

Lutherans Give \$11 Million for Hurricane Relief

Financial gifts to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) through Sept. 30 totaled more than \$11 million to support disaster relief and recovery efforts in the wake of the Gulf Coast hurricanes. Many of the church's 4.9 million members and others contributed the funds by mail, by phone or through the ELCA's web site.

"This overwhelmingly generous response from Lutherans will enable a comprehensive relief and recovery effort now and for years to come," said Kathryn Sime, director, ELCA World Hunger and Disaster Appeal.

"I am particularly grateful for the leadership of Thrivent Financial for Lutherans through their commitment to supplement the gifts of their members. Together, the gifts of our church family form a powerful witness to God's abundance in the midst of this disaster," she said.

Funds given to ELCA Domestic Disaster Response are channeled through Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR), which is coordinating the response to the disaster. LDR is a ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS). National and local LDR staff are working to provide immediate assistance to people displaced from their homes, communities and work as a result of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita.

Lutheran Disaster Response is coordinating volunteer efforts for debris removal and cleanup in Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi. It is also organizing "tent camps" to house these volunteers, and it is providing grants, plus emotional and spiritual care for survivors of the hurricane.

Thrivent Provides Additional Funds

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, a Minneapolis-based not-for-profit financial services organization serving members of the ELCA and other Lutheran church bodies, is providing additional funds when its members give to LDR or ELCA Domestic Disaster Response, said Dave Rustad, senior media relations specialist, Thrivent Financial for Lutherans. Thrivent will give \$1 for every \$2 given by members to the disaster response funds, up to \$300 per member, he said. Thrivent is prepared to give



Some churches have limited capacity to house volunteers. Lutheran Disaster Response coordinators are pitching tents to house volunteers who are needed for clean-up work in Hurricane Katrina-affected areas.

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as much as \$2 million in additional funds, Rustad said.

On Sept. 8 Thrivent and Habitat for Humanity announced a financial, volunteer and advocacy alliance designed to increase Habitat's capacity to build more affordable housing in the United States, including the Gulf Coast area. The alliance, "Thrivent Builds with Habitat for Humanity," represents a four-year, \$105 million commitment by Thrivent, Rustad said. Thrivent has specifically earmarked \$5 million of the total to rebuild homes in the Gulf Coast region.

Lutheran-Episcopal Food Program Not Needed

"Due to the reduction of evacuees residing at the Houston Astrodome, we no longer need to provide the level of services that we've been asked to provide there this month," said Feltman. Initially Lutherans and Episcopalians were scheduled to provide food for the tens of thousands of people who escaped Hurricane Katrina and eventually took shelter at the Astrodome.

With thousands of evacuees now relocated to other parts of the country, the effort between both church bodies is no longer needed. "However, Lutheran Disaster Response will continue to provide volunteer assistance at the Astrodome," she said.

ELCA Domestic Disaster Response, P.O. Box 71764,
 Chicago, Illinois 60694-1764
 Credit card gifts: 800-638-3522 or www.elca.org/disaster/