



# Pinewood Lutheran Church

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Hurricane Harvey seems like an ancient memory as I write this since hurricane Irma is fast approaching Florida with devastation in her wake. Fires are bad, but hurricanes and floods are truly awful. We've seen all the images from Texas that promise to be soon repeated in Florida. The muck, the mold, the disease microbes that follow will all take their toll in the coming months and even years. There is no heaven on earth and this month is shaping up to validate that statement. Recently I've learned a new insight into the ravages of original sin upon humans. That is, when you know something is wrong or amiss and hurting you, such suffering is bad. But when you also know you're powerless to fix the situation, that makes it even worse! That's our condition since original sin came upon us. We know we have a problem and sometimes even can visual a solution, but we're powerless to help ourselves. Ah, will America turn back to God and seek His help, or not?

I came across an article from the BBC this last week that foreshadows the problem. They did a poll of people in Great Britain asking them if they are "religious." Mind you, Islamic adherents and other religious people were included in this poll. 53% stated that they didn't believe in or adhere to any religion! So, the Christian population in England is shrinking and shrinking fast. No wonder people go to pieces when disasters strike. If you cannot rely on God you have to rely on yourself. And we're pretty frail reeds that easily snap and break whenever an ill wind blows. Will America follow suit? I guess we'll see.

That being said, Harvey and Irma have and will also bring out the best in people. We've seen it already and we'll see it again in Irma's aftermath. Think of that Christian woman singing Gospel hymns to the refugees in a shelter outside of Houston? In the midst of despair she brought Godly joy. Think of those people from Cajun country who packed up their boats and drove to Texas to help. Yes, the "Cajun Navy" rescued many people and brought relief amid suffering. Look at the outpouring of donations and support from around the country and Boston to feed the hungry and clothe the destitute. The stories will go on and on in subsequent days and months. I'm certain they will be repeated in Florida. And I'm also sure that if anyone bothered to poll all those volunteers, the vast majority would identify themselves as both religious and Christian! That's because Christians know that "whatever you do to the least of these my brothers, you do unto me," as Christ said.

The modern attitude of most people when confronted by a stressful situation is: "What's in it for me?" That, my friends, is original sin rearing its ego-centered head. However, true Christian volunteerism adopts a different mindset. It is: "What can I do to help?" I would go even further. True Christian volunteerism doesn't just react when it sees an obvious need, but searches out a need in order to assist. We do that around church. I think back a few years ago when the big pine tree fell on our sanctuary roof busting a

support and poking holes in it a few weeks before Christmas and winter. We sent out an email calling for help the next day, which was a Saturday. And many of you came and assisted in cleaning up the mess so that we could have worship the following day. That same spirit of seeing a need and helping translates to Sunday School teachers, ushers, Sunday Servers, kitchen renovation projects, church clean-ups, serving as officers of the church, choir participation, VBC, literally everything we do. Christians help Christians. Christians also help others in need.

When I see those images of volunteers dropping their lives to help others, I get a tear in my eye. I always seem to come back to that phrase: "Where do we get people like this?" I'm gratified that some humanity is still alive in this inhumane world. And then I also immediately think: "Christians are still "out there" and are willing to show their love for the Lord and their love for their fellow humans." We get "people like this" from the hand of God. They are His gift to us amid a world filled with suffering.

Since you are a child of God through faith in Christ, you're one of "those" people! Each of you is gifted by God to each other. Each of you has burned upon your conscience the truth that you are to "love your neighbor as yourself." Volunteerism is a way to show that gift to the world.

It's a sad truth that tragedy is often needed to bring out the best in people. We know that sometimes it brings out the worst, too; but as Christians we choose to dwell on the best. So, what about you?

Our synod has already sent funds and is collecting money for direct relief of Hurricane Harvey victims. I'm sure many of you have done similar things in your community. Considering the many ELS churches we have on the east coast of Florida, I'm pretty sure Irma will be added to the list by the synod very soon. Next week I'll be attending the synod bishop's conference in Minneapolis and I know we'll be talking about it all and getting updates. In any case, I guess this newsletter is all about you. What can and are you currently doing to assist in Christian volunteerism both at church and in your larger community? The old mission hymn has that memorable line: "Here am I, send me, send me." Well, most of us cannot always go and rebuild Houston or Florida. But we can pray, send some financial support, and encourage those agencies on the ground. We can help make our church stronger and more vibrant thereby helping out in our midst when a need arises which also enlarges our heart and enriches our own lives in the process. Because, at the end of the day, just as St. Paul says: "The love of Christ moves us" doesn't it?