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# Under One Roof: A Theology of Mercy Responding to Tragic Flooding in Minot, North Dakota

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Paul A. Krueger

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# Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

UNDER ONE ROOF: A THEOLOGY OF MERCY RESPONDING TO TRAGIC  
FLOODING IN MINOT, NORTH DAKOTA

Written by

PAUL A. KRUEGER

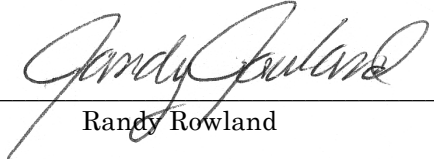
and submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

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upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:

  
Randy Rowland

  
Kurt Fredrickson

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UNDER ONE ROOF: A THEOLOGY OF MERCY RESPONDING TO TRAGIC  
FLOODING IN MINOT, NORTH DAKOTA

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER  
SUBMITTED TO FACULTY OF THE  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY  
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

PAUL A. KRUEGER  
OCTOBER 2018



## ABSTRACT

### **Under One Roof: A Theology of Mercy Responding to Tragic Flooding in Minot, North Dakota**

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2018

God's people can play a critical role in times of natural disaster. This ministry paper explores the theological concepts that propel a local church to action during a time of natural disaster. In addition, this paper will provide a practical framework for a local church to respond with incarnational ministry that transforms disaster-related human suffering with the tangible compassion of Christ.

Following a 2011 Level 1 natural disaster, Our Savior Lutheran Church in Minot, North Dakota, coordinated a ministry of mercy where five thousand volunteers from forty-two states changed the city's trajectory through Christian service. Often churches do not know the transformational role they can play in the event of a disaster. This paper offers a framework to provide transformational mercy during such a time.

This paper contains three sections. The first section explores the city of Minot and Our Savior Lutheran Church and discusses how pre-disaster relationships set the stage for transformational ministry. This section then highlights the pivotal role local congregations can play in healing a disaster-ridden community through the tangible compassion of Christ.

The second section examines theological concepts that propelled a church to action when confronted with human suffering. This section reviews seven books that discuss the church's role in incarnational mercy care and develops a theology of incarnational disaster response through mercy and mission.

The third section provides a practical framework for a local congregation to engage in incarnational disaster response with the introduction of a disaster response handbook. The handbook raises a vision for service following a local disaster and exposes church leaders to multi-faceted opportunities for incarnational mercy care within their community. A plan for implementation is also offered.

Content Reader: Randy Rowland

Word Count: 276

In grateful appreciation to Dick — entrepreneur, innovator, and believer in dreams

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                           |     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| DEDICATION                                                | iii |
| INTRODUCTION                                              | 1   |
| PART ONE: MISSIONAL CHALLENGE/CONTEXT                     |     |
| Chapter 1. THE COMMUNITY CONTEXT OF MINOT, NORTH DAKOTA   | 9   |
| Chapter 2. OUR SAVIOR LUTHERAN CHURCH OVERVIEW            | 24  |
| PART TWO: FOUNDATIONS FOR MERCY CARE                      |     |
| Chapter 3. LITERATURE REVIEW                              | 58  |
| Chapter 4. A THEOLOGY OF INCARNATIONAL DISASTER RESPONSE  | 80  |
| PART THREE: MINISTRY PRACTICE                             |     |
| Chapter 5. HANDBOOK DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION AND ASSESSMENT | 95  |
| SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS                                   | 115 |
| APPENDIX                                                  | 120 |
| <i>UNDER ONE ROOF – A DISASTER RESPONSE HANDBOOK</i>      |     |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY                                              | 164 |



## INTRODUCTION

On Wednesday, June 22, 2011, an unthinkable tragedy descended upon the city of Minot, North Dakota. That day, floodwaters fed by four massive Canadian reservoirs ripped through the city, swallowing 4,180 homes, more than one fourth of the city's housing.<sup>1</sup> Water with depths as high as twelve feet and speeds over thirty miles per hour inundated the city for an unbelievable five weeks.<sup>2</sup> As a result, 12,000 people, one fourth of the city's population, were forced from their homes, robbed of their futures, and left with emotional, physical, and financial scars, victimized by a Level 1 natural disaster.<sup>3</sup> The devastation and human heartache on every side was incomprehensible.

The next morning, church leaders across the city had to come to grips with a number of questions including: "What is the role of a local church in a time of massive tragedy?" and "How does the church respond?" For some leaders, the answer was simple: nothing. Disaster response did not fit into their ecclesiology, which says the Church is about preaching, teaching, administering the sacraments, and conducting worship services. These leaders, faithful to their understanding of the Church, remained on the peripheral, impacting few while the members of their church family and the community struggled.

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Emergency Management Association, ND, "Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC), <http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nrf/EMACoverviewForNRF.pdf> (accessed January 12, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Other leaders felt that disaster response should be focused on the physical, emotional, and spiritual care of their members who had been affected by the tragedy. This line of thought certainly has scriptural support. St. Peter writes: “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care” (1 Peter 5:2).<sup>4</sup> St. Paul writes: “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10). This is a godly response. Christians are called to love one another, care for one another, and sacrifice for one another (John 13:34-35). To do otherwise is a denial of the Lord’s own mandate. In a post-modern culture where the community is the message, the effective witness of the church to the Kingdom of God would be severely compromised. However, this godly response does little to alleviate the suffering of thousands of lives, nor does it further the mission of Christ in time of disaster.

A third response recognizes the missional nature of the Church even as it reflects the missional nature of Christ Jesus himself. This response calls for the church to see human suffering, such as people experience in time of disaster, as the manifestation of a very real sin-broken world and the very real sorrow that a sin-broken world places upon mankind. God’s answer to a sin-broken world is not to run away or to remain neutral (Galatians 4:4, John 3:16). Instead, God’s answer to the brokenness of sin is to incarnate himself into the center of the brokenness and to infect sin’s darkness with rays of hope,

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<sup>4</sup> All Scripture quoted is taken from the New International Version, unless otherwise noted.

redeeming a fallen, broken world from the center outward (Philippians 2:5-11). Likewise, the missional nature of the church calls for God's people to do the same.

On the morning of June 23, 2011, those thoughts occupied my mind as I stood on a hill in the city that overlooked the devastation in the community that had become my home. Heroic efforts to save the city had failed. City officials and social service agencies were overwhelmed and families were caught in the crosshairs<sup>5</sup>. In twenty-four years of pastoral ministry I had experienced tragedy but never on this scale. The question on my mind was how I should respond and how my church family should respond. In the face of devastation where both state and local resources were deemed "totally inadequate"<sup>6</sup> was there a way that a local church could become a healing asset to the community, I wondered. As I looked upon the waters below I really did not know what to do, but I knew doing nothing was not an option. As Matthew Harrison writes, "In Christ, God acted and acts for the temporal and eternal blessing of the world. When we are in Christ, we can do nothing other than to act for the well-being of others."<sup>7</sup> Rather than walking away, Jesus walked toward the center of human suffering, offering himself as the instrument of God's mercy and healing (Philippians 2:5-11). In the life of Jesus,

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<sup>5</sup> ND Department of Emergency Services, Washington, "2011 Flood Report: Response and Recovery," (November 2011), <http://www.nd.gov/des/uploads/%5Cresources%5C744%5Cfloodrecoveryreport-2011-2.pdf>, 19 (accessed November 17, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew Harrison, *Christ Have Mercy: How to Put Your Faith in Action* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), 39.

“Compassion *begets* action. Mercy *makes* something *happen* [italics mine].”<sup>8</sup> To follow Christ would mean doing the same.

These pages represent a journey of personal discovery and hope. What began with unthinkable devastation concluded with resounding hope as Our Savior Lutheran Church stepped forward to take a lead role in the healing of a city. Forging partnerships with area Christian churches; national faith-based disaster response organizations; and state, local, and federal government entities, Our Savior Lutheran Church and its partners directly assisted 1,108 flood-devastated Minot families. Over a three-year period, 5,200 volunteers from forty-two states and three Canadian provinces came to help the people of Minot. As instruments of Christ’s own compassion these volunteers were sent out from the campus of Our Savior Lutheran Church each day to mercifully serve flood-affected families, addressing their emotional, physical and spiritual need. In those three years, homes for 549 families were rebuilt as volunteers supplied more than 186,000 hours of volunteer service to the flood-ravished people of Minot. This work would not have happened without recognizing the missional nature of the church, the incarnate nature of Christ at work in the world today through his church, and the compelling nature of Christ’s mercy, which propelled a local church to take a transformational role in the alleviation of human need.

It is my contention that the local church is God’s instrument for carrying mercy and healing into a sin-broken world and that pastors and church leaders are often unaware

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 41.

of the vital role they can play in times of tragic need. It is through the church, incarnate with action, that the mercy of Christ often becomes tangible to people in need. God chooses to hide behind human hands as he interacts in the hearts and lives of the broken, desolate, and needy. As the needy cry out, God chooses to answer their prayers by sending ordinary people who are enlivened by the Holy Spirit and filled with mercy. These men and women of God do extraordinary things to ease human suffering and inject hope into the darkest circumstances. Through acts of mercy, the Kingdom of God breaks into disaster's darkness and divine restoration begins to take place. As Harrison writes, "In word and sacrament, the Christian is born again. Raised to walk in newness of life, the believer demonstrates compassion for those in need: the lowly, the suffering, the orphan, etc. However weakly and imperfectly, our compassion reflects the compassion of God Himself."<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther makes the point even more powerfully, saying we "clothe ourselves in our neighbor's flesh,"<sup>10</sup> meaning in times of disaster, the church becomes the mask that God chooses to wear in order to bring restoration and redemption. Compelled by the compassion and the mercy of Christ, the church must embrace its mask, move out beyond its doors, and interact in people's lives by crying their tears, carrying their burdens, offering aid, and providing assistance on behalf of God himself. "The glorious truth is that the Bible gives us a gospel that addresses every dimension of the problem that sin has created. God's mission is the final destruction of all that is evil from his

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<sup>9</sup> Harrison, *Christ Have Mercy: How to Put Your Faith in Action*, 45.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

whole creation,”<sup>11</sup> Christopher Wright says. “He chose[s] to do so within history through persons and events that run from the call of Abraham to the return of Christ.”<sup>12</sup> In this regard, the local church, incarnate with action, is part of God’s redemption story. “God bestows all that is good on us,” Luther says, but, he adds, “...you must work and lend yourself as a means and a mask to God.”<sup>13</sup> To do otherwise is to deny the very purpose of the incarnation and the very mission of God’s people, the church.

With these things in mind, Part One of this paper examines the mission context of Minot, North Dakota, exploring how pre-disaster relationships set the stage for transformational ministry. Special attention has been given to the critical role a local church had in cultivating long-term relationships with a community. Using the language of Michael Frost, a church of mission asked, “What can we do to become more imbedded in our communities, to appreciate their needs, hopes and yearnings?”<sup>14</sup> Kingdom work is relational. Kingdom work is incarnational. Commenting further, Frost writes: “These ancient practices [of incarnational ministry] call us into place. They insist we live out our faith not in church worship services and Bible study groups alone, but in relationship

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<sup>11</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Churches Mission*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 41.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Luther, as quoted in Gene Veith, *The Spirituality of the Cross* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 170.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Frost, *Incarnate: The Body of Christ in an Age of Disengagement* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 165.

with our neighbors, in compassionate, humble collaboration with others.”<sup>15</sup> Recognizing the way in which deep relationships with the community set the stage for God’s works of mercy, Part One concludes by evidencing how local congregations can play a pivotal role in healing a disaster-ridden community with the tangible compassion of Christ.

Part Two engages theological concepts that propelled a church to action when confronted with human suffering. Key theological sources informing the concepts of mercy care, including Lutheran tradition, are surveyed with a focus on the writings of Wright and Harrison, as these amplify the church’s role in God’s redemptive purposes. This part concludes by demonstrating how works of mercy prepare the heart for the Gospel message to be embraced by those who do not yet have faith in Christ.

Part Three describes the development of a disaster response handbook, which raised a vision for service and exposed church leaders to a number of multi-faceted opportunities for incarnational mercy care following a disaster. Supplied with careful evaluation this handbook will be a resource for a local congregation to meet disaster-related human suffering with the tangible compassion of Christ.

Turning attention now to a very real disaster and a very real application of incarnate mercy care that changed the trajectory of an entire city, Chapters 1 and 2 tell the story of the city of Minot, North Dakota, its tragic 2011 flood and the role a local congregation took in expressing the tangible compassion of Christ.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 173.

PART ONE  
THE MINISTRY CONTEXT



## CHAPTER 1

### THE COMMUNITY CONTEXT OF MINOT, NORTH DAKOTA

Three words: stable, solid, and secure describe the pre-disaster context of Minot, North Dakota in 2011. Situated in the north-central part of the state, Minot is North Dakota's fourth-largest city with a population of 46,321<sup>1</sup>. It serves as a regional hub for farms, ranches, and small towns that lay within a ninety-mile radius of the city. In the best sense of the term, Minot and its surrounding region could be described as a micropolitan community, a term coined in 2003 by the U.S. Census Bureau meaning "a metro area in miniature."<sup>2</sup> Jerry Harris's observation on micropolitan communities is an apt description of Minot when he writes:

One in ten Americans call a micropolitan community home. Their existence and growth reflect a culture longing for something a little less metro; without the insanity of traffic, with better schools, familiar faces, and amenities that metro areas used to hold exclusively like the Lowe's home improvement store, Applebee's, and of course Walmart. They have become hubs for rural people to shop, eat, get medical attention, or go to community college."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "United States Census Quick Facts," <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/38/3853380.html> (accessed April 13, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Jerry Harris, *Micropolitan Church: Doing Mega-Ministry in America's Small Towns* (Bloomington, IN: Crossbooks, 2011), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

As the center of a micropolitan area, Minot serves a regional population of approximately 73,146 people.<sup>4</sup> Though fiercely independent, this population base, consisting of farms, ranches and outlying small towns, has been able to maintain a deeply satisfying rural way of life due to proximity and interdependence with the city of Minot. In the pre-disaster context especially, but also in its post-disaster context, Minot itself often has felt more like a small town than a large city as the familiar faces of a stable, deeply connected population interact on a daily basis. Yet, far from a small town, Minot is the community that anchors the region providing strength, stability, and security to the population. The city does so in a number of ways.

The first is through health care. Minot's award-winning hospital,<sup>5</sup> networked with the Mayo Clinic and connected with a dozen rural health clinics, provides healthcare services to the region that are comparable to most large cities. Distance and isolation are bridged by two air ambulance services that provide critical care transport for a 150-mile radius of the hospital's Level 2 Trauma Center.<sup>6</sup> This ensures that even the most critical health care needs can be addressed in a timely manner.

The second is through education. Minot serves as a vibrant educational center for the region. Online parent reviews list each of Minot's schools in the above average

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<sup>4</sup> Jill Schramm, "Census Changes: Minot Area Growth Slows After Flood," *Minot (ND) Daily News*. March 14, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Trinity Health, Minot, ND, "Trinity Health Honored," <http://www.trinityhealth.org/index.php?page=pressrelease&story=Trinity-Health-Honored-among-top-nations-top-hospitals> (accessed November 9, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Trinity Hospital (ND), "About Trinity Health," <http://www.trinityhealth.org/about> (accessed April 23, 2015).

category, which shows the confidence that parents have in the city's education system.<sup>7</sup> Educational quality is further enhanced where, in true micropolitan fashion, Minot's schools are formally and informally networked with the region's outlying communities for music, sports, art, and academic resources. Through these networks, each school in the region multiplies its strengths and minimizes its weaknesses. The result is that students in both larger and smaller schools benefit. A 2014 Gallup poll showed that North Dakota residents were the most positive in the nation about their public schools system,<sup>8</sup> further demonstrating an educational system that gives stability and optimism to its community.

The third is through jobs and economic security. The city of Minot sits at the hub of an economic engine that at the time of this disaster drove the most vibrant economy in the nation, with a growth rate that was five times the national average in 2015.<sup>9</sup> Agriculture,<sup>10</sup> explosive energy development,<sup>11</sup> support services, and one of the nation's

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<sup>7</sup> Truila, "Schools in Minot, (ND)," [http://www.trulia.com/real\\_estate/Minot-North\\_Dakota/schools/](http://www.trulia.com/real_estate/Minot-North_Dakota/schools/) (accessed April 23, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Susan Sorenson and Stephanie Kafka, "North Dakota Residents Most Positive About Their Schools," <http://www.gallup.com/poll/168413/north-dakota-residents-positive-schools.aspx> (accessed April 9, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Annalyn Kurtz, "North Dakota Grows Five Times Faster Than Nation," <http://money.cnn.com/2013/06/06/news/economy/north-dakota-economy/> (accessed April 23, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> North Dakota Agriculture, "North Dakota Quick Facts," <http://www.ndstudies.org/resources/maps/ag/quickfacts.html> (accessed April 27, 2015). Production agriculture generates over five-billion dollars in cash receipts in North Dakota each year. As one of the state's four main agriculture centers the Minot micropolitan area generates over one-billion dollars per year in agricultural production alone.

largest Air Force installations<sup>12</sup> all provide a stabilizing economic impact in the region and a level of economic security uncommon to cities of a similar size. In Minot's comprehensive 2013 annual financial report, the economic climate of Minot was summarized this way:

Minot's centralized location in North America and its high-quality transportation make it an attractive site for both business and manufacturers. A growing sales tax base, the booming oil industry, and record construction are all factors that build a solid foundation for business and industry to enjoy greater productivity and profitability.<sup>13</sup>

Far from a stereotypical small town, Minot's progressive direction in health care, education, business, and community dynamic creates a climate that allows the people of the region to weather changes and build a future. As an anchor to the region, the city provides strength, stability, and security to the population within its city limits and beyond.

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<sup>11</sup> Coon, Randal C. et al., "The Economic Base of North Dakota: A Measure of the State's Economy in 2012." <http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/189888/2/AAE%20No.%2014001.pdf> (accessed April 15, 2015). Oil production in the state was 113.1 million barrels in 2010, 153.0 million in 2011, and increased to 243.8 million in 2012 (ND Department of Mineral Resources 2014). Relatively high crude oil prices coupled with the rapid development of the state's oil reserves has resulted in unprecedented growth in the petroleum sector.

<sup>12</sup> City of Minot, ND, "Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, City of Minot North, Dakota, for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2013," <http://www.minotnd.org/pdf/finance/cafr13.pdf> (accessed April 15, 2015). Located twelve miles north of the city, and a definite part of the community, is one of the nation's largest Air Force bases. The economic impact of the Minot Air Force base on the City during 2013 was approximately \$583 million. During 2013, the Minot Air Force Base had nearly \$127 million in construction, services and other expenditures. Minot Air Force Base serves as home for over 12,966 active duty personnel and their dependents. Many of the personnel choose to reside in the city during their tour of duty and after their discharge. The relationship between the citizens of Minot and the citizens of the base is one of cooperation and friendliness.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

This stability is not by accident. In Minot's case, long-term vitality and stability for the region are the result of a long line of capable leaders: men and women of influence who understand the importance of community involvement along with the indispensable practice of developing leadership networks in business, education, community development and government. It is this network of leadership that has given the Minot region its strength and has propelled North Dakota to the top of Gallup's state-by-state polls on community well being, trust in state government, and job creation.<sup>14</sup> Strong performance in these surveys represents the effectiveness of leadership at all levels and the vitality that leadership networks bring to the people of the region.

In the pre-flood context of 2011, the people of Minot experienced a quality of life that would seem almost idyllic to many portions of the country. Safe schools, secure jobs, deep relational ties with friends and family along with general economic security all combined to form a magnetic, relatively secure, family-friendly environment. This pre-disaster world changed abruptly for the Minot's residents. Explosive change from unbridled oilfield discoveries would be compounded by an unthinkable natural disaster. These two simultaneous events shook the city's foundation to its core, stretched Minot's leadership and resources to the breaking point, and left an entire community crying out to God for mercy. This was the mission context in which the members of Our Savior Lutheran Church responded in tangible ways with the mercy of Christ.

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<sup>14</sup> Susan Sorenson and Stephanie Kafka, "North Dakota Residents Most Positive About Their Schools," <http://www.gallup.com/poll/168413/north-dakota-residents-positive-schools.aspx> (accessed April 9, 2015).

## **Explosive Change: Stretching Community Resources**

The change that shook the city found began in April of 2008 when the United States Geological Survey issued a report on North Dakota petroleum resources. Right below Minot's feet lay the largest continuous oil accumulation ever assessed by the U.S. Geological Survey,<sup>15</sup> a storehouse of recoverable oil four times larger than the continuous accumulations of Louisiana and Texas.<sup>16</sup> Originally assessed in 1995 as a large find with 151 million barrels of recoverable oil, the survey placed the North Dakota's Bakken formation at 4.3 billion barrels of recoverable oil, or twenty-five times greater than the 1995 estimate, elevating the formation to a world-class accumulation.<sup>17</sup> In less than four years, oil production from the Bakken formation changed the serene city of Minot into a cataclysm of unbridled change and catapulted North Dakota past Alaska and California to become the second-largest oil producing state in the nation.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Geological Survey Report, Washington, USGS Newsroom, "3 to 4.3 Billion Barrels of Technically Recoverable Oil Assessed in North Dakota and Montana's Bakken Formation -25 Times More Than 1995 Estimate" - (April 10, 2008), <http://www.usgs.gov/newsroom/article.asp?ID=1911> (accessed April 7, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> American Oil and Gas Historical Society, <http://aoghs.org/states/north-dakota-williston-basin/> (accessed April 15, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Kurtz, "North Dakota Grows."

Responding to economic opportunity, 14,000<sup>19</sup> workers from all over the world suddenly descended upon the Minot region, producing a housing crisis that would be further exasperated by the 2011 flood. Hotels maintained a continuous 100 percent occupancy after tripling rates and still there were not enough hotel rooms.<sup>20</sup> Apartments that leased for \$450 per month in 2009 drew \$2,400 per month in 2010 and still there were not enough apartments.<sup>21</sup> Homes valued at \$70,000 in 2009 rapidly sold for \$290,000 in 2010 and still there were not enough homes.<sup>22</sup> Recreational vehicles with oil workers filled area parking lots and, as a last resort, workers even slept in their cars.<sup>23</sup> A 2010 study prepared for the Minot Area Development Corporation estimated that Minot's housing market would have to grow by 5,700 units within five years simply to keep up

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<sup>19</sup> The Fiscal Times, "11 Shocking Facts About the North Dakota Oil Boom," <http://www.thefiscaltimes.com/Articles/2013/06/06/11-Shocking-Facts-about-the-North-Dakota-Oil-Boom> (accessed November 28, 2015).

<sup>20</sup> Bakken Construction News, "Explosive Hotel Development Poses Questions," [http://bakkenconstructionnews.com/Article/Explosive-Hotel-Development-Poses-Questions\\_3030](http://bakkenconstructionnews.com/Article/Explosive-Hotel-Development-Poses-Questions_3030) (accessed November 28, 2015).

<sup>21</sup> Our Savior Lutheran Church leaders were caught in this housing fiasco. While searching for housing for a new seminary intern in 2011, leaders found that the lowest priced rental unit available was a one-room efficiency apartment renting for \$2,400 per month. After a fifteen-minute consultation, the decision was made to rent the apartment, but it was no longer available as someone else had already rented it for \$2,800 per month.

<sup>22</sup> "Minot Real Estate Market Trends," <http://www.minot-nd-realestate.com/market-trends/> (accessed November 11, 2015). The fall 2015 housing market update currently lists the average selling price for a Minot, ND home at \$250,000 showing a slight drop since the 2010 peak.

<sup>23</sup> Eric Goldschein, "Homeless Oil Workers Are Camping Out at Walmart," <http://www.thefiscaltimes.com/Articles/2012/02/08/Homeless-Oil-Workers-Are-Camping-Out-at-Walmart> (accessed November 15, 2015)

with demand.<sup>24</sup> Jolting the security of the city, the acute housing shortage was a crisis in its own right calling out for the mercy of Christ. However, the housing shortage reached unprecedented levels when combined with the 2011 flood. Families caught in the flood faced a double tragedy: not only did they lose their homes in the floodwaters, but with the acute housing shortage, they also found find nowhere else to live.

Community leaders were also caught in the explosive carnage of oil field change as relentless pressures lay on their shoulders. Doug Lalim, building director for neighboring Williston, ND, summarized the feeling of leaders in the region when he said in January 2011, “As far as we are concerned it is just chaos. We just have to react. It’s hard to explain really.”<sup>25</sup> Keeping up with the white-hot economic growth was a problem all its own. Building materials, people resources, professional services, common workers, and with other essentials were all in short supply, yet the economic monster had to be fed. Since rural communities tend to operate with limited resources so it is easy to see how the essential services of a community become taxed to the breaking point. In the case of the Bakken, mechanics, truck drivers, bookkeepers, general laborers, and other types of workers drawn by the promise of lucrative wages left their local jobs for the burgeoning oil fields. These actions left a vacuum of qualified workers to handle essential services in a community. In Minot, even the county Emergency Manager’s position was vacant at

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<sup>24</sup> “Minot, North Dakota Housing Demand Analysis,” <http://www.minotusa.com/uploads%5Cresources%5C104%5C2011-minot-housing-study.pdf> (accessed November 28, 2015).

<sup>25</sup> Williston (ND) Wire, <http://willistonwire.com/News/Janaury-14-2011> (accessed April 28, 2015). Doug Lalim is the Building Department director for neighboring Williston, North Dakota, commenting on the tripling of building permits in one year.



the time of the flood.<sup>26</sup> Everyone from storekeepers to the city engineer's office struggled to keep qualified help.<sup>27</sup> Material resources, such as asphalt, concrete, and building supplies were in short supply as companies tried to keep up with the oil field-driven demand.<sup>28</sup> With more people flooding the streets, law enforcement officials faced an increasing caseload of crime that stretched the city's limited resources as well. Responding to the relentless pressures of growth, city officials fought weekly battles to stay ahead of infrastructure needs, such as roads, utilities, transportation, permitting, inspections, and even shortages of water.<sup>29</sup> These demands left community leaders overwhelmed in their own right as they faced a cacophony of pressures fueled by economic growth. Resources were simply not there. In the case of Minot, shortages meant that adequate resources, both people and material, were unavailable to community leaders at the time of the flood. Minot benefited from strong economic opportunity, yet the oil industry's demands further compounded the effects of the disaster as it stretched leadership, people, and material resources to their breaking points even before the flood.

### **A Natural Disaster Devastates Every Remaining Resource**

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<sup>26</sup> Ward County North Dakota Emergency Management, <http://www.co.ward.nd.us/155/Emergency-Management> accessed November 15, 2015).

<sup>27</sup> Ryan Holeywell, "North Dakota's Oil Boom is a Blessing and a Curse," <http://www.governing.com/topics/energy-env/north-dakotas-oil-boom-blessing-curse.html> (accessed November 18, 2015).

<sup>28</sup> Observations and interviews by author.

<sup>29</sup> Kurtz, "North Dakota Grows."

When disaster struck Minot on June 22, 2011, it did so with unimaginable fury. Four massive Canadian reservoirs, designed to control melting Rocky Mountain snow, had been in danger of being compromised, giving officials had no choice but to open the spillways and send torrents of water towards Minot, 120 miles away. “If you picture the southern third of Manitoba and the southern third of Saskatchewan as a giant funnel,” Minot resident Van Tvedt said, “the end of the funnel would point directly at Minot.”<sup>30</sup> Fearfully, the National Weather Service had said in early spring that models showed that year’s snowpack contained “a water content ranked among the highest in the last 60 years.”<sup>31</sup> Hydrologist Ed Eaton described the situation further, saying, the weather had led to dangerous circumstances. “We had a wet fall, springs are running, no frost and early snow cover” he said at the time. “The ground is wet and saturated. The airborne survey shows a lot of water content.”<sup>32</sup> All four Canadian reservoirs were full, then opened in June to prevent their own destruction. “Rafferty is full. Boundary is full. Long Creek is running high and Alameda will be full. Lake Darling is expected to fill,” the National Weather Service’s Alan Schlag said. “When you add them all up, the

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<sup>30</sup> Tvedt, Van. Interviewed by Paul Kreuger. Personal interview. Minot, ND, March 17, 2014.

<sup>31</sup> Minot (ND) Daily News, “Timeline of Minot’s 2011 Flood”<http://www.minotdailynews.com/page/content.detail/id/557475/Timeline-of-Minot-s-2011-flood.html?nav=5010> (accessed April 17, 2015).

<sup>32</sup> Minot (ND) Daily News, “Timeline of Minot’s 2011 Flood,”<http://www.minotdailynews.com/page/content.detail/id/557475/Timeline-of-Minot-s-2011-flood.html?nav=5010> (accessed April 17, 2015).

cumulative is that it's pretty ugly. ... It's a stupendous amount of water for the Souris [River]. The cat is way out of the bag and there's a lot of pain heading towards Minot."<sup>33</sup>

The pain came in the form of water, with depths as high as twelve feet and speeds over thirty miles per hour, water that would inundate the city for an unbelievable five weeks. Four thousand, one hundred and eighty Minot families lost their homes; fully one fourth of the city's housing was gone. The top headline on the front page of the Minot Daily news simply read, "Swamped!"<sup>34</sup> In less than forty-eight hours, 12,000 people, one fourth of Minot's population, found themselves homeless, robbed of their futures, and left with emotional, physical, and financial scars. The heartache was incomprehensible. Heroic efforts to save the city had failed. City officials and social service agencies were overwhelmed and families were caught in the crosshairs. With damage estimates placed at more than \$2.6 billion, the city was shattered; hopelessness descended upon Minot like a pall.<sup>35</sup>

Minot's situation appeared hopeless for many reasons. A damaged home is a financial struggle in its own right, and Minot's shattering loss was greater than the norm. Single story homes had water in their attics. Two-story homes had water on their second floors. Unlike a typical flood where the waters rise quickly and then recede, the waters

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. The four Canadian reservoirs that feed the Souris River are Boundary, Rafferty, Long Creek and Alameda. Lake Darling is the fifth reservoir in the system and is located on the United States side of the border a scant ten miles northwest of Minot.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Minot (ND) Recovery Information, "Mouse River Facts," <http://www.minotrecoveryinfo.com/facts/2011-flood-by-the-numbers/> (accessed November 21, 2015).

from this disaster remained for a staggering five weeks, working insidious harm on the structure. Repairs were complex and families bore the cost of replacing everything but the two-by-fours in the wall and the joists that held up the floor. Hopelessness was compounded as families had to carry this burden without the benefit of insurance. Less than 5 percent of Minot residents carried flood insurance, not because of neglect, but because the city was not considered a flood plain.<sup>36</sup> The financial need was overwhelming. Single parents, retired couples, and hard-working, two-income families were all caught in the crushing reality. The cost of repair was only a small portion of a family's financial peril. A family's house might be destroyed, but the mortgage doesn't go away. The house payment must still be made. Helplessness is multiplied as a mom and a dad try to figure out how to pay a mortgage on a home they cannot live in, pay rent on a house they can't afford, and then at the same time attempt to purchase materials for the home they need to repair, all while trying to maintain their family and give as much normalcy to their children as possible. This is a financial impossibility and a daunting task for even the best of families, leaving many overwhelmed and hopeless.

When the waters hit, the reality was that resources of any type were hard to come by. Equipment, contractors, building materials — all of these were sucked into the black hole of the oil field, leaving not just city leaders but flood-affected families empty handed

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<sup>36</sup> CBS News, "Most N.D. Flood Victims Don't Have Insurance," <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/most-nd-flood-victims-dont-have-insurance/> (accessed April 17, 2015).

and alone as well.<sup>37</sup> Engaging a plumber, electrician or even a simple contractor proved to be nearly impossible.<sup>38</sup> Not only did the flood victimize families, but often times families were victimized yet a second time as the few contractors who were available canceled jobs only in favor of lucrative oil field contracts.<sup>39</sup> Even friends and family were unavailable to assist as they too were facing the loss of their own homes. In this regard Minot families not only faced shattering loss but they also faced the loss without the resources to pick up pieces.

The acute housing shortage forced many families into precarious situations where they often felt trapped. Simply to put a roof over their heads required many families to be split up, as the first of the FEMA homes did not arrive on the scene for five months. Children were sent to the homes of friends or family members in different corners of town, different corners of the state, or even different corners of the country. Many families temporarily relocated to neighboring towns. While this may have provided a place to live, relocation often fueled difficult family dynamics as a seventy-mile

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<sup>37</sup> It was not uncommon for Minot area residents to contract with plumbers, electricians or heating and cooling contractors who were based in towns that were three or more hours away. One Our Savior Lutheran Church member gratefully hired a contractor from Fargo, ND, five hours away, to install HVAC in his home with a travel associated bill of \$12,000.

<sup>38</sup> Because electrical work was a critical component for the reconstruction process, Hope Village finally hired its own master electrician to oversee all the electrical work associated with volunteer rebuilds.

<sup>39</sup> This was an actual event occurring for Our Savior Lutheran Church. A local contractor was scheduled to rebuild and pave the church parking lot in June of 2011. Shortly before the start date the contractor withdrew and left the church without options. It subsequently took four years to complete.

commute each way for work became a part of daily family life.<sup>40</sup> Pulled away from friends and family, isolation became common and children often acted out the family tensions in unhealthy ways. Caught in the crushing dynamics of post-flood survival, hope became elusive for many families and helplessness became a way of everyday living.

The “whole lot of pain” that NWS hydrologist Schlag predicted for Minot<sup>41</sup> crushed every facet of life in the city. Caught in the crosshairs were real people with crushing financial burdens, non-existent options for resources, and dauntless challenges on the most basic levels. These are the people Jesus called “the least of these.” (Matthew 25:37-40) with mercy from God himself as the only answer to the peril being experienced. The solution was to get people back into their homes as quickly as possible in order to begin the healing processes. This is what mercy demands and God’s people would answer Christ’s call to service. As Harrison writes, “The incarnation, servant hood, self-humbling obedience, and finally death on a cross on our behalf – the Gospel – creates Christ’s attitude in us. We are baptized by Christ into merciful compassion for those in need around us. In this way we indeed become “incarnate” to our neighbor.”<sup>42</sup> Or as Christopher Wright says, “The mission of God’s people in the Bible is to *be* the people

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<sup>40</sup> A one-way seventy-mile commute became necessary for some families as the little towns closer to Minot were already occupied with flood refugees. Residents didn’t simply quit their jobs and move from Minot because at the time, the national unemployment rate was approaching double digits; Minot’s unemployment rate was below two percent. Residents opted not to relocate because Minot was one of the few places where jobs were secure.

<sup>41</sup> Minot (ND) Daily News, “Timeline of Minot’s 2011 Flood,” <http://www.minotdailynews.com/page/content.detail/id/557475/Timeline-of-Minot-s-2011-flood.html?nav=5010> (accessed April 17, 2015).

<sup>42</sup> Harrison, *Christ Have Mercy: How to Put Your Faith in Action*, 46.

whom God created us to be and to *do* the things that God calls us to do [emphasis in original].”<sup>43</sup> As God’s people answered the call for mercy pain and suffering would be transformed.

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<sup>43</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, 149.

## CHAPTER 2

### OUR SAVIOR LUTHERAN CHURCH OVERVIEW

From cover to cover the Bible tells the story of a merciful God making things right in a sin-broken world as he uses everyday followers of Jesus Christ in crucial ways. The story begins when an incarnational God chose before the foundation of the earth to send his only Son to live among a sin-broken people and redeem them through the atoning work of Calvary's cross. The story becomes personal as the incarnate Christ walks into the individual lives of the hurting and broken, making the life-changing transformation of the Kingdom of God a new reality in their lives. The story continues today as Jesus Christ himself chooses to live incarnationally into the lives of sin-broken men and women through the people he calls his church. Among those everyday followers of Jesus in the city of Minot, North Dakota, are the members of Our Savior Lutheran Church, men and women of God who would take a leading role in transforming disaster-related human suffering with the tangible compassion of Christ.



## **A Dynamic Church and Community Relationship**

Our Savior Lutheran Church is a member congregation of the 2.3 million-member Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, a theologically conservative branch of Lutheranism with thirty-three partner churches worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Begun as a mission plant in 1984, the congregation immediately faced epic challenges. These challenges would eventually prepare God's people to lead the community through catastrophic need twenty-one years later as the 2011 flood ravished the people of Minot.

Beginning with the congregation's first pastor, Our Savior Lutheran Church leaders were quickly required to chart paths of adaptive change simply for survival. Called as the congregation's mission developer, Our Savior Lutheran Church's first pastor left after a mere six months, forcing leaders not only to take faith seriously but also to bear responsibility for ministry.<sup>2</sup> Without a pastor, the congregation began an early pattern of discovering and networking the giftedness of individual members in order to serve the church family. Not only would this shared responsibility carry the congregation through the immediate loss, but networking and serving would become patterns imbedded into the congregation's future DNA, a DNA of missional service that would also serve the community of Minot at the time of the 2011 flood.

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<sup>1</sup> The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, <https://www.lcms.org/aboutus> (accessed November 27, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Oral history of Our Savior Lutheran Church.

The congregation's second pastor arrived a year later and proved to be an innovative, creative pastor with authentic faith and an outward thrust into the community. These qualities also became imbedded into the congregation's psyche. Under his leadership a fledging Our Savior Lutheran Church prospered. Attendance grew. Relationships flourished. Partnership ministries were formed with local organizations, such as the Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch,<sup>3</sup> local food pantries, and other mercy-care agencies in the community.<sup>4</sup> As Harrison says, "Christ's example of love and care are our supreme example for life in this world. Lives that receive mercy and grace cannot but be lovingly merciful to others."<sup>5</sup> This was modeled by the congregation's pastor and embraced by its people. Yet as quickly as ministry flourished, a short three years later the pastor left to start another mission.<sup>6</sup> Once more, loss drove the congregation to its knees and ultimately to deeper ownership of Kingdom work. By assuming ownership, the qualities of innovative relational ministry modeled by the pastor became imbedded even more deeply into the fabric of the church family.

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<sup>3</sup> The Minot, ND based Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch is the largest Lutheran Social Service agency in North Dakota with a mission to help at-risk children and their families succeed in the name of Christ. <https://www.dakotaranch.org/about/agency-profile/>

<sup>4</sup> During this time support groups open to the community for grief, addiction, and other caring services were directed at Our Savior Lutheran Church by the church's pastor.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew C. Harrison, "Being Active in Mercy," in *Mercy in Action: Essays on Mercy, Human Care and Disaster Response*, ed. Ross Edward Johnson (St. Louis, MO: The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, 2015), 40.

<sup>6</sup> Oral history of Our Savior Lutheran Church.

Our Savior Lutheran Church's third pastor, though equally faithful, forced a crisis of identity for the congregation. Schooled to be a guardian of the past<sup>7</sup> his approach to ministry turned theological practice inward. Innovation, creative communication, people-centered application, and outward-focused ministry became buried in a direction that mimicked a Lutheran church of the past. His method of theology violated the soul of the congregation, which began to wither as people left en masse. The pastor left three years later. Serious consideration was given to closing the congregation's doors. Once again, loss drove the congregation and its leaders to their knees and to a deeper ownership of kingdom work.<sup>8</sup> Though it was painful, God was working the qualities of mercy, service, relational ministry, and outward focus ever more deeply into the congregation's core. Michael Frost describes the outwardly-focused church that God was forming when he writes, "These ancient [qualities of mercy and service] ... insist we live out our faith not in church worship services and Bible study groups alone, but in relationship with our neighbors, in compassionate, humble collaboration with others."<sup>9</sup> Over the next two-and-one-half years a commitment to these qualities was pressed ever deeper into the soul of the church family as eleven calls were issued for a new pastor and painfully, ten men turned the congregation down before a new pastor would be found.

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<sup>7</sup> The terms "Guardian" and "Missional" were terms that were coined in the mid-1990s to describe two theological poles within the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. As a common theme of the time pastors were either considered to be missional pastors or guardian pastors.

<sup>8</sup> Oral history of Our Savior Lutheran Church.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 173.

Today one of the greatest strengths Our Savior Lutheran Church has possessed is that of long-term leadership. As senior pastor, I had the privilege to lead the congregation for more than twenty years from the pain of a failing mission plant with fewer than forty-five members to today's 1,100-member church. In June of 2002, Our Savior Lutheran Church was recognized as one of the fastest-growing LCMS churches in a non-metropolitan setting by the president of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod because at the time, the congregation had achieved a yearly growth rate of 27 percent each year for five straight years.<sup>10</sup> Fueled by an emphasis upon genuine discipleship, relationships of care, the networking of leaders, innovation, and outward ministry to the community, Our Savior Lutheran Church has continued to grow numerically as well as influentially into the community. Members of Our Savior Lutheran Church have served on the city's planning council, in the mayor's office, in the city works department, influentially into the business sector, fire departments, schools, and law enforcement agencies of the city. Men and women of faith have been seeded through vocational ministry into the community with a mindset of service in the name of Christ.

These relationships became critical capital for flood recovery and the works of mercy that would come. "We are called by the Gospel to faith in Christ," writes J.A.O. Preus, "and through and from that Gospel we are called to a life of love and service."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> From the citation presented to Our Savior Lutheran Church on June 16, 2002 by Rev. Dr. Gerald Kieschnick, President of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod.

<sup>11</sup> Jacob A.O. Preus, "The Vocation of Every Christian: Life in Christ as a Holy Calling," in *Mercy in Action: Essays on Mercy, Human Care and Disaster Response*, ed. Ross Edward Johnson (St. Louis, MO: The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, 2015), 115.

With Gospel-motivated lives of love and service, God’s people were in key roles throughout the community as the impending flood tragedy approached. At key moments, these men and women became bridges of influence that allowed a remarkable ministry of healing to enter the community’s disaster-stricken hearts and homes. As Alan Halter says, “Influence doesn’t happen by extracting ourselves from the world for the sake of our values, but by bringing our values into the culture.”<sup>12</sup> Shaped by the congregation’s own history, these men and women of community standing and influence became bearers of hope, answers to prayer, and providentially had access to networks of people who together found solutions to some of the most heartbreaking facing the people of Minot. In the words of David Canther, these men and women of God “unlocked the power of the gospel in their lives by serving others with unconditional love. Every challenge they faced became an opportunity to glorify God through their service to God and those around them.”<sup>13</sup> The everyday relationships between Our Savior Lutheran Church’s pastoral staff, its congregation, community leaders, along with other Christian leaders across the city ultimately became critical links in forming life-changing partnerships that would heal Minot.

### **Embracing Opportunity for Incarnational, Transformational Ministry**

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<sup>12</sup> Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 31.

<sup>13</sup> David Mark Canther, *First Response: Change Your World Through Acts of Love* (Lake Mary, FL: Excel Books, 2011), xv.

A theology of mercy and the church's response to disaster was written in real-time through real events as the members and leaders of Our Savior Lutheran Church stepped to the forefront of the city's need. Though painful at the time, the following pages simply tell the story of mercy in action.

A few days before the flood, the Army Corps of Engineers announced that it could no longer maintain the integrity of the four upstream dams that were protecting the city of Minot. Television and web pages became alive with evacuation zones as an unbelievable amount of water was predicted to slam into the city within a mere three days. An immediate panic set in as 49,000 people braced for the worst. This same panic began to sweep through the church membership as well. Quickly it was determined that more than one hundred OSLC families were in the direct path of the raging waters and would have to be evacuated in less than forty-eight hours. The church was called to action.

While the church should have eyes on the community as a whole, its ministry of mercy during a time of disaster cannot start by looking beyond its doors. Rather, as St. Paul writes, mercy begins with the family of believers. "Therefore, as we have opportunity," writes St. Paul, "let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10). In a disaster setting, one might, as Harrison suggests, picture the response of the local congregation as a series of concentric circles, beginning with a small circle at the center and a series of ever-larger circles

working their way out.<sup>14</sup> The center circle represents a congregation's essential staff and leadership. The next circle represents members of the church family affected by the disaster, and the third circle represents the congregation's works of mercy and service to disaster-affected families beyond its doors.

### **Circle Number One: A Ministry of Mercy to Essential Leadership and Staff**

Even though the members of Our Savior Lutheran Church would become deeply involved in the community's recovery, embracing opportunities for incarnational, transformational ministry began with its family of believers. The first order of business was to start with the smallest circle at the center, the congregation's essential leadership and staff. Without the capabilities and specialties of the key leaders, the congregation's ministry of mercy would falter and thousands of people would fail to be helped. Three of OSLC's five full-time staff members and nine of its twelve part-time staff members were in the water's direct path. The first of the congregation's many ministry teams were sent to evacuate and support Our Savior Lutheran Church's staff and leaders.

At first glance, this action appears to be the exact opposite approach that one might take. Given the cultural context where there is disdain for the clergy as a privileged few, it seems that the first line of help should be members at large and not clergy and staff. While some might approve of this strategy, the truth is that without leadership secured, the mission of mercy will falter. City leaders determined that 12,000 people

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew C. Harrison, "Being Active in Mercy," 42.

would be impacted by the floodwaters, and, if Our Savior Lutheran Church was to play a role in the community's healing, the first circle would have to be secured.

Mercy care to the family of believers began as staff members and their families were moved to temporary housing. Remote offices and work teams were set in place. Due to an intense shortage of housing, one critical staff member had to be housed in another community nearly ninety miles away. This staff member was set up with remote access and continued to provide critical care for members of the church family and ministry into the community even from a distance. Among her tasks was the development of a Christ-centered crisis care line, where people from the entire flood affected region could telephone, night or day, simply to have a safe person to talk with about the hurts in their heart regarding the flood. Nine people from six different churches were trained to compassionately respond to these calls. These people received thirty to forty calls per week and provided Christ-centered care to many people in their darkest moments.

Another staff member, the director of Our Savior Lutheran Church's Child Development Center, had to be housed forty miles away. Her only car was lost in the floodwaters. With ninety-four childcare facilities closed by the flood, this staff member's essential task was to keep Our Savior's child care center open. The church family provided a car for her to drive so that her ministry area could remain intact. This staff member's contribution to the community included opening the doors of the Child Center in the evening with free child care for thirteen weeks so that parents in the community could clear the debris from their flood-damaged homes without having to worry about their children. Care for the staff and leadership was an essential strategy in the early phases of the flood response.



Each staff member continued their critical roles, and in this way, Our Savior Lutheran Church as a community of faith remained stable enough to provide much-needed ministry into the people of the city.

### **Circle Number Two: A Ministry of Mercy to The Family of Believers**

The second concentric circle, as described by Harrison, represents ministry to the members of the Our Savior Lutheran Church family who were affected by the floodwaters. Eighty-three Our Savior families lost their homes to the raging water, each one confronting needs beyond the ability to face alone. With intentional effort and compassion, Our Savior members who were spared the water's fury were quick to come to the aid of fellow church members. If a church family had the resources to assist, those resources were freely given.

In this regard, St. James's words speak strongly where he writes, "Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?" (James 2:15-16). Christian love and compassion calls for the body of believers to care for one another and to provide for one another's needs. Christopher Wright calls this a costly compassion that reflects the very character of God. He writes:

Part of the mission of God's redeemed people is to reflect the character of their redeemer in the way they behave to others. And that means especially the chief requirements of any *go'el* [the one who redeems another]; costly compassion, commitment to justice, caring generosity, redemptively effective action. Those are the things that are involved in redemptive living."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 106.

In the days immediately preceding the flood, the church family provided costly compassion to one another as they were organized and dispatched to evacuate member families from their homes. In three days, seventy-one of the eighty-three families received help moving from their homes. It could almost be said that every Our Savior Lutheran Church member's garage was filled with someone else's household belongings. Most members provided many months of housing for at least one, and in some cases two or more families.<sup>16</sup> Given that the flood hit in June and the last FEMA trailer was not placed until late December, this was no small act of compassionate service. For many Our Savior flood families, the process of returning to their homes would be a long and arduous task. Yet the tasks became easier as they were surrounded with the ongoing care and the compassion of their church family. Martin Luther's reference to Christ-centered mercy in a 1519 sermon summarizes the compassionate care given by Our Savior Lutheran Church members to one another. Luther writes: "When you come to the altar, you kneel and you lay your burdens upon Christ and the gathered community. When you leave the altar, you take up the burdens of the others at that same altar."<sup>17</sup> Lives that receive mercy and grace cannot but be lovingly merciful to others. In this way Christ is honored.

It is important to note that compassionate care demonstrated within the church family also serves a missional purpose, for in demonstrating genuine care for one

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<sup>16</sup> For six months following the 2011 flood, my house was the home to five additional families.

<sup>17</sup> As quoted in Matthew C. Harrison, "Being Active in Mercy," 39.

another, the community of faith gives witness to the transformational power of Gospel.

John Stott wrote: “The greatest hindrance to evangelism in the world today is the failure of the Church to supply evidence in her own life and work of the saving power of God.”<sup>18</sup>

A church family actively living out the compassion of Christ toward one another does not go unnoticed by the surrounding culture. Faith in action validates the claims of the gospel by showing life-transformation in action. Commenting on this, Christopher Wright says:

God longs to draw people to himself. God seeks the lost, invites the stranger to come on home. But a primary means that he does so is by living in the midst of his own people in such a way that they attract others . . . Part of the Mission of God’s people is to have God so much at the center of who they are and what they do that there is a centripetal force, God’s own gravitational pull, that draws people into the sphere of his blessing.<sup>19</sup>

Responding in merciful care to one another, the members of Our Savior Lutheran Church gave a vibrant testimony to believers and unbelievers alike by simply caring for one another’s needs in the name of Jesus. This compassionate action makes faith in Christ attractive and shows that the Gospel message has a genuine effect.

### **Circle Number Three: A Ministry of Mercy to the Disaster-Stricken Community**

The third concentric circle, Harrison describes, represents ministry to the community beyond the church family’s doors. By securing circles one and two, the congregation is prepared for this vital stage of ministry. Immediately following the flood, the city’s essential services all but collapsed. Grocery stores were destroyed. Drinking

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<sup>18</sup> John Stott, as quoted in Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, 129.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, 129.

water was contaminated and people were faced with limited options for food, shelter, and water. In acts of mercy, Our Savior Lutheran Church members worked together to meet some of these immediate needs. An emergency feeding station was set up at the city's emergency operation's center, where 3,000 meals were served weekly. Other members undertook the task of supplying drinking water to an isolated area of the city. This group of men and women drove sixty-two miles one way every other day to fill a water bladder with non-contaminated water for the general population to use. Supplies were gathered and distributed en mass ranging from diapers for newborn children and toiletries for men and women in the flood shelter to Gatorade for North Dakota National Guard members serving the Minot area.

What makes these activities unique is that Our Savior Lutheran Church leaders used their relational networks to connect with each flood response organization that rushed to help the city. Needs identified by FEMA, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the Army Corps of Engineers and the North Dakota National Guard, along with the city of Minot's government, were networked to multiple organizations in a large degree through the relational connections of Our Savior Lutheran Church members. These actions in the first critical days of the disaster mercifully served a great number of people and set the church family up for its most important work in Minot's flood recovery efforts, the work that would begin when the water subsided and the unfathomable damage would be revealed.

### **Working Together: The Local Church Networking Into The Community**

Just as Jesus becomes incarnate into the center of the human condition, a series of events took place to bring the ministry leaders of Our Savior Lutheran Church into the center of Minot's flood recovery leadership. These events filtered from the personal relationships that I, as Our Savior Lutheran Church's senior pastor, had built with city leaders over the previous twenty years, coupled with the highly visible ministry performed by Our Savior ministry teams. During this period, I became a confidant to the mayor, members of the city council and other city officials. This echoes Bill Robinson's thoughts on leadership when he writes, "The most powerful position of leadership is *beside* those God calls us to lead [italics mine]." <sup>20</sup> This was the role that I took, giving personal encouragement and support as the tragedy unfolded. The work of recovery began to move outwardly from the leadership center with Our Savior Lutheran Church playing a central role. A senior pastor at Our Savior, I was appointed to serve on the county's five-member Long Term Recovery Committee, which was charged with managing the five-year recovery process. The congregation's pre-disaster relationships and missional service set the stage for a transformational ministry that affected the entire flood-torn community and become a new model for disaster recovery that received national recognition, <sup>21</sup> but daunting challenges soon became leadership tests.

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<sup>20</sup> Bill Robinson, *Incarnate Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 36.

<sup>21</sup> A FEMA Region Eight "Best Practices Conference" was held to discuss "The Minot, ND Model" and the successful efforts of flood recovery through the work of Hope Village. In addition, Hope Village was one of the concept organizations nominated for Innovative Program of the Year, in the 2012 National VOAD Conference.

As if 12,000 people without a place to live and \$2.6 billion worth of damage were not enough, three months into the flood crisis it became apparent that yet another overwhelming challenge stood as an obstacle to Minot's recovery. Minot's housing shortage contributed to an uncharacteristically low number of volunteer teams from state, regional and national organizations that would have normally travelled to the community for disaster assistance. Just to picture this staggering void, the AmeriCorps Volunteer Center in Joplin, MO logged 75,786 volunteers in the first year following Joplin's devastating EF5 tornado.<sup>22</sup> The tornado struck exactly one month before Minot's flood tragedy, causing \$2.8 billion of damage, roughly the same as Minot's \$2.6 billion flood damage, yet Minot organizations logged fewer than 1,000 volunteers in the first year.<sup>23</sup> When potential volunteers expressed their reason for bypassing Minot, the most often cited reason was the lack of adequate accommodations for volunteer housing. So critical was the housing shortage that in the first six months following the flood, a typical volunteer would be housed in a church basement, without showers, thirty to forty-five miles away. These distances along with the accompanying obstacles were simply unacceptable to most volunteers. Hope was withering and Minot families with critical need were not being served. Mercy required action.

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<sup>22</sup> Samantha Jo Warfield, "Joplin by the Numbers," <http://www.serve.gov/?q=servegov-blog-article/joplin-numbers> (accessed November 16, 2015).

<sup>23</sup> This number roughly reflects the total number of volunteers that were actually logged in by flood recovery organizations serving Minot. Until the formation of Hope Village, Minot did not have a unified registration center for volunteers, which means the number of actual volunteers could be somewhat higher than listed.

Martin Luther wrote: “You must feel with sorrow... all the unjust suffering of the innocent, with which the world is everywhere filled to overflowing; you must fight, work, pray, and if you cannot do more, have heartfelt sympathy.”<sup>24</sup> There are no words more accurate in describing the local church’s role than “you must fight, work, and pray.” Something different had to happen to prevent the pall of hopelessness from becoming permanent. In order to increase the number of volunteers and to maximize the effectiveness of those volunteers, Our Savior Lutheran Church became the founding partner in a new model of disaster recover: a unified, one-stop volunteer service center that would mercifully change the trajectory of the city’s recovery efforts, a ministry organization called Hope Village.<sup>25</sup>

What made OSLC’s Hope Village organization remarkable was that not only did it provide housing for volunteers, but it also served the cause of mercy by remarkably combining the efforts of fifteen local, national, NGO<sup>26</sup> and national faith-based organizations into one focused point of service for the people of Minot.<sup>27</sup> In the structure,

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<sup>24</sup> Martin Luther as quoted in Matthew C. Harrison, “The Church is a Mercy Place,” in *Mercy in Action: Essays on Mercy, Human Care and Disaster Response*, ed. Ross Edward Johnson (St. Louis, MO: The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, 2015), 111.

<sup>25</sup> [www.hopevillageND.org](http://www.hopevillageND.org).

<sup>26</sup> NGO in the common acronym for Non-government Organizations.

<sup>27</sup> While some organizations are singled for recognition in this paper, many organizations contributed to maximize the recovery efforts given to the people of Minot. The following organizations worked together as partner organizations in Hope Village, listed here in no particular order: Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, Lutheran Social Services Disaster Response, LCMS World Relief and Human Care, UMCOR, Mennonite Disaster Services, Orphan Grain Train, Episcopal Disaster Relief, CRWRC, RSVP+, Souris Valley Unmet Needs Committee, Souris Valley Long Term Recovery Committee, Souris Valley

each organization kept its identity, leadership, and agency goals. However, as these organizations worked together toward the larger goal of returning families to their homes, the cause of mercy multiplied exponentially. The advantages to the people of Minot through this creative organizational approach were remarkable.

Since Minot's flood recovery was already imperiled by a lack of resources, Hope Village served to maximize limited resources by reducing the duplication of services among partner agencies. There was one case management system, one construction management team, one fundraising arm, one tool crib, one volunteer village, and one recruitment point that served the unified efforts of all fifteen organizations.<sup>28</sup> This unified concept had never been successfully implemented anywhere in the country, but in Minot not only would a unified approach be a necessity, but this remarkable organizational structure also became the critical factor in Minot's rapid recovery. Experts predicted that the volunteer recovery work would take up to seven years, yet through the Hope Village partnership the volunteer recovery work was accomplished in a little over three years.<sup>29</sup>

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United Way, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Faith United Methodist Church, First Presbyterian Church, Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, the Western North Dakota Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the North Dakota District of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.

<sup>28</sup> A lack of resources can also be attributed to the fact that Minot's disaster did not receive long-term national media attention, as did other disasters in 2011. For instance, in Joplin, MO, a 2011 disaster with national media extensively covering the daily need, emergency managers tell the story of the Dewalt Tool Company driving around unsolicited with a trailer filled with \$150,000 worth of tools to be given away for use by volunteer organizations active in the tornado recovery. These tools were finally distributed to the recovery center located at Immanuel Lutheran Church. In contrast, in Minot, nearly every tool had to be purchased.

<sup>29</sup> Joan Buchhop with Lutheran Disaster Response quoted these figures in an August 2013 meeting of the Souris Valley Long-Term Recovery Committee.



Commenting on the hope that volunteers were giving to flood-torn families, North Dakota Governor Jack Dalrymple said, “The story of Minot’s recovery will be written through the remarkable work of Hope Village.”<sup>30</sup> That story would be a story of Christ’s own mercy bringing healing and hope to Minot’s families in their darkest hour.

This unified concept allowed each partner organization to achieve greater results by working together than they could ever achieve working alone. In this way, the cause of mercy and the people of Minot were served with even greater effectiveness. By design, each partner organization contributed to the recovery according to their strengths while other organizational partners covered their weaknesses.

For example, UMCOR, the United Methodist Committee on Relief,<sup>31</sup> is recognized nationwide for expertise in case management. In the Hope Village organizational structure, the case management for all fifteen organizations was unified and managed by UMCOR’s local personnel. Each family had one contact person, their caseworker, who opened access to the resources of all fifteen organizations. Volunteer caseworkers were trained to walk families through the entire flood recovery process from beginning to end. This action in itself was an act of mercy as overwhelmed family members knew they were not alone in the recovery.

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted from the web page of United States Senator John Hoven, <http://www.hoven.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2012/5/hoven-hope-village-helping-rebuild-minot-area> (accessed April 13, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> UMCOR stands for the United Methodist Church Committee on Relief. For more information see: <http://www.umcor.org>.

Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) is nationally recognized as one of the very best organizations to handle volunteer construction management. The Disaster Response Database (DRD), a computer program developed by LDR and used in every disaster response since Katrina, was especially helpful. Every volunteer, every tool, every piece of material, every home under reconstruction was tracked on behalf of all fifteen Hope Village partners with the help of Lutheran Disaster Response's DRD. Countless hours of time and energy were saved as volunteer skills were matched with homeowner needs effectively and efficiently. In addition to database expertise, LDR's extensive understanding of the nuances required for rebuilding disaster ravished homes served all fifteen partners and ultimately the people of Minot. LDR of North Dakota was uniquely positioned to provide these vital services and each organization benefited from these strengths.

Since no facilities existed to house volunteers, the strengths of another organization were brought into the Hope Village partnership. Orphan Grain Train is an international mercy-care organization known for the ability to supply and ship large quantities of food and medical supplies all around the world.<sup>32</sup> What is little known about the organization is that it also has the capacity to house volunteer workers anywhere in the world. Standard intermodal shipping containers, capable of delivery by truck, rail, or ocean-going vessel, have been modified to serve as the infrastructure for volunteer

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<sup>32</sup> Orphan Grain Train is a Christian volunteer network that ships donated food, clothing, medical and other needed items to people in sixty-two different countries including the United States. More information can be found at, [www.ogt.org](http://www.ogt.org).

housing. Dormitories, showers, mobile feeding stations, storage units, and the equipment necessary to operate a mobile village were all made available to Our Savior Lutheran Church and Hope Village through a partnership with Orphan Grain Train. With equipment from Orphan Grain Train and other organizations, a complete mobile volunteer village was constructed on the campus of Our Savior Lutheran Church in less than twenty-one days. Breakfasts and evening meals were supplied to volunteers by a mobile kitchen capable of preparing three thousand meals per day. Storage units held tools and supplies. Twenty-eight hot showers housed in three mobile shower units greeted volunteers at the end of the day, along with restroom facilities that served the entire camp.

Our Savior Lutheran Church leaders worked in creative ways with city and state officials to meet occupancy requirements required by state codes and to gain the proper permits for cross-country transportation. Both proved critical to the long-term success of Hope Village. Without approval for occupancy by the county officials, no volunteers would have been able to stay at the village. Without the appropriate DOT certifications, no units would be able to have been transported to Minot and the people of the city would not have been served. Each posed a unique challenge that would not have been overcome without the pre-disaster relationships formed by Our Savior Lutheran Church leaders.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> The work of mercy in Minot, ND, is indebted to area farmer and Christian businessman, Ken Niewoehner. With an extreme shortage of both semi-tractors and CDL drivers available to transport housing and shower units to Minot, Ken was able to network with area farmers, DOT officials, over-the-road transportation companies, and licensing officials to find a creative way where area farmers who own their own semi-trailers could lease their trucks to a DOT certified transportation company, receive a one-time DOT certification and then drive their own trucks to transport units to Hope Village. Ken's work is but

The end result is that each of the fifteen Hope Village partners were able to use Orphan Grain Train units on the campus of Our Savior Lutheran Church to facilitate operations and house personnel. With Orphan Grain Train's partnership, Hope Village had the capacity to house, care for, and deploy 160 volunteers each day. Drawing from Orphan Grain Train's strength, each partner organization could maximize their efforts and volunteers would begin to supply critical rebuilding help to the people of Minot.

Providing food service for volunteers was the specialty of another Hope Village partner, Southern Baptist Disaster Relief (SBDR).<sup>34</sup> SBDR is known as a national faith-based organization that provides mass feeding to communities in need. In Minot's case, immediately following the flood, SBDR provided food for Minot's 12,000 evacuees. Meals were delivered to shelters and homes throughout the community. With expertise in emergency food service, Southern Baptist Disaster Response was the natural choice to provide food service to Hope Village volunteers. Everything necessary for the village's food service was provided under SBDR's leadership. SBDR also enlisted the services of other community groups and service clubs to take turns in serving evening meals to volunteers. By providing these valuable services, SBDR freed other partner organizations to focus on their strengths and more effectively serve the cause of mercy in the community of Minot.

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one example of creatively networking known relationships to solve problems and get the efforts of care flowing.

<sup>34</sup> Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, <http://www.baptistrelief.org> (accessed March 17, 2018).

If there was one item that could shut down Minot's recovery, it would have been rampant financial need. A village filled with volunteers could provide little help if homeowners could not afford to purchase materials necessary to rebuild their homes. Once again working together and maximizing relational networks, Hope Village partners discovered creative ways to help Minot families overcome some of the critical financial issues that stood in their way.

First, through the creation of the Recovery Warehouse,<sup>35</sup> local, state, and national business organizations could directly donate building supplies for the people of Minot. Paint, sheetrock, cabinets, bathroom fixtures, windows and other supplies were donated from all over the country and melded into the construction management process used by Hope Village. An average family could reduce its cash outlay for materials by several thousand dollars through warehouse donations and the warehouse's bulk purchasing power.

Hope Village partners also went to work in other ways to meet critical financial need. Given the magnitude of Minot's tragedy, state and local officials became concerned that families would simply walk away from Minot and leave their blighted properties for the city to clean up. Recognizing this fear, Hope Village partners began to pursue funding options that would address this concern. Working with members of Minot's Long-term Recovery Committee, I co-authored a \$3.5 million grant proposal to the State of North

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<sup>35</sup> Jill Schramm, "Recovery Warehouse," <http://www.minotdailynews.com/page/content.detail/id/564695/Recovery-Warehouse.html?nav=5010> (accessed November 20, 2015).

Dakota called the Retain and Rebuilt Grant.<sup>36</sup> Funded by the State of North Dakota in 2012 and managed by the Souris Valley United Way, the Retain and Rebuilt Grant provided the average homeowner with approximately \$4,000 that could be used toward rebuilding his or her home provided that the family remained in Minot for five years. This grant was among other significant forms of financial assistance provided to flood affected families through the work of the Hope Village Resource Team.

Additional funds were secured through private foundations, community grants, individual donors and community businesses. Of special note are two very generous Minot business organizations that provided help through creative solutions. First, Minot-area Taco John's fast-food restaurants made a notable donation as they set aside one entire business day where receipts from every sale at each of their three locations went to the work of Hope Village. The people of Minot responded enthusiastically with customer lines that stretched around blocks, setting the one-day gross sales record for any Taco John's store in the nation. This generous work provided more than \$29,000 to the people of Minot.<sup>37</sup> A second company, Minot development corporation Stonebridge Farms, made a notable donation towards flood recovery. Working with Hope Village's Resource Team, Stonebridge Farms donated an empty lot from one of its highly successful housing

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<sup>36</sup> North Dakota Retain and Rebuild Grant, <http://www.minotrecoveryinfo.com/progress/souris-valley-long-term-recovery/rebuild-and-retain-grant/> (accessed November 27, 2015).

<sup>37</sup> Jill Schramm, "Record Sales Help Hope Village," <http://www.minotdailynews.com/page/content.detail/id/574813/Record-sales-help--Hope-Village.html?nav=5010> (accessed November 29, 2015).

developments,<sup>38</sup> which was then sold to another developer. The proceeds of more than \$75,000 were used to assist the people of Minot through Hope Village.

With rampant financial need as an obstacle for families all through the community, the path of mercy called for action on behalf of the afflicted and Hope Village personnel stepped up to meet the challenge. When a family's financial resources were completely exhausted, yet another option remained for Hope Village families. Through the case management system, these families could access funds from the Unmet Needs committee. Managed by the Souris Valley United Way and drawing on donors from the four corners of the state, the Unmet Needs committee provided a safety net of more than \$1.25 million as yet another option to help a family get back into their home.<sup>39</sup> Over a three-year period, Hope Village partner organizations worked together and secured nearly \$9 million to assist the people of Minot.<sup>40</sup> The combined power of fundraising was yet another benefit as individual partner organizations combined their strengths through the work of Hope Village.

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<sup>38</sup> North Dakota Office of the Governor, <http://governor.nd.gov/media-center/news/dalrymple-celebrates-minot-housing-development-and-major-donation-area-flood-recov> (accessed November 29, 2015).

<sup>39</sup> A summary of the Long-Term Recovery Committee's Unmet Needs Committee as reported to the Dakota's Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, <http://www.dakotasumc.org/news/raft-serves-over-2400-in-minot-under-united-methodist-leadership/> (accessed November 27, 2015).

<sup>40</sup> \$9 million is the estimated total operating capital from all sources used to pay salaries, purchase materials, and support volunteers in Minot's flood recovery action through the ministry of Hope Village.

The successful day-to-day management of the Hope Village itself was done under the expertise of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA),<sup>41</sup> illustrating the use of another organizational member's strength. PDA has a nationwide reputation as one of the organizations best equipped to develop and run volunteer villages. Each facet of a volunteer's service managed by PDA in such a way as to give a volunteer the very best experience possible. In the case of Hope Village, PDA ran a national call center where individuals and teams could phone to register their time volunteering in Minot with the ease of registering for a vacation in Jamaica. Having this one-point registration system gave the village manager an opportunity to be in contact with team leaders several times prior to the team's arrival in order to ensure that all questions were answered and that the volunteers felt as confident as possible in their service to the people of Minot. Daily routines, camp life, volunteer debriefing, spiritual support, and daily evaluation were all carefully structured to support volunteers in their daily work of rebuilding people's homes and lives.

With PDA's direction, each Hope Village partner was able to blend its organizational strengths in such a way that not only were flood-affected families served, but volunteers who had traveled from all over the country were equally served. An UMCOR volunteer from Michigan wrote: "I've been on twelve disaster responses over the years, this is by far the best managed disaster response effort I've experienced." A volunteer from Florida, Episcopal by background, writes: "I've been on six different trips

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<sup>41</sup> Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, <https://pda.pcusa.org> (accessed March 17, 2018).



in four different camps. Hope Village sets the standard. You made the most of our time. Thank you!”<sup>42</sup> These positive responses speak of volunteer satisfaction and in great part are due both to the expertise of PDA in volunteer management and to the wisdom of each Hope Village partner as they worked together with PDA to place their own positive organizational strengths in service to the people of Minot.

### **Working Together: The Local Church and Emotional, Spiritual Care**

If Kingdom-living involves bringing restoration to all spheres of the sin-broken world, then the broken world of Minot, North Dakota, following the 2011 flood was impacted in positive Kingdom-ways through the work of Our Savior Lutheran Church and other Hope Village partners. Yet it remains to be said that in addition to organizational leadership, a local church has an even greater role in the disaster recovery effort, and that role is the emotional and spiritual care of the community. When homes are finished and the recovery work is completed organizations and agencies will leave. However, the local church remains. Its people are embedded in the community and its ministries take on new meaning. Homes may have been rebuilt, but for many families deep emotional and spiritual scars still remain and a mercy-centered church can become a critical bridge for ongoing healing. In this regard, a local church family can provide from the very beginning what no other organization or agency can offer: long-term care.

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<sup>42</sup> These two quotations are from volunteer evaluation forms mailed to each volunteer following their service to the people of Minot through Hope Village.

As a founding partner with Hope Village, Our Savior Lutheran Church was given direct access into the hearts and lives of more than 500 families as the rebuilding process was taking place. Early on it was recognized that these families carried stories filled deep wounds that sheetrock and new carpet alone would not heal. Their stories included deep brokenness, such as: “My house was flooded and my husband had a leg amputated last week.” Or, “My house was flooded and my spouse is going through chemotherapy.”<sup>43</sup>

With so much brokenness in the community, Our Savior Lutheran Church took a great financial risk and extended a call to a third staff pastor who would take on the duties as Hope Village’s director of emotional and spiritual care. In this role, the director of emotional and spiritual care worked with Hope Village volunteers, Minot area pastors, mental health providers, and other community organizations to address the emotional and spiritual care needs of Minot’s population. This pastor visited with each family served by Hope Village volunteers as their home was being rebuilt, listening to the family members’ stories, caring for their needs, praying with them when appropriate, and being ready to provide ongoing care as necessary.

Hope Village volunteer teams were coached and given permission to put their hammers down when appropriate in order to listen to a homeowner’s story and provide the healing power of a caring heart. These listening sessions often provided the first release for grieving families and served the cause of mercy well. Working side by side

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<sup>43</sup> These quotations are from a Hope Village promotional video featuring Pastor Andy Busch, Hope Village’s director of emotional and spiritual care. This promotional video can be found on YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8xM5m4u6nsQ> (accessed October 30, 2012).

with area pastors, the director of emotional and spiritual care became a resource for local pastors, coordinating spiritual care activities in the community and helping each minister more effectively to his or her own flood-torn families.

The same coordination took place with Minot's mental health professionals. With direct personal access to families in need, the emotional and spiritual care director was often on the frontline of family crisis and accordingly able to quickly work with families and provide referrals to healthcare professionals. Of special note to the community was the Hope Village-led training of more than 200 men and women with a practical suicide prevention program called QPR.<sup>44</sup> QPR-trained individuals were from all walks of life and were imbedded in the community through their everyday professions, capable and ready to assist when confronted with crisis. Surprisingly, given the depth of crisis following the flood and its subsequent recovery, suicide rates in the greater Minot area remained extremely low. The network of QPR-trained individuals embedded in the community is cited as one of the contributing factors to this positive statistic.<sup>45</sup>

The ministry of emotional and spiritual care provided by Hope Village reached deeply into the community and mercifully helped many families turn the corner in their fight to regain normalcy. This type of community care continued after the recovery was completed. For many people, the experience of mercy-care brought an even greater

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<sup>44</sup> QPR stands for Question, Persuade, Refer – three steps that anyone can learn to help save a life from suicide. Individuals of all walks of life in Minot were trained to recognize signs of crisis and the warning signs that someone may be contemplating suicide through QPR. More information may be found at <https://www.qprinstitute.com>

<sup>45</sup> Cited in a report from the Souris Valley Long-term Recovery Committee, March 14, 2013.

blessing as it opened their heart for a new hearing of the Gospel. In this regard the work of mercy served to bring healing to the deepest cry of the soul. Regarding Gospel consolation in time of need, Martin Luther writes, “In the Holy Spirit you have eternal consolation and comfort, you have a church as your community of mercy. The Bride of Christ – the Church – is your mother that conceives and bears every person through God’s Word.”<sup>46</sup> Or as Christopher Wright says,

The mission of God’s people flows from the uniqueness of the God of the Bible, supremely revealed to us in the uniqueness of Christ. That is both the *source* of our mission (for this is the one who sends us into the world in his name), and also the *content* of our mission (for all that we say and do is to bear witness to the truth that the Lord is God and there is no other, that Jesus has been given the Name that is above all names, and that there is “no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved”).<sup>47</sup>

The missional nature of the church calls for God’s people to respond as instruments of Christ’s redemptive power, which is available freely and abundantly to all. For the sake of the Gospel, the church is not to run away from disaster or even to remain neutral. Instead, like Christ himself, God’s missional people are to find their purpose at the very center of a disaster, stepping right into the middle of human suffering and infecting its darkness with rays of physical, emotional, and spiritual hope. On behalf of those who are in need, the church must be willing to become inconvenienced, to sacrifice, and if necessary, even to suffer so that restoration and wholeness might return. This is the

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<sup>46</sup> Harrison, *Christ Have Mercy: How to Put Your Faith in Action*, 46.

<sup>47</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, 32.

way of Christ, who willingly bore sorrow and suffering, and the way of the cross where sacrifice and suffering are the vehicles through which redemption and restoration flow. Armed with the redemptive purposes of Christ in one hand and hammers, nails, saws, and sheetrock knives in the other hand, God's people are able to alleviate physical need and inject hope into broken people's lives. Empowered with the empathy of the Holy Spirit and compassion for the hurting, God's people are able to sooth many an emotional storm through caring hearts and listening ears. Each missional response is able to create a bridge that allows Gospel proclamation to be heard and saving faith in Christ to be embraced as never before.

When during times of disaster, the church is willing to step into the very heart of human suffering and work from the center out, even bearing its own cross in the process, God is able to bring about the greatest restoration of hearts and the greatest healing of a disaster stricken community, both in time and for eternity.<sup>48</sup> This is the legacy of a local church, reflecting the mercy and compassion of Christ in tangible ways that touch the soul of a community and open hearts to perhaps embrace the greatest hope possible, the eternal hope that only the Gospel can bring.

### **Working Together: Delivering Priceless Hope**

In Minot's flood tragedy, it was discovered that God works incarnationally at the center of human need through his church. "Missional has an inseparable twin. It's called

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<sup>48</sup> Adapted from: Paul A. Krueger, "From the Center Out: The Theology of the Cross and the Church's Response to Disaster," (theological reflection paper, Fuller Seminary, 2012), 9.

‘incarnational.’” says Hugh Halter.<sup>49</sup> As the church reflects the missional nature of Christ Jesus, it cannot help but to step into the center of action and respond to human suffering with the compassion of Christ. Men and women of faith who display confidence and skill begin to inspire others and together a community becomes more than they thought they could ever be and accomplishes more than they ever thought they could accomplish. In a short twenty-month period, Our Savior Lutheran Church and fellow Hope Village partners changed the trajectory of the entire city through incarnational service that reflected the tangible compassion of Christ. Thanks to the generosity of many, 494 teams representing 5,812 volunteers from forty-two states and three Canadian provinces came to the city of Minot and served through Hope Village. Together these men and women of faith gave more than 185,000 hours of volunteer service to flood-broken families, restoring homes and rebuilding lives with the compassionate care that reflected the mercy of Jesus Christ himself. A total of 1,108 families were served and 549 homes were rebuilt and restored to safe, secure, essential living space standards. The end result was an astonishing \$3.6 million worth of volunteer labor given freely to the people of Minot at their time of greatest need.<sup>50</sup> Working with Our Savior Lutheran Church and other Hope Village partners, volunteers from across the country stepped into the center of tragic human need with the tangible mercy of Christ transforming the trajectory of an entire city by giving a simple, heaven-sent, heartfelt commodity: hope.

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<sup>49</sup> Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom*, 38.

<sup>50</sup> The value of volunteer hours can be calculated state by state by accessing [http://www.independentsector.org/volunteer\\_time](http://www.independentsector.org/volunteer_time).

Perhaps the best illustration of the transformational power of mercy comes from a real-life account that touched each Hope Village partner profoundly. On a late summer morning in 2013, a team of volunteers knocked on a homeowner's door. The father was a young man in his late 20s with an equally young wife and a little child. According to usual Hope Village protocol, the family had been contacted and the team's arrival was known in advance. When the door opened, the father openly gasped, immediately broke into tears and began to sob uncontrollably. The volunteer team stood bewilderingly in the doorway as he choked out, "I can't believe you're here! I just can't believe you're here! I've been alone. I've done this all by myself. I'm trying to keep my job; keep my family and I've got nothing left. People would be scheduled to give me an estimate and no one would show up. You're the first people who said you would come, and you did!"<sup>51</sup> And his tears fell freely once more. Very little work was accomplished on the house that morning as each team member took turns consoling the family members, but a tremendous amount of work was accomplished for the Kingdom as Christ himself was present through the hands and hearts of Hope Village volunteers. In the consecutive weeks, three more teams worked on the family's home, with the tearful parents finally able to return to their home one month later. At the end of the summer, Hope Village leaders received a thank you beyond words that reflects the entire reason for a local church to step into action during a time of natural disaster: "Our daughter, Sheridan Hope

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<sup>51</sup> As reported to Hope Village's coordinator, July 17, 2013.

Hostetler, was born on September 10<sup>th</sup>. Her middle name is inspired by the hope your volunteers gave us in rebuilding our home. Thank you for all that you do.”<sup>52</sup>

Human suffering was transformed with the tangible compassion of Christ. Echoing this mercy-centered transformation, J.A.O. Preus speaks for the mission of the local church as an instrument of God’s incarnational mercy in a time of disaster: “Those whom [God] calls, He sends. He sends them into all the world with the words of His love on their lips and His works on their hands so that, as they have been transformed by the power of God’s Word, they may likewise transform their realities through word and deed.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> From a thank-you note received by Hope Village from the Hostetler family dated September, 2013.

<sup>53</sup> Jacob A.O. Preus, “The Vocation of Every Christian: Life in Christ as a Holy Calling,” 117.



PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 3  
RELEVANT LITERATURE FOR ENGAGING IN A MINISTRY OF MERCY IN  
MINOT, NORTH DAKOTA

Chapter 3's literature review is intended to explore the roots of mercy care in the Christian church, demonstrating that from the very beginning of the movement mercy propelled Christian believers to engage with the broken, hurting and sorrowful, seeking to walk alongside suffering people with the compassion of Christ. This chapter will also explore the unique contributions of Lutheran theology, both historic and contemporary as it magnifies the role of the church in works of service and love to one's neighbor. Following a review of non-Lutheran contemporary sources and thought, this chapter will demonstrate that even today churches like Our Savior Lutheran Church continue to seed and embed the gospel into different cultures and people groups through ministries of mercy, including mercy care in times of disaster.

***The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission***

**by Christopher J. H. Wright**

Christopher Wright unfolds a comprehensive biblical theology that vividly describes the role of the Church in God's redemptive purposes in this world. Redeemed

by sacrificial life and death of Jesus Christ and brought into a new relationship with God by the supernatural working of the Spirit, God's people have a special role in the ongoing redemption of the world. From the Bible's first page to the Bible's last page, as Wright says, "it is the story of how God in his sovereign love has purposed to bring the sinful world of his fallen creation to the redeemed world of his new creation."<sup>1</sup> As men and women who are redeemed, restored and forgiven, God's people understand that their lives are now part of God's redemptive story in whatever place or set of events that a sin-broken creation manifests itself. Wright says: "God chose not to abandon or destroy his creation, but to redeem it. And he chose to do so within history through persons and events that run from the call of Abraham to the return of Christ."<sup>2</sup> The fury of a fallen creation hit with full force as floodwaters raged through the city of Minot and Wright helps us understand that God's desire is not to abandon suffering and broken people devastated by disaster, but rather his desire is to bring redemption into the midst of horrific brokenness through his people, the church. "We are called to *constructive engagement* in the world – because it is God's world, created, loved, valued and redeemed by him," [emphasis in original] Wright says.<sup>3</sup>

Wright's ecclesiology challenges the voices of Lutheranism from a bygone era with a call to engagement. Wright asks: "Is the church's mission *primarily* the delivery of the message of the gospel – in which case the verbal element is all that really matters? Or

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 46.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 229.

does the church's mission include the embodiment of the message in life and action?"

[emphasis in original]<sup>4</sup> Wright answers with an astounding yes to both. Both proclamation and presence, that is works of mercy, are included in the mission of God's people. A retired Lutheran pastor and former missionary to the Philippines remembers the ecclesial struggle between a mission of proclamation and a mission of presence from his time in the Philippines:

The need for "Christ-styled mercy" was to be found in the furrowed brow of the typhoon-blown mother sitting amid the rubble of her nipa hut. The need for "Christ-styled mercy" was to be heard from the lips of fathers walking in waist-deep water with a child on each shoulder, chanting his own version of the Kyrie as he pleaded for the thirty-one consecutive days of rain to stop. But we were evangelistic missionaries; our assigned task was to preach and teach the Gospel. It was not to become involved in social gospel.<sup>5</sup>

Wright helps the Church understand that the proclamation of the Gospel and works of mercy are not mutually exclusive, rather they both have a vital role in redeeming the whole of a sin-broken world. Physical loss and hopelessness, such as experienced by victims of a natural disaster, are redeemed in the same way that spiritual loss and hopelessness are redeemed, namely through the mercy of Jesus Christ. In the way that Jesus himself walked toward human need, whether spiritual or physical, so also the people of God are sent with redeeming power to walk toward and engage human need today.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>5</sup> Harrison, *Christ Have Mercy: How to Put Your Faith in Action*, 7.

When the local church sees human need, such as the devastating need surrounding a natural disaster, and recognizes that God has provided both resources and opportunities to alleviate human suffering, then the local church must step into action. This was the case for Our Savior Lutheran Church as the waters receded and 4,180 families came to terms with their brokenness. God’s answer to brokenness is to take action. In Jesus Christ, God incarnates himself right into the very center of the brokenness and infects its darkness with rays of hope. Likewise, the missional nature of the local church recognizes that by its very nature the church must to do the same. “The mission of God’s people in the Bible,” says Christopher Wright, “is to *be* the people whom God created us to be and to *do* the things that God calls us to do.”[emphasis in original]<sup>6</sup> As a local church steps into action on behalf of a disaster-torn community, the church has the opportunity to be the very people that God has called them to be, and pain and suffering have the opportunity to become transformed with the mercy of Christ.

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<sup>6</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, 149.

*The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the  
Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*

**by Rodney Stark**

In *The Rise of Christianity*, Rodney Stark provides a detailed analysis of the factors that caused the early church to grow at such an explosive rate that it would become the western world's most dominant force in less than 300 years. Stark's analysis details factors such as the role of women in Roman society, the chaos and crisis of urban life, martyrdom and sacrifice, virtue, the improbable conversion of Jews, and the reality of disease and epidemic in the first century. A touch-point that undergirds the whole of the work is the role of compassion or mercy, a foreign concept to the day's prevailing pagan world-view.

Stark details how acts of sacrificial mercy and compassion were characteristic behaviors of the early church as he examines the writings of the church fathers, Cyprian, Dionysius and others. Stark quotes Dionysius, who at the height of a great epidemic around 260 A.D., wrote a lengthy tribute to the heroic efforts of local Christians, many of whom lost their lives while caring for others:

Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement*

At the same time, this type of compassion was far removed from the pagan culture. “The emperor Julian launched a campaign to institute pagan charities in an effort to match the Christians,” writes Stark. “Julian complained in a letter to the high priest of Galatia in 362 that the pagans needed to equal the virtues of the Christians, for recent Christian growth was caused by their moral character, even if pretended.”<sup>8</sup> In a culture that practiced unrestricted abortion, abandoned its elderly, and left newborns to die on the street, the concept of compassionate care for the broken, hurting and sorrowful, was a foreign concept. As Stark writes:

Equally alien to paganism was the notion that because God loves humanity, Christians cannot please God unless they *love one another*. Indeed, as God demonstrates his love through sacrifice, humans must demonstrate their love through sacrifice on behalf of *one another*. Moreover, such responsibilities were to be extended beyond the bonds of family and tribe, indeed to “all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor.1:2). These were revolutionary ideas.<sup>9</sup>

Stark’s account of the early church and its unrelenting acts of sacrificial mercy and compassion helps today’s church understand the vital importance of being involved in the lives of hurting people. This type of sacrificial mercy and compassion is especially needed for those who have experienced tragedy and loss through natural disaster. The local church plays a pivotal role for this type of healing when followers of Christ

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*Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 82.

<sup>8</sup> Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 83.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

willingly lay down their lives to pick up the broken and wounded who are experiencing catastrophic loss. In this way the local church not only follows in the merciful footsteps of the early believers, but it also follows in the footsteps of Jesus himself.

## **How Christianity Changed the World**

**by Alvin J. Schmidt**

Alvin Schmidt's detailed work, *How Christianity Changed the World*, reveals the full, radical nature of the Christian faith as a shaping force in western culture. Countering the depravity of infanticide, abortion, the abandonment of infants and the elderly, human sacrifices, gladiatorial games, and other forms of senseless violence that devalued human life, the Christian faith gave birth to new societal patterns that reoriented the entire Roman Empire and finally the western world. Schmidt's well-researched book opens the reader's eyes to Christianity's far-reaching impact on everything from health care to higher education to human rights to the arts and humanities, and more.

No impact would be greater than Christianity's role in transforming society's view of the value of human life. "The low value of human life among the Romans," writes Schmidt, "was a shocking affront to the early Christians, who came to Rome with a high view of human life. Like their Jewish ancestors, they saw human beings as the crown of God's creation; they believed that man was made in the image of God."<sup>10</sup> Such a view of humanity moved Christian men and women to step toward the helpless, broken,

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<sup>10</sup> Alvin J. Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 48.



and hopeless in society while their Roman counterparts chose to look the other way. “Greco-Roman culture did not see the hungry, sick, and the dying as worthy of humane assistance. The worth of a human being was determined by external and accidental circumstances in proportion to the position he held in the community or state.”<sup>11</sup> Before the birth of Christ, radical assistance to those who would suffer from any calamity, including natural disaster, would be met with inaction because life itself had little value or intrinsic meaning. Schmidt writes:

When modern secularists show compassion today upon seeing or hearing of some human tragedy – for example, massive starvation, earthquake disasters, mass murders – they show that they have unknowingly internalized Christianity’s concept of compassion. Even so-called objective news reporters often find it difficult to hide their emotions when they report major calamities on radio or television. But had these reporters not grown up under the two thousand-year-old umbrella of Christianity’s compassionate influence, they would probably be without much compassion, similar to the ancient Greeks, Romans, and others.<sup>12</sup>

Christianity’s influence birthed a new understanding of the value of human life along with a formerly unknown urgency to move with compassion toward suffering people to provide help and hope.

When a local church, finds itself in the midst of a community ravished by natural disaster such as happened to Our Savior Lutheran Church, the intrinsic value of each human life lays heavy and draws the soul of each believer to step forward with action. This is the way of the early believers who chose to embrace the God-given value of each

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<sup>11</sup> Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World*, 130.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

person caught in the throws of suffering. Compassion moved the early believers to action and their action changed an entire culture. Likewise in time of disaster compassion moves the local church to action with the promise that God can use their action to create change.

*Christ Have Mercy: How to Put Your Faith in Action*

by **Matthew C. Harrison**

Matthew Harrison makes a compelling case that meeting human need with the compassion of Christ is not a secondary function of the Church but in fact is one of the Church's primary purposes. When faced with human need God's people are compelled by the mercy of Christ to step forward and take action. "In Christ," Harrison writes, "compassion means action because of who He is. In Christ, God acted and acts for the temporal and eternal blessings of the world. When we are in Christ, we can do nothing other than act for the well-being of others."<sup>13</sup> Harrison's words admonish the Church to look beyond its earthly organization and see a dynamic relationship where a merciful God is reflected through the lives of merciful people. "Because Christ is who He is (Mercy Incarnate), He does what He does (mercifully saves) and He makes us after His own image (merciful people)! When a person or a congregation rejects mercy, the individual or congregation is rejecting Christ. It is that simple. It is that radical!"<sup>14</sup> Jesus tells us, "As you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me" (Matthew 25:45). As Martin Luther writes: "No one may forsake his neighbor when he is

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<sup>13</sup> Harrison, *Christ Have Mercy*, 39.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

in trouble.”<sup>15</sup> When there is need in the world, God himself steps in and brings merciful action and the way he does it is through the compassionate actions of Christian men and women who refuse to forsake their neighbor in time of need. “God works through each [and every believer] to merciful serve His people to see that they are cared for in both spiritual and physical needs.”<sup>16</sup>

In the face of suffering and loss following a natural disaster, Harrison directs the Church to recognize its own merciful nature, even as it reflects the merciful nature of Christ Jesus himself. God’s merciful answer to the suffering and loss of a sin-broken world is to incarnate himself right into the very center. Likewise, the merciful nature of the Church calls for God’s people to act in the same incarnational way. When a believer uses his or her hands to clear debris from a disaster-ridden home, those hands are the very hands of Christ. When a believer uses his or her hands to push a broom, swing a hammer, hang a piece of sheet rock, or perform any other type of work that alleviates the suffering of a natural disaster, those too are the hands of Christ. “The incarnation, servanthood, self-humbling obedience, and finally death on a cross on our behalf – the Gospel – creates Christ’s attitude in us. We are baptized by Christ into merciful compassion for those in need around us. In this way we indeed become “incarnate” to our neighbor.”<sup>17</sup> In

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<sup>15</sup> Theodore G. Tappert, ed. and trans., *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, Library of Christian Classics 18 (Philadelphia and London: Westminster Press and SCM, 1955), 233.

<sup>16</sup> Harrison, *Christ Have Mercy*, 234.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

this regard God answers the prayers of the broken and needy with the merciful actions of his own people, the Church.

When, following a natural disaster, the gifts and resources to make a significant difference in the lives of a community are at the disposal of a local congregation, then Christ himself asks the local church to offer itself in service to the community. This understanding of the church compels congregations such as Our Savior Lutheran Church and others to willingly step forward and take on leadership roles in the community. Commenting on this, Harrison writes: “The Lord’s mercy received is mercy lived. The believer lives a merciful life toward others in the home, workplace, congregation and community.”<sup>18</sup> Answering the call to merciful service may be the very thing for which God has prepared a local church. Compelled by mercy, God’s people step forth in action.

***God’s Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church***

**by Charles Van Engen**

Charles Van Engen challenges a local congregation to be more than a defensive fortress for believers as they live in a changing world. Van Engen’s words invite members to engage and influence their communities in godly ways. “On Sunday,” writes Van Engen, “the people of God gather for worship and all the various internal systems operate at a maximum ... but where is the congregation on Monday morning? It has now been scattered. ... There it is involved in mission – sent to influence its environment.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Harrison, *Christ Have Mercy*, 79.

<sup>19</sup> Charles Van Engen, *God’s Missionary People* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991), 141.

Writing from the perspective of a former missionary, Van Engen invites the church to dynamically understand that its mission is more than caring for those within its walls. Van Engen advocates for a strong missional engagement with the culture in whatever location the local church may be found. “The people of God,” writes Van Engen, “focus their attention in mission by interacting with their environment in the world.”<sup>20</sup>

Missional engagement with the world also includes interacting in the lives of the hurting and needy in times of natural disaster. Van Engen writes: “The church exists for humanity in that it is the spiritual body of Christ, and – like Jesus – it is sent to be a servant. As the Father sent Jesus, so Jesus sends his disciples into the world for the sake of the world.”<sup>21</sup> Because the local church is a servant of Jesus in this world, it is appropriate for the congregation to take on roles of compassion that serve people in distress, roles of sacrifice that help victims who cannot help themselves, roles of cooperation with other agencies that maximize a family’s recovery, and even roles of leadership that help direct the community’s post-disaster healing processes. Again sensing the compelling importance of missional engagement and service in the community, Van Engen writes:

As we build missionary congregations, then, it is extremely important to understand what is involved in leading them. At every level of congregational life missionary churches require dynamic, forceful, optimistic, and organized leaders who can direct the potential abilities and resources of the embers as they emerge in ministry in the world.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>21</sup> Van Engen, *God’s Missionary People*, 74.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 164.

In this regard Van Engen reflects the thinking of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who writes: “The Church is the Church only when it exists for others.”<sup>23</sup> Becoming a servant to others in times of loss following a natural disaster means to put Van Engen’s ecclesiology into practice and engaging the world as a servant of Christ. Engagement in the midst of community need is an appropriate response for a local church such as Our Savior Lutheran Church and other congregations who might someday find themselves in a similar post-disaster situation.

***Friendship at the Margins: Discovering Mutuality in Service and Mission***

**by Christopher L. Heuertz and Christine D. Pohl**

*Friendship at the Margins* presents a highly relational model of Christian mission that follows closely in the footsteps of Jesus. Jesus chose to befriend people who were at the margins of respectable society rather than objectify them for the sake of mission. (John 8:1-11, Luke 15:2). Heuertz and Pohl invite the Church to see today’s mission work in the same way. Impacting lives with the person of Jesus Christ is more than speaking words. Mission work must also be deeply relational. “It’s not that words are insignificant or unnecessary, but when detached from relationship, they can be quite difficult to hear and comprehend. In situations where persons have been brutalized or have suffered at the hands of others, words of comfort, hope and promise –

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<sup>23</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 203.

unaccompanied by presence and action – are small comfort indeed.”<sup>24</sup> When people have been devastated by natural disaster, Heuertz and Pohl help a local church understand how simple acts of friendship, such as helping a stricken family in the muck and grime of a disaster-damaged home, may be one of the most powerful ways to communicate the reality of a the Gospel message. “[People] have heard lots about Jesus, but they haven’t seen him ... [because] the good news has not been embodied in a consistent presence of love and concern.”<sup>25</sup> Genuine care and friendship are transformational commodities. They cost the local church very little to give to their community, yet pay big dividends in the lives of hurting individuals. “People are transformed,” Heuertz and Pohl write, “when someone is willing to listen to their stories, to share a meal with them, to find their insights and concerns important or interesting. They are able to recover a measure of self-respect and a fuller sense of identity.”<sup>26</sup> This is what Jesus did. Addressing a group of rag tag fishermen and tax collectors who were marginalized and shunned by the world, Jesus spoke transformational words, saying: “I call you friends” (John 15:15). In using the word friend, value and worth were bestowed upon these twelve men. As a result twelve marginalized men changed the course of human history. As the local church befriends and then provides heartfelt assistance to those violated by a disaster’s fury, God himself

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<sup>24</sup> Christopher L. Heuertz and Christine D. Pohl, *Friendship at the Margins: Discovering Mutuality in Service and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 74.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

restores value and worth to the broken, hurting and hopeless. The same transformational hope given by Jesus long ago is given to a disaster survivor today.

When one understands the power of friendships in time of need, taking a role in a community's recovery following a natural disaster is nothing less than a matter of the heart for a local church. Love for God and love for others, regardless of another person's life-situation, is what calls the local church to step forth in action. As Heuertz and Pohl say: "Friendships that open into reconciliation validate the message of the good news. Our practice becomes inseparable from our message, and affirming the divine imprint of God in each human being compels us to love [others] as an extension of God's love at work in us."<sup>27</sup> These words paint a compelling picture that draws a local church leader to become involved deeply in the life of the community, especially in times of hardship and disaster. Disaster response is none other than matching words with deeds to show the very love of God to those who believe that they have somehow become unworthy of God's care. Heuertz and Pohl use this picture from which to view all mission work:

Mission in our neighborhoods or social ministry across town can be reframed when we recognize that friendship and love belong at the heart of every Christian ministry and act of reconciliation. Reconciliation requires friendship wherever we find ourselves. Friendships that cross the divisions of class, education, race, gender, ethnicity, age and ability are crucial for reconciliation and for the life of the church.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Christopher L. Heuertz and Christine D. Pohl, *Friendship at the Margins*, 32.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.



Compassion and mercy are at the core of what it means to be a friend. “The needs of our friends become an invitation to practice generosity.”<sup>29</sup>

***First Response: Change Your World Through Acts of Love***

**by David Canther**

In the book *First Response: Change Your World Through Acts of Love*, David Canther makes a direct connection between the Church’s work of mercy and disaster response. As the founder of ACTS World Relief, a faith-based international disaster response organization, Canther helps readers understand how combining faith with compassionate action in times of need can become a powerful force for hope. Each account in Canther’s book tells a story of devastating loss followed by compassionate responses that help to create new futures. Canther’s stories are compelling accounts of courage and faithfulness that help local church leaders understand that they too can become a powerful force for hope in their own community following a natural disaster.

There are several themes that undergird Canther’s work, which can give guidance to a local church’s efforts. First, Canther helps readers understand that serving those in need is done unconditionally. Disaster response is an expression of unconditional Christ-like love. “Mercy,” writes Canther, “comes with no strings attached; it is given freely and without a required response from the recipient.”<sup>30</sup> Canther’s words reinforce the understanding that service to a hurting community means that there are no expectations

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>30</sup> Canther, *First Response*, 221.

of reciprocity. To receive help a person does not need to attend services, join the church, or feel indebted to the congregation in any way. Mercy, as Jesus modeled it, comes with no strings attached (Mark 1:29, Mark 2:1-11, Mark 5, Luke 7:11-17, Luke 15:11-32). Canther helps leaders understand that lending a helping hand in a time of need is a pure gift of love, one that reflects the very care that Jesus showed to people in need when he walked on this earth.

In addition, serving others with unconditional love rules out judgmental attitudes. This is a second point that undergirds Canther's work. Those who chose to step into the chaos of a natural disaster will encounter people with different tastes, different values, and different cultural distinctions, as well as people who have different opinions on what is morally right and what is morally wrong. Yet Canther helps the reader understand that differences do not negate mercy. He writes: "God does not need you to condemn hearts. God needs you as His hands and feet, dispensing mercy with love, compassion and forgiveness. Mercy is the opposite of our natural human tendency. Mercy treats another as if they never did wrong."<sup>31</sup> Removing judgment in order to serve is how God chose to deal with humankind. On account of Jesus Christ, God chose to put mercy first by serving humanity with compassionate care (Matthew 20:28). Canther therefore asks, "Are we willing to allow God to change our hearts [so that] we put mercy first? [If so] God is able to shine His light through us more brightly. Only God knows the number of lives

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<sup>31</sup> Canther, *First Response*, 221.

that [He will touch] and the amount of eternal good He will achieve through our experience.”<sup>32</sup>

In order to reflect the compassion of Christ, Cather admonishes God’s people to place judgment aside and put mercy first, allowing God himself to work in the hearts and lives of others through the compassionate care that is offered. “The approach of Jesus was always the same: His first response was to meet the needs of people, build relationships, accept them for who they were, and then provide hope for who they could become.”<sup>33</sup> When this happens, God’s people become channels of divine blessing to people in need, meeting not only their physical needs but also their spiritual need for Christ-like love and compassion. This same spirit infected the people of the New Testament era, “Christianity,” Canther writes, “spread like wildfire through the implementation of a fresh, unseen kind of unselfish love.”<sup>34</sup> It is this same unselfish love that motivates hearts today, meets human need, and plants seeds for faith that ultimately may prove to answer a disaster survivor’s deepest spiritual longing. Serving people without judgment is fundamental to Canther’s understanding of Christian mercy, which means that serving people without judgment is a fundamental principle in Christian disaster response.

A third understanding in Canther’s work is that effective disaster response happens when Christian organizations, whether a local congregation or a national church

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>33</sup> Canther, *First Response*, xv.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

body, make an intentional effort to work in cooperation with other community organizations. Fundamentally speaking, when teams or organizations unite in vision, life-threatening situations that would otherwise prove to be undefeatable are overcome. If God is the Lord over all things, then all things, including civil governments and secular agencies can be shaped and enlisted in accomplishing God's merciful actions of help and healing.

Canther champions a unified concept when it comes to responding to a community's disaster. Yet local congregations it often seems are most comfortable when they work alone as independent, autonomous organizations. Canther encourages congregations to think in a different way when responding to disasters in their own communities. Each of Canther's examples illustrate how the work of mercy is often most effective when organizations work together. By working together organizations maximize resources, compliment one another's organizational strengths, and mitigate one another's organizational weaknesses. "ACTS World Relief," says Canther, "is built on the premise that the only way to be effective is to work together as a team, both internally, and within the community."<sup>35</sup>

Whether speaking financially, organizationally, or simply in the supply of sheer manpower, a unified team-centered approach means that more resources become available to help families in need. As Canther says, "ACTS World Relief can repeatedly take a donation of one hundred thousand dollars and multiply it into ten million dollars in

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<sup>35</sup> Canther, *First Response*, 147.

value.”<sup>36</sup> This happens because redundancies, duplication of services, and competition for limited resources are removed when organizations work together toward a common goal of recovery. Working together serves the cause of divine mercy by providing effective, streamlined channels of care. Canther adds: “When professional emergency leaders of devastated communities know that you have been trained to work together with them, speak the same lingo, and respect what they do, the power of unity is quickly realized.”<sup>37</sup> The result is that disaster ravished families get back on their feet in the soonest possible way.

In the case of the 2011 Minot, North Dakota flood, Our Savior Lutheran Church leaders chose Canther’s principle of unity to maximize the community’s flood recovery efforts. Guided by this principle, a single case management system was implemented in order to serve all the flood recovery agencies, whether they were secular, governmental, or faith-based organizations. A unified construction management program was implemented, incorporating the best of each recovery organization while providing a laser-like focus on each family’s home. A unified volunteer management system was put into place to maximize the labor of willing volunteers who came from all corners of the nation. The result was an astonishing 186,000 volunteer hours, from 5,812 volunteers, who completed the rebuilding of 549 flood-ravished homes in a short three-year period. Reflecting Canther’s principle of working together as a team, this unified approach

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

injected \$3.6 million worth of volunteer labor into the community of Minot, North Dakota, infusing the community with the single most important commodity that a disaster torn community could ever receive – hope. Canther pointed out that the federal disaster relief agency FEMA recognized the value of the efficiency, teamwork, and contributions of faith-based organizations following the response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005.<sup>38</sup> The principle of a unified response proved to be true in the again disaster of 2011 as it brought healing to a flood-ravished Minot, North Dakota.

Canther challenges local congregations to see themselves as team players in the work of disaster recovery, rather than individual actors. His writing illustrates that the work of mercy is most effective when organizations work together to maximize resources, compliment one another’s organizational strengths, and mitigate one another’s organizational weaknesses. Time and time again, history shows that when Christian disaster response organizations make an intentional effort to work in cooperation with other community organizations, life-threatening situations that would otherwise prove to be undefeatable are overcome in remarkable ways.

By choosing a path of intentional involvement, forsaking judgmental attitudes, serving with unconditional love, and championing a unified team-like approach to disaster response, a local congregations can become a part of a community’s healing transformation. Serving with acts of love, as Canther uses to describe disaster response, means that God’s people lovingly become the hands and feet of Jesus. Hands and feet

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<sup>38</sup> Canther, *First Response*, 147.

that work to transform heartbroken lives. In this light, disaster response ministries reflect the incarnate nature of Christ at work in the world today through his church. In the most fundamental form, the mercy of Christ propels a local church to take a transformational role in the alleviation of human need.

A brief literature survey shows that the church is not designed by God to be an institution that merely serves its own interests. In reality, the church, that is the people of God, is designed to be a transformed people who carry Jesus' own infectious spirit of care and compassion into a world filled with heartache and sorrow. In times of disaster the church exists in order that life-giving, spirit-breathed, transformation might occur in the lives of disaster ravished families and that a disaster-torn community might be changed with the merciful physical and spiritual care of Christ himself. This concept is further expanded in the next chapter, A Theology of Incarnational Disaster Response.

## CHAPTER 4

### A THEOLOGY OF INCARNATIONAL DISASTER RESPONSE FOR ENGAGING IN A MINISTRY OF MERCY IN MINOT, NORTH DAKOTA

The Bible is the story of God himself moving toward human need with redemptive purposes and the church's mission in a time of natural disaster is simply an extension of God's redemptive work. Just as God moves toward human need, God's people do the same, serving hurting people with Christ's own sacrificial care and merciful compassion. The Bible tells us that every aspect of creation suffers disastrous results because of human disobedience and mankind's original rebellion against the creator. Spiritually, human beings are alienated from God, rejecting his goodness and authority (Romans 1:18-32). Socially, human relationships experience heartache and pain, which results in the fracture of families, marriages and social constructs. Intellectually, human beings use the incredible powers of the mind to explain, excuse and even normalize evil behaviors (Romans 2:15). And physically, the whole of creation is subject to death, decay, along with a violent physical environment where unpredictable weather, earthquakes, flooding, and fire create catastrophic loss and suffering (Romans



8:22).<sup>1</sup> “If there is good news for such dire realities,” Christopher Wright says, “[then the good news] needs to be pretty big. The glorious truth is that the Bible gives us a gospel that addresses every dimension of the problem that sin has created.”<sup>2</sup> In simple terms, the church understands that no disaster is beyond of the Gospel’s redemptive purposes.

The Gospel addresses every spiritual and the physical dimension of the fall. As Christopher Wright reminds his readers, the Gospel is the point from which all redemptive activities of a loving creator flow:

The cross and resurrection of Jesus bring us to the central point of the whole line of redemption in history. Here is God’s answer to *every* [emphasis mine] dimension of sin and evil in the cosmos and all their destructive effects. The gospel presents us with an accomplished victory that will ultimately be universally visible and vindicated. If we have been as radical as we ought in our analysis of the effects of the fall, then we must be equally radical and comprehensive here in our understanding of all the ways in which the cross and resurrection *reverse and ultimately destroy* [emphasis mine] those effects. The cross must be central to every dimension of the mission of God’s people – from personal evangelism among individuals and friends to ecological care for creation, and everything in between.<sup>3</sup>

The spiritual dimensions as well as the physical dimensions of the fall are both addressed by the Gospel. Yet, while the Church celebrates the redemption of each human soul, it often seems that the joy filled message of personal salvation overshadows God’s on-going redemptive purposes in the physical world. God’s redemptive purposes, whether spiritual or physical are still both at work today. Christopher Wright says that, “God’s

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<sup>1</sup> These four aspects of the fall into sin are noted and further expanded upon by Christopher Wright. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, 40.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 43

mission is the final destruction of *all* that is evil from his *whole* creation [emphasis mine],”<sup>4</sup> meaning that God’s redemptive desires apply even to the catastrophic heartbreak that people experience in the way of a natural disaster’s fury. Wright goes on to say that, “God did not choose to abandon or destroy his creation, but to redeem it. And he chose to do so within history through *persons and events* [emphasis mine] that run from the call of Abraham to the return of Christ.”<sup>5</sup>

What Wright highlights is that God’s ongoing redemptive purposes in this physical world, including the work of disaster response, often take place through the tangible actions of everyday people who offer themselves in service to those who suffer. Certainly God’s redemptive work in the physical realm is not confined to the mere constraints of human hands. A miraculous God can change the course of violent, disaster filled weather activity, simply with his presence (Mark 4:35-41). However, it often happens that God chooses to use the gifts and abilities of his redeemed children to serve as the vehicle of his own redemptive activities. As Gene Veith indicates: “In the spiritual realm, He [God] works through the Word and the Sacraments. In the earthly realm, He works through vocation [that is, people].”<sup>6</sup> Tangible actions such as providing food and shelter for a disaster-affected family, mucking out a flooded home, clearing debris, swinging a hammer for new construction, hanging sheetrock, and even crying tears with

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>5</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, 41.

<sup>6</sup> Gene Edward Veith, *The Spirituality of the Cross* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 92.

those who have lost everything, are acts of divine redemption when motivated by the Gospel. Tangible actions such as these drip with divine mercy as God himself sends his church to meet human need. “Wherever the church breathes in the blessed Gospel and sacraments,” writes Matthew Harrison, “it cannot but exhale mercy and love toward the neighbor (*diakonia*). *Diakonia* [or merciful service] is as much a part of the church’s life as good works are a part of the life of faith.”<sup>7</sup> Merciful service, says Wright, “is a pattern that Jesus laid on his followers for their own costly engagement in the world and all its issues, as he prayed to his Father – “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18; cf. 20:21).”<sup>8</sup> The Gospel tells us that God moves toward human need in Christ, and in Christ, God’s people are to move toward human need, especially in times of natural disaster, when heartache and brokenness are at their worst.

The New Testament addresses heartache and brokenness by showing how Christ himself responded to human need. Fueled by mercy, Jesus is compelled to take action. Matthew Harrison speaks of Jesus’ compassion, or mercy, toward those in need, as if it were a gut-wrenching, tearing at a person’s inward most being type of reality, the kind of feeling that drives a person to only one possible option, namely, to do something about the hurt.<sup>9</sup> This is what Gabe Lyons in the book, *The Next Christians*, has termed the

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew Harrison, “The Church’s Role of Mercy in the Community,” *Mercy In Action: Essays on Mercy, Human Care and Disaster Response*, Ross Edward Johnson, ed. (St. Louis, MO: The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 2015), 169.

<sup>8</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, 43.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Harrison describes compassion as visceral, especially for Jesus. To view human need is gut-wrenching for Jesus and should be for the church of God as well. Harrison, *Christ Have Mercy*, 39.

“sense of the ought,” meaning a believer sees a need and says to him or herself, “This ought to be different! I can’t let this stay the way it is.”<sup>10</sup> Harrison writes, “[The New Testament word] *splachnon* has to be one of the all-time great Greek words in the New Testament. You will not find a more incarnational, enfleshed talk about Christ than in this word. . . . Given the origin and development of the use of the word, we might think that in the Gospels it came to mean simply “to have compassion” or “mercy,” and it does. However, each time *splachnon* occurs as a conviction or a sentiment or emotion in Christ, or of characters in his parables, there is a consequent merciful action. Compassion begets action. Mercy makes something happen. For Jesus, *splanchnizomai*, the verb form of *splachnon*, is always, “compassion giving birth to action.”<sup>11</sup>

The following accounts from Jesus’ life demonstrate how compassion gives birth to action. In Matthew 9:36-38, Jesus is travelling from village to village, preaching, teaching and interacting with people. First we see compassion: “When [Jesus] saw the crowds, He had compassion [*splanchnizomai*] for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (v. 36). Then we see action: “Then [Jesus] said to His disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few; Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out laborers into his harvest field’” (vv. 37-38). Not surprisingly, in the very next verses (Matthew 10:1ff) Jesus sends the twelve to, “drive

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<sup>10</sup> A more in-depth understanding of Gabe Lyons’ concept can be found in chapters 4 and 11 of the book, *The Next Christians*. Gabe Lyons, *The Next Christians* (New York: Doubleday, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Harrison, *Christ Have Mercy*, 41.

out evil spirits and to heal every kind of disease and sickness.” Compassion gives birth to action.

In Matthew 20:29-34, Jesus and his disciples are leaving the city of Jericho and they encounter two blind men sitting by the side of the road. First we see compassion: “Jesus stopped and called them. ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ he asked. ‘Lord,’ they replied, ‘we want our sight.’ Jesus had compassion [*sphlanchnizomai*] on them and touched their eyes” (vv.32-33). Then we see action: “Immediately they received their sight” (v34). Mercy would not allow Jesus to walk past these two men without stopping to help them.

Mark 1:40-45 records the account of a man living a tortured life of leprosy. Mercy gives birth to action as this man comes to Jesus. First we see compassion: “A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, ‘If you are willing, you can make me clean.’ Filled with compassion ...” the Bible continues (vv. 40-41). Then we see action: “Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. “Be clean!” Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured” (vv. 41-42). Mercy would not allow Jesus to ignore this man’s suffering.

Mark 9:14-29 records the account of a small boy suffering with an evil spirit. Once again, Jesus is filled with mercy and asks for his father to bring the child to him. First we see compassion: “Jesus asked the boy’s father, ‘How long has he been like this?’ ‘From childhood,’ he answered. ‘It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity [*splanchnizomai*] on us and help us’” (vv.21-22). Then we see action: “‘If I can,’” said Jesus. ‘Everything is possible for him who

believes.’ Immediately the boy’s fathers exclaimed, ‘I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!’ When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. ‘You deaf and dumb spirit,’ he said, ‘I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.’ The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out” (vv.23-26). Once again, compassion gives birth to action. With gut-wrenching resolve, Jesus refuses to let the little boy or his family suffer any longer.

In Luke 7:11-17, a helpless, heartbroken mother mourns at the death of her only son. The funeral procession is making its way to the cemetery and Jesus is taken aback by this woman’s hopeless plight. First we see compassion: “As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out – the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her [*splanchnizomai*] and he said, ‘Don’t cry’” (vv. 12-13).” Then we see action: “Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, ‘Young man, I say to you, get up.’ The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother” (vv.14-15). Once more, mercy gives birth to action. Moved from deepest part of his being, a compassionate savior is compelled to step into the middle of a woman’s tragedy and with merciful action not only restores the young man’s life, but returns him to his mother. In four short examples the New Testament shows how Christ’s earthly life was fueled by mercy in such a way that he is compelled to take action when face to face with human need.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The scriptural examples used for this illustration were initially developed by Matthew Harrison in the book, *Christ Have Mercy*. Harrison, *Christ Have Mercy*, 41-43.

Fueled by mercy, the church, like Christ himself, is also compelled to take action in the face of heartbreaking need. Martin Luther sets the tone for Christian mercy-care when he writes:

Our Lord and Savior Jesus has left us a commandment which applies equally to all Christians, namely, that we are to render ... the works of mercy to those who are afflicted and in a state of calamity ... so that the evils of the present may be somewhat lessened. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself gave us the brightest example of this commandment when ... he descended from the bosom of the Father into misery and our prison, that is, into our flesh and our most wretched life, and took upon himself the penalty for our sins so that we might be saved.<sup>13</sup>

For Luther, stepping forward to offer compassionate care is the Christian's default response to calamity, crisis, and human need. Compelled by divine grace, the Church's work of mercy is nothing more than caring for one's neighbor in concrete and effective ways because of what Christ has done. Mercy gives birth to action in the life of the church, just as it does in the life of Christ himself. "A healthy Christian faith," adds Michael Frost, "preaches and practices the breadth and depth and beauty of living as Jesus taught us to, of entering fully into the world we find ourselves in, and of cooperating with him in setting things right in preparation for the age to come."<sup>14</sup>

Given this understanding, a church's disaster response effort can be viewed incarnationally, meaning that Christian disaster response is nothing more than bringing the incarnate Christ into the center of human tragedy and cooperating with him in setting

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<sup>13</sup> Martin Luther in, LW 42:121, 22.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Frost, *Incarnate: The Body of Christ in an Age of Disengagement* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 196.

things right. Using the language of Christopher Wright, the “story we are in”<sup>15</sup> as the church today, is the continuing story of the incarnation, meaning the continuing story of God bringing healing to every corner of a sin-broken creation through Christ. As Matthew Harrison writes:

The coming of God into the flesh [incarnation] is Gospel. It is God’s gracious will to accomplish our salvation. Christ’s life is filled with compassion and compassionate action for those in need ... Raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6), the believer demonstrates compassion for those in need, the lowly, the suffering, the orphan, etc. However weakly and imperfectly, our compassion reflects the compassion of God Himself.<sup>16</sup>

He goes on to say, “We cannot repeat or imitate the incarnation of Christ per se ... the incarnation, servanthood, self-humbling obedience, and finally death on a cross on our behalf - the Gospel - creates Christ’s attitude in us. We are baptized by Christ into merciful compassion for those in need around us. In this way we indeed become “incarnate” to our neighbor.”<sup>17</sup> Martin Luther says it succinctly when he writes:

Just as our neighbor is in need and lacks that in which we abound, so we were in need before God and lacked his mercy. Hence, as our heavenly Father has in Christ freely come to our aid, we also ought freely to help our neighbor through our body and its works, and each one should become as it were a Christ to the other that we may be Christs to one another and Christ may be the same in all, that is, that we may be truly Christians.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Christopher Wright uses phrase, “the story we are in” to talk about the role that today’s Christian Church plays in the Bible’s big story of redemption. “The story we are in the story of how God in his sovereign love has purposed to bring the sinful world of his fallen creation to the redeemed world of his new creation.” Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, 46.

<sup>16</sup> Harrison, *Christ Have Mercy*, 45.

<sup>17</sup> Harrison, *Christ Have Mercy*, 46.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Luther in, LW 31:367-68.



In Luther's mind, Christ himself is living incarnately into this world through the church today. When a believer uses his or her hands to pick up a hammer, hang a piece of sheetrock or clear debris from a family's flood ravished home, those are the hands of Christ himself coming to aid a family as they suffer brokenness. As Gene Veith writes: "In this context, God is providentially at work caring for His people, each of whom contributes according to his or her God given talents, gifts, opportunities and stations. Each thereby becomes what Luther terms a "mask of God.""<sup>19</sup>

Social services, government agencies, and other human care organizations provide tremendous help in the wake of a natural disaster. The church however adds the incarnate presence of Christ. As if to emphasize the point, one disaster-ravished family said it like this: "When everything was falling apart we prayed that God would help us, and he sent you!"<sup>20</sup> Disaster response work is hard, agonizing, emotionally consuming, sacrificial work. Yet at the same time, disaster response work is filled with joy, reward, and rich meaning when God's people embrace the divine reality that Christ Jesus himself is using their efforts to answer the call of human need. As Hugh Halter writes:

The gospel is not news that we can accept Jesus into our lives. The gospel is news that Jesus has accepted us into His life and that we can live His life now. That's the choice of incarnation: not to just be a Christian but to actually receive God's invitation through Christ to be in the eye of the incarnational storm as He brings redemption to the world. That's worth waking up for! Every day is dripping with meaning, every person you meet is under divine renovation, and thus every second is open to kingdom opportunities. That's great news!<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Veith, *The Spirituality of the Cross*, 93.

<sup>20</sup> From a first-person account shared by a Hope Village volunteer during an evening team debrief.

<sup>21</sup> Hugh Halter, *Flesh: Learning to be Human Like Jesus* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2014), 58.

For this reason, a local church cannot remain on the sideline when a disaster strikes within its community. Instead alive with purpose, the church has the invitation and the privilege to join with Jesus at the very center of disaster's pain as an instrument of Christ's own redemptive, healing work. "Mercy is love responding to need," writes Harrison, and both are the work of the church. "Where divine love meets sin, mercy exists as grace in Christ. Where divine love meets bodily suffering and need, that love becomes mercy and care for those who are suffering."<sup>22</sup>

Rooted in Christ, works of mercy, including disaster response, also have the power to create relational bridges to open unbelieving hearts for the hearing of the Gospel and the embracing of new eternal realities. The incarnation shows us that missionary work is relational work. The life-on-life experiences of care and compassion, such as are experienced in disaster response care, is relational work that can be seen as opening acts for the Gospel. As Hugh Halter writes: "God knew that the Messiah couldn't just show up. Some buzz and buildup were needed. People had to be prepared. God knew it is very difficult for people to believe in something that has never shown up before."<sup>23</sup>

In Jesus's life, miracles of mercy often created opportunity to believe. Acts of mercy formed lasting relationships and became the gateway for people to come to faith and the pattern remains the same today. In John Chapter 2, after experiencing how Jesus mercifully rescues an embarrassed groom with water turned to wine, the Bible says, "He

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<sup>22</sup> Matthew Harrison, "The Church's Role of Mercy in the Community," 170.

<sup>23</sup> Halter, *Flesh*, 99.

[Jesus] thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him” (John 2:11).

Mercy opened the door to faith. In John, Chapter 4, a merciful Savior heals an official’s dying son. Once again, an act of mercy became the gateway for faith. The Bible says, “Then the Father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus said, ‘Your son will live.’ So he and all his household believed” (John 4:53). By entering into relationships of care, Jesus began to break through walls of unbelief. As Hugh Halter says: “[People] are looking for a God with skin on, a God they can know, speak with, learn from, struggle with, be honest with, get straight answers from, and connect their lives to.”<sup>24</sup> Each one is experienced relationally. Halter goes on to say, “We are the opening act for one another – and for Jesus – and we play a huge role in preparing people for their future faith. Don’t think the whole process is up to you, but you really do matter! The more your street cred rises [the kind that comes from genuine friendship and merciful care], the easier it will be for your friends to point to you and for you to point people to Jesus.”<sup>25</sup>

While commenting on the struggling evangelistic efforts in today’s church, Matthew Harrison perhaps provides an answer to help the church’s future evangelistic work. Harrison writes:

Where the church is missiologically weak, it is perhaps because we have divided body from soul? Can we be faithful to Christ by preaching the Gospel but ignoring the physical needs of people? Christ cared for body and soul. Gospel proclamation is affected when we fail to care for people in need, whether within or outside of the church. For “if a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 108.

without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?" (James 2:15-16).<sup>26</sup>

Forming genuine relationships and entering into the lives of the afflicted goes hand in hand with the work of the church and gives credence to Gospel proclamation. This is true also in the case of disaster response. In another place, Harrison writes even more forcefully:

The church's concern is therefore for the whole person. The proclamation of the Gospel of forgiveness by grace through faith is accompanied by Christian concern for physical and psychological need as well as spiritual need. If it is not, it is a ministration, which is less than the intent of Christ at best, and Gnostic (denial of the unity of body and soul) at its worst. The concern and care for physical need is accompanied by proclamation of the Gospel and a concern for incorporation into the church's life, or it is merely secular at best, and may deprive of eternal life at its worst. Proclamation of the Gospel and mercy for the needy belong together like faith and love.<sup>27</sup>

Relationships matter. Acts of mercy create a chain of relationships where walls of unbelief become softened, hearts become open, and Christ can be embraced by faith for who he really is: God's merciful answer to a sin-broken world and all of sin's effects. This church's work is to meet needs of body and soul in Jesus's name and through acts of mercy, even in times of natural disaster; to create the relational bridges for Jesus to walk from one heart to another.

When disaster strikes the community, the local church cannot live in isolation. Compelled by the mercy of Christ, the church follows her master into the center of human suffering in order, by the grace of God, to infect suffering with the healing power

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<sup>26</sup> Harrison, *Christ Have Mercy*, 105.

<sup>27</sup> Matthew Harrison, "The Church's Role," 177, 178.

of God's hope. Mercy propelled the incarnate Christ Jesus to engage with the broken, hurting and sorrowful in every way. Jesus walked side by side with suffering people with compassion and care that opened hearts to eternal life. In the same way, the church of Jesus Christ is called to bring the incarnate Christ into the lives of the broken and sorrowful today by serving both body and soul with mercy from above. History's story is the story of God making things right through the incarnation of Christ. Incarnate in the world first through his physical body as he walked on this earth, now incarnate in the world through His Body, the Church.

PART THREE  
THEOLOGICAL PRACTICE

CHAPTER 5  
HANDBOOK DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION AND ASSESSMENT

Few churches understand the transformational role they may play in the event of a disaster. Preaching, teaching, and administering the sacraments rightfully occupy a significant place in the church's ecclesiology. Yet briefly exploring the theological concepts of mercy and the church's response to natural disasters, one quickly recognizes that a local congregation can play a pivotal role in a community's healing. The church is uniquely prepared to follow Christ into the center of disaster-related sorrow and then to tangibly meet human suffering with Christ's own compassion.

Mercy-care is the incarnational presence of Christ in time of need. As Jesus himself moves toward human sorrow with redemptive purposes, the Church of Jesus Christ is called to do the same. "The 'royal priesthood' of the baptized exists for mercy" (Romans 12:1 ff),<sup>1</sup> writes Matthew Harrison, which means that God's people cannot help but to lend their hearts and hands to aid the distressed, comfort the sorrowful, and labor to make things right. "Having the mind of Christ, the church is called to identify with and

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Harrison, "The Church's Role," 177.

humbly serve the needy (Matthew 25:3ff.; Philemon 2)''<sup>2</sup> whenever opportunity arises. “Just as divine love in the very incarnation of Christ, the atonement, and the continued proclamation of the Gospel, is directed to and seeks all, so the church’s mandate for mercy knows only the bounds of “opportunity” and resources (2 Cor.9:10-12; Gal. 6:10).”<sup>3</sup>

From the earliest days of the New Testament, works of mercy have been a defining element in the life of the Church and as such are still today. The early church fathers (Eusebius, Dionysius, Tertullian, Cyprian, and many others) write about the heroic and sacrificial acts of mercy administered by God’s people to the sick, the suffering and the dying during ancient times of calamity.<sup>4</sup> “Pagan and Christian writers,” writes Rodney Stark, “are unanimous not only that Christian scripture stressed love and charity as the central duties of faith, but that these were sustained [and practiced] in everyday behavior.”<sup>5</sup> Acts of merciful care were the norms of the early Christian community, just as Tertullian claimed, “It is our care of the helpless, our practice of loving kindness that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. ‘Only look,’ they say, ‘look how they love one another!’”<sup>6</sup> Mercy propels Christians toward human need in each era of history. When the local congregation resolves to help those in their

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 172.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Harrison, “The Church’s Role,” 172.

<sup>4</sup> Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 79-87.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 87.



community who suffer in times of disaster, the congregation stands on the shoulders of the great heroes of faith who have gone before. Simply put, the local church throughout history is God's frontline vehicle for mercy-care to a disaster-stricken community.

### **The Design of a Disaster Response Handbook**

While books that talk about the church's role in times of disaster exist, such as Harold Koenig's "In the Wake of Disaster: Religious Responses to Terrorism and Catastrophe,"<sup>7</sup> a survey of the literature indicates that what is missing is a simple, first-read handbook on disaster response for the local congregation. The theory behind this doctoral project is that local church leaders would benefit from a simple handbook that would guide them toward successfully engaging their community with the incarnational care of Christ through a unified community disaster response effort. As a first-read resource, the handbook would give enough step-by-step information to inspire a vision for the congregation's disaster response efforts while at the same time providing a tested, practical framework that would give local church leaders the confidence that their church family can play a significant role in the community's long-term healing. Built upon a theology of mercy, such a handbook would include among other things:

1. an organizational structure that describes the components of a community's disaster response
2. a functional framework from which to execute a successful disaster response effort and a timely restoration of the community

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<sup>7</sup> Harold Koenig, *In the Wake of Disaster: Religious Responses to Terrorism and Catastrophe* (Philadelphia: Templeton Press, 2006).

3. a tested, step-by-step process that moves a disaster survivor from the rubble of their destroyed dwelling to the safety and security of their restored home
4. a vision for a greater relational presence in the community, both with community leaders and with disaster survivors
5. helpful steps for working in harmony with other disaster response organizations, including state and local agencies
6. insights to assist in securing funds for disaster response work
7. practical helps for finding, serving and managing volunteers in a community's recovery effort
8. meeting a survivor's needs at all levels by providing intentional spiritual care to the whole of the community

With the above items in mind and supplemented with the narrative of Our Savior Lutheran Church's successful disaster response ministry, a disaster response handbook was developed to give direction to a local church's disaster response consideration. The handbook titled, *Under One Roof: How Your Church Can Partner to Deliver the Healing Mercy of Christ Through a 'One-Stop' Disaster Recovery Center*, provides a simple yet effective path for local churches and their communities to consider as they engage in the healing work of disaster response. The disaster handbook seeks to achieve specific goals.

Its first goal is to provide a blueprint that inspires a local congregation to step forward and play a significant role in the healing of their community following a natural disaster. This handbook answers the question of how to do disaster response in a community. The handbook provides tangible examples that illustrate simple processes of cooperation and care that allow the local church to become a transformational agent of compassion and Christian mercy in the community. If local church leaders find that they want to help their

community but have no idea of how they might do so, this handbook will give direction and answer questions in a positive way.

Secondly, the handbook is designed to encourage government agencies to think in new ways as they consider the impact that a local church can have in its community. Government agencies, along with state and local officials, often fail to realize the impact that faith-based organizations can bring to a community crisis. As a result, these officials fail to leverage the substantial influence of the local church when it comes to healing to a disaster-stricken community. As noted by David Canther, “FEMA used to belittle faith-based organizations before Katrina, but were humbled to realize that they could not rally enough troops as fast or as efficiently, no matter how much money they had, as faith-based groups could. Faith-based groups have a strong network of volunteers within their church structures who understand teamwork clearly.”<sup>8</sup> Not all church leaders themselves are even aware of these truths. With this handbook church leaders will become exposed to a breadth of resources that the Church at large can supply.

Its third goal is to invite national, faith based organizations to consider new ways of organizing disaster response efforts on a local community level. The response to Minot, North Dakota’s 2011 flood happened in new ways. Rather than working as independent ministries that offered competing services to disaster survivors, Minot’s flood recovery effort was the first to combine all of the participating faith-based disaster ministries into

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<sup>8</sup> Canther, *First Response*, 147.

one unified organization.<sup>9</sup> Each organization maintained its own ecclesial and corporate identity while working for a common purpose. Organizational strengths were combined, redundancies and organizational weaknesses were minimized and as a result the maximum amount of help could be delivered to survivors in the shortest amount of time. This handbook provides a basic framework for Christian disaster response ministries to work together in complimentary ways for the community's common good.

Fourthly, the handbook strives to inspire a new way for communities themselves to approach disaster response by bringing the services of all disaster response organizations under one roof. By eliminating duplication and maximizing services through a unified organizational structure, faith-based organizations are able to improve their effectiveness in the community. As was the case in Minot, North Dakota's recovery, government agencies, along with state, county and local resources can also be harnessed to work within this same one-stop organization. By including government entities in the unified system the community's recovery effort can become even more effective. This handbook provides a vision for orchestrating a unified approach that includes all participating agencies through which the greatest amount of assistance, in the most effective way, to the greatest number of survivors, in the least amount of time can be provided.

And finally, the fifth goal is to honor God's desire to bring healing to broken hearts. Mercy is at the core of God's mission to redeem a sin-broken world, and in both big ways

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<sup>9</sup> Minot's unified model for flood recovery was featured in a FEMA Region Eight best practices training conference in 2013 where the presenter indicated that a model such as Minot's had often been talked about but never successfully implemented as was the case in Minot.

and small ways God is still at work in this world to make things right once more. Mercy propelled Jesus to engage with the broken, hurting and sorrowful, seeking to walk alongside suffering people with compassion. In the same way, the church of Jesus Christ brings honor to God when it brings the compassion and care of Christ into the lives of the broken and sorrowful today. This handbook seeks to inspire the people of God and to encourage them to bring glory to God by transforming disaster-related human suffering with the tangible compassion of Christ.

### **Evaluation and Recommendation**

The handbook, with a sample found in the appendix, was designed to meet the above-mentioned goals and was distributed for field-testing and evaluation. A cross-section of disaster response leaders were asked to review the handbook and to provide feedback based upon their experiences in disaster response settings. Selected for this evaluation were leaders in two congregations currently involved in disaster response efforts within their communities, leaders in two congregations who have completed a disaster response ministry within their communities, and two leaders from regional or national disaster response organizations. These respondents were asked to complete and return a questionnaire supplied for the evaluation. The instructions provided to the participants are as follows:

The handbook that you are asked to evaluate is part of a Doctor of Ministry project. As such, this handbook is designed to be a first-look resource that can be used to help local church leaders consider how they as a church might consider taking a meaningful role in the recovery of their community following a natural disaster.

The designation “first-look” means that this handbook is designed to be one of the first resources that a pastor or church leader might read should they want to play a

healing role in their community's recovery. As such, this handbook provides a broad picture of the way a local congregation can, in a very tangible way, bring the mercy of Christ to people in need.

Because it is a first-look resource you will discover that this handbook is not filled with minute details. The handbook, however, is designed to have just enough detail to help a ministry leader understand the larger picture of involvement in a disaster recovery ministry and therefore to be able formulate a plan that meets his or her specific situation.

As you engage this handbook for evaluation purposes, please read it as if you were a ministry leader confronting a natural disaster for the very first time. Then use your disaster response experiences to evaluate the handbook's helpfulness for a first time reader.

Respondents were then asked a series of questions, which follow:

1. Involvement in Recovery: "As a first-look resource to what degree do you feel this handbook provides encouragement for a local congregation to become involved in their community's recovery following a natural disaster?" Respondents were then asked to rate their answers on a scale of 1 to five, 1 indicating, "Not very helpful" and five indicating, "Very helpful." All respondent ranges were between 4 and 4.5 on the scale, indicating that the handbook provided significant helps.

Two follow-up questions were asked in order to identify the thinking behind the answers. First: If you were a local church leader, what would be the most helpful part of this manual to encourage you and your church to step forward and become involved in your community's disaster recovery? Why do you say that? Selected responses included the following:

It identifies the need for faith-based and non-profits to supplement the government services that are provided. In taking a role, the recovery time can be reduced and the trauma of the event can be mitigated by faith-based groups willing to listen and show compassion as the asset in the relief effort.

Once a Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) is opened, survivors tend to get caught in the governmental red tape and experience additional suffering as they work through the

system. This shows there is a significant place for ministry as caring and compassionate personnel are especially needed to walk individuals through the processes.

This resource is very good at letting you know where to start and some of the organizations that are available to you locally and nationally to help you. It lets you know you do not have to do this alone and you might not have the resources available to play a big role in disaster relief but there are still different roles you can participate in.

A second follow-up question was asked: In your opinion what might this resource be lacking, that if included, would help a local church decide to step forward and become involved in their community's recovery? Why do you say that? Selected responses include the following:

Some reference to pre-planning and building relationships with governmental agencies. In most cases local emergency responders tend to minimize the resources available to them through faith-based and non-profit groups.

Most people do not think about disaster response in their community until it happens. Churches should be aware of local resources and what they can do before a disaster ever strikes. This will make things easier when something ever happens.

As indicated, respondents felt overall that the handbook would be very helpful in encouraging a local church to step forward and become involved in their community's disaster response efforts. As a weakness, a preference was raised indicating that the handbook should include a section on pre-planning and becoming aware of possible disaster response actions that can be taken even before a disaster strikes.

2. Identifying Steps to Take: As a first-look resource to what degree do you feel this handbook would help you, if you were a local church leader, to identify steps that your church could take to help your community recover following a natural disaster?

Once again respondents were asked to rate their answers on a scale of 1 to 5.

Respondents answered this question with a solid 4.

Two follow-up questions were then asked. First: If you were a local church leader, what would be the most helpful part in this manual in identifying steps that you might take in order to help your community recover from a natural disaster? Why do you say that? Significant responses include:

The path to recovery and where to start section gives you a starting point about what is available as resources. It also gives a good lay out of the different steps to recovery and what is need for a relief village like Hope Village.

I find it helpful that this handbook provides real-life experiences to draw upon as a leader considers steps to take. In these real-life experiences I find the need to tailor your operation to the situation you are facing as well as the need for strong leadership.

A second follow-up questions was asked: In your opinion what might this resource be lacking, that if included, would help local church leader identify steps that they might take in order to help their community recover following a natural disaster? Why do you say that? Significant responses included:

As a first step, churches should be proactive when it comes to disaster recovery. Before a natural disaster ever occurs, they should look at what type of disasters can occur and how they would be able to help. This way they will be prepared when something happens.

I would have nothing to add. I find that this handbook provides a very clear set of steps that church leaders can follow right away to start to begin helping their community.

Once again, the handbook received high marks as a step-by-step resource for local church leaders. Yet, once more a call to pre-disaster planning was raised which encouraged



congregational leaders to proactive in their communities, giving thought to potential opportunities to serve should a natural disaster occur.

3. Addressing Organizational Questions: As a first-look resource to what degree do you feel this handbook would be helpful for a local church to navigate the organizational components that would be necessary to form a disaster response ministry that would help their community recover following a natural disaster? Respondents once again rated their answers on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating, “Not very helpful,” and 5 indicating, “Very helpful.” All but one respondent indicated a 5 on this question, indicating that the handbook would be very helpful to navigate the organizational components of a disaster response ministry. The dissenting respondent gave a 4.5, which still shows that the handbook provides significant help to leaders in organizational matters.

Two follow-up questions were then asked: First: If you were a local church leader, what would be the most helpful part of this manual for you to grasp the organizational pieces necessary for developing a local disaster response ministry through your church? Why do you say that? Some of the significant responses include:

This resource does a good job of listing the components of the path of recovery and describing each one. It lists the different agencies that are good at different aspects of the recovery process. Understanding how they complement each other’s work is also a very helpful organizational insight.

Organizationally, I find that the way that the multi-agency planning committee was assembled was a key component to success. Additionally, understanding the Unified response was also a key. These are basic needs necessary to ensure the success of your involvement in the efforts.

A second follow-up question was asked: In your opinion what might this resource be lacking, that if included, would help a local church leader grasp the organizational pieces necessary for developing a local disaster response ministry? Why? Responses include:

I would add an index of the different organizations nationally in the back and how to contact them.

More emphasis needs to be given to the person who acts as a volunteer coordinator. It is very important to be able to match people to tasks.

A tried-and-true vetting system of the volunteers could be included as it insures the integrity of the organization.

The handbook received very high praise for the way it addressed the organizational components necessary to assemble a successful disaster recovery effort. Respondents wisely highlighted the importance of including a greater emphasis on a volunteer coordinator along with attention given to the quality or integrity of volunteers. Volunteers with poor construction skills, or more importantly, volunteers with poor people skills, reflect poorly on the ministry of care. Special efforts should rightfully be included in each of these areas. Additionally, since the organizational structure of a one-stop disaster recovery center is dependent upon the interaction of many organizations working in one accord, a listing of national response organizations would be a helpful addition.

4. Identifying Potential Challenges: As a first-look resource to what degree do you feel this handbook would help you, if you were a local church leader, to identify potential challenges in forming and implementing a disaster response ministry to your community following a natural disaster? On a scale of 1 to 5, respondents answered with

overwhelming 4s and 5s, once more indicating that the handbook was a helpful resource for identifying, and ultimately addressing potential obstacles.

Two follow-up questions were asked. First: If you were a local church leader, what would be the most helpful part of this manual in identifying potential challenges while forming and implementing a local disaster response ministry through your church? Why do you say that? Respondents indicated some of the following insightful comments:

The manual in its entirety addresses a wide spectrum of incidences that can trip up an operation. In this case, the manual is tempered with cases where the writer, led by his mistakes, simply adjusted until success was found.

The manual lists very concise ideas to setting up a response. These are ideas that have been tested and help a church leader avoid many of the larger challenges simply by providing a clear plan.

This resource did a good job listing potential pitfalls; with things like housing volunteers and different aspects you need to look out for. It also did good job discussing the aspects of spiritual and mental well-being of survivors and volunteers.

A second follow-up questions was asked: In your opinion what might this resource be lacking, that if included, would help a local church leader *identify* potential challenges while forming and implementing a local disaster response ministry through their church?

Why do you say that? Some significant responses include:

It is extremely important to identify your strengths and weaknesses prior to the event rather than developing a plan as you go. Greater attention needs to be given to the development of pre-disaster relationships with government agencies, as these organizations can become great assets or great obstacles.

I would also focus on the mental and spiritual well-being of survivor right after the disaster as well as long term. Although an individual might not need their home rebuilt they are affected by the disaster also.

Overall, respondents felt that the handbook successfully identified many of the potential obstacles that a church leader might encounter. The handbook's stories of the adaptive responses to challenges exercised by the leadership of Hope Village gave a hopeful picture of success for church leaders, who themselves might face challenges.

Respondents indicated that the handbook would benefit by adding more direction with some of the key relational issues encountered in disaster response work. Both spiritual care and pre-disaster connections with government agencies require relational skill, although in different ways. For a successful disaster response, relational skills are required for both.

5. Overcoming Potential Challenges: As a first-look resource to what degree do you feel this handbook would help you, as a local church leader, overcome potential challenges that would be encountered in carrying out a disaster response ministry to your community following a natural disaster? Respondents answered once again with 4s and 5s, indicating that the handbook provided significant helps.

Two follow-up questions were asked. First: If you were a local church leader, what would be the most helpful part of this manual in *overcoming* potential challenges while forming and implementing a local disaster response ministry through your church?

Why do you say that? Respondents wrote:

It gives a look at some possible problems that can occur and what needed to be done to get everything on track. It lists things to look for and what Hope Village did to overcome their problems.

I find the narrative items helpful in that they illustrate a successful pattern of identifying the challenge and addressing it with resources that can alleviate it.

A second follow-up question was asked: In your opinion what might this resource be lacking, that if included, would help a local church leader overcome potential challenges while forming and implementing a local disaster response ministry through their church? Why do you say that? Respondents shared some of the following more significant insights:

Problems are solved with resources. Have an index in the back with national organizations available to help.

A church needs to be proactive and look at this before a disaster even happens. With an emphasis given on advance planning many obstacles can be addressed or mitigated before they become problems.

The handbook once again received high praise for providing strategies that could prove helpful in overcoming potential challenges. High ratings in this area indicate that it is a useful tool to give confidence to local church leaders and their decision to enter into a disaster response ministry. Once more, respondents identified the importance of pre-planning on behalf of the local church as a factor that would be helpful to include in the handbook.

6. Seeing Recovery in the Long-Term: As a first-look resource to what degree do you feel this handbook would benefit you, if you were a local church leader, as you consider the long-term recovery of your community following a natural disaster? Evaluating the handbook's use for considering the long-term recovery of a community, respondents answered affirmatively with strong 4s and 5s.

Once again, two follow-up questions were asked. First: If you were a local church leader, what would be the most helpful part of this manual in thinking about the long-

term recovery of your community following a natural disaster? Why do you say that?

Commenting on this question, some of the significant respondents were:

This resource lists the different aspects of the recovery process. It helps you view the long-term items that need to happen depending on the size of the disaster. Some recovery processes take only a few years some will be longer. The communication process is big on getting the word out there when the occurrence of the disaster is no longer in the news but the recovery is still taking place.

I found that the explanations of the different parts of the long-term recovery were explained very well. Understanding the process from beginning to end gave me a greater insight into the efforts necessary to sustain the recovery for the long term.

The illustrations were helpful in picturing recovery over the long term.

The handbook helps the reader see the complexity of a well-run program and the success that a well-run program can bring in the long haul.

A second follow-up question was asked: In your opinion what might this resource be lacking, that if included, would help a local church leader think about the long-term recovery of their community following a natural disaster? Why do you say that? Some of the respondents provided the following highlights:

I would include follow up with individuals receiving care years after the incident to see how they are doing and also have follow up with volunteers to see how their experience was and what could be done better.

Maybe a bit more emphasis on the emotional and spiritual needs as the survivors go through this process. This is an extremely stressful time for them and a spiritual care team can assist them through this phase.

Respondents found the handbook to be a helpful tool in understanding the efforts necessary for the long-term recovery of a community. Understanding the process of recovery from beginning to end, along with breaking down the complexities of a well-run response provided additional insights to bring success. Adding a greater emphasis on the

emotional and spiritual care needs for survivors over the long-term would also be a helpful addition.

Overall, the handbook received positive evaluations by a cross-section of leaders involved in disaster response work. These evaluations show the handbook to be a very helpful first-look resource that can be used to help local congregations take a meaningful role in the recovery efforts of their community. The handbook identifies simple step-by-step actions that a local congregation can implement as they engage in mercy-driven care for a disaster-affected community. Respondents also felt the handbook helps a leader navigate the organizational components found in forming or participating in a one-stop unified disaster response effort. Through compelling stories that speak of success in the midst of challenges, respondents affirmed that the handbook helps a reader to catch a vision for disaster response organizations working together in one system, under one roof, with one noble purpose: to bring healing and recovery to disaster-ravished families in the fastest possible way.

In evaluating the handbook, respondents also made several suggestions that would strengthen the handbook's effectiveness. The suggestion most often identified by those who have been involved past disaster recovery efforts was to add a section on a congregation's pre-planning for a possible disaster. Pre-planning for a potential disaster could take place on two fronts. First, pre-planning that would serve the church membership in the event of a disaster, and secondly, pre-planning that would involve the church and its role in the community. The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod offers its member congregations a simple booklet titled, *Mercy in Action: Preparing*

*Congregations for Disaster Response*.<sup>10</sup> The booklet walks church members through personal steps of preparation in one's home in the event of a disaster. The booklet also outlines basic steps of preparation for the church building and facilities, along with basic training principles for members who might consider serving as volunteers in a disaster response situation. The booklet provides conversation starters, checklists, and informative articles to aid a congregation in meeting internal pre-disaster planning objectives.

A small section describing how church members could prepare their own homes for a possible disaster may be a helpful addition to this doctoral project's handbook. However, the personal preparation of the church and church membership itself is outside of the handbook's objectives. The handbook, *Under One Roof*, is designed as a resource to be consulted immediately after a disaster has occurred, when preparations have come to an end, and when constructive solutions for the community's healing are needed.

Given the handbook's purpose, a more helpful pre-planning topic to address in the handbook would be the congregation's involvement and interaction with community leaders and disaster response organizations prior to a disaster event. The strong pre-disaster relationship developed by Our Savior Lutheran Church prior to Minot's devastating flood proved to be monumental in the development, management and implementation of the city's disaster response efforts. In hindsight, Our Savior Lutheran Church leaders could have capitalized upon these relationships at an even deeper level prior to the flood by participating in county emergency response exercises, regional

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<sup>10</sup> *Mercy in Action: Preparing Congregations for Disaster Response* (St. Louis, MO: The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, 2012).



training seminars, and county disaster briefings. Portions of David Canther's book, *First Response: Change Your World Through Acts of Love*, especially chapters 8 and 9, could be drawn upon to provide information on how to grow a church's pre-disaster relationships and partnerships in disaster response planning. In addition, pre-planning efforts would also be beneficial if those efforts involved networking with regional and national disaster response organizations prior to a disaster event. Chapter 5 in Harold Koenig's book, *In the Wake of Disaster: Religious Responses to Terrorism and Catastrophe*, provides a helpful list of current faith-based organizations that respond regionally and nationally to disasters.<sup>11</sup> An updated version of Koenig's organizational list could be referenced and included in the handbook's appendix.

Expanding the handbooks section on the role of spiritual care in the community was also another area where the respondent's evaluations suggested improvement. Agreeably, this section would benefit by the inclusion of spiritual care helps that would immediately benefit the pastor or church leader in their role as spiritual leaders as they interact with disaster survivors. Southern Baptist Disaster Relief,<sup>12</sup> LCMS Disaster Response<sup>13</sup> and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance<sup>14</sup> all have disaster response or emergency service chaplain training programs that specifically focus on crisis ministry. A

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<sup>11</sup> Harold Koenig, *In the Wake of Disaster: Religious Responses to Terrorism and Catastrophe* (Philadelphia: Templeton Press, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, <http://www.baptistrelief.org> (accessed March 17, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> LCMS Disaster Response, <http://www.lcms.org> (accessed March 17, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, <http://www.pda.pcusa.org> (accessed March 17, 2018).

selection of resources from these and other sources could be added to the handbook in order to strengthen the section on spiritual care. The relief effort to help a community affected by a disaster is monumental. The local church has the ability to meet people in the midst of their greatest need with the tangible presence of Christ. Strengthening this section would only serve to make the local church's efforts more effective.

Through their evaluations respondents agreed that this project's disaster response handbook provides a helpful step-by-step process that can be easily organized and effectively managed. Building upon the experiences of those who have walked through a disaster recovery, the evaluation process affirms that *Under One Roof: How Your Church Can Partner to Deliver the Healing Mercy of Christ Through a 'One Stop' Disaster Recovery Center* successfully meets its goals as it introduces a local church to a transformational role of incarnational mercy during times of disaster.

A sample of the handbook, *Under One Roof: How Your Church Can Partner to Deliver the Healing Mercy of Christ Through a 'One-Stop' Disaster Recovery Center*, follows in the appendix.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The journey to discover what role a local church might have in the wake of a tragic community event began with an unthinkable disaster. Twelve thousand people lost their homes in a single day as floodwaters, fed by four massive Canadian reservoirs, inundated the city of Minot, North Dakota. The event was an unexpected disaster of epic proportions that directly ravished homes of one-fourth of the city's population and threatened the entire city's future. In the midst of violent loss, resources were stretched to the limit. State and local leaders were overwhelmed and it seemed for all concerned that the church stood still.

But a merciful God did not stand still. With the same redemptive purposes that took Jesus to the cross on Good Friday and to a glorious empty tomb on Easter Sunday, God himself chose to act redemptively in the midst of human sorrow. Mercy propelled Christ Jesus to engage with the broken, hurting and sorrowful as he walked on this earth. Jesus walked alongside suffering people with the compassion and care. Exercising the resources at his disposal, Christ chose to alleviate suffering and make things right once again. In the life of Jesus, mercy gives birth to action.

In the same way, through acts of mercy and compassionate care the church is uniquely equipped to bring the incarnate Christ into the lives of broken and sorrowful people today, especially in times of disaster. Using the physical and spiritual resources at its disposal, the church can play a significant role in alleviating disaster related human suffering and creating a path to make things right once again for families caught in a

disaster's tragedy. This is the work of mercy. In the life of the church, just like Jesus, mercy gives birth to action. Mercy is at the heart and the core of God's mission to redeem every manifestation of evil a sin-broken world and the church is God's front-line instrument of mercy in the world today.

The church does not have to work alone. As a part of the larger community, the local church can enter into the arena of civic action and work side by side with other community agencies to mitigate a disaster's effect. By working together with other agencies, as if under one roof, in a single, comprehensive, unified system, the local church can channel the benefits and expertise of each organization, whether religious or secular, into remarkable ways of service. Working under one roof these organizations can bring the greatest amount of resources, to the greatest amount of people, in the best possible way, for the fastest possible healing of the community. This brings glory to God and hope-filled transformation to a devastated community. The church, responding with incarnational-mercy, walks side by side with God to transform disaster-related human suffering with the tangible compassion of Christ. "The 'royal priesthood' of the baptized exists for mercy," writes Matthew Harrison, and the church exists for the very purpose divine mercy in times of disaster.<sup>15</sup>

Many local churches are unaware of the transformational role that they can play in a community's healing. Instead of moving toward a disaster and engaging in a community's healing, local churches often step back in isolation. Pastors and church

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<sup>15</sup> Matthew Harrison, "The Church's Role of Mercy in the Community," 177.

leaders may be unaware of the healing resources at their disposal. A theology of mercy, the kind that gives birth to God-directed action in the face of human need, may lay dormant or undeveloped in their ecclesiology. Or, absent information to the contrary, a local pastor or church leader may simply be paralyzed, unable to determine what the first step of action might be.

In order that church leaders in every place might embrace the transformational hope that a local congregation can provide to its community, this doctoral project set forth to develop a simple, yet compelling disaster response handbook. The handbook titled, *Under One Roof: How Your Church Can Partner to Deliver the Healing Mercy of Christ Through a 'One-Stop' Disaster Recovery Center*, vibrantly describes how a local church can partner with multiple disaster response organizations in its community in order to deliver incarnational care to a disaster-ridden population. Informed by the transformative experiences of Our Savior Lutheran Church, the handbook details a unique model that combines the strengths of multiple disaster response organizations working as one unit to deliver unparalleled assistance to disaster ravished families. As experienced in Minot, North Dakota, the handbook details a powerful model that provides Christ-filled hope to disaster-worn families while at the same time it accelerates a community's healing, amplifying the church's role as a vehicle of God's redemptive purposes.

*Under One Roof: How Your Church Can Partner to Deliver the Healing Mercy of Christ Through a 'One-Stop' Disaster Recovery Center*, can become the starting point for a local church's disaster response efforts. The resource is engaging, simple to read, and

creates a vision of compassionate service that honors God and helps people when they need help the most. “Mercy gives birth to action”<sup>16</sup> and the actions of a local church can transform a disaster-stricken community. In Minot, North Dakota, 4,180 homes were destroyed as floodwaters ravished the city. One-fourth of the population, or 12,000 people, were left with shattered lives and broken dreams. Yet a merciful God did not abandon the broken. A merciful God chose to reach out in mercy with the efforts of a local church and its ministry partners.

Our Savior Lutheran Church and its partners directly assisted 1,108 flood-devastated Minot families. Over a three-year period, 5,200 volunteers from forty-two states and three Canadian provinces came to help the people of Minot. As instruments of Christ’s own compassion, these volunteers were sent out from the campus of Our Savior Lutheran Church each day to mercifully serve flood-affected families, addressing their emotional, physical and spiritual need. In three years, homes for 549 families were rebuilt as volunteers supplied more than 186,000 hours of volunteer service to the flood-ravished people of Minot. This work would not have happened without recognizing the missional nature of the church, the incarnate nature of Christ at work in the world today through his church and the compelling nature of Christ’s mercy, which propels a local church to take a transformational role in the alleviation of human need. Similar acts of mercy can happen in any local church. So, as Hugh Halter writes, “Don’t hide the Jesus you love or

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<sup>16</sup> Harrison, *Christ Have Mercy*, 41.

live for, but go into the world as He did. And at the end of your earthly story, I hope you will be able to say with peace, “I’ve finished the work You’ve given me to do.””<sup>17</sup>

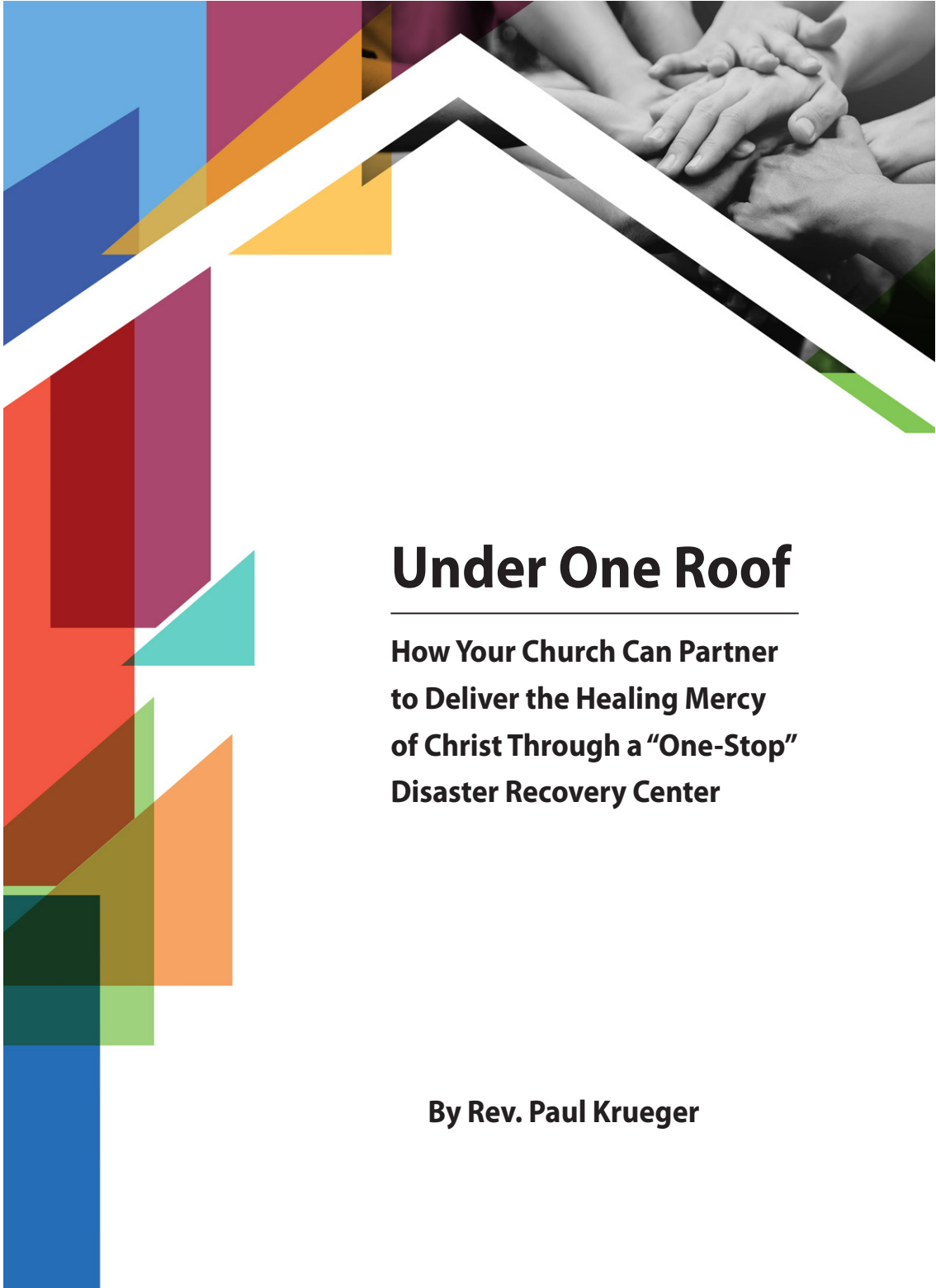
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<sup>17</sup> Halter, *Flesh*, 217.

APPENDIX

*UNDER ONE ROOF* – A DISASTER RESPONSE HANDBOOK





# **Under One Roof**

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**How Your Church Can Partner  
to Deliver the Healing Mercy  
of Christ Through a “One-Stop”  
Disaster Recovery Center**

**By Rev. Paul Krueger**

## Table of Contents

|                                                                                               |           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| What Can We Do?.....                                                                          | 3         |
| The Path of Recovery is Different in Each Location.....                                       | 4         |
| How Does a “One-Stop” Recovery Center Work? .....                                             | 5         |
| Where to Start? .....                                                                         | 5         |
| Path of Recovery .....                                                                        | 6         |
| 1. Intake.....                                                                                | 7         |
| 2. Case Manager Assigned.....                                                                 | 8         |
| 3. Funding.....                                                                               | 9         |
| 4. Unmet Needs Committee .....                                                                | 14        |
| 5. Organization of a Multi-Agency Recover Center .....                                        | 15        |
| 6. Construction Management .....                                                              | 18        |
| 7. Recovery Warehouse .....                                                                   | 22        |
| 8. Volunteer Management.....                                                                  | 23        |
| 9. Homeowners and Volunteers Working Together.....                                            | 29        |
| 10. Public Relations.....                                                                     | 31        |
| 11. Spiritual Care .....                                                                      | 35        |
| 12. Home Again .....                                                                          | 38        |
| <br>                                                                                          |           |
| <b>Appendices.....</b>                                                                        | <b>39</b> |
| Appendix A: Intake Form .....                                                                 | 40        |
| Appendix B: Bylaws of Hope Village .....                                                      | 46        |
| Appendix C: Hope Village Governance Policies and<br>Practices of the Board of Directors ..... | 52        |
| Appendix D: Hope Village Flow Charts.....                                                     | 61        |
| Appendix E: Job Descriptions and Hiring Policies<br>and Procedures.....                       | 62        |
| Appendix F: Tool Sign Out/in Procedures.....                                                  | 85        |
| Appendix G: Fiscal Sponsorship Arrangement.....                                               | 87        |
| Appendix H: Volunteer Information and Registration Packet.....                                | 89        |
| Appendix I: Sample Appeal Letter .....                                                        | 104       |

Dedicated to visionary leaders in the church who, like Jesus himself,  
run toward human need to bring healing and compassion.

### **What can we do?**

In the wake of devastating losses following a natural disaster, your church family can be the hands and feet of Jesus and play a transformational role in the healing of your community. By working together with the disaster response organizations of National Church bodies, state, local, and federal agencies, your church family can reflect the mercy of Christ and play a critical role in healing of your community as you bring hope and healing to the hearts and lives of disaster affected families.

This handbook is written for the church leader who has never experienced a natural disaster but now for the first time is trying to answer the question, “What can we do?” The pages provide a quick overview of the lasting role your local congregation can play once the crisis is no longer in the news and families are left picking up the pieces. At the same time there is also enough “how to” information to spark your own creativity as the compassion of Christ compels you to step toward human need and take action. A local church seldom realizes the full extent of their ability to bring hope and healing to an entire community as families recover from a natural disaster. Perhaps here you will find a practical framework from which your church family can begin a focused incarnational ministry that transforms disaster-related human suffering with the tangible compassion of Christ Jesus himself.

### **Real Life Experience**

Based upon the real-life experiences of Our Savior Lutheran Church in Minot, North Dakota, and the creation of **Hope Village**, a “One-Stop Disaster Recovery Center,” this handbook offers a framework for your church family to work in partnership with other disaster response entities to help families in your community rebuild their lives in the fastest way possible. Specifically this manual outlines a way for you to develop a one-stop volunteer center that can bring thousands of volunteers to assist. By combining the strengths of multiple disaster response agencies into a single volunteer center your church family can maximize the time, talents and resources of thousands of volunteers, display the Mercy of Christ, and help families in your community find recovery in the fastest possible way.

### **Where is God? He’s right here!**

In the wake of a disaster people will often ask, “Where is God?” Remarkably it is through the church, that is, God’s people incarnate with action, that the presence of God becomes tangible to people in need. This is especially true following a natural disaster such as the one you may have experienced. The simple truth is that God himself chooses to hide behind human hands, such as yours, as he interacts in the hearts and lives of broken and needy people. As people in your community cry out, God chooses to answer their prayer by sending ordinary people, just like you, who are filled with the mercy of Christ. With God’s help, everyday men and women of faith do extraordinary things that ease human suffering and inject hope even into the darkest circumstances. This is mercy. As Matthew Harrison writes, “In Christ, God acted and acts for the temporal and eternal blessing of the world. When we are in Christ, we can do nothing other than to act for the well-being of others.”<sup>1</sup>

**Thank you for taking the time to pick up this handbook. May the Lord Jesus lead you in the path of healing and hope.**



<sup>1</sup> Matthew Harrison, *Christ Have Mercy: How to Put Your Faith in Action* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), 39.

## The Path of Recovery is Different in Each Location

As you read this manual, please know that each disaster differs from another in both breathe and scope. And as a result, the recovery processes will also differ. This manual provides one possible approach among many that you and your church family may wish to consider. In some disaster recovery situations, a church family may simply work to help their own member families who have been afflicted by the disaster. In other disaster situations, a church family may choose to become deeply involved in their community's recovery efforts. The choice is yours as you are led by the Spirit of God to serve in the way that is best for you. While far from a comprehensive manual, this handbook seeks to provide enough information for you to find a spot in the recovery process where God can best use you to bring the mercy of Christ to broken people.

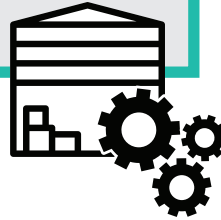
In the case of Our Savior Lutheran Church in Minot, North Dakota, the site of a catastrophic flood that destroyed 4,830 homes and left one-third of the community's population homeless, a decision was made to become deeply involved in the recovery process. Working together with other agencies, Our Savior Lutheran Church helped pioneer a new model for disaster recovery that combined the efforts of multiple agencies into a single volunteer center. Located on the campus of Our Savior Lutheran Church and working under a unified brand called Hope Village, nine national faith-based agencies, along with federal, state and local entities, formed a "one-stop volunteer center" that maximized the strengths of each individual organization, reduced redundancies, and helped people get back into their homes in the fastest possible way. The end result of this unified approach was to defy what the experts predicted. Predictions were that Minot's recovery that would take up to seven years. However, by working together through a one-stop recovery center Hope Village partners were able to reduce the community's recovery time to a mere three years.



## How Does a One-Stop Recovery Center Work?

The philosophy behind Hope Village – a unified one-stop recovery center

1. Each partner organization retains its own corporate identity and works according to its greatest strength.
2. Each partner organization provides primary funding for its portion of the combined work.
3. Each partner organization recruits volunteers from its own networks for the common work of recovery.
4. Each partner organization works from a unified case management system.
5. Each partner organization provides direction for the whole through a unified leadership structure.



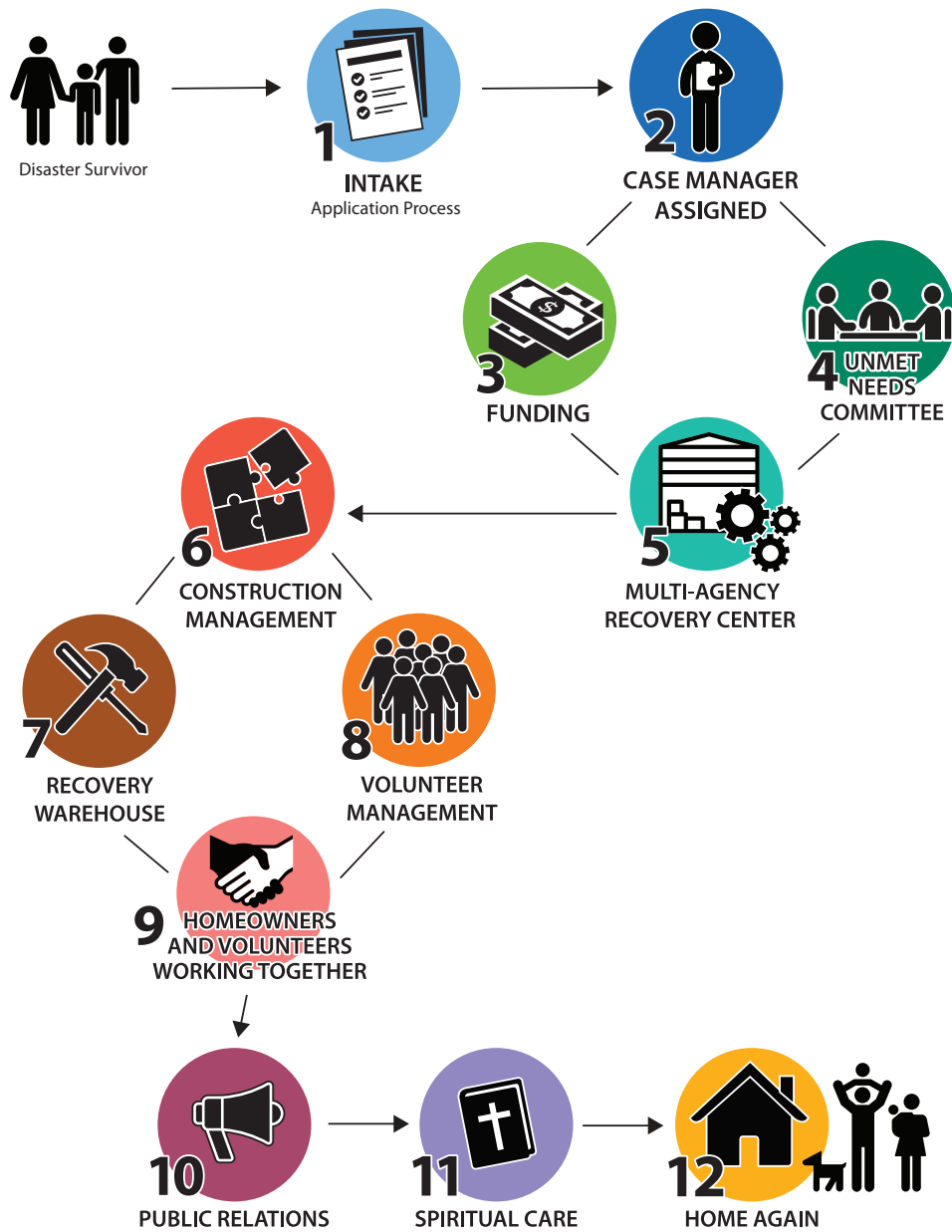
A one-stop volunteer recovery center works hand in hand with the LTRO to quickly move families toward healing.

Know the system. Become involved. Find your best fit.

## Where to start?

Whether you and your church chose to take a larger role or a smaller role in your community's disaster recovery, you don't have to go it alone, nor should you. You can begin by taking an active part in your community's Long Term Recovery Organization (LTRO). Following a disaster, a county's Emergency Manager will activate the processes to form a LTRO from within the community. By definition, an LTRO is a collaborative, interfaith, interagency group from the community which aims to meet people's unmet needs after they have suffered damage to their houses. The LTRO networks with community leaders, state and local government officials, FEMA Voluntary Agency Liaisons (VALs) and others to provide meaningful direction for a community's recovery. Based on the level of need, your church can determine whether services such as volunteer housing may be needed or whether other levels of involvement might be a helpful way to serve. A one-stop volunteer recovery center works hand in hand with the LTRO to quickly move families toward healing. Know the system. Become involved. Find your best fit.

## Path of Recovery



## 1. Creating the Intake System: The Journey of Hope Begins

The journey to healing for disaster-affected families and individuals begins with a simple application for services connecting people in need to the resources available through your volunteer recovery center. The registration, or **intake system** is a cooperative effort of the partner organizations where information necessary to access each organization's services is gathered and compiled through one application format.<sup>2</sup>

Information such as:

- The names and relationships of household members caught in the disaster
- Pre-disaster information on the family's dwelling
- Current contact information, pre- and post-disaster financial information
- Immediate unmet needs, such as medications and similar items
- Aid that has been received to date
- An assessment of risk factors
- Other information that may be helpful to serve each family unit

From this single registration point your recovery center partners are best able to serve each affected family. This is significant because with a single registration point, family members are not caught in a frantic search for help, nor are they re-victimized by competing questionnaires from multiple organizations offering limited assistance. A single entry point eliminates duplication and maximizes the amount of aid that can be channeled to a hurting family as recovery organizations are all working from the same page.

In the case of Minot's Hope Village, the partner organization that managed both client intake and the case management systems was the Dakota Conference of the United Methodist Church. The complexities of FEMA rules, state and federal laws, legal landmines, HIPPA privacy concerns, and more—all items that could easily damage the recovery efforts if done poorly—were each handled with unprecedented expertise. With a strong history of case management training from UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief), the Dakota Conference of the United Methodist Church was the best organization to run both the client intake and the case management system for the recovery center's cooperative work.

The Dakota Conference developed a cooperative intake team called the Resources Agencies Flood Team (RAFT). RAFT is a cooperative effort that has proven to be one of the most effective ways for faith-based and community based agencies to work together in a crisis. RAFT's mission is to bring caring and compassion to people whose lives have been impacted by suffering and destruction caused by disaster. RAFT's role in the face of disaster is to come together to find resources to assist in recovery.<sup>3</sup>



One way that the members of your church family may wish to become involved in the recovery effort might be to serve as a part of the INTAKE TEAM.

With compassion and care your members can reflect the mercy of Christ and begin to build bridges to healing.

<sup>2</sup> For a simple form, see the appendix at the end of this manual.

<sup>3</sup> Dakota Conference UMC, 2012.





## CASE MANAGER ASSIGNED

As your church family chooses to become involved in your community's healing, members from your church family may wish to serve as Case Managers.

In this role they have the privilege to become the hands and feet of Christ himself as they listen, encourage, and help disaster survivors work toward a new normal in their life.

## 2. Assigning a Case Manager: No Survivors Are Alone

Vital to the recovery center's entire effort is the function of the **case manager**, an individual who is specially trained to walk beside a disaster survivor from start to finish in their recovery journey.

Over several meetings, a case manager works with the homeowner to develop a recovery plan. The case manager will determine which resources will be of greatest importance to the client. This might include information about finances, rebates and potential benefits from filing for casualty losses with the Internal Revenue Service, or more. In this capacity the case manager is a vital wealth of knowledge to an overwhelmed survivor. This is mercy in action. Simply having a knowledgeable person to talk with as the plan is being developed provides a strong injection of hope. The case manager also works closely with the recovery center's home-appraisal team to assess the cost of rebuilding the essential living space with volunteer labor. They are a vital link between the homeowner and the powerful help that is available through the recovery center's partners. The case manager is also a vital link for a client's emotional care, often recommending counseling and pastoral care options for those still experiencing trauma.

When a case manager has provided as many resources as possible and a recovery plan is in place, they present a family's remaining need to an unmet needs committee. This is a committee of "last resorts." Through this committee the survivor may receive money, which he or she often stretches two to four times in value through volunteer labor and donated building supplies.

The partner organization that trained and supervised case managers for Hope Village was the Dakota Conference of the United Methodist Church. Individuals who were willing to serve as case managers were recruited from local churches and other community organizations and trained for service. With compassionate hearts and knowledge of the recovery process, these case managers were able to help point survivors in the right direction and navigate the treacherous road of resources, while assuring the homeowner that they were not alone.

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### Case Management is Truly a "Must-Have"

Even if your church chooses a very small role in assisting the community, making a connection with a centralized case management system in your area is strongly recommended. Given the complexities that often surround the recovery efforts, such as IRS reporting guidelines or the often-complicated FEMA regulations, your kindness could actually create a greater hardship for the families you are trying to help. Connecting with the expertise of a case management system is vital if you are looking to assist people in recovery.

### 3. Conquering the Impossible: Funding a Family's Recovery

Given the magnitude of the community's loss, the burning question at every level is, "Where will we find the money to rebuild?" The good news is that there are funding sources that are readily accessible for both the homeowner and the church leader willing to take bold steps toward the healing of the community.

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#### Ten Potential Funding Sources for a Homeowner

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The good news is that a surviving family may have access to more financial options than they originally thought. Here is a beginning list of funding sources that a homeowner may be able to access.

##### 1. Personal resources

Each family is usually able to bring something to the table to aid in the rebuilding of their home. For some it might be personal savings. For others it might be the ability to borrow money from their local bank, or even take on an additional job to apply toward their recovery. These may be hard options, but each family has the ability to contribute something to the rebuilding of their home.

##### 2. Homeowner's insurance

Depending upon the cause of the disaster, a large portion of the rebuilding costs may be covered by a family's homeowner's policy. For example, tornado losses are often a covered peril with a typical homeowner's policy, while loss due to flooding is generally not considered a covered peril. The types of insurance benefits available will vary according to the type of disaster and according to each individual policy. However, in many circumstances a family will benefit greatly with insurance coverage.

When it comes to volunteer labor there is a rule of thumb that comes into play. Homeowners with full insurance coverage, as in the case of a tornado, should use local contractors for the work of rebuilding their homes. Homeowners who are without insurance coverage, as in the case of a flood, should give active consideration to using qualified volunteer laborers for the rebuilding processes and target their financial resources for the purchasing of materials. Well-trained case managers can help a family sort through these details.

##### 3. FEMA Disaster Assistance

As soon as possible after a disaster strikes, survivors should register with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). FEMA offers a number of grant and assistance programs for affected individuals. An initial FEMA grant is given in order to provide safe housing immediately following a disaster. While there are strings attached to the way this grant can be used, most FEMA emergency grant funds can be applied directly to a family's rebuilding needs. A case manager can help sort this through.



#### FUNDING

Funds that Support  
These Projects

Healing begins with  
personal ownership and  
helping survivors to  
identify their resources  
for recovery.

Active civic leaders with a heart for their communities will find ways to make a difference in the lives of those facing great need.

Are there special programs in your community now?

If not, how can you help make it happen?

#### **4. Small Business Administration loan**

Grant assistance from FEMA can help jump-start the recovery, but it may not cover all damage or property loss. Low-interest disaster loans are available to homeowners through the Small Business Administration (SBA) in order to repair or replace damaged real estate. Homeowners and renters may also be eligible for SBA funding to repair or replace damaged personal property as well.

#### **5. Friends, family, coworkers, employer**

It is not uncommon to find that friends, family members or coworkers will come to the aid of a person who has been hit especially hard by a disaster. While these gifts range significantly in size, financial assistance from family or friends can add to a homeowner's ability to purchase materials for their home. At the same time it is not uncommon for an employer to provide financial assistance when their employees have been hit hard. In Minot's disaster, some employers provided an outright grant to employees who were affected by the flood. Others provided free housing to their employees for up to six months while they got their families back on their feet. These gifts range significantly in size yet each gift has the ability to augment a family's financial need when it comes to rebuilding their home.

#### **6. Corporate gifts**

In some cases, major corporations or individuals will make a significant personal contribution to families in need. Following high profile flooding in Grand Forks, North Dakota, the McDonald's Corporation, through its charitable foundation, gave a \$2,000 gift to every homeowner who was affected by the massive Red River flood. This gift was a large injection of hope for the community. Other corporations are known to have made similar contributions to disaster-affected families. In some settings, corporate gifts such as these can be a substantial part of a family's financial help.

#### **7. Special assistance programs**

Forward-thinking leaders will often look to create special assistance programs designed to help homeowners who have survived a disaster. In the case of Minot's catastrophic disaster, the Bank of North Dakota, a state owned institution, put together a series of low-interest loans that were specifically targeted to help Minot area homeowners. The terms of these low-interest loans made a significant difference for many families in recovery. Perhaps one of the ways your church can further the cause of mercy is through connections found from within your own church family. Through your members you can perhaps suggest ways to create special programs through local businesses or institutions.

#### **8. Community foundations**

Active civic leaders with a heart for their communities will find ways to make a difference in the lives of those facing great need. This is especially true following a natural disaster. When a catastrophic disaster hits, generous and caring people are moved to contribute financially. Well-established community foundations are often places where donations are received and where donors for the recovery are actively sought. Funding for a family's rebuilding efforts can be substantial when community foundations are active behind the scenes in securing recovery funds. The Minot Area Community Foundation became a vehicle of choice for donors to make significant gifts to the recovery efforts. The foundation actively

used its resources to cultivate donors and gather funds that could meet a host of community needs. Their expertise formed a backbone of support through private donations. Members of Hope Village's resource team were able to access funds on behalf of individual families through the normal grant application process, with the Minot Area Community Foundation generously meeting those requests.

### **9. Local churches**

Local churches also play a role in helping their members during the rebuilding process. In most cases, local churches will receive donations from sister congregations across the nation. National church body partners will also provide assistance to members who have lost their homes in the disaster. These gifts come from the merciful hearts of God's people who hurt for their Christian brothers and sisters. When combined with the generous gifts of their own membership, local churches can often be a generous source of assistance. It is necessary to note that not every local congregation is able to provide financial assistance. A good case manager will help individuals approach their church family to determine if there are possibilities for financial assistance.

### **10. Funding developed by your recovery center**

As you bring all the players in a community's recovery under one roof you also bring together a host of creative minds who all have the homeowner in mind. From this group of people there exists the potential for many creative ideas that may financially help a homeowner.

Working together, Hope Village partners were able to provide a number of additional creative ways to bridge the financial gap for families by tapping into funding sources that may not have been accessible as agencies working independently. For example:

#### **a. The North Dakota Retain and Recovery Grant (R&R Grant)**

Working in partnership with Minot's Long Term Recovery Organization, Hope Village partners were able to write and then secure a \$3.5 million grant from the State of North Dakota. The grant was the first of its kind to directly assist qualified homeowners who were in danger of relocating away from the Minot area following the disaster. The R&R Grant was a creative approach to retain a homeowner's presence in the community by supplying significant funds for materials. A key to the successful funding of this request came as a result of the combined capacity of multiple disaster organizations working together under one roof. The Hope Village concept created a natural vehicle for the state to channel recovery dollars. Developing a one-stop recovery center may provide a similar vehicle through which your state might consider supplying recovery dollars.

#### **b. Foundation grants**

A one-stop multi-agency system proved to be an exceptional vehicle for foundations to make a large impact with their funds. Individually, each Hope Village partner wrote and received grant funding for the common work. In addition, a resource team was developed that was comprised of community members who were familiar with all areas of the grant writing process. The resource team included men and women who served on the staff of local colleges, schools and nonprofit organizations in the capacity as grant writers.

As you bring all the players in a community's recovery under one roof you also bring together a host of creative minds who all have the homeowner in mind. From this group of people there exists the potential for many creative ideas that may financially help a homeowner.

God's people are very generous people in times of disaster. With compassionate hearts Christian people freely and generously give to their national church bodies to support disaster response.

Each one volunteered their time and expertise to collaborate with Hope Village in finding foundation dollars that would help put families back in their homes. The team members worked together to secure additional funding from suitable foundations. As your recovery center seeks to find additional dollars for the reconstruction of homes, you may wish to contact local grant writers in your area for direction in working with foundations.

**c. Business sponsorships**

Once Hope Village established a positive reputation in the community for helping families rebuild their lives, local businesses became generous and creative in the ways they chose to support the work. This might become an avenue for your recovery center to help secure funding for the families that you serve.

**Here are some examples:**

- A local fast food chain created a community sensation when it announced a special Saturday where it would donate 100% of its proceeds to Hope Village. This special event became a media frenzy that generated unprecedented publicity for the business while raising close to \$40,000.
- A local contractor found a creative way to make a life-impacting gift. The contractor's gift was more than \$75,000. However, rather than making an outward cash gift, the contractor donated a piece of property directly to Hope Village. By donating the land, the contractor could realize significant tax benefits. Hope Village then realized a significant gift as the property was resold.

These are two of the more significant ways in which area business leaders were able to make significant contributions to the work of recovery following Minot's disaster. As a church leader, you can get involved with business leaders, gain their confidence, listen to their ideas and find creative ways to work together to develop significant funding.

**d. Support from national church bodies**

God's people are very generous in times of disaster. With compassionate hearts Christian people freely and generously give to their national church bodies to support disaster response. Church leaders are also wise stewards with the resources that God's people provide. This means they do not distribute resources indiscriminately. A one-stop recovery center developed by your church may prove to be an exceptional vehicle for national church bodies to impact a large number of lives with the compassion of Christ. Invite national church leaders to tour your facility and see your work first-hand. Gain their confidence. Seek their wisdom. There is usually an application process that you use to request funds. Use the existing networks of your church and the networks of your partner organizations to explore funding from national church bodies.

**e. Develop a speakers bureau**

Within your recovery organization there are usually individuals who can make a compelling case for financial assistance. And truth be told, the story of a unified one-stop recovery center bringing maximum assistance to disaster survivors is a compelling story. Civic clubs, business associations, churches, para-church organizations, clergy associations and other organizations are generally favorable to your message and will often yield significant funding. As you network, additional opportunities to tell your story will arise. Creating a well-developed speakers bureau can add significant support to your organization's work.

**F. Social media contribution**

Significant funding can also take place through social media networks. A knowledgeable public relations person from your recovery center will have the ability to grow support through the social media networks of each volunteer. According to Facebook, an average post made by an individual is viewed approximately 80 times. If your recovery center were to host 5,000 volunteers who post to Facebook, a single reposted message could reach 400,000 views. A well-developed marketing strategy can communicate your story in powerful ways and at the same time provide an avenue for donations through social media networks.<sup>4</sup>

These are some of the creative ways that Hope Village found to provide additional funding for families and individuals as they rebuilt their homes. Working with a strong case manager, a homeowner can assemble significant financial help from a number of sources. When these funds are combined with skilled volunteers, your recovery center can do remarkable things for individual homeowners, and, beyond that, for the community at large.

A well-developed marketing strategy can communicate your story in powerful ways and at the same time provide an avenue for donations through social media networks.



<sup>4</sup> Facebook, 2012



## UNMET NEEDS COMMITTEE

When working in coordination with your recovery center, the unmet needs committee can be one more avenue through which critical funding can be found to assist in even the most difficult of situations.

### 4. The Power of an Unmet Needs Committee

In every disaster it can be assumed that there will be individuals with remaining need that will not be met by state, federal or local programs. An **unmet needs committee** is developed by the county's LTRO to identify and assist individuals who did not receive sufficient assistance to get them back to pre-disaster levels. The unmet needs committee might include area business leaders, clergy, social service personnel, heads of community non-profit organizations and others. This group works to secure funding and resources to assist the most difficult cases where families and individuals have simply run out of options.

When a case manager has provided as many resources as possible and a recovery plan is in place, the case manager then works with a supervisor to present the remaining needs to the unmet needs committee. This is a committee of "last resorts" so to say. When all other options have been exhausted the committee considers each applicant on a case-by-case basis and allocates financial assistance from a wide range of sources.

Because of the extensive ties to the community, the Souris Valley United Way was utilized as the partner organization to manage Minot's unmet needs committee. Using fiscal expertise, fundraising prowess, and wise management, the United Way served as a strong partner for the community's disaster recovery as it directed the work of the unmet needs committee. Partnering with Hope Village, many families were able to meet a large portion of their remaining financial need and return to their homes because of the work of the unmet needs committee.



## 5. Unwinding the Knots: How a Multi-Agency Recovery Center is Organized

A **one-stop multi-agency recovery center** is a unique approach to disaster response that minimizes redundancy, maximizes resources and moves people back into their homes in the fastest possible way.

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### Basic Organizational Philosophy: Five Key Points

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- 1. Each partner organization retains its own corporate identity and works according to its greatest strength.**
  - One organization may be strong in construction management but weaker in case management. Another organization may be stronger in volunteer organization but have a weakness in the area of food services. This model allows each partner organization to focus efforts in its area of strength and then allow another strong organization to cover its area of weakness.
  - The result is a more effective recovery that serves disaster-affected families more efficiently with less redundancy.
- 2. Each partner organization provides primary funding for its portion of the combined work.**
  - If a partner organization's role is food service, that organization supplies the necessary personnel and funding for a successful food service on behalf of the group. If a partner organization's role is case management, or volunteer management, that organization supplies the necessary personnel and funding for the successful operation of case management or volunteer management on behalf of the entire group.
  - Partner organizations use their normal funding sources, i.e. donors, foundations, grants, etc., to supply funds for their area of service, thus enhancing the overall work of the group.
  - The end result is that the limited financial resources of each partner organization are maximized as donor dollars are used in the most productive ways possible.
- 3. Each partner organization recruits volunteers from its own networks for the common work of recovery.**
  - Each partner organization already has its own volunteer recruitment processes that run deep in the organization. Rather than reinventing the wheel, each organization uses its own networks in the most effective way possible in order to enlist volunteers for the common recovery effort.
  - With each partner organization working to recruit volunteers, the quality and quantity of volunteers expands exponentially.
- 4. Each partner organization works from a unified case management system.**
  - "One-stop" means that disaster-affected families are able to access the services of all partner organizations through one intake system. Families are not re-victimized by the trauma of filling out repeated paperwork time and time again in order to find the help they desperately need.
  - This also means that a single case manager walks with the family through the entire process from beginning to end, giving the disaster-affected family additional encouragement and security in the difficult process of rebuilding their home and life.



**ORGANIZATION OF  
A MULTI-AGENCY  
RECOVERY CENTER**



**5. Each partner organization provides direction for the whole through a unified leadership structure.**

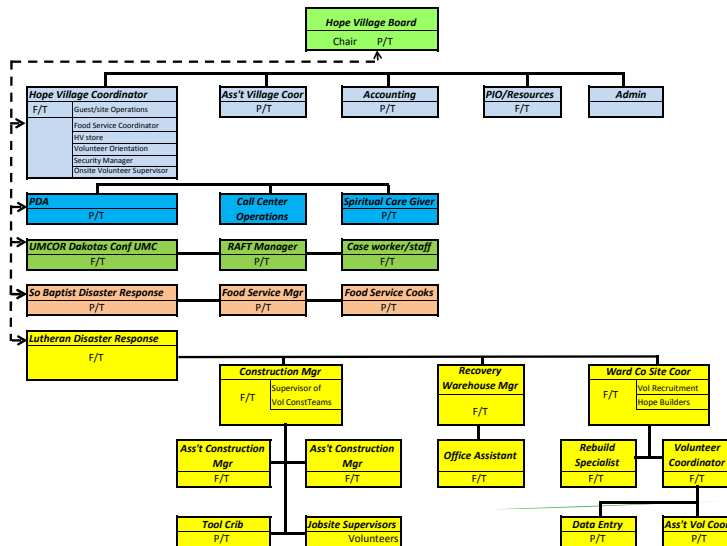
- Once the organizational structure and functions are established, the work of recovery is directed through a unified board or leadership team consisting of representatives from each partner organization.
- Working together from a common leadership team, strengths are maximized, weaknesses are minimized, and solutions are found to meet even the most difficult of challenges.

**A Workable Framework**

Oversight, communication, management and accountability will all be important functions for your recovery center’s success. These are directed through a unified board or leadership team that represents each of the primary partners organizations.

One member of each partner organization sat on the Hope Village Board of Directors. These members worked together to handle difficulties, monitor progress, and coordinate the efforts of each partner organization for the work of the whole group. With the exception of the position of village manager, which was hired by the whole board, each organization was responsible for its own staffing and management needs in order to most effectively accomplish their assigned tasks. This arrangement worked well, allowing individual organizations to add or subtract staff according to need.

Below is a copy of the table of organization. Notice how each organization functioned as its own department according to its own area of specialty.



For more detailed organizational charts, see Appendix D, pages 61-63.

The Hope Village Board of Directors developed operational policies and procedures for the whole organization. They developed a system of reporting that could communicate with the whole group and be translated into potential public relations opportunities. The board adopted financial management and reporting guidelines and provided for transparency and integrity in all leadership matters.

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### Handling Financial Resources – Fiscal Sponsorship

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Your recovery center will be handling donations and contributions from individuals, foundations and other organizations. In order to make these gifts qualify as charitable donations for tax deductible purposes, it is necessary to operate under an IRS 501(c)(3) designation. There are two ways to make this happen. The first is by application with the IRS for not-for-profit status. This can be a lengthy process that may work against the rapid disaster response that you are seeking. The second is much quicker. Your recovery center can seek a qualified 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization to serve as fiscal sponsor.

The following items should be in place in order to serve as a fiscal agent:

- The fiscal agent has internal safeguards and record protection procedures, as well as the ability to provide regular financial reports to your organization.
- Annual external audits are conducted by the fiscal agent.
- The fiscal agent agrees to manage the funds at the direction of your recovery center. The funds are given to and remain the property of your recovery center and not the fiscal agent.
- Your recovery center should establish a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the fiscal agent that outlines these agreements.<sup>5</sup>

Our Savior Lutheran Church served as the fiscal sponsor for Hope Village. Each of the above recommendations were easily met as the church contracts its own financial work with a local CPA firm. As was the case, Hope Village also paid for a part-time staff member within the firm who was dedicated solely to financial matters concerning Hope Village. Payroll, accounts receivable, accounts payable and general reporting and bookkeeping were all handled meticulously. The combination provided both transparency and accountability to the recovery center's finances. For further information, the fiscal sponsorship form between Our Savior Lutheran Church and Hope Village can be found in the appendix.

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### Creating Organizational Bylaws

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Whether they are formal documents or an informal set of documents, it is also wise to construct organizational bylaws for your recovery center. The bylaws will define how your recovery center intends to operate organizationally. It defines how decisions are made, gives direction to financial management, the acquiring and disposal of equipment, and more. The bylaws give guidance to each of these matters and provide a measured amount of protection to your organization. As an entity accountable to the public there is not room in your organizational structure for "seat of the pants" management. Carefully crafted bylaws will provide assurances that the best management practices are in place for the city's recovery. For a sample set of bylaws that define how a multi-agency recovery center is governed, see the bylaws of Hope Village in the appendix.

Your recovery center will be handling donations, contributions from individuals, foundations and other organizations. In order to make these gifts qualify as charitable donations for tax deductible purposes, it is necessary to operate under and IRS 501(c)(3) designation.

A fiscal sponsor may be your best option.

<sup>5</sup> National VOAD Guide, 2012



## CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT

Rebuilding efforts are guided by a criteria called safe, secure, essential living space.

### 6. Assembling the Puzzle: Construction Management

At the heart of a volunteer recovery center's work is the process of **construction management**. Construction management is like a giant jigsaw puzzle where all of the moving parts of a volunteer recovery center come together. Fundraising, grant writing, volunteer recruitment, case management, and more combine to bring the mercy of Christ to people in a tangible way as disaster-ravished homes are restored.

In Minot's recovery, Lutheran Disaster Response, later called Lutheran Social Services Disaster Response of North Dakota (LSSND), handled the complexities of construction management. LSSND supplied the critical expertise necessary to successfully manage a large-scale volunteer rebuilding effort in a way that reflected the mercy of Christ in a compassionate, professional way. As a result, each Hope Village partner organization could share in the daily successes as their own organizational strengths were multiplied through the common effort.

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#### Your Goal: Safe, Secure, Essential Living Space

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When it comes to rebuilding a disaster survivor's home, it is important to note that the primary goal is not to completely rebuild a family's damaged home. Rather, your goal is to get a family out of a temporary living situation and back into the own home where further healing can begin.

Your rebuilding efforts will be guided by a criteria called **safe, secure, essential living space**. What this means is that your organization and volunteers will only do what is necessary to make the home safe and secure for a family's return. The additional criteria of essential living space means that volunteers will rebuild only those rooms that are necessary to meet a family's essential needs, such as a kitchen, bathroom and bedrooms. Perhaps the best way to understand this is that a four-bedroom home might only have three bedrooms restored by your volunteers if the fourth bedroom was merely a guest room prior to the disaster. A guest room is not essential to a family's return. The same could be said about a basement family room or a den. These rooms, while important, are not essential to the family's safety or security and can be rebuilt over time once the family has returned to their home. Safe, secure, essential living space is an agreed upon guideline that directs your rebuilding efforts in such a way as to help a family get on their feet and begin their first steps to a new normal in the fastest possible way.

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#### Assessment and Estimates for the Rebuild – One Puzzle Piece

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Construction management begins with an assessment of the home's damage and an estimate of the repairs necessary to restore the dwelling's essential living spaces to a safe and secure standard. Driving this function is your organization's **construction manager**. Among his or her many responsibilities, a construction manager arranges for each home in your case management system to receive a careful assessment and a written estimate outlining the home's necessary repairs. This written estimate, called the construction estimate, is an essential document for a family's recovery. The construction estimate outlines the work that must

be completed, identifies the building supplies that must be secured, and assists a volunteer coordinator in matching skilled volunteers to the home's needs. In the hands of a skilled case manager, the document also guides the search for building materials and directs a family's recovery plan. At the same time, when done well, the construction estimate will also meet the necessary criteria for securing a construction loan from a lending institution should that become necessary. The construction estimate forms the cornerstone for your rebuilding efforts.

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### Managing the Daily Work – Another Puzzle Piece



There are four functions that seamlessly interact to make your recovery center's daily operation successful: jobs, volunteers, materials and tool. These functions are under the direction of key staff members in your recovery center's organization: the construction manager, the volunteer coordinator, the job site supervisors and the tool manager. Like a well-choreographed dance these four come together each day to create a symphony of care for a disaster-stricken family.

#### a. Jobs

When it comes to rebuilding homes, the **construction manager** is responsible for the jobs to be accomplished each day by your volunteers. Together with a team, the construction manager keeps attune with the progress of each home and helps foster continued positive progress toward completion. He or she is familiar with construction methods and the applicable building codes. He or she is a problem solver and a careful manager of people. On any given day at Hope Village, volunteer teams were working in five to fifteen different homes and the construction manager orchestrated their activities. Each morning volunteers could receive their work assignments with confidence knowing that the very best efforts had been put into place for the successful completion of their tasks.

#### b. Volunteers

Equally important is the job of the **volunteer coordinator**. The volunteer coordinator has the vital task of identifying the skill sets of each volunteer and then matching those skills to jobs in a particular home. While most volunteers have a wide variety of experiences, the volunteer coordinator's task is to target specific volunteers for specific tasks to insure that a disaster survivor receives the very best possible work. In this regard the volunteer coordinator acts much like the conductor of a symphony orchestra as he or she delays or accelerates jobs on the calendar to match the skill sets of upcoming volunteer teams.

Since most teams stay for approximately one week, a volunteer coordinator will do as much work as possible to assess a team's capability prior to their arrival. This critical pre-arrival assessment makes the most of a volunteer's time and makes sure that their experiences in a disaster area will be worthwhile. Hope Village sent a volunteer packet as soon as a team registered. The volunteer packet included many things that would put volunteers at ease and would prepare them for time in the disaster zone. In addition, the packet included a skills assessment form to be returned to the volunteer coordinator. This form outlined individual skill sets and provided a clearer picture of the volunteer team's capabilities. When done well, the volunteer coordinator is able to put a volunteer team to work on day one of their arrival with jobs that match their skill sets.

There are four functions that seamlessly interact to make your recovery center's daily operation successful: jobs, volunteers, materials and tools.



For a sample volunteer manual used by Hope Village see the appendix at the end of this handbook.



**IMPORTANT ROLES:**

**Construction Manager**  
Responsible for the jobs to be accomplished each day by the volunteers

**Volunteer Coordinator**  
Identifies the skill sets of each volunteer and then matching those skills to jobs in a particular home

**Job Site Supervisor**  
Ensures the proper materials are in place and ready to go as the volunteers arrive for their day's work

**Tool Manager**  
Assesses work schedules and prepares tools for each volunteer team

**c. Materials**

Nothing happens in the home if the right materials are not in place when volunteers arrive. Working in conjunction with the other team members, the **job site supervisor(s)** carries this responsibility. While case management may help a family find the funds for materials, it is the role of the job site supervisor to make sure that the proper materials are in place and ready to go as the volunteers arrive for their day's work. This may involve everything from the actual physical delivery of materials to making sure that the family has purchased the right building supplies for the day's work. Regardless of the action, the supervisor's goal is to have the right materials in the right place at the right time for the recovery center's volunteers to begin their work each day.

The job site supervisor serves two additional roles for the rebuilding process. First, he or she provides direction to the volunteer teams as they rebuild a disaster survivor's home. There is nothing worse than to have to redo a day's task because a well-intentioned volunteer did not understand how to do the job properly. The supervisor monitors the work in order to maintain quality. He or she is familiar with home construction and is able to patiently direct or assist a volunteer when necessary. Secondly, the job site supervisor provides continuity to the rebuilding process. Volunteers come and go over the course of a home's reconstruction but the job site supervisor stays with the home from the beginning of construction to the end. He or she understands the home's building plan in its big picture and at the same time is also able to orchestrate individual jobs to create a masterful whole. This is a win-win situation. The homeowner gets the assurance of quality construction and the volunteers get the satisfaction of knowing that the family was blessed with work done right.

It's also important to note that it is not necessary for a supervisor to micro-manage each home. Depending upon the skill level of a volunteer team, the job site supervisor may oversee the construction of up to five homes at a time, freely moving in between each home to answer questions, lend a hand, or provide valuable expertise in new areas of construction. In this regard the job site supervisor is a valuable part of your recovery center's team and a vital link in the rebuilding of your disaster stricken community.

**d. Tools**

Jobs might be ready, materials may be on site but work will not happen without properly equipped volunteers. This is the job of the **tool manager**. The tool manager has the important task of viewing the next day's work schedule and preparing tools for each volunteer team. Ideally, tools are gathered and set aside for teams to quickly check them out each morning as they make their way to the job site. Some experienced volunteers or volunteer teams will travel with their own tools. In this case your tool manager arranges for the specialty tools that a job may require or the tools that a volunteer team could not bring.

Keeping track of the tools is often one of the more difficult responsibilities that a tool manager must deal with. For that reason, most use a system whereby volunteers check out tools at the beginning of the day and recheck tools back in at the end of the day. Not only does this system keep tools from getting lost, it also gives the tool manager the opportunity to identify broken tools that need

repair or replacement. Hope Village utilized a tool crib containing tools from multiple agencies, and tools were color-coded to match each agency's inventory. Repairs and replacements were often supplied from a common fund.

Having the right tools for the job in a timely and efficient manner serves your volunteers well and adds to their sense of accomplishment. At the same time it maximizes their ability to help disaster-stricken families. This is the vital purpose that your tool manager plays.

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### **The DRD: Disaster Response Database – Another Piece of the Puzzle**



Managing the details of a large disaster rebuild is a monumental task. Surprisingly, the task can become easier with the use of a computer software program called, the Disaster Response Database (DRD). The DRD is a continually evolving software program developed by Lutheran Disaster Response of North Dakota that tracks all aspects of a volunteer rebuilding effort. Volunteer registration, homeowner information, construction estimates, tool purchases and inventory, building materials, supply inventories, private purchases, homeowner comments, case management details, volunteer hours for FEMA reimbursement, and much more are all captured by the DRD. With the push of a button, a report can be generated to give real-time data on most aspects of the rebuilding process. This simple tool can save hundreds of hours of work as it corrals the minute details necessary to make informed decisions. The DRD has been used in volunteer rebuilding efforts all over the United States since 2001 and proved to be an invaluable component for Minot's disaster recovery efforts.

Another software program to become familiar with in managing the rebuilding process is a program called Coordinated Assistance Network (CAN). Using CAN, multiple community-based agencies are able to appropriately share data in a way that will speed the rebuilding process.

Both of these programs are proprietary software and with rare exception are not available for individual usage. However, access to data management on this level is truly one of the benefits of working as a multi-agency recovery center. Hope Village's partner organizations all benefited from the management strength of both the DRD and CAN. The end result was that the care and compassion of Christ could be delivered with an attentiveness to detail to disaster-stricken families in the community.





## RECOVERY WAREHOUSE

Through the creation of Minot's Recovery Warehouse, local, state and national business organizations could directly donate building supplies.

### 7. Managing Materials: the Recovery Warehouse

A village filled with volunteers provides little help if homeowners could not afford to purchase materials necessary to rebuild their homes. Rebuilding a disaster damaged home is costly. Making the task even more difficult is the stark reality that following a disaster a family is hit with three massive financial situations all at the same time. First, a family must still pay their monthly mortgage on their damaged home, even if they cannot live in it. Second, they must pay monthly rental fees on a home or an apartment until they can return to their home. And, finally, on top of those two large expenses, a family must try to purchase the materials necessary to repair their home. This is a daunting task and perhaps one more way that your recovery center can provide significant help.

Working together, the partner organizations in your recovery center can greatly reduce the cost of materials that your homeowners need to purchase. By maximizing relational networks, Hope Village partners discovered creative ways to help families overcome some of the critical financial issues that stood in their way when it came to purchasing materials. Through the creation of Minot's Recovery Warehouse, local, state and national business organizations could directly donate building supplies. Paint, sheetrock, cabinets, bathroom fixtures, windows and other supplies were donated from all over the country. A local radio station did a sheetrock drive for homeowners. Corporations and manufacturers donated appliances and windows.

Many manufacturers and corporations have a process through which they can provide donations for charitable purposes. Members of the Hope Village resource team actively sought out corporate donations. In this way the Recovery Warehouse became a great vehicle to accept corporate donations of materials that homeowners could use for rebuilding their homes. For items beyond donations, bulk purchasing made possible by the warehouse concept allowed for even greater savings. The Recovery Warehouse could order and store sheetrock for fifty homes at one time and pass the savings on to the individual homeowners as construction took place.

As each home's construction plan was put into place, materials generated by the Recovery Warehouse, along with materials provide by the homeowner and others, were melded into the construction management process used by Hope Village. The Construction Manager and Job Site Supervisors worked hand in hand with the Case Managers and the Recovery Warehouse personnel to put together a materials package for each home. Each day Job Site Supervisors made sure that these materials were on site so that volunteers could make the most of their time as they helped families rebuild their homes.

As you consider the development of a recovery center, consider the benefit you might bring to your community through the development of a recovery warehouse as part of your overall plan. Corporate donations, bulk purchasing, and materials storage can all reduce the cost of materials and maximize your ability to help families. Taking part in this process is yet one more way that you and your church family can display the mercy of Christ in a tangible way.

## 8. Caring for Your Volunteers: the Volunteer Village

While a local church will probably not manage the large scale rebuilding of homes on its own, the one area where a local church can partner and perhaps make the greatest contribution is by serving as a host site for a **volunteer village**. A volunteer village is a temporary location in the heart of a disaster zone that houses, feeds, and equips volunteer laborers to assist disaster-affected families. Often times a local church will house volunteers on a small scale and make limited impact. However, as a part of a combined, multi-agency effort, the local church can have a large role in the healing of a community and make a significant impact by helping to deliver thousands of volunteers to a disaster affected region. This is big stuff and it's the kind of stuff that brings a pleasing name to Jesus.

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### Basic Facilities

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“Volunteer villages run on food and showers,” is the saying of one long-time village coordinator. While food and showers are certainly important, it takes a lot more to make a volunteer village a successful place from which to stage your recovery efforts.

#### a. Office space

First, of course, are the needs for your management staff. A suitable place for desks, files, computers, and general office equipment is a minimum requirement. Some volunteer villages have used converted classrooms from the church building itself. Others, as in the case of Hope Village, used office trailers, such as one might find at a construction site as office facilities for the management staff. These trailers were equipped with telephone, internet services and other necessities for daily work and served as the management hub for the village. Office equipment, even the trailers themselves, are great items to seek to fund through grants. In some cases, a national partner such as Orphan Grain train already has access to mobile office units that can house your management staff.

#### b. Sleeping space

Overnight lodging is another consideration. While a certain amount of urgency may exist, care should be exercised to provide reasonable accommodations for your volunteer workers. Simply tossing a sleeping bag on the corner of a basement floor may work for an evening, but in the long run it will most certainly deter volunteers from returning. For some churches, this means turning spare classrooms into sleeping rooms, complete with bunk beds and mattresses.

For churches without classrooms to spare, an option once again is to provide overnight accommodations for your volunteers through the use of mobile bunk trailers. A back lot at the church can very quickly be transformed into the location for a volunteer village as bunk trailers are placed to accommodate your volunteers. Many of your national partners may have access to mobile bunk units. In most cases, a bunk unit will house eight to ten people depending upon the style and layout. Mobile bunk units are also something that you may seek to fund through your grant writing teams.



## VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

Over the course of a 20-month rebuilding phase, Presbyterian Disaster Response flawlessly registered 5,812 volunteers from 42 states and four Canadian provinces. These volunteers provided more than 185,000 volunteer hours resulting in \$3.6 million in volunteer labor to the people of Minot.





**A solid proposal that demonstrates the impact of your volunteer rebuilding efforts will often yield positive results from a foundation or other funding source.**

A solid proposal that demonstrates the impact of your volunteer rebuilding efforts will often yield positive results from a foundation or other funding source. Hope Village secured grants to purchase four fully winterized units consisting of three bedrooms, housing a total of 12 volunteers each. These were designed and built to North Dakota specifications and were crafted specifically for our volunteer needs. When combined with housing units from the national partners, Hope Village was capable of housing 180 volunteers per night on the main campus, with additional beds available at off-campus satellite locations.

#### **c. Electrical service**

Not surprisingly, it takes a little bit more to set up the housing units than to simply roll them in and open the door. Among them is the need to supply electrical power to each unit. One would wish that a simple extension cord plugged into an outside outlet would suffice. However, this is far from true. Depending upon the unit, 30, 50, or 100 amp power sources are needed for each unit. This requires a conversation with your local utility company and a licensed electrician. Supplying the needed power may also involve additional transformers and lines brought into service on your property. The good news is that this is what your local utility companies do on a daily basis, which very simply means you can have power up and running for your units rather quickly.

#### **d. RV accommodations**

Some volunteers, as well as your job site supervisors, may prefer to stay in their own motorhomes or campers. In your site preparations, plan to include several spots for private motor homes. Each site should be equipped with its own 50 amp electrical service and have easy drive in/out access. This is especially true when your site plan does not have the capacity to offer any type of septic service for private campers. In that case you may wish to consider contracting with a local septic service company to provide septic care for your long-term residents. Organizations such as Mission Builders or Laborers for Christ have members who may easily form the core of your job site supervisors. These members usually bring their own lodging and stay on site for three to nine months at a time so having RV pads in your site plan is a positive option.

#### **e. Zoning requirements**

In addition to utility services, there may be significant zoning requirements that your volunteer village must meet before you begin to house volunteers. In many cases, your city or county may require something called a Special Use Permit or a Temporary Use Permit. This is the official stamp of approval that a city council gives allowing you to house volunteers on your property. In some jurisdictions a Special Use Permit is required when you do something as simple as converting classrooms to sleeping spaces. As you are putting your action steps together make sure to contact your city or county planning officer. There are usually very defined steps for you to take in order to gain all of the necessary approvals for a Special Use Permit. In the process you may also find statutes of which you were unaware, such as zoning requirements or noise regulations. Hope Village's planners were surprised to discover a seemingly unusual regulation requiring that a vapor barrier be placed between the ground and any temporary unit that was to be in a location for more than 90 days. It was simple to comply with large sheets of plastic prior to putting each unit in place. However, discovering the requirement after the village was already in place would have been even more costly to remedy.

There are usually a number of safeguarding regulations to meet before the city or county officials will issue a Certificate of Occupancy to your recovery center. Understanding and meeting these regulations is a definite requirement. Failure to do so can cause the immediate closure of your village and bring your recovery efforts to an abrupt halt.

#### **f. Showers and restrooms**

In the planning of your volunteer village, never underestimate the value of a hot shower at the end of the day. This means paying careful attention to both the quantity and the quality of your shower facilities. A good working ratio to target in your planning is to have one shower for every ten volunteers. If this seems excessive, consider a family of ten all trying to use a single shower in the morning before starting the day. This is what your volunteers face at the end of a hot, dirty, sweaty day of work. Anything less than a one to ten ratio will only make the close of the day difficult for your volunteers.

The same thing can be said about the quality of your showers. While volunteers understand the nature of disaster work and the realities of working in a disaster zone, the simple truth is that they also appreciate genuine attempts to have their own needs met. A couple of cold, moldy showers in the back corner of the church basement may work when there are no other options but in the long run these poorer quality options will do little to effect the return of a volunteer team. The longer the recovery period is estimated to be, the more attention should be given to your volunteer shower options.

Some of the workable options include:

- **Local schools or YMCA facility.** Many times your recovery center can establish a working relationship with a local school or YMCA that will allow your volunteers to use locker room facilities. This will usually require proof of your background checks done on volunteers and a strict set of guidelines for your volunteers to adhere. However, when done well, these local facilities can help you meet the needs of your volunteer workers.
- **Mobile bathroom and shower units.** Your partner organizations are often able to supply mobile bathroom and shower units that you can place on your property as part of your volunteer village. In the case of Hope Village, Orphan Grain Train was the partner organization that was able to supply shower and restroom units. Bathroom units were self-contained and provided separate facilities for men and women. Shower units were self-contained units consisting of three to six showers that could simply be set in place and connected to local water and sewer. An “on-demand” propane water heater supplied hot water and local plumbers worked to make sure each unit met city and county occupancy codes.
- **Grant funding for additional mobile units.** To meet the need that partner organizations could not supply, members of the Hope Village resource team were able to secure grant funding for additional shower trailers. These trailers could be easily transported to whatever location they might be needed, such as a satellite housing site for volunteers or a worksite where shower access might be needed. When not in use off-campus, these mobile shower units provided additional resources on the Hope Village campus.

Just as your volunteers give to the city, members of the city desire to give back to your volunteers as they help the city to heal.

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## Large Group Space and Village Life

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When putting your recovery center together, consideration should also be given to providing large group spaces for your volunteers. These spaces are areas where volunteer teams might meet for some of the official functions of the camp, such as daily instructions and job assignments, or simply the space for volunteers to gather for their own team discussions, relax and wind down the day.

With a capacity of 180 volunteers per night, Hope Village provided three large group spaces for volunteer use. The primary large group space for daily instructions, job assignments and other gatherings that required the full assembly of volunteers took place in the dining tent. In this capacity the dining tent was equipped with simple audio/visual equipment to address the larger group. With this media equipment, the dining tent also served for orientation of new teams. Each arriving team could be briefed on the depth of Minot's flood tragedy, the hope they would provide as volunteers, and an update the latest on the recovery efforts. Hope Village also provided two other large group spaces for volunteers to use at the end of the day in order to relax, regroup and enjoy one another's company. One of the spaces was another larger tent equipped with comfortable chairs, tables and board games that were all donated by the larger church family. Another space was a small modular classroom building placed on the property. This served as a television lounge and internet hub for volunteers to use at their leisure. This was often the room that a volunteer team would use for evening prayers or group devotional time.

When it comes to village life, consider involvement with the city or neighborhood community as well. There is a surprising phenomenon that takes place when a city or neighborhood realizes the depth of the help that volunteers bring to a city's post-disaster healing. Just as your volunteers give to the city, members of the city desire to give back to your volunteers as they help the city to heal. Local musicians find it rewarding to perform for volunteers as a thank you for their service. Service organizations such as the Kiwanis or the Rotary might show their gratitude to the volunteers by serving the evening meals and joining in conversation. During the summer months, Hope Village itself hosted neighborhood picnics on Thursday evenings and invited community members. These were usually well-attended events that often included key city officials. Not only did these events provide enjoyment, they also gave volunteers an even greater sense of appreciation for the sacrifices made to help disaster-affected families. The side benefit of neighborhood events is that they also create goodwill in the community. This goodwill often goes a long way to smooth troubled waters should an issue arise regarding the village.

The agency responsible for giving direction and guidance to Hope Village was Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. Just as other agencies have strengths in construction or case management, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance has developed great strength and a strong reputation in creating volunteer villages. Presbyterian Disaster Assistance provided the village manager, who was the staff person responsible for day to day care of volunteers. Registration, housing, meals, facilities oversight, and all other non-construction activities were under the charge of the village manager. In this role the village manager freed other staff members to concentrate on their own responsibility areas in a way that ensured the highest possible quality.

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## Kitchen and Dining Facilities

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Napoleon is quoted as saying, “An army marches on its stomach.” In some ways the same thing could be said about volunteers who work in a disaster zone. Demolition and restoration is hard work and at the end of the day a quarter-cup of Spaghetti-O’s and a hot dog will not suffice. Quality meals with substantial portions are essential to volunteer success. Fortunately, disaster recovery agencies understand this need and already have help available that you can draw upon for your recovery center. Southern Baptist Disaster Response is known across the United States as an agency with the capacity to provide mass feeding when disaster strikes. While their work is primarily geared for mass feeding immediately following a disaster, their resources can also be enlisted in service to your volunteers. When Hope Village was formed, Southern Baptist Disaster Response became the agency that managed food services for volunteer workers. Arriving with a mobile kitchen and the know-how necessary for daily meals in a disaster setting, Southern Baptist Disaster Response put food management in place for volunteers and staff at Hope Village.

Typically a full meal was served for breakfast and supper. For daily lunches, Southern Baptist Disaster Response set out an assembly line for sandwiches with volunteers preparing their own lunches before traveling to their job sites each day. These were packed in coolers and became an on-the-job meal each noon.

As you assemble your recovery center it is possible that you already have an area that can be used for your dining hall. Some larger churches or schools that are equipped with gymnasiums and kitchens are able to use this space for their volunteers. If a larger space is unavailable, it is possible to serve volunteers in other ways. Hope Village used grant funds to purchase a large 50’x70’ tent which became the central dining area. A wooden floor was built to provide a stable walking area. Tables and chairs were secured from area churches, giving the dining area a seating capacity of 200 people. Coffee pots, drink machines, ice makers, refrigerators and even a steam table for serving hot food were all incorporated within the tent’s walls. Secure from the elements, volunteers could gather and eat a hearty meal at the beginning and end of the workday.

As Minot’s recovery progressed, the services of Southern Baptist Disaster Response were required at other locations in the nation. In preparation for their departure, the Hope Village resource team secured grant funding for the purchase of a mobile kitchen unit and two refrigeration trailers. These units were put into place and a local cook with food service experience was hired to manage the daily meals. This proved to be another successful way to provide meals for the village’s volunteers and over the remaining time of the recovery effort served the food service needs of the village well.

**Demolition and restoration is hard work and at the end of the day a quarter-cup of Spaghetti-O’s and a hot dog will not suffice!**



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The recruitment of skilled volunteers is a large task that is cut in half as agencies work together in a single recovery center.

One volunteer said: "I've been on 12 disaster responses over the years, this is by far the best managed disaster response effort that I've experienced."

Another volunteer said: "I've been on 6 different trips in four different camps. Hope Village sets the standard. You made the most of our time. Thank you!"

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## Recruiting and Scheduling Volunteers

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The recruitment of skilled volunteers is a large task that is cut in half as agencies work together in a single recovery center. This happens because each partner organization already has its own volunteer recruitment processes that run deep within their own organization. With wisdom, rather than reinventing the wheel, each partner uses its own networks in the most effective way possible in order to enlist volunteers for the common recovery effort. The end result is that the quality and the quantity of volunteers expands exponentially.

As recruitment efforts grow, a solid scheduling mechanism needs to be in place. Presbyterian Disaster Assistance served as the lead agency for volunteer registration for Hope Village through its national volunteer registration system. Volunteer teams anywhere in the nation could schedule time at Hope Village by calling a single toll-free telephone number. Working with the village manager, lodging was assigned and arrival and departure dates were set. These schedules were then communicated to other members of the village's management team in order to make the most of the volunteer's time in Minot. Volunteers were charged a nominal fee of \$20 per night to stay at Hope Village. This fee included food, lodging and tools for each volunteer.

Over the course of a 20-month rebuilding phase, Presbyterian Disaster Response flawlessly registered 5,812 volunteers from 42 states and four Canadian provinces. These volunteers provided more than 185,000 volunteer hours resulting in \$3.6 million in volunteer labor to the people of Minot. The registration system provided by Presbyterian Disaster Assistance gave volunteers confidence that before ever setting foot in the camp that they were going to have a positive experience in serving Minot's disaster-stricken families.

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## Volunteers Who Return

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While every volunteer village is different in its management style and in its physical layout, the one thing that volunteer villages share in common is the desire to treat volunteers well. Volunteers are your recovery center's most valuable commodity and deserve your very best. Volunteers want to know their time and skills will be invested wisely in the community and that their contribution truly matters. This attitude permeated the staff and management of Hope Village and the leadership team took great pride in receiving strong words of commendation when volunteers returned to their homes. Positive responses such as these fueled a continued desire to serve volunteers in the best possible way from within the entire organization. Volunteer care matters! When your organization approaches volunteers with this same mindset your efforts will not go unnoticed. Not only will you meet and exceed a volunteer's expectations but you will also plant seeds for a volunteer team's return in order that they might do even more to help the people of your community.

As a partner organization in your city's recovery, your church may not take on the management of larger scale reconstruction. However, your church can genuinely be the hands and heart of Jesus to your community by hosting a volunteer village. Working together with other agencies, your church can take a lead role in forming a highly effective volunteer organization that will make a significant impact in the lives of disaster-stricken families.

## 9. Honoring the Homeowners: Homeowners and Volunteer Teams Working Together

On a late summer morning a team of volunteers knocked on a disaster victim's door. The father was a young man in his late 20's with an equally young wife and a little child. According to usual protocol, the family had been contacted and the team's arrival was known in advance. When the door opened, the father openly gasped, immediately broke into tears and began to sob uncontrollably. Looking at the bewildered team members, he fought to say choked-filled words, "I can't believe you're here! I just can't believe you're here! I've been alone. I've done this all by myself. I'm trying to keep my job, keep my family and I've got nothing left. People would be scheduled to give an estimate and no one would show up. You're the first people who said you would come, and you did!" and the tears fell freely once more. The time, the toil, the frustrations, the expenditure of energy, the gathering of materials and money all boil down to this moment, the moment when volunteers walk into a home to help with the mercy of Christ.

The work of your recovery center is really about serving people with the mercy of Christ. Mercy means loving people like Jesus did and serving them in spite of their circumstances. Understanding the role of mercy in this way means that your recovery center is a member of the homeowner's healing team. As volunteers work to rebuild the windows and walls, they are also at work to build the heart.

### There are some common guidelines:

- **Volunteers are guests in a family's home.**  
Simply because the home has been ravished by a natural disaster does not mean that a volunteer has the right to be rude. Volunteers represent Christ, and should be respectful and treat the homeowner's dwelling with dignity.
- **A family's story matters.**  
As volunteers work side-by-side with a homeowner in the repair of their house, there is a time and a place to put forth 100% effort to complete a task, but there is also a time and a place to stop the work and listen. Pain and loss are very real to disaster survivors. A volunteer may be there to swing a hammer and hang sheetrock, but they are also there to lend a compassionate ear. In doing so their actions help bring reassurance that the world is still "OK" in spite of the homeowner's loss. While swinging a hammer may repair the home, listening to their story repairs the heart.
- **There is no room for judgment in mercy.**  
To be merciful means to look upon someone with compassion, regardless of their situation. The homeowners we serve may have different values, a different social status, a different lifestyle, different religious values, or even something as simple as a different taste in home décor. Mercy is about compassion, not judgment, which means we faithfully serve an atheist who has lost their home with the same commitment and care that we might give to a fellow believer. You and I don't know their path that has brought them to this point in their lives. All we know is that mercy calls us to help them in their need and the rest is up to the Savior.



A volunteer may be there to swing a hammer and hang sheetrock, but they are also there to lend a compassionate ear.

While you are rebuilding a home, you are also working to rebuild a heart.

- **Volunteers are hope givers.**

There are a thousand things that can go wrong in a rebuild and a thousand reasons to complain. The homeowner is already beat down and crushed. He or she does not need our negative attitudes or complaint. When difficulties arise, volunteers need to be the first to say the words, “In what ways CAN we?” rather than the words, “I can’t.” There are usually workable solutions to even the most perplexing of problems. Immediately looking for ways to rise above a problem gives reassurance to a homeowner that other problems can be conquered too.

- **Honor a homeowner’s opinion as much as possible.**

We each have an idea for how a home should look, but only one of us has to live in the home when it is complete, and that’s the homeowner. Our preference might be for the refrigerator to be on the left and the dishwasher on the right, but unless there is a structural reason against it, seek to accommodate the homeowner’s wishes. In one particular Minot rebuild, the homeowner wanted the kitchen cupboards mounted directly at ceiling level. To the cabinet specialists who were volunteering their time, this placement made no sense. However, when complete, the homeowner was delightfully proud of his new kitchen and the fact that he could hang all of his pots and pans on hooks below the cabinets. Unless there are structural reasons to the contrary, try to honor the homeowner’s wishes in whatever way possible.

While you are rebuilding a home, you are also working to rebuild a heart. By honoring your homeowners you are opening the door for Christ himself to begin his work. This is the role of mercy. Mercy means loving people like Jesus did and serving them in spite of their circumstances. In this way Christ is honored and hearts are opened to experience healing in ways that only Christ himself can bring.



## 10. Public Relations: the Power of Exceptional Communication

A good story is compelling, creates interest, and most importantly, draws people into your vision and harnesses their goodwill for your shared future. Favorable public relations benefits every facet of your recovery center's work. The National VOAD makes a compelling case for including the work of public relations in a long-term recovery. In their long-term recovery manual they write:

“Having a good communications strategy is essential for a Long Term Recovery Group. A recovery group that tells a timely, accurate and compelling story can make the most of opportunities to connect with donors and volunteers. Further, keeping the community informed as disaster recovery progresses will also promote good will and mitigate the effect of rumors or possible complaints from individuals who have not received help. Because of this it is important to develop a relationship with the media – they can be your best friend.”<sup>6</sup>

The National VOAD recognizes the importance of public relations because it understands the power of intentional communication and the benefit to the community's entire recovery that good public relations can bring.

Here are some of the things that good public relations can do for you and your recovery center.

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### Connect Volunteers to Need

At its primary level, good PR tells the story of human need and an opportunity to meet that need and create positive compelling change. A well-told story ignites something deep within the human heart that draws people to give of themselves. Every press release, every human interest story, every event that features your recovery center's work tells the story of ordinary people doing extraordinary things to touch human hearts in uncommon ways. It challenges people's self-perceptions and invites people to say, “I want to do that too. I can help!” As you look at your disaster-torn community the task before you may seem daunting, yet the old axiom still holds true, “Many hands make for light work.” Good public relations efforts will fuel volunteer involvement and will inspire people to become involved in the work of rebuilding your community.

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### Connect Donors to Opportunity

You may have materials, volunteers, and a plan for recovery, but without donor dollars your recovery will come to a screeching halt. When your story is told in a compelling way it tugs at the human heart and inspires people to believe that the healing of your community can actually happen. Donors are drawn to the opportunity to help make your vision a reality. Tell the story. Create ways to give. People want to see healing. They want to see families restored and communities rebound after tragedy. They want to make it happen. Good public relations draws upon the best of the human spirit, taps a heartfelt desire for things to be better, and draws out sacrificial giving in ways that stretch human understanding. When you let people know how they can help and why it matters, donors graciously step up to make it happen.



## PUBLIC RELATIONS

**Tell the story.  
Create ways to give.  
People want to see  
healing. They want to  
see families restored  
and communities  
rebound after tragedy.  
They want to make it  
happen.**

<sup>6</sup> From the National VOAD Manual, 2012



Good PR in disaster response really means crafting and telling the story of hope. Hope is compelling. Hope is propelling.

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### Connect Creative Solutions to Difficult Problems

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There are some problems that require resources that you do not have or answers that you cannot find. As you draw people into your story through a variety of communication sources, it is not an uncommon practice that you paint the picture of some of the challenges that stand directly in your way. Those challenges, when communicated in a compelling way, begin to draw solutions from a larger audience and present solutions in ways that you never thought possible. A great many people hunger for your community to get back on its feet and for families to return to their homes. If there is a particular challenge that you are facing, communicate it tactfully and tastefully to the larger audience. Chances are there is someone with heartfelt compassion who is ready to help. Connecting creative solutions to difficult problems is one of the ways that good PR will benefit your recovery center.

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### Creates Allies for a Common Cause

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*“Never underestimate the ability of someone to become angry.”* Those are sage words when working in the disaster recovery business. People will be offended. People will misunderstand. People will be unreasonable. Creating goodwill through positive PR has the ability to turn enemies into allies, or at a minimum the ability to mitigate the effects of a boisterous few. Keeping the community informed of your work, sharing stories of success, creating opportunities for positive interaction in the community, and other activities, goes a long way in generating the type of goodwill that naturally quiets naysayers.

The same difficulties can happen as you work with the partner organizations that make up your recovery center. The give and take that is necessary to work together as organizations under one roof can sometimes become stressful. Creating and maintaining goodwill among your partner organizations is essential for your recovery center’s mission. Strong, positive, well-received communication with the public, the kind that celebrates successes and creates genuine goodwill, will help each partner organization see that the sacrifices they are making truly are worth it as each one recognizes they are accomplishing more by working together than working apart. It is easy for people’s feelings to get hurt or for people to misunderstand. Don’t underestimate the power of your PR activities to shape attitudes and create the type of goodwill that propels people into a positive future.

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### Connect the Hopeless With Hope

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More than anything else, good PR generates the most important commodity that a city or community needs in the midst of disaster recovery, the commodity of hope. Every day, the piles of debris littering your community yell out the word, “Hopeless!” But the activities of your recovery center yell out, “Hope!” Every day someone says, “The task’s too hard, I can’t do it!” But your volunteers tell a different story. Their actions yell out the words, “We can!” Each news article, media posting, television interview, video clip, speaking engagement or written letter that finds its way into the public gives a compelling testimony to all who hear that “This disaster will not win!” Hope is compelling. Hope is propelling. Never underestimate the effects of strong PR, because the darker the darkness the brighter your light will shine, and where there is light, there is hope.

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### **The Art of Making Your Message Count**

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Public relations efforts are communications activities that enhance visibility, sculpt public perception and affect change. These activities create a positive public image for your recovery center. In this regard PR is more than advertisements or TV spots. PR is considered earned media where your organization creates a positive story that simply must be told.

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### **Who is Your Storyteller?**

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Good PR in disaster response really means crafting and telling the story of hope. Each new team that arrives, each grant application that is funded, each home that is completed, each family that is helped is part of an overall story of healing that needs to be told. To accomplish this there is great wisdom in appointing someone to serve as the public relations director, communications director, or public information officer to manage this vital task. A PR director is fluent in the art of creating positive events or stories that raise the visibility of your efforts and casts your recovery center in a positive light. Working with journalists, reporters, web sites, and other media, a PR director helps convince the media professionals that the story (or stories) of your recovery center is a good story to tell. In a one-stop multi-agency recovery center such as Hope Village, each organization certainly has its own story to tell. And yet at the same time, each organization is part of a greater narrative of healing that is all encompassing. A PR person can skillfully use this narrative for an even greater common good.

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### **The Goal: Everyone is a Storyteller**

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The difference between a recovery operation that helps a few people and a recovery organization that transforms an entire community is determined in large part by the quality of your public relations. In the days following a disaster's tragic events, it would appear as if the disaster owns the community. The story of its pain is written everywhere. You can create a new story through the work of your recovery center as you create a story of transformation and healing. If done well, your story will become the new story, and the community itself will own the story of hope.

Commenting on the hope that volunteers were giving to flood-torn families, North Dakota Governor Jack Dalrymple said, "The story of Minot's recovery will be written through the remarkable work of Hope Village."<sup>7</sup> That story would be a story of Christ's own mercy bringing healing and hope to Minot's families in their darkest hour.

If you've never done this sort of thing before, it might seem scary. But with a little self-confidence, anyone can learn how to do this, and many PR pros are self-taught. All it takes is time, effort, and a passion for telling a story.

**Never underestimate the effects of strong PR, because the darker the darkness the brighter your light will shine, and where there is light, there is hope.**

<sup>7</sup> Quoted from the web page of U.S. Senator John Hoven, <http://www.hoven.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2012/5/hoven-hope-village-helping-rebuild-minot-area> (accessed April 13, 2012).

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## Public Relations Tools

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### Here are some of the tried-and-true communications tools<sup>8</sup> to keep in your PR toolbox:

- Create fact sheets, press releases, brochures, letters, etc. to inform people about the work being done by your recovery center.
- Hold press conferences and town hall meetings.
- Create events that celebrate your efforts. Hope Village created events to celebrate the start of a new building season, the arrival of a new kitchen trailer, the donation of major equipment from a local dealership, the completion of the 500th home, the arrival of new staff members and much more. A dedication ceremony was even created to mark the start of Hope Village's work. The ceremony included the mayor, the governor, two state senators, and the regional director FEMA. If there was a way to gain positive exposure for the recovery center's work, Hope Village's communication director found a way to involve local media who would then be inspired to tell the story to their audiences.
- Persuade and inspire people through written media, such as letters to the editor, blog posts, and guest columns in local and national newspapers. Hope Village's communications director became a featured writer with her own byline for newspapers across the state. On one Sunday edition she even scored a simultaneous front page, top of the fold feature story that ran in every major newspaper across the state.
- Schedule appearances on local and national radio and TV talk shows.
- Conduct a multimedia campaign using accumulated photos, video clips, charts, and blogs and provide them to people who will speak on your behalf.
- Create video updates to use on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to get your message out in short form. Encourage and equip volunteers to create and post their own video updates to increase the reach of social networks.
- Create recruitment tools that will inspire volunteers to join you in your efforts to rebuild the community. The Hope Village volunteer recruitment video was made available on YouTube where leaders across the nation could access it both to find out how to take part, but also to use to recruit others for their teams.<sup>9</sup>
- Create merchandise such as t-shirts, coffee mugs, water bottles, and more that communicate your vision. In the summer immediately following Minot's disaster, Hope Village achieved a staggering marketing success with logo t-shirts touting the message *Summer of Hope*. Retail marketers in Minot sold thousands of the Hope Village t-shirts. *Summer of Hope* t-shirts were seen in all corners of the city with each one communicating a powerful reminder that disaster would not get the final word in people's lives. People could help make hope real by supporting the work of Hope Village.

<sup>8</sup> Taken from the web page, titled "The ABC's of Public Relations"

<sup>9</sup> HV Promo Video  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8xM5m4u6nsQ>

## 11. Healing the Soul: Spiritual Care for the Community

Without a doubt, a natural disaster will shake families to the core and leave individuals emotionally, physically, and spiritually ravished. Volunteers from across the nation do a great job in physically rebuilding a family's home, but there's so much more that remains to be rebuilt deep within a survivor's heart.

As the Emotional and Spiritual Care Committee of the National VOAD states, "Spirituality is an essential part of humanity. Disaster significantly disrupts people's spiritual lives. Nurturing people's spiritual needs contributes to holistic healing. Every person can benefit from spiritual care in time of disaster."<sup>10</sup> Your church can be the catalyst for the community's spiritual care through the work of your recovery center.

In the aftermath of a disaster, national church bodies and para-church organizations will often deploy spiritual care providers or emergency chaplains to help meet the critical spiritual care needs of a population. Working with local clergy, these men and women interact with disaster survivors to give prayer and support to broken spirits from a faith-based perspective.

What happens when the emergency chaplains leave and local clergy return to their flocks? Who carries the vision for continued spiritual care of disaster survivors? Fears, heartaches and loss still remain as a survivor's journey of recovery moves into the future which means that the role of spiritual care becomes yet another compassionate tool for extending the mercy of Christ Jesus.

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### Spiritual Care to the Homeowners

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"The approach of Jesus is always the same," says David Canther of ACTS World Relief, "[Jesus'] first response was always to meet the needs of people, build relationships, accept them for who they were, and then provide hope for who they could become."<sup>11</sup>

When you show merciful care, you are walking in the steps of Jesus, just like Canther says. That means your church has a critical role to play in the recovery process. Your church's people are embedded in the community and your church's ministries take on new meaning. Homes may have been rebuilt, but for many families, deep emotional and spiritual scars still remain and a mercy-centered church can become a critical bridge for ongoing healing. A local church family can provide from the very beginning what no other organization or agency can offer: long-term care.

This was the role that Our Savior Lutheran Church provided in Minot's recovery. With so much brokenness in the community, Our Savior Lutheran Church extended a call for an additional staff pastor who took on the duties as the director of emotional and spiritual care for Hope Village.



## SPIRITUAL CARE

Providing a chaplain as the entry point for spiritual and emotional care might be a role to be considered.

<sup>10</sup>From the National VOAD spirituality manual.

<sup>11</sup>David Canther, *First Response*, 2011

As you consider the long-term struggle that your community will go through, perhaps creating a similar vehicle of healing might be one of the places where your church can make the biggest contribution?

<sup>12</sup>QPR: Question, Persuade, Refer – three simple steps that anyone can learn to help save a life from suicide.  
<https://www.qprinstitute.com>

<sup>13</sup>Cited in a report from the Souris Valley Long-term Recovery Committee, March 14, 2013.

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## Networking Spiritual Care Resources

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The director of emotional and spiritual care at Hope Village worked with volunteers, Minot area pastors, mental health providers and other community organizations to address the emotional and spiritual care needs of Minot's population. This pastor was in the home of each family served by Hope Village volunteers as their homes were being rebuilt, listening to the families' stories, caring for their needs, praying with them when appropriate, and being ready to provide ongoing care as necessary.

- **Even volunteer teams can be involved in spiritual care.** Hope Village's volunteer teams were coached and given permission to put their hammers down when appropriate. This was done in order to listen to a homeowner's story and provide the healing power of a caring heart. These "listening sessions" often provided the first release for grieving families and served the cause of mercy. With a small amount of training, your volunteers could not only repair homes but also serve on the front line of spiritual care.
- **When done well, spiritual care encompasses caregivers from the whole community.** Working side by side with area pastors, the director of emotional and spiritual care for Hope Village became a resource person to local pastors, coordinating spiritual care activities in the community and helping each pastor minister more effectively to his or her own disaster-torn families. The same coordination took place with Minot's mental health professionals. With direct personal access to families in need, the director of emotional and spiritual care was often on the front line of family crisis and accordingly able to quickly work with families and provide referrals to healthcare professionals.
- **Never underestimate your role in healing human hearts.** As a church family you have a significant role that you can play in networking caregivers from all levels and professions. Through the work of your recovery center you have the privilege of unthinkable access into people's lives. With that access you can be a bridge that connects people to hope in their deepest moments. This is the role that you can play as you consider providing emotional and spiritual care through a one-stop recovery center.

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## Suicide Prevention - Stepping Into Hopelessness

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As a recovery center partner, your church can also play a vital role in saving lives in the post-disaster turmoil. Hope Village led the training of more than 200 men and women with a practical suicide prevention program called QPR.<sup>12</sup> QPR-trained individuals were from all walks of life and were embedded in the community through their everyday professions, capable and ready to assist when confronted with crisis. Surprisingly, given the depth of crisis following the flood and its subsequent recovery, suicide rates in the greater Minot area remained extremely low. The network of QPR-trained individuals embedded in the community is cited as one of the contributing factors to this positive statistic.<sup>13</sup>

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### Open Hands of Mercy Create Open Hearts for the Gospel

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For many people, the experience of mercy-care brings an even greater blessing as it opens their heart for a new hearing of the Gospel. In this regard the work of mercy serves as an agent to bring healing to the deepest cry of the human soul: the need for God. For the sake of the Gospel, the church is not to run away from disaster or even to remain neutral. Instead, like Christ himself, God's missional people are to find their purpose at the very center of a disaster, stepping right into the middle of human suffering and infecting its darkness with rays of physical, emotional and spiritual hope. Your church can embrace this God-given role in the disaster recovery that you are facing now.

On behalf of those who are in need, the church must be willing to become inconvenienced, to sacrifice, and if necessary, even to suffer so that restoration and wholeness might return. This is the way of Christ who willingly bore sorrow and suffering. This is the way of the cross where sacrifice and suffering are the vehicles through which redemption and restoration flow. This could be true of your church and the role that you play as a partner in your recovery center. Armed with the redemptive purposes of Christ in one hand, hammers, nails, saws, and sheetrock knives in the other hand, God's people are able to alleviate physical need and inject hope into broken lives. Empowered with the empathy of the Holy Spirit and compassion for the hurting, God's people are able to soothe many an emotional storm through caring hearts and listening ears. Each missional response is able to create a bridge that allows Gospel proclamation to be heard and saving faith in Christ to be embraced as never before.

During times of disaster, when the church is willing to step into the very heart of human suffering and work from the center out, even bearing its own cross in the process, God is able to bring about the greatest restoration of hearts and the greatest healing of a disaster stricken community, both in time and for eternity. As you consider your role, consider the legacy of your church, reflecting the mercy and compassion of Christ in tangible ways that touch the soul of a community and open hearts to perhaps embrace the greatest hope of all, the eternal hope that only the Gospel can bring.

To find out more about emergency chaplains or emergency chaplain training, contact your national church body representatives or visit the National Disaster Interfaiths Network at [www.n-din.org](http://www.n-din.org).

Empowered with the empathy of the Holy Spirit and compassion for the hurting, God's people are able to soothe many an emotional storm through caring hearts and listening ears.



Through Hope Village, \$3.6 million worth of volunteer labor was given freely to the people of Minot at their time of greatest need.

Rather than walking away, Jesus walked toward the center of human suffering, offering himself as the instrument of God's mercy and healing. To follow Christ means to do the same.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew Harrison, *Christ Have Mercy: How to Put Your Faith in Action* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), 39.

## 12. Home Again

Case managers, an unmet needs committee, volunteers, job site supervisors, construction management, a resource team, spiritual care, a recovery warehouse and more, all combine in breathtaking ways as your recovery center meets human need with the compassion of Christ. Your recovery center answers the deepest cry of a disaster survivor, the cry to return home again. As partner organizations working side by side, your center is able to speed the processes in a way that no single organization can do. Operating according to each agency's strengths, you maximize resources, negate weaknesses, eliminate redundancies, create focused energy and propel the recovery process ahead in the fastest way possible.

In a short 20-month period, Our Savior Lutheran Church and fellow Hope Village partners changed the trajectory of the entire city through incarnational service that reflected the tangible compassion of Christ. Thanks to the generosity of many, 494 teams representing 5,812 volunteers from 42 states and four Canadian provinces came to Minot and served through Hope Village. Together these men and women of faith gave more than 185,000 hours of volunteer service to flood-broken families, restoring homes and rebuilding lives with the compassionate care that reflected the mercy of Jesus Christ himself. A total of 1,108 families were served and 551 homes were restored to safe, secure, essential living space standards. The end result was an astonishing \$3.6 million worth of volunteer labor given freely to the people of Minot at their time of greatest need.

Working with Our Savior Lutheran Church and other Hope Village partners, volunteers from across the country stepped into the center of tragic human need with the tangible mercy of Christ transforming the trajectory of an entire city by giving a simple, heaven-sent, heart-felt commodity: hope.

The development of a one-stop disaster recovery center may be a vibrant way for you to bring the mercy of Christ to hurting families in tangible ways. "When we are in Christ," writes Matthew Harrison, "we can do nothing other than to act for the well-being of others."<sup>14</sup> Rather than walking away, Jesus walked toward the center of human suffering, offering himself as the instrument of God's mercy and healing. To follow Christ means to do the same. Understand the system. Become involved. Find out where your church can best fit. God may be calling you to be the instrument of healing in your community.

## Appendices



## *Resources Agencies Flood Team (RAFT)*

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February 2012

Dear Community Member:

The Resources Agencies Flood Team (RAFT) cooperative effort has proven to be the most effective way for faith-based and community based agencies to work together in a crisis. It is our mission to bring caring and compassion to people whose lives have been impacted by suffering and destruction caused by disaster. Our role in the face of disaster is to come together to find resources to assist in recovery.

Enclosed you will find an application form and release of information. Please complete these forms and return.

If you live in Ward, McHenry, Renville, Burleigh or Morton Counties return the form to RAFT, 1905 2<sup>nd</sup> St SE Suite 1B, Minot, ND 58701.

If you live in other counties in North Dakota return the forms to RAFT, 1720 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave North, Fargo, ND 58102.

**Include any pictures of the damage sustained, estimates for replacement or repair of damage and a copy of your 2010 or 2011 income tax return (if possible).**

If you have insurance coverage but still have an unmet need, it is important that you complete these forms and return them. If your county has been declared by FEMA for Individual Assistance, please register now. These resources will also assist in your recovery.

Once your completed application has been received, a case manager will be assigned to you and then you will be contacted to discuss your unmet need. The case manager will help you through the long term recovery process by accessing resources for which you may be eligible.

While we may not be able to meet all of the recovery needs due to limited resources, please know that you are not alone and we are here to walk with you in the process.

Sincerely,

Shirley Dykshoorn

Lutheran Disaster Response ND  
Resource Agencies Flood Team Member

### **Resource Agencies Flood Team (RAFT) INTAKE FORM**

#### *Response Team Members:*

† Dakotas Conference United Methodist Disaster Response  
† Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota /Lutheran Disaster Response  
† Thrivent Financial † Northern Plains Conference UCC † Seventh Day Adventist  
† Catholic Charities North Dakota /Catholic Charities USA-Disaster Response Office  
† The Salvation Army † Presbytery of the Northern Plains (PCUSA) ■ United Way ■ American Red Cross

**Many of these organizations are also members of the  
North Dakota VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster)**

Appendix A

Intake and Determinaon

Name of Applicant (print): \_\_\_\_\_

Today's date (MM/DD/YYYY): \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ FEMA #: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth (MM/DD/YYYY): \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

|                                                                                                                       |                                                 |                                           |                                                |                                                       |                                                                        |                                                     |                               |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>PRE-<br/>DISAST<br/>ER</b>                                                                                         | Pre-Disaster Address<br>(including Apt #, Rm #) |                                           |                                                |                                                       |                                                                        |                                                     |                               |
|                                                                                                                       | Pre-Disaster Mailing<br>Address (if different)  |                                           |                                                |                                                       |                                                                        |                                                     |                               |
|                                                                                                                       | County                                          |                                           |                                                |                                                       |                                                                        |                                                     |                               |
|                                                                                                                       | Did applicant formerly...                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Own              | <input type="checkbox"/> Rent                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Live with family/<br>friends | <input type="checkbox"/> Reside in transient<br>shelter or is homeless | <input type="checkbox"/> Other                      |                               |
|                                                                                                                       | This residence was ...                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Apartment        | <input type="checkbox"/> Hotel /<br>Motel      | <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Home / Trailer        | <input type="checkbox"/> Single Family Dwelling                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Other                      |                               |
|                                                                                                                       | This housing was<br>subsidized by:              | <input type="checkbox"/> USDA             | <input type="checkbox"/> FEMA                  | <input type="checkbox"/> HUD / Section 8              | <input type="checkbox"/> HUD /<br>Grant or<br>Loan                     | <input type="checkbox"/> HUD /<br>Public<br>Housing | <input type="checkbox"/> None |
|                                                                                                                       | Did applicant share<br>housing expenses?        | <input type="checkbox"/> NO               | <input type="checkbox"/> YES                   | If YES, describe:                                     |                                                                        |                                                     |                               |
| <b>Number of persons residing in pre-disaster household:</b><br><i>Adults:</i> _____ <i>Dependent Children:</i> _____ |                                                 |                                           |                                                |                                                       |                                                                        |                                                     |                               |
| <b>CURRE<br/>NT<br/>CONTA<br/>CT<br/>INFOR<br/>MATIO<br/>N</b>                                                        | Current Address<br>(including Apt #, Rm #)      |                                           |                                                |                                                       |                                                                        |                                                     |                               |
|                                                                                                                       | Current Mailing Address,<br>(if different)      |                                           |                                                |                                                       |                                                                        |                                                     |                               |
|                                                                                                                       | County                                          |                                           |                                                |                                                       |                                                                        |                                                     |                               |
|                                                                                                                       | Applicant's Phone #                             |                                           |                                                |                                                       |                                                                        |                                                     |                               |
|                                                                                                                       | Alternate phone #                               |                                           |                                                |                                                       |                                                                        |                                                     |                               |
|                                                                                                                       | E-Mail Address                                  |                                           |                                                |                                                       |                                                                        |                                                     |                               |
|                                                                                                                       | Does applicant<br>currently...                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Own              | <input type="checkbox"/> Rent                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Live with family/<br>friends | <input type="checkbox"/> Reside in transient<br>shelter or is homeless | <input type="checkbox"/> Other                      |                               |
| This residence is a...                                                                                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Apartment              | <input type="checkbox"/> Hotel /<br>Motel | <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Home / Trailer | <input type="checkbox"/> Single Family Dwelling       | <input type="checkbox"/> Other                                         |                                                     |                               |
| This housing is<br>subsidized by:                                                                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> USDA                   | <input type="checkbox"/> FEMA             | <input type="checkbox"/> HUD / Section 8       | <input type="checkbox"/> HUD /<br>Grant or<br>Loan    | <input type="checkbox"/> HUD /<br>Public<br>Housing                    | <input type="checkbox"/> None                       |                               |
| Does applicant share<br>housing expenses?                                                                             | <input type="checkbox"/> NO                     | <input type="checkbox"/> YES              | If YES, describe:                              |                                                       |                                                                        |                                                     |                               |



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