilities Team secured the property and made it safe for when utilities returned.
* **Are there members who can help** with housing, necessities, languages, pets/livestock?
  + *St. Paul’s Learning*: Be aware of community-based support for pets/livestock - rodeo/fairgrounds, hay and feed support, and transportation for moving livestock.
* **Contact the Rocky Mountain Synod for support**. RMS will pray for everyone impacted by the disaster. The RMS Disaster Support Work Group is available to offer practical guidance and support as requested and help with connections to other supporting congregations and/or clergy.
* **Offer spiritual support**. Consider:
  + Holding a prayer vigil or service as soon as possible.
  + Worshiping together in-person with those who can attend as soon as possible. Offer a virtual option for those who may not be able to attend in-person.
  + Having a prayer list of those most affected by the disaster. Share this list with the faith community and others.
* **Will you collect financial donations to support disaster survivors? If so, see** [**later section**](#_COLLECTING_DONATIONS_AND)**.**
  + *CTS Learning:* People want to give, and they want to give immediately. Start this as soon as possible to provide an outlet for that caring. While we accepted funds, you could point to the RMS disaster fund if you don’t want to deal with this.
  + *Trintiy Learning*: If disaster gets national attention, be prepared for outside local area donations.
  + *St. Paul’s Learning*: Rural and spread out allowed for working w/local Community Foundations for streamlined donations. Then those organizations “contracted” for services that could be more easily provided by churches or others offering aid. Develop those relationships NOW, so that you can receive the “contract” to help your neighbors.

# **CONSIDERATIONS DURING THE FIRST WEEKS**

* **Contact all members,** including those not directly impacted
  + Some initial needs may not be identified during the first round of contact with those who may be most affected. More than one round of calls to survivors will help uncover evolving needs as well as provide care.
  + Ask someone to watch social media postings to learn more about the status of members.
  + Point people to ways to offer help.
* **Who will lead your response effort, which may be different than the initial volunteers? What are the roles of the pastor, staff, council, and other volunteers? How can they most effectively communicate and work together?** 
  + *CTS Learning:* We realized that calendar management and the integration of our response to our overall church ministry required intimate pastor and staff involvement even though they were directly impacted by the disaster. We ended up with a leadership team of 5: 3 staff and 2 volunteers.
  + *CTS Learning:* The volume of communication initially was immense. We decided that each response area created an Update Email (labeled that) sent to all the leaders weekly for the first month or so to ensure key information wasn’t lost.
* **Will you collect and distribute furnishings, clothing, etc. to survivors? Or will you encourage members to access disaster relief organizations and not collect and distribute things to survivors?**
  + *CTS Learning:* We chose not to do in-kind collections for two main reasons. First, there were other organizations in the area, including governmental ones, who were supporting these needs. Second, we felt that our facility could be better used for providing care than being a “garage” especially since the donations may or may not have aligned with survivor needs.
  + *Trinity Learning:* Can’t emphasize this enough. Churches can’t be everything to everyone. Doing this allows other organizations/nonprofits to help, too. Find your lane and stick to it. It's ok to say a nice “No thank you” from well-meaning individuals but are just not items survivors or churches are able to store or need right now.
  + *St. Paul’s Learning:* We worked with community organizations for coordinated donations. It was much more effective to have a COAD or County or Salvation Army type group coordinating items. In the shelter setting, though, we took non-perishable foods, toiletries and animal supplies.
  + *St. Paul’s Learning:* In another location, donations management became the basis of ongoing unmet needs response while case management was evolving. For weeks it was a meals-based, pick-up-items-you-need, or bring-what-you'd-like-to-donate program
* **How can you organize and respond to offers to help?** 
  + Consider establishing a database to store offers to help so the emails and phone messages that probably will have been sent to multiple people can be housed in one place and sorted.
  + Focus on survivor needs. *It is ok to say no to offers for help that are not a good fit for the current need* or offers that may make sense in a few months but not immediately.
  + An online tool such as Sign-up Genius can be an effective way to collect requests for assistance and match them with volunteers.
  + *CTS Learning:* In the first days and weeks, survivors were overwhelmed and not always interested in gathering with other faith community members. Also, people who do not have homes may not have a place to live and store all the “stuff” people want to donate, including handmade gifts such as quilts and prayer shawls. Saying “thank you – no” or “thank you – not now” can be a vital way to support survivors.
  + *CTS Learning:* A person(s) who is the “matcher” of needs and offers was necessary. We were blessed with someone with the gift of inviting others both to give and receive help as well as who knew who/where to look for resources.
  + *CTS Learning:* Ideas for ways to help included meals, childcare, clean up, moving, driving people to appointments.
  + *Trintiy Learning:* Try to anticipate needs before the survivors ask*.* Sometimes the survivors are so overwhelmed they don’t even know where to begin. So instead, we would say, here is a CPA who knows how to do taxes after a disaster instead of asking if they needed help with taxes.
  + *CTS Learning:* Ask for the donations of what you need. Both affected and unaffected survivors will respond. We continue to be humbled by the generosity of the Holy Spirit expressed through our congregation and the larger RMS.
  + *Trinity Learning:* Use the resources of your congregation. In our case, only a few families were directly affected, so we had the larger congregation connections/networks to work from for support.
  + *St. Paul’s Learning:* Evacuation centers lasted for so long, with such a wide variety of who was in need v. who could offer help, we started having little “gatherings” in the shelter. Sharing meals together and identifying some unmet needs folks had that were unique to them. There were also resource tables from community agencies available to help with the application processes for various kinds of help. Some of the things we were able to offer were gas cards and laundry vouchers for the many who were displaced for extended periods of time.

# **CONSIDERATIONS DURING THE FIRST MONTHS**

* **How will you communicate with members and provide updates?**
  + Consider using a combination of social media, electronic newsletters, announcements at worship, phone calls and emails to members, and giving presentations to the congregation.
  + *CTS Learning*: The pace of communication evolved for us from weekly initially to bi-monthly after the first few months, then monthly and now (after two years) matching events or milestones.
* **What are ways to provide spiritual support, prayer, and worship to those most impacted and others?**
  + Consider opportunities to weave messages about lamenting, grief, loss, recovery, and connection into sermons and other worship activities.
  + Consider offering a healing vespers service for survivors and others to gather.
  + Consider prayer circles, centering prayer groups, prayer lists, and Bible studies as opportunities to offer and receive spiritual support.
  + Consider a pet memorial service.
  + Do not underestimate the need for professional counseling and appropriate referrals.
  + *Trinity Learning:* we keep survivors on the prayer list each week and verbally raise them up weekly to remind our members that as the world moves on, it's not over for many folks.
  + *St. Paul’s Learning:* In the evacuation area and time, we also used what COVID taught us about connectivity – Zoom. We were so displaced for so long, in person updates and services were not an option.

* **How can you create space to share stories and experiences?**
  + Use check-in calls with members as an opportunity to listen to the stories and experiences related to the disaster.
  + Offer informal gathering opportunities for folks most affected by the disaster.
  + When time has passed, consider opportunities to gather such as brunch or other social events.
  + Consider having opportunities for art/craft work and/or videotaping survivor stories.
  + *Trinity Learning:* We found that our 4 families most affected had this opportunity to talk with other survivors in other venues, so we chose not to duplicate efforts.
  + *CTS Learning*: Stories need to (re)shared for a very long time (we are still sharing our stories 2 years later).
  + *Trinity Learning:* Don’t over ask for this as sharing can retraumatize for some.
  + *St. Paul’s Learning:* This is where rural, community and faith-based response held hands together. Neighbors Helping Neighbors (NHN), a community volunteer group, had already formed in the Las Vegas community for Mora and San Miguel Counties, and the Mora/San Miguel Long Term Recovery Group was evolving. We did not duplicate efforts but joined in community response.
* **How can you educate members and others about trauma and common emotional responses to disasters?**
  + Governmental and disaster relief agencies have a lot of information and help here. See the Resource Section, later in this document.
* **How can you continue regular ministry? Life events continue in the midst of a disaster.**
  + Consider engaging retired clergy for supplemental pastoral care.
  + Consider dividing responsibilities or time so that disaster response does not consume all resources.
  + Reach out to RMS for additional support or partner churches.

# **CONSIDERATIONS FOR LONG TERM SUPPORT**

This section reflects thoughts 24+ months after the Marshall Fire, and 19 months after the Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon Fire.

* **How will you mark anniversaries?**
  + Remembering anniversaries is a sign of care, of affirming for survivors that they are not forgotten and that they should not necessarily have “moved on.”
  + Consider a remembrance service on the first anniversary in particular. Consider including the entire community.
  + *CTS Learnings*: The first-year anniversary service was hosted by non-CTS pastors and members of the Bishop’s staff so that the survivors could just “be.”
  + *CTS Learnings*: We have come to realize that the Marshall Fire is part of our congregation’s story now. We marked it on Year 2 within an existing service versus a special one. We expect that model to continue into the future.
  + *St. Paul’s Learnings*: We worked with interfaith/community leaders to have a blessing of the watershed at the six-month mark, and Neighbors Helping Neighbors has taken the lead on regular survivor events for the whole community, with faith-based leaders participating.
* **How have survivor needs evolved?**
* As survivors make decisions and deal with the, often long, effort of rebuilding or relocating, their need for support evolves. Tangible needs tend to trail off until a move into permanent housing happens. Emotional needs come and go, but don’t usually disappear completely.
* Marking the transition to permanent housing has mixed emotions – joy for the stability, pain for the remembered loss.
* *CTS Learnings:* After year 1, our Chrysalis program shifted to individualized support versus group activities.
* *CTS Learnings:* Through the RMS Disaster Team, we were able to offer a grant to help with mental health needs around the 2nd anniversary of the fire. We got a high response rate to that offer.
* *St. Paul’s Learnings:* We have learned that FEMA’s 10-fold definition of needs is true. For the length of time the disaster happens, there will be 10 times that in immediate needs, and 10 times that in Long Term Needs/Recovery. Our fire lasted four months!! We are 19 months into recovery, after the fire was completely contained, and we are STILL providing basic needs in some cases. The work that NHN is doing has moved to Case-Management, but community healing events are still scheduled about every 3 months now.
* **How will you close out programmatic support?**
  + The trauma never fully leaves, but a coordinated effort of support can stop.
  + Planning for the ending, notifying survivors and helpers of the ending provides clarity for all.
  + *CTS Learnings*: We planned for and provided intentional support for 3 years.
  + *St. Paul’s Learnings:* The evacuation shelter in Taos was closed at 6 weeks for overnight stays. A shared resource center stayed open for another two weeks after, to ensure all folks had been notified, and if there were any ongoing immediate needs for food, shelter or transportation, we worked with community partners to get referrals in place and needs met. The NHN response in Las Vegas continued as a “day support” for almost 8 months. This included meals, vouchers for household items available in the give/take donations area, connections to FEMA representatives, and NLBHA (National Latino Behavioral Health Association) representatives, pastoral care ...

Now NHN is the premier location in Las Vegas, NM for ongoing case management and FEMA appeals, in addition to community wide pastoral and healing response. It is securing its own 501c3 status.

Using the FEMA 10-fold time estimates relative to the timing of the HPCC Fire, we expect to continue to operate for several more years!

# **COLLECTING DONATIONS AND PROVIDING FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO SURVIVORS**

This section is primarily the learnings from CTS in creating the Marshall Fire Designated Fund. As noted in earlier sections, the desire to give money is often immediate after a disaster so creating a fund or pointing to one (e.g., RMS Disaster Fund) is helpful to do early. Note: A disaster response fund “shell” can be outlined, before a disaster happens. Congregations are encouraged to work with the RMS Generosity Team to establish fund policies.

* **Will you create your own disaster response fund, or work through the RMS or the ELCA’s Lutheran Disaster Response, or a Local Community Organization?**
  + *CTS Learning*: Although the RMS has a Disaster Response Fund, we established a Marshall Fire Fund and worked with the RMS Assistant to the Bishop for Generosity in creating the policy that governs that fund.
  + *Trinity and CTS Learning*: It took more time to get distributions sent from the RMS Disaster Fund. Consider the simplicity of not having to manage a fund with the speed of wanting to respond if you’re in the middle of the disaster.
  + *St. Paul’s Learning:* Huge community response in Taos had donations going to the Taos Community Foundation (TCF) for Evacuation support. In Las Vegas, the Las Vegas New Mexico Community Foundation (LVNMVF) was the donation point for immediate needs. Because of existing relationships in the Taos community, TCF was able to “contract” with St. James, using its already established discretionary/designated fund, to meet the immediate humanitarian/crisis needs being managed at the evacuation shelter. The church could also receive designated donations to its fund directly. St. Paul’s in Las Vegas became more directly involved in the longer-term response and has established a fund which can now receive direct donations or be used to manage grants. Both churches are now referral points for the NM-VOAD (New Mexico Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster.)
* **What will your distribution policy be?**
  + Who is eligible for distribution? Your congregation, the larger community, people with catastrophic loss or with partial loss, organizations who are doing survivor support?
  + Will you be supporting the church community overall, e.g., covering damaged building expenses?
  + Will you need to cover administrative expenses? Examples include additional bookkeeping and overall management.
  + Will you proactively distribute funds and/or respond to requests?
  + Are there any limits to what types of requests or how much you will spend?
  + Who will make distribution decisions?
  + *CTS Learning*: It can be very hard to ask for help, especially money. Be proactive, be generous, don’t have any strings.
  + *Trinity Learning:* We found that more than anything, money helps. Don’t wait for them to ask, just give it frequently. Then survivors can use money wherever needed.
  + *St. Paul’s Learning*: Community wide support was always a part of our distribution policy. With time, equity of response was organized by case management that came from both national and locally created organizations. (National VOAD, Long Term Recovery Groups, faith-based disaster response groups.)
* **What will your collection policy be?**
  + Will you accept funds into a designated fund specific for the disaster or into a general fund that the church can use as they dictate.
  + Will you accept funds with additional designation (e.g., only for children)?
  + Will you accept gift cards, cash, stock, non-financial gifts?
  + How will you acknowledge donations both for gratitude and for tax purposes?
  + *Trinity Learning:* We found a pastor-discretion fund we already had gave us great flexibility and ability to give out money very quickly. Also, it had funds in it already so we could immediately give out even as donations were first coming in. That was helpful (even a few thousand $)
  + *St. Paul’s Learning:* We concur w/Trinity!
* **How will you advertise the fund?** Will it be on your website? Will you actively fund raise?
* **What will the time limit be for the fund?**
* **What will you do with any funds that remain at the end of the time limit?** 
  + *CTS Learning:* Our published policy included the plan for any funds remaining after the fund’s time limit.
  + *St. Paul’s Learning:* Both churches have established sections in discretionary funds that are for “disaster response”, which is outside of the typical daily humanitarian response of loving our neighbors.
* **How will you advertise the policy?** 
  + *CTS Learning*: Donors want to know how their donations will be used. We posted our policy next to the “donate” button on our website.
  + *CTS Learning*: Allow yourself the flexibility to edit the policy as you learn. We have a Fund Committee who defines and performs the policy, and the Church Council approves the policy.
  + *Trinity Learning:* We found keeping it at the Pastor’s Discretion (with checks written by bookkeeper) gave us greatest flexibility. Didn’t have to wait for next Council decision. Do what is best for your community and needs.
  + *St. Paul’s Learning:* “The loving and pastoral” response is always the highest standard. Making sure donors know there is no discrimination in distribution and following up w/reports of progress is key. Many donors wanted to keep donating!

# **TIPS FOR CAREGIVING FOR SURVIVORS, HELPERS, LEADERS**

Providing care for people in their different roles and at different stages is critical in dealing with long-term disaster recovery. This section overlaps with some of the others.

* **Most impacted survivors: Provide direct services within your capacity**
  + Immediate help with housing, food, clothing, furniture, and other basic needs.
  + Ongoing meals, help moving.
  + Sifting through debris or clearing debris (as allowed).
  + Financial support if you are collecting and distributing funds for this purpose.
* **Most impacted survivors: Offer Companions**
  + Match every survivor who is interested with another member (or members from a partner church) who will walk alongside them throughout the recovery process.
  + Companions provide emotional support, a sounding board, and a connection to resources. They also pray for survivors and offer spiritual care.
  + Have periodic meetings where Companions can gather and share experiences so that they can continue giving their love and care.
  + *CTS Learning:* Companions need to make a long-term commitment if possible. Disasters have a long tail.
  + *Trinity Learning:* Most survivors only wanted someone they already knew as their companion, and we were able to accommodate due to smaller numbers.
  + *Trinity Learning:* Our companions tried to stay up on benefits for survivors out in the community (discounts, donations, etc.) as a way to help them with the bureaucracy of keeping on top of it all.
  + *CTS Learning*: Periodic staff 1:1 check-ins help confirm care givers and receivers are getting what they need.
* **Everyone: Telling stories and connection within the community**
  + Monthly opportunities for those most affected to gather with others who shared a similar experience to connect and pray together.
  + Create opportunities for children and youth to gather to have fun together, to buy books for their new spaces, and talk about how they are doing.
  + Staff make 1:1 calls regularly to check in.
  + RMS funded the creation of videos where survivors and leaders shared their perspectives and stories.
  + *CTS Learning*: Telling stories will be part of every event, meeting, and informal get together for some time. Accept and plan for that time.
* **Leaders: Avoiding burnout**
  + Have a leadership team so no one stands alone. Find ways to spread the load and/or create backups.
  + Allow “tap out” for the leaders to get physical, mental, and emotional rest.
  + Find time for fun together that isn’t about work as part of holding each other in care.
  + *CTS Learning*: Be careful about waiting too long to give permission to pause. The early crisis weeks and months feel like you can’t stop, but individuals probably can take time away from their roles more than we did.
  + *St. Paul’s Learning*: Early on, the demands require a sprint mentality. For the long haul, stepping back and evaluating become much more measured.

# **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES, OPPORTUNITIES, TOOLS TO CONSIDER**

## CHRYSALIS INITIATIVE



**Christ the Servant’s (CTS) Response to the Marshall Fire**

Given the impact of the Marshall Fire on the entire CTS community and the anticipated duration of recovery, we established the Chrysalis Initiative to respond to and support fire survivors. We intentionally avoided retraumatizing members with a program name that had the word “fire” in it. Moreover, the imagery of a period of cocooning to rest and recover followed by a messy looking larvae phase leading to a beautiful butterfly resonated with us. The Chrysalis Initiative honors survivors’ feelings, needs, and perspectives wherever they are on the journey while looking for joy and new life in the present and future.

The Chrysalis Initiative’s vision is to create a beloved community where fire survivors are embraced, supported practically, and connected with the CTS community. Those most impacted also received financial support through the CTS Marshall Fire Designated Fund. Our guiding principles are:

* **God’s abundant love is shared through our acts of kindness and support** for each other. The Spirit is with us throughout our healing journey – individually and as a community.
* **Everyone at CTS is a fire survivor**. We defined circles to better understand some common needs and variety in programming.
  + - Circle 1: Individual/family homes were destroyed, losing everything.
    - Circle 2: Individual/family homes that experienced significant damage displacing them for weeks to months.
    - Circle 3: Individuals/families evacuated and returned home in a few days with limited damage. Many of these survivors live in burn areas and witness burned homes/landscape every day.
    - Circle 4: Not directly impacted or evacuated. They watched the fire on television and witnessed the trauma and suffering of loved ones.
* **CI is survivor centered**. Our goal is to walk alongside survivors at their pace responding to their needs and not the pace of the helpers. The trauma, grieving, and recovery process is different for each individual. The CI response has started with listening and being flexible with our project design based on what is needed and not needed at various times.
* **Stay in our lane**. We were intentional about leaning into our role as a faith organization. We avoided becoming a victim service organization, a donation distribution center, or a resource center connecting people with various services. Other organizations are designed and have the bandwidth to fill these roles. We referred survivors to these organizations.

CI manages the activities and programs listed in the [Tips for Caregiving Section](#_TIPS_FOR_CAREGIVING). Additionally, CI has offered the following programming:

* **Healing through worship and prayer**
  + We offered 5 weeks of a Vespers service following the fire for individuals who wanted to gather and pray together.
  + Mid-week Lenten services sermons were given by various members who talked about their experiences with change and transition.
  + Messages about lamentation, grief, healing, and hope were incorporated in every worship service in the months following the fire
  + Our weekly centering prayer practice has gently supported some members who were significantly impacted by the fire.
  + We created videos and blessings on website [Blessings and Prayers - CHRIST THE SERVANT LUTHERAN CHURCH (ctsonline.org)](https://www.ctsonline.org/blessings-and-prayers.html)
* **Connection to other community events**
  + We provided information about meetings and activities such as a prayer service for pets who died or were lost in the fire that was organized by another church.
  + We will be hosting a mosaic project for survivors to bring pieces from the debris to create art with local artists.
* **Education** 
  + We provided education on common trauma response and local resources.
* **Connect. Pray. Love.**
  + We partnered with RMS to establish a program ([see specific section](#_CONNECT._PRAY._LOVE.)) that allowed other churches in our Synod to share their love and care. It was hugely valuable to not feel forgotten.

***CTS Learnings***

* The Spirit was everywhere.
* Amazing council, pastor and staff. Retired pastors were literally God-sent.
* Fortunate to have members with trauma backgrounds.
* Regular communication through congregation meetings, weekly newsletters, lots of time on zoom and phone listening and meeting with people early on made a difference later as members were on the same page about the program.
* A lot of the work is bearing witness to incredible suffering and pain. It’s hard – especially if you are also a disaster survivor and are addressing your own practical needs and trauma response. Honor the pain and grief.
* Life kept happening and some of us had hard things to deal. We have needed to step in and out of our work on this project as we have had to address our own health issues or family crises.
* We are writing this document at the 6-month mark, and we expect the recovery process to take 3 years.
* To sum it up, follow the Spirit, follow survivors, and lead with love and kindness.
* *Trinity Learning:* Worked very well to have one congregation take the lead. At Trinity, one person for companion for our 4 most affected families so it was helpful to just piggyback on what CTS was doing instead of inventing our own.

These two videos, produced by Mary Stoneback of Stoneback Media, describe the perspectives of Marshall Fire survivors and the Chrysalis Initiative.

[Marshall Fire: Perspectives - 2022 Synod Assembly on Vimeo](https://vimeo.com/708007335)

[Marshall Fire: Chrysalis Initiative - Synod Assembly 2022 on Vimeo](https://vimeo.com/707977341)

## NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS (NHN)

## MORA/SAN MIGUEL LONG-TERM RECOVERY GROUP (MSM-LTRG)

**Mora and San Miguel County Community response to the HPCC Fire**

Recovery from the HPCC Fire has been a monumental task. In a widespread, sprawling, rural environment, with generations-deep cultural connection to land and family, no singular effort from any one organization to support recovery could have been successful. Instead, the communities of Mora and San Miguel Counties started working together with key locations to provide support. During the evacuation and sheltering phase, lasting six weeks, immediate needs were tended to: food, shelter, etc. As the evacuations ended, resource centers continued in Taos, for a short time -- but in Las Vegas, **Neighbors Helping Neighbors** not only still operates, it has evolved.

With guidance from state, federal and non-profit partners (FEMA, VOAD, Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management – DHSEM, Highlands University and Luna Community College) and participation from community leaders, the **Mora San Miguel Long Term Recovery Group** was born.

<https://hermits-peak-calf-canyon-fire-resources-nmhu.hub.arcgis.com/pages/ltrg>

**“Faith can be a story built on service.”**

St. Paul’s quickly learned that to best help, *participating with ongoing and evolving community efforts* made more sense than inventing a new wheel. We had an initial focus of participation the Emotional and Spiritual Needs Committee, as well as the Unmet Needs Table. With a Matthew 25 approach of helping “the least of these” in the best way possible, we have also participated in grant writing/fundraising, and responding to case management needs.

Our Vicar sits on the boards for both groups, and we have active congregational participation in the weekly recovery and Unmet Needs meetings – where case managers present the ongoing needs of survivors with a goal of filling gaps and getting folks back home. We also offer pastoral counseling and home/property blessings as folks get to go back home.

An “LTRG” will have several committees – examples of structure shown here:

(Sources: St. John the Baptist Parish, and Whatcom, WA. LTRGs)





**Neighbors Helping Neighbors (NHN)**

NHN initially was grassroots volunteers operating in the shelter at Memorial Middle School. By late July, the school needed its gym back as school was to start, so New Mexico Highlands University offered space for use as a continued resource center location for fire (and now flood) survivors. This volunteer response offered a space for meals, scheduled and impromptu support and counseling, both mental/emotional (on site and referrals), and spiritual care from local pastors. Food, supplies, clothes, household items could be secured, and navigation assistance for applying to FEMA and other agencies for aid. NHN has been located at the First United Methodist Church since January 2023.

NHN was serving and meeting, informally, the needs of the community. The Mora San Miguel Long Term Recovery Group (MSM/LTRG) was forming in order to fundraise and secure monies needed for Unmet Needs and Case Managers. **Everyone was 100% volunteer for the first 14 months**!! We also had phenomenal support from UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief.)

As the structures became defined, and some grants were secured, everyone fell into natural roles – some folks and roles stayed volunteer, other aspects of ongoing support had the opportunity to become paid positions. Depending on a person’s function ... some folks started playing multiple roles.

While the MSM//LTRG has fundraised, much needed funds for Unmet Needs, initial Case-Management and planning for cultural heritage and economic recovery support - with the support of the Las Vegas New Mexico Community Foundation (LVNMCF) - NHN has taken on many of an LTRGs typical roles. UMCOR has come “to the table” and now covers salary for the Case Managers and Volunteer Management (three full-time, one still volunteer.) St. Paul’s covers the cost of the monthly rent for the community gathering location, Case Management and Unmet Needs Table, and the MSM/LTRG provides insurance.

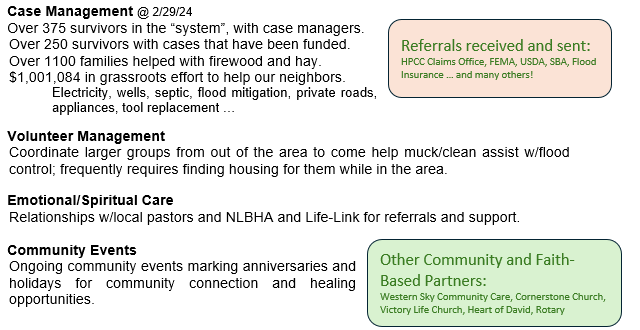
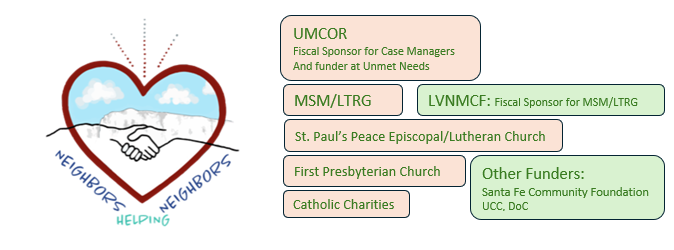
In addition to this Disaster Case Management structure, folks at NHN still volunteer to coordinate Community Healing Events and referrals for Emotional and Spiritual Care, as well as a voucher-based program for a survivor’s Thrift Store to shop at for those donated items still offered and needed.

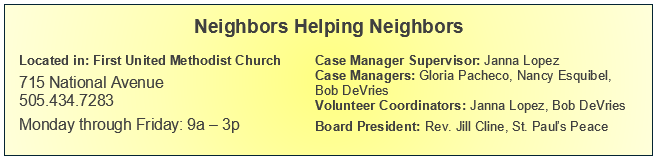
NHN is survivor centered – always meet the folks “where they are.”

Healing comes through connection and sharing recovery together.

In a rural and wide-spread community, survivors of the HPCC fire did not have an existing social service organization to turn to. While a large number of initial and ongoing supporters come from faith-based organizations, our lane has been “off the beaten track” of “normal” roles ... We’re all in recovery together, and in the grief cycle and prayer cycle, we are frequently still “Lamenting” and feeling like we’re living the life of Job!

**Case Management** **Unmet Needs**





## CONNECT. PRAY. LOVE.

*Connect. Pray. Love*. is an opportunity for RMS faith communities to support a congregation for one week in the months following a disaster.

* *Connecting* with the congregation by sharing the disaster story
* *Praying* for those affected by the disaster
* *Sharing* gifts of love

***CONNECT***

Create text and/or a video describing the disaster. Sample text for the Marshall Fire can be found on page \*\*. This is the video that was created by Pastor Stephanie Lord.

<https://youtu.be/JEo8ZHclKjA>

Congregations who participate are invited to share the text and/or video with their members.

***PRAY***

Congregations who participate are encouraged to intentionally pray for the disaster survivors for their assigned week.

***LOVE***

Congregations are also invited to send acts of love to support survivors on this difficult journey.

We recommend not accepting in-kind donations unless you need them. We suggested things like:

* A video message from your community
* A video of your choir or children’s choir singing
* Photos of your kids drawing pictures on your sidewalk for our kids
* Poems, cards, or other inspirational messages
* A video of your pastor’s sermon talking about the Marshall Fire survivors
* Financial contributions
* Other creative, fun ideas

## BLESSINGS AND PRAYERS

These are some of the blessings Pastor Stephanie Lord created for fire survivors.

[Blessings and Prayers - CHRIST THE SERVANT LUTHERAN CHURCH (ctsonline.org)](https://www.ctsonline.org/blessings-and-prayers.html)

Additional blessings and prayers can be found by contacting the RMS Disaster Response Team.

*Trinity Learning:* Not all families wanted this. Some were ok just an acknowledgement in the Sunday church prayers, some wanted a blessing and open house. Follow the lead of your survivors.

### A Blessing for a New Living Space

Jesus told us,

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+14&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-26659a)] in God, believe also in me. **2** In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+14&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-26660b)] **3** And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. **4** And you know the way to the place where I am going.” (John 14:1-4)

Holy One. You told us that you go ahead to prepare a place for us. Be with us now in our new space. Prepare this place for us today. Fill it with love, be with us as we create memories in a new place, and begin to fill it with the smells, things, and people that ground us and make this new place feel like home. Hold us in the moments when we miss our old homes. Bless our excitement and make space for our grief. Guide us to trust that your love is big enough to wrap around all our feelings as we move into and live into this new living space. As you moved with the Israelites from place to place, and home to home, you move with us now. You are here with us, no matter where we go. Amen.

### Thanksgiving for Spaces

*Can be used at a current living space or at the site of your home before debris removal.*

#### For the kitchen

* Talk about your favorite meals shared (either the food or the company you shared it with)
* What experiences and memories do you have in this space?
* Say and pray: Creator God, we give thanks for all that you provide, especially food and connection. We are grateful for this space and how it has shown us your love and the love of our family. Amen.

#### For a living or family room

* Talk about the things that your family likes to do together.
  + Which of those things do you do in your home?
  + Which of those things do you do in another place?
* What experiences and memories do you have in this space?
* Say and pray: Redeeming God, you became human and know the joys, challenges, and power of human relationships. We are grateful for this space and how it has shown us your love and the love of our family. Amen.

#### For a bedroom

* Talk about what makes you feel rested and comfortable.
* What experiences and memories do you have in this space?
* Say and pray: Sustaining God, you make a place for us to rest and set an example of taking time to be restored. We are grateful for this space and how it holds us when we need care. Amen.

## RMS DISASTER RESPONSE TEAM

The RMS Disaster Response Team was formed in response to the Marshall Fire. The work group’s mission has broadened to provide support and resources to any Lutheran congregation within the RMS synod who experiences a disaster. The RMS staff and work group can offer:

* Prayers for the community during and immediately following the disaster
* Technical assistance in the first days, weeks, and months following a disaster. If you would like help with determining next steps, creating policies, how to work with disaster relief organizations etc., contact RMS staff who will connect you to resources.
* Support from other congregations in the synod through [Connect. Pray. Love.](#_CONNECT._PRAY._LOVE.)
* Assistance connecting with Lutheran Family Services and Lutheran Disaster Response as appropriate.

Access this team through the Office of the Bishop.

## NATIONAL DISASTER ORGANIZATIONS

* **Federal Emergency Management Agency** (FEMA): **FEMA** is the federal agency that helps people before, during and after disasters. A large part of FEMA’s job is helping people recover after a disaster. FEMA offers federal grants to victims to help them with temporary housing, emergency home repairs, loss of personal property, funeral and medical expenses, among other things. FEMA will not pay to restore your home to its original condition or to rebuild. However, FEMA partners with the Small Business Administration to offer low interest loans to victims. Grants for emergency housing are available to disaster victims regardless of income, but FEMA grants for personal property replacement, property storage, and vehicle repair and replacement are based on financial need. Victims do not have to repay FEMA grants. All FEMA support is guided by the [Stafford Act,](https://www.fema.gov/disaster/stafford-act) and there are limitations on available funds and their use. <https://www.fema.gov/>
* The **American Red Cross** is a non-profit humanitarian organization that provides emergency assistance, disaster relief, and disaster preparedness education in the United States.
* **Lutheran Family Services Disaster Relief** offers financial assistance for basic needs in the short term and case management and spiritual care over the longer term to individuals and families.
* **Lutheran Disaster Response** shares God's hope, healing and renewal with people whose lives have been disrupted by disasters in the United States and around the world. When the dust settles and the headlines change, we stay to provide ongoing assistance to those in need.
* **National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster** (National VOAD) is the forum where organizations share knowledge and resources throughout the disaster cycle—preparation, response and recovery—to help disaster survivors and their communities.

- <https://www.nvoad.org/>

And for help in starting a ***Long-Term Recovery Group***

- https://www.nvoad.org/wp-content/uploads/longtermrecoveryguide-final2012.pdf

## LOCAL DISASTER ORGANIZATIONS

* **Local Community Foundations:**

For the Marshall Fire, most location donations funneled and distributed through the Community Foundation.

For the Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon Fire, the Taos Community Foundation and the Las Vegas New Mexico Community Foundations received donations for the benefit of fire survivor needs.