

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

Thank you for all of your prayers for those affected by Hurricane Harvey. Now that it has moved to the east, please extend those prayers to the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod, especially the Houston area, as it deals with historic flooding.

Let me share first that there will be much to do to help recovery in our synod. It will be a long-term process, so please be patient. The hardest hit areas – Port Aransas, Rockport, Port Lavaca, Refugio, Victoria – are still in search and recovery to varying degrees. Electricity and water are still out in many places, roads are blocked by debris, and law enforcement is greatly limiting anyone in those areas. We need to let the infrastructure return before systems are in place to help. Many of our pastoral leaders evacuated those areas and will not return until later this week.

I and Bishop's Associate Sue Briner have been personally contacting pastors and other leaders in the Gulf Coast and Bluebonnet Conferences. What we hear first is their appreciation for the many prayers and contacts through email and social media and phone to see how they are doing. Thank you for your support of your brothers and sisters in Christ.

The good news is that most of our congregations' structures have fared very well. Some had roof and water damage, but it was not significant. Lots of trees, however, were destroyed. So far, we know of only one congregation that suffered significant damage, Holy Cross in Rockport. Pastor George Haynes reported that the steeple is gone; there are holes through the roof of the fellowship hall, nave, and sanctuary; carpeting is all wet; the columbarium was blown over; generally, the windows of church are intact, but there is extensive inside damage. As others return in the hardest hit areas, we'll get more updates.

In a conference call today coordinated by ELCA Lutheran Disaster Response, Bishop Rinehart and I shared the situations in our synods and heard from Upbring (who helps with local Disaster Response), the ELCA's Mission Investment Fund, and World Hunger. There are several things to remember:

- 1) If you want to do something to help right now, consider working with the Red Cross shelters. They need volunteers and supplies. It will provide a close, hands-on ministry for congregation members and clergy for all kinds of care.
- 2) Please don't send any in-kind gifts to the affected areas. They are still in search and recovery mode and have no way to distribute them. All volunteer activities and donations are to be held until the appropriate time, and we'll let you know when that is. Keep up your patient praying.
- 3) If you want to make a financial contribution, and much will be needed both for the short and long term, there are several options.
 - a) If you want to help with pastoral/congregational support so synod ministries (like Holy Cross in Rockport) can return to serving their neighborhoods, a gift to the [Southwestern Texas Synod](#), marked "Hurricane Harvey," is welcomed. Such funds will be provided to pastors in congregations for their emergency use.
 - b) If you want to help more long term, consider gifts to [Lutheran Disaster Response](#). They will be dealing with case management of the recovery, helping people get repairs, resettled, etc. They are wonderful partners in the church.
 - c) If you want to help through a local agency, [Upbring](#) (formerly Lutheran Social Services) provides the local help with disasters in connection with Lutheran Disaster Response, VOAD, and other agencies. We depend upon them greatly for their expertise and local proximity.

Always remember that we do not walk down these difficult roads alone. Whether in storms or life's turmoils, God walks beside us to give courage, hope, and strength for our work. As we partner together to address this crisis called Hurricane Harvey, I pray you will all be upheld by the Holy Spirit.

Peace,

Bishop Ray Tiemann