

If you have never been able to pull back the curtain to see what is happening behind a disaster relief and recovery, it is a delicate dance of unknowns involving thousands of people - some who bear the scars of working multiple disasters and tragedies - and others who are experiencing the pain and effects of a disaster for the first time while trying to help. From the first raindrop or spark or gust of wind or tremor of the earth - a community of faith is summoned so that, *“At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need.”* 2 Corinthians 8:14

Sometimes we know the disaster is coming, other times it comes like a thief in the night. Either way, rescue, relief, and recovery begins with a phone call or text or e-mail. Phil Zabell, DDRC for the CNH District and President Mike Lange begin making phone calls to Lutheran Church Charities, Orphan Grain Train, LCMS World Relief and Human Care so they can begin to gather resources and teams. Lutheran Early Response Teams (LERT) are notified. Phone calls, e-mails, and texts are sent to pastors and lay leaders in the affected areas, asking what they know, what they need - and most importantly, reminding them they are not alone, nor will they be. In this incident, Emmanuel Lutheran Church and School, Kahului, was the closest church. They are on the opposite side of the island which made them the perfect site to begin coordinating efforts for relief. Emmanuel is currently in a pastoral vacancy; in fact, the Sunday before the fires, they had issued a call to a pastor in Kansas. Principal Josh Rempfer and the church leadership immediately began contacting school and church families - working to determine who was affected and who might be able to help.

One thing that is often overlooked is the response of congregation members who are First Responders - and often on the scene long before any official LERT team arrive. Captain Blake Novak (USCG) was helping coordinate efforts for the Coast Guard rescue helicopters and small boats. Chaplain Pon Chanthaphon, Coast Guard Chaplain, was on site providing spiritual care for the Coast Guard Service Members and their families. Reservists and Guard members, members of local congregations, were activated to staff everything from humanitarian need, rescue, and logistics.

Local congregation members opened their arms and homes. Emmanuel held a prayer service that night - and one family who escaped with nothing but the clothes on their back found a place to stay and funds to take care of their immediate needs - thanks to the generosity of another congregation.

The next day, the statistics brought tears and grief - as well as placed the enormity of loss before everyone. 2200+ structures destroyed; 114 (as of today) confirmed dead (requiring families to provide DNA to identify them); 750 missing (FBI certified list as of today); 9,500 people displaced. An entire town no longer existed.

Pastor Chris Singer, Lutheran Church Charities, and Deaconess Kathy O'Day arrived along with a counseling team: Pastor Rod Hall and Pastor Mark Hannemann. LCC normally travels with their K-9 team, but Hawaii regulations require a 30-day rabies test before entry. The VOAD (Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters) was stood up - coordinating with FEMA and the Red Cross. Orphan Grain Train began loading a jet with relief supplies. LCEF World Relief and Human Care paid for the counseling teams. Lutheran Church Extension Fund waived the fees

and expedited delivery of gift cards that would help those affected purchase necessary items immediately, since Red Cross and FEMA relief takes a little longer.

Local congregations began gathering funds and other supplies, LERT (Lutheran Early Response Team) training took place in two congregations, and people from all over the world sent prayers, financial gifts, and offered to help.

One beautiful note - there are no questions about a person's faith or past - no examination of whether or not they know or even care about Jesus. There is a hand extended, a listening ear, a place to sit or lay down, some food or a cool drink of water and the compassion of a Savior who said, "*love one another the way that I have loved you...*" It is enough to know they went through the fire - and in our small acts of kindness, we hope we can show them - just like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego - they were not alone in the flames - there was Another in the Fire with them - and now there are others outside the flames, standing alongside them.

Over the next weeks, as the media and crowds forget about Maui and create a new front page article (currently the floods in the Pacific Southwest), the people of Maui will do what those who have gone before them (Paradise, California; Santa Rosa, California; and others) did and settle in for the long haul - knowing it will be years before things are rebuilt and lives are somewhat back to normal. You've probably seen the term Maui Strong (Ikaika) - the community of faith is resilient because it is a community. It is held together beyond all the things that are so easily consumed by fire and flood and wind and shaking ground. 1 Peter and the Book of Revelation talk about a day when the heavens and the earth are no more - the only thing left of God's creation is the people He loved so much He sent His Son to save them. Some get a foretaste of that day while they are here.

For far too long, every time a siren wails or there is the smell of smoke in the air - hearts will race, breathing will become shallow, and the mind will begin to panic - but even that will eventually fade away for most. Our prayer is that everyone knows they are not alone. Mahalo for all you have done for your brothers and sisters on Maui (and all the other places God has used you to accomplish His work of mercy).