



Disaster Response – Success Stories

Ice Storm in Kentucky

At the end of January in 2009, Kentucky was hit with an ice storm described by Gov. Steve Beshear as the state's largest-ever natural disaster. A few days later, President Barack Obama declared 93 of Kentucky's 120 counties to be Major Disaster Areas. In the first days after the storm, most of the state was without electricity, water and heat. Roads were impassible and communication was difficult. No one was unaffected.

The Bishop of Kentucky at the time, the Rt. Rev. Ted Gulick, needed to know the extent of the damage – how parishioners were doing, how the churches and their clergy and staff had fared, and what state communities were in. The Bishop asked the Rev. Karl Lusk, then vicar of St. Thomas, Campbellsville, now rector of the Church of the Ascension in Bardstown and the Diocesan Disaster Response Coordinator, to help him. Within days of the storm they called all diocesan congregational contacts for an initial evaluation of the damage sustained by the different churches and communities around the state. Then, as soon as roads were passable, Bishop Gulick and the Rev. Lusk drove through Kentucky for a “windshield assessment” of the situation and to meet with their contacts, to see first-hand the kind of issues that were affecting communities. They needed this assessment to better inform their planning for response activities around the diocese and for proposals to fund these activities.

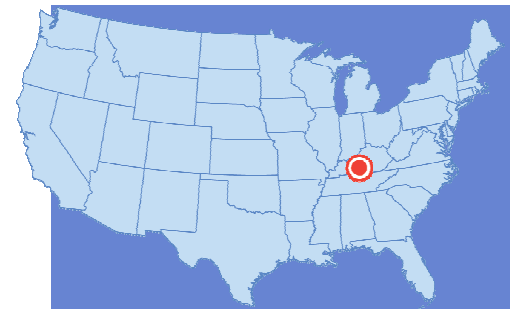
Not only did they talk to their local church contacts, but over the years Lusk had built a network of people and organizations involved in disaster response in Kentucky. Gulick and Lusk drew on these people for information as well. After he and the Bishop had spoken to both their church contacts and Lusk's networks, they knew damage was extensive and that the government had its hands full with clearing roads and trying to get public services working again.

They decided the diocese should support parish response programs and partnerships around the state to provide services to the most vulnerable in the affected communities.

For the Rev. Lusk there were two important aspects to the diocesan response effort. The first was that they tapped into their existing networks to get a better understanding of what was happening so as to better inform the program they wanted to create. The second was that they focused on helping those people



All Saints' Episcopal Center,
Leitchfield, KY



Fast Facts



DIOCESE:
Episcopal Diocese of Kentucky
DIOCESE SIZE:
approx. 9,500 baptized members
LOCATION: Kentucky
POPULATION: Approx. 4,300,000
DISASTER TYPE: Ice Storm
PEOPLE DISPLACED: 8,000

DISASTER RELIEF:
Managing church partnerships to provide aid for communities affected by the 2008 ice storm



who would struggle a bit more with recovery. These two things went hand in hand: because of his involvement with the state network of first responders, Lusk could talk to people and find out what the bigger picture was at the state level – who was doing what and who still had needs.

He wanted to know, “what isn’t getting done that the Episcopal Church in Kentucky can do?”

What he came to understand from all the information he gathered was that the vulnerable communities in rural counties were the people that needed more help – and that is who the Episcopal Diocese of Kentucky set out to help. After three months of work, and with help from Episcopal Relief & Development, the diocese supported projects implemented through 12 different congregations. The programs they worked with had a variety of activities that included:

- A food distribution in Hopkinsville –restock a local food pantry and hand out vouchers to those who lost food from the power outage
- In Fulton/Hickman County – bill and rent assistance for 16 families who lost income because places of employment were closed
- Restore utilities in Madisonville/Hopkins County

broken pipes) for low income families –those without insurance or cover the gap of what insurance didn’t provide.

- In Mayfield/Graves County – replace prescriptions for low-income residents that were lost because of lack of refrigeration.
- Through a partnership in Paducah – help families living with HIV/AIDS restock food supplies and pay for fuel or alternate housing, allowing them to conserve their last financial resources and continue to receive medical treatments.

In every disaster there are always groups of people who, because of their special circumstances, will find it more difficult to recover after a disaster –

like the those living with HIV/AIDS, whose extra income is tied up in medical expenses and who live on the outskirts of town in harder-to-reach counties. While the different government agencies and various organizations were working on reestablishing electricity, clearing roads and providing temporary shelters, for Lusk it was important that he get out there to assess what exactly was happening and to find the people who slip through the cracks. He said, “The goal was to fill gaps in assistance for people with immediate needs.”

Windshield Assessment Tips



- Use government resources for a bigger picture of the situation.
- Make preliminary calls to find out what the situation is like, who you can meet and which places you should target.
- Make a map of where you will visit. Include places off the major highways and go to places without Episcopal churches.
- See as many people as possible: they don’t have to be affiliated with the Church, the goal is to understand the needs of the whole community.
- Be sure to see as many people as possible in person – it’s OK to stop your car and talk to someone you see sitting on their porch or working in the yard.
- Use the information you collect to make a plan – then execute your plan.
- Send the information you collected back to the affected communities and continue to get feedback from them.

Additional Resources



For more information winter storms see the following online resources:

- “How To: Windshield Assessment”
- “How To: Winter Shelters”

Share your own disaster response stories or tips to help a community in need at www.er-d.org