

September 14, 2005

Dear Brothers and Sisters of Iowa District West,

During the last week President Kieschnick, Matthew Harrison (LCMS World Relief and Human Care) and the Council of Presidents have developed a plan to provide an organized way for our LCMS members to provide assistance and support to our Lutheran congregations and schools in the Southern District devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

The plan is LCMS World Relief will assign to each district willing to participate in the plan one or more affected congregation(s) and/or school(s) in the Southern District. They have asked Iowa District West and Iowa District East to partner together in supporting these congregations:

Bethel Lutheran Church, New Orleans, LA - Vicar Jerome Terry

Faith Lutheran Church and School, Harahan LA - Rev. David Lofthus

The Village Lutheran Church, Lacombe, LA - Rev. Ed Horninghausen

We are attempting to contact these congregations and church workers to provide specific information about their needs and to coordinate the assistance our districts will provide. I have asked Pastor Erland Asmus (our part-time Executive Assistant for Human Care Ministry) and Ellie Menz (our IOWAY Director) to work with Pastor Dean Rothchild (Iowa District East Executive Assistant), to put into place the structures and networks that we need to coordinate our efforts.

General areas of assistance and support will include:

Prayer: We will receive specific information regarding the prayer needs of the congregation/school, their staff and members which can be distributed to districts. In the meantime, please include these congregations, their staff and members in your prayers this weekend.

Presence: We will contact the congregation/school and determine when and where to have people from our districts present with them. The goal is to establish a personal relationship between our districts and the people we are helping.

Work: There will be opportunities for assistance with cleanup, removing debris, and eventually repairing and/or rebuilding. We anticipate there will be short-term mission trips or servant events to provide this type of assistance which can be coordinated with the needs of the congregation/school assigned to us.

Funds: Districts are encouraged to provide financial resources for immediate needs, especially salaries for professional church workers who now have no source of income.

Advocacy: Districts are encouraged to assist the congregations and workers assigned in numerous ways. Concordia Plans Services is waiving all premiums, co-pays, deductibles, etc., for employees covered under its benefit plans. LCEF will be providing consolidation loans for rostered workers and Laborers For Christ teams to assist congregations in damage assessment and repair. Efforts are underway to get clergy/church workers covered by disaster unemployment. A significant concern is to ensure equitable treatment for all affected workers, to the greatest extent possible.

Please remember this is a plan in process. No one has ever done this before, so we expect to have to make changes as we go along. We want the people of our Synod, who are so willing to provide assistance, to be able to do so in an organized way that will make good use of the resources they provide. We are committed to helping our brothers and sisters in the Southern District over the long term and to making our response work as smoothly as possible. Communication, coordination, and cooperation will be vital to the success of this effort.

Rev. David Lewis is the disaster response coordinator for the Southern District and has been working with the individual congregations. He asked that we pass along to you the message “some of these congregations are overwhelmed, and are not yet able to accurately assess what their needs are right now.” Please exhibit patience and understanding for their situation. Some will have immediate needs that you and your congregations can help to meet. This will be a wonderful partnership! Some will have needs that start to become clearer in the coming weeks and months, and will need you more at that time. We understand that you are beginning to be inundated with volunteers and offers for help, and that everyone wants to jump in right away and give aid - please encourage the patience of these kind people as well. They **are** needed and valued, and the folks in the Southern District are very appreciative of everyone who is willing to lend a hand.

This is a great challenge, but also a great opportunity to share Christ’s love with people whose lives have been dramatically affected by this horrific storm. May God bless and guide our efforts as we work together to “vigorously make known the love of Christ, by word and deed, within our churches, communities, and the world.”

In Christ Jesus,

Paul G. Sieveking,
President Iowa District West