

Hurricane Harvey Disaster Relief Response

It is overwhelming to me to see the tragic events that are going on right now in Houston and the Texas coast. Many emotions have been evoked with a sense of urgency and doubt. Having been a vicar in south Louisiana during Hurricane Katrina, I want to ensure that any help that is provided from Hope is good help. I know for a fact that the faith based communities in the affected areas are overwhelmed and inundated with volunteers showing up unannounced with no game plan as to how to best be helpful. I have learned that the best way to be helpful is to be directed from those who are on the ground there and have no choice but to be first responders. Recently, I spent some time speaking with Pr. Stephen Demik, pastor at Cypress Chapel, a satellite of St. John Lutheran Church in Cypress. Please find below different ways to help.

1. Prayer: Though this sounds cliché, don't neglect it. Prayer is one of the best "first responses" the church can offer. If you need help thinking about what to pray for here are some suggestions, a) pray for the responders, b) pray for the church workers, c) of course pray for the victims, d) pray for the longevity of care for the area.
2. Giving: Again, this sounds cliché, but it is perhaps one of the most impactful ways to help because it gives discretion to the recipients to assess and attain the immediate needs. Here are my recommendations if you choose to give money.
 - a. Give directly to the Texas District of the LCMS. <https://txlcms.org/how-can-i-help-hurricane-harvey/> or www.lcms.org/harvey 100% of donations helps with the disaster relief.
 - b. Give to Hope Lutheran Church. No we will not keep any of the money. We are working on partnerships with congregations in the area and will distribute these funds through the District to the congregations as they have need. Again, 100% will go to the affected areas.
3. Go: If you are so inclined to go to the coastal area to help, please contact me and let me know. After talking with Pr. Demik in Cypress, he requested a team that could come to the area and set up a grill of some sort and cook. A team from Louisiana (my vicarage congregation) is coming with pots to cook gumbo for 150. We could do the same only West Texas style. If a team so chooses, they would be asked to deliver collected donations as well.
4. Supplies: Working alongside St. John's Lutheran and Cypress Chapel in Cypress, they have requested several items.... Find the list here.... [DONATIONS](#). They have also requested school supplies. We will collect these items at the church beginning this week.
5. Wait for the Longevity: One of the things I am proud about with the LCMS in these situations is that they stay for the long haul. They will be working to repair the Texas coast for years to come. Their Camp Restore is still going in New Orleans, and they will establish a similar camp in the area once there is opportunity for accurate assessments. This camp will be able to shower, feed, sleep and supply volunteer teams to come and begin the cleaning and rebuilding process. If you feel a sense of urgency or even guilt that you are not doing something now, put your mind at ease. Eventually the media will move on and the conversations will stop, but we (the LCMS) will still be there and there will be plenty of work for us to do.

Please call and talk to me if you have any questions/suggestions/concerns. And may the God of respite and mercy show his compassion on the people affected by this horrible flood.

Pastor Hiner