

ADVENT CARES: HELPING OUR NORTH CAROLINA NEIGHBORS IMPACTED BY HURRICANES

2017-present

LUMBERTON, NORTH CAROLINA

A little background information...

In Fall 2017, Pastor Greg Williamson, one of three pastors who led Advent during our pastoral search period, told us about ongoing needs in Lumberton after Hurricane Matthew in September 2016. Pastor Williamson, a retired US Army Chaplain who heads the Junior ROTC program at Lumberton High School (LHS), is knowledgeable about and involved in the needs of that community. We are grateful to Pastor Williamson for introducing us to key LHS personnel and helping us connect with other Lutheran pastors to explore ways to help with rebuilding activities in Lumberton.

2016-2017

Students were out of school for three weeks after Hurricane Matthew hit in September 2016. When they returned, LHS School Counselor Adrian Hammonds and his team of counselors and teachers canvassed all students to learn how they had been impacted and identify their most pressing needs. Approximately 180-220 students and their families had been displaced from homes seriously damaged or completely destroyed. They had lost clothing/personal necessities, jobs, transportation and income, etc. The worst damage occurred in Lumberton's most disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Based on feedback from students, LHS identified 80-85 "Storm Kids" who needed immediate help with clothing, hygiene products, etc. Mr. Hammonds' office organized a system to track the needs of individual students (age, gender, sizes, etc.), the help they received, and the needs of other siblings in the home. The recordkeeping system assigned each LHS student a number to ensure privacy. Gifts were shared one-on-one in the Guidance office.

Because of the school's outreach response, students saw school as a safe place where people cared and helped while respecting their pride and their privacy; it was a refuge with people they trusted. Teachers and counselors also supported students experiencing continued trauma, apprehension about recurring flooding, concern about their families, and discouragement about the future. Sadly, we learned that some students were left with no family to turn to; they had become homeless.

2017-2018

In November 2017, Advent's Board of Outreach visited LHS and met with Pastor Williamson and Mr. Hammonds to learn how our congregation might get involved. While some students still required help with personal items, the 2017-18 "Adopt a Pirate" outreach program focused on school-related events that encouraged students to stay in school, to continue to learn and achieve, and to look to the future with confidence. Of the original Storm Kids, 15 had graduated and 15-20 had moved out of the school district, leaving approximately 50 students in the program. This number did not yet include new freshmen, who had been 8th graders in 2016-17.

We learned that contributions of cash and gift cards were the best way for Mr. Hammonds and his school team to support the needs of individual students. LHS Storm Kids needed assistance with iPad rental (a school requirement), college application costs, ACT and SAT test fees, cap and gown fees, physicals required for athletes, Driver Education fees, lunch and library fees, school field trip fees, and prom tickets and tuxedo rental. (Another group offered help with prom dresses.) These payments were made directly to the source. Some gift cards (Shoe Show, Walmart, Food Lion, Game Stop, gas cards, McDonalds/Burger King etc.) were given directly to students to provide for personal needs and a little fun.

Advent Gets Involved in Lumberton

December 2017

Mr. Hammonds hoped to give each of the 50 students in the program a \$25 Visa gift card for Christmas so they could buy a gift for themselves or for others in their families. Thanks to Advent's generous response to our Christmas Sharing Tree, we were able to send 34 gift cards to for these students.

January 2018 – Distribution of 2017 Mission Funding

Advent tithes its income for missions and shares it through designated local, regional, and global organizations. In 2017, the Board of Outreach recommended that half of our local donation support Hurricane Matthew recovery relief efforts in Lumberton. Council approved presenting that recommendation and a congregational vote affirmed the proposal. Pastor Wayne Puhls, Hope Lutheran in Wake Forest, coordinated volunteer work and resources from Lutheran churches in the Triangle area for Lumberton recovery efforts.

February and March 2018

Advent's Spring Sharing Tree donations sent \$950 to help LHS Storm Kids pay for caps and gowns for seniors, ACT and SAT test fees, college application fees, prom tickets, and more. Donations made on February 25 and March 4 were sent directly to the Lumberton High School Storm Relief Fund. Mr. Hammonds sent an update about how our gifts were making a difference and added heartfelt thanks and blessings for our help.

On March 15, volunteer workers from Advent joined other workers to help repair and restore damaged homes in Lumberton.

October - December 2018

When Hurricane Florence struck in September 2018, Advent got involved again. Pastor Williamson, who was named the coordinator of LCMS-SED storm relief efforts in Lumberton, suggested contributing gift cards for Walmart and Lowe's Home Improvement stores (stores convenient to Lumberton residents). Our contributions in October, November, and December sent Pastor Williamson a total of \$1970.00 in gift cards to help families in the Lumberton area purchase items needed to clean, repair, and restore their homes.

November 2018

In lieu of our tradition of gathering food for Thanksgiving dinners for several local families, we gathered cleaning supplies for Hope Buckets to send to Lumberton families working to restore their homes. A local business donated 30 buckets, members donated supplies posted on the Thanks-Giving Tree, Outreach purchased additional needed supplies, and members packed 15 buckets in an after-worship activity. Each Hope Bucket included an envelope with a letter from Pastor Scott, a list of scripture verses about hope compiled by Bob Serpas, and a devotional written by Joe Schradie. All buckets were delivered to a Lumberton distribution center in November.

December 2018

Instead of packing shoebox gifts for Operation Christmas Child, we posted names and information about 18 children (ages six months to 13) from five Lumberton families on our Christmas Sharing Tree. Members selected names, purchased and wrapped gifts, and returned tagged gifts that were delivered in Lumberton for distribution before Christmas. Pastor Williamson and Mr. Britt, Principal of Carroll Middle School, provided names.

January 2019

We shared photographs, thank you cards, and letters from Lumberton children, families, and school personnel thanking our members for Christmas gifts sent as part of Advent's Christmas Sharing Tree activity. We also received cards from other individuals who had received help from Advent donations.

Dwain Warne Memorial Fund

Donations to Dwain Warne's memorial fund were designated to helping families in Lumberton. Maryanne Warne asked Pastor Williamson to identify individuals or families needing assistance, and they continue to work together to administer gifts. Example: A cafeteria worker at Lumberton High School received assistance to repair the family's HVAC system. She included a family picture in her letter of thanks. The family's four little boys had also received gifts through Advent's Christmas Sharing Tree activity.

January 2019 - Distribution of 2018 Mission Funding

In light of Advent's focus on helping our Lumberton neighbors, the Board of Outreach recommended giving \$1650.00, half of our local mission giving donation, to the SED LCMS Disaster Relief Fund – North Carolina in 2018. Council approved presenting that recommendation and a congregational vote affirmed the proposal. LCMS-SED continued response and recovery support for families across NC impacted by hurricanes. Coordinators were Sally Hiller, LCMS-SED Disaster Response Coordinator (or her area designee) and Pastor Greg Williamson, SED Coordinator for the Lumberton area.

March 2019

Mr. Hammonds updated us about how our gifts continue to help Storm Kids at LHS. They were able to pay for the following where needed: computer rental fees (required), school field trip fees, cap and gown fees (10), and Driver Education fees (5). They also gave each student a Christmas gift card, purchased prom tickets (10), and helped support LHS Senior Day festivities.

"You and your group are wonderful. The need is great, but you are a provider of hope. We always tell each student that the gifts are from wonderful churches and not from Public Schools. They know that it is God's people providing. THANK YOU!!!"

-Adrian Hammonds, LHS School Counselor and Student Advocate

April 2019

Member donations sponsored Easter lilies that decorated the sanctuary this year. Contributions were designated as gifts to support ongoing relief efforts in Lumberton, under the guidance of Pastor Williamson.

Hurricane Relief for a Wilmington, NC Family

December 2018

Donations (\$300) given at the Men of Advent retreat were used to purchase gift cards sent to a Wilmington family that lost everything to Hurricane Florence in September. The family's daughter, a close friend of a member of Advent, sent a thank you note on behalf of her parents for our prayers and the gift.

August 2019

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