



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Office of the
Presiding Bishop

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Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

"Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above..." James 1:17a

Today, I echo the words of James as I remember the events related to the Gulf Coast hurricanes and flooding one year ago. When Hurricane Katrina struck on August 28, 2005, followed first by flooding and then by Hurricane Rita, the powerful devastating force that swept through the Gulf Coast shocked and saddened us all. Yet I have witnessed the resilience of ELCA congregations in affected communities, which have confronted the losses in their personal lives while also responding to the outpouring of offers for assistance. The two synods most affected (Texas-Louisiana-Gulf Coast and Southeastern) have, in collaboration with social ministry organizations and Lutheran Disaster Response, responded immediately and have continued to minister to the congregations, communities, and rostered people affected by the hurricanes.

The response from the congregations and members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to this disaster has been powerful and overwhelming. For this generosity of spirit, I am thankful.

Thank you for your financial gifts that total over \$25 million to-date to ELCA Domestic Disaster Response and Lutheran Disaster Response. Your gifts have sufficiently funded a multi-year response plan in the Gulf Coast which includes bringing help and hope through grants to families and individuals, establishing emergency relief centers, supporting volunteers, and providing spiritual and emotional care for disaster survivors and caregivers.

Thank you for your willing hands and feet and for the 15,000 volunteers who have contributed 500,000 hours of volunteer service. Lutheran volunteers, including 1,100 students from our colleges, universities, and campus ministries, endured grueling, hot work to help repair the homes and communities of Gulf Coast neighbors they might never meet. The need is great, and so I am grateful that many have signed up to volunteer not in the last year, but for years to come.

Thank you for our disaster partners who ministered to hurricane survivors in the Gulf Coast and beyond and who continue to walk with survivors as they rebuild their lives in the Gulf Coast or in new locations. With ecumenical partners, we are advocating for affordable housing and justice as communities rebuild.

Thank you for your prayers, for safety for those affected, for comfort for those who lost loved ones, and for gratitude for God's abundant love and compassion.

"But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers..." James 1:22a

Yet even while rejoicing at the abundant generosity of this church, many of us struggle with the painful knowledge that poverty and inequality exacerbated the storms' impact. In addition to the strong winds and rain, the hurricanes shocked many with a glimpse of poverty close to home and underscore the need for a heightened commitment to fighting the "silent disaster" of chronic hunger and poverty.

As individuals and congregations, remember that your gifts and voice do make a difference through this church's advocacy efforts and support for ELCA World Hunger Appeal and ELCA Disaster Response. Support for ELCA Disaster Response helps prepare for and respond to the next disaster, wherever and whenever it is needed most. Find more information on our response to domestic and international disasters at www.elca.org/disaster, including a reproducible insert on our Gulf Coast hurricane response.

As we commemorate the events of a year ago on the Gulf Coast, we give thanks for this church's generous response and for God's compassionate presence among those who continue to struggle. Your gifts continue to make a difference.

In God's grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark S. Hanson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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