



Update on Lutheran Disaster Response in the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod

Ruth Doty, Disaster Preparedness and Response
Coordinator, Lutheran Disaster Response – NE PA

(1/29/12) During the over four months since the devastating storms known as Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee we Lutherans have been busy helping the affected local areas figure out how best to assist the many hundreds of families still in need. Bishop Zeiser asked me to share the following information with you.

While 16.5 % (15,300) of the over 91,000 applications for assistance that FEMA received from Pennsylvania following both storms were from NEPS counties, over 50% of the funds FEMA approved for Housing assistance, 47 % of funds approved for other needs, and over 62% of the maximum grants FEMA issued were for families in *our* territory. (A max grant, \$30,200, is the most FEMA is by law allowed to distribute to one family.) In addition numerous communities are in conversation with FEMA to determine whether they will apply for buyouts. (The buyout process, which takes years to complete, would allow residents to receive funds for their properties, properties that are likely to be flooded again and that homeowners would not be able to otherwise sell.)

Since disaster response begins and ends locally, it is vital that we and other faith communities support local efforts to organize assistance to their residents. For effective recovery and to make sure resources are applied as broadly and fairly as possible, it is essential that procedures for case management be put in place first, and that a procedure for assessment and planning for how to address each affected property be put in place before scheduling teams for rebuilding. As you will see below, a number of our counties and local areas are making good progress in these endeavors and some will soon be ready to put volunteers to work.

BERKS

The Berks Long Term Recovery Committee is ready to do case management, pending establishment of which organization will serve as its fiscal agent.

BRADFORD CO

- **Sayre/Athens:** The Valley Relief Council is transitioning from immediate response for cleanouts to getting more effective procedures in place for rebuilding.
- **Wyalusing:** We are already working with a local non-profit, Loaves and Fishes, to address the rebuilding of homes in the Wyalusing/Laceyville area.
- **Towanda:** At this time Trinity Lutheran and we are clarifying with Presbyterian Disaster Response what the plans and current response are for this area. Early on we made a grant to assist the ministerium in distributing food.

LUZERNE

The Disaster Recovery Coalition of Luzerne County is beginning case management and taking applications for a project (rebuilding) coordinator and volunteer coordinator. By providing a small start-up grant we enabled the coalition to obtain another \$30,000 and may soon bring in another \$60,000.

PIKE

We are responding to a single client FEMA asked us to assist.

SCHUYLKILL

The Schuylkill County Long Term Recovery Coalition is making adjustments in its organization and hopes to be able to start case management soon. We have referred teams to assist in the Pine Grove area. In addition, our partner, Lutheran Disaster Response, Lower Susquehanna Synod is addressing needs in Klingerstown, technically in Schuylkill County but linked with the Lower Susquehanna Synod.

SUSQUEHANNA

The Susquehanna Long Term Recovery Coalition is making rapid progress in its organization, having just begun the process in November.

WYOMING

The Wyoming County Long Term Recovery Coalition is already making “call-outs” to people who received FEMA assistance, to determine who still needs help. Once identified, case management will begin. Their case manager, project coordinator and unmet needs committee are already in place.

LEHIGH, MONROE AND NORTHAMPTON

None of these counties had large numbers of FEMA applicants. Our United Methodist colleague is making contacts to determine whether any of the FEMA applicants are still in need.

In addition, we are working to set up as many **CAMP NOAH** sites in as many locations in eastern PA as possible. (A host site needs to be within the affected area so that the children can be easily transported.) We are also preparing to train as many teaching teams which will travel to and provide leadership at these sites.

To **volunteer for rebuilding**, contact Dianne Fox.

(Dianne@lutherancongregationalervices.org or 610-428-4598) or Linda Frey (lfrey@epix.net or 610-657-4730).

For more information contact

Ruth Doty

Disaster Preparedness and Response Coordinator

Lutheran Disaster Response – Northeastern PA

484-553-1162 cell

ruth@lutherancongregationalervices.org