
“OHANA IS EVERYTHING IN HAWAII”

LUTHERAN CHURCH CHARITIES SERVE MAUI COMMUNITIES HIT BY TRAGIC WILDFIRES



***114 Confirmed Deaths; 850 Still Missing
12,000+ People Displaced; Families Left Homeless***



On Tuesday, August 8, a firestorm fueled in part by fierce winds from the Category 4 Hurricane Dora's 140 mph winds triggered raging fires on the island of Maui. Hard hit is the historic town of Lahaina, a popular tourist destination and economic hub. The wildfires also impacted the communities of Kihei and Kula.

As of Tuesday, the death toll from the Maui wildfires climbed to 114, with hundreds still missing. Authorities are continuing to search the community by grids and the harbor waters for remains. This is the deadliest United States wildfire in more than 100 years. 3,000+ homes, businesses, schools, government, and cultural centers are destroyed.



A local family shared, *“Hawaiian cultural belief is that the land is not ours. God gives us the land to take care of it, and if we do, it will take care of us. Lahaina was the original capital and where all of the original Hawaiian culture was preserved. Family, or Ohana, is everything, and all share what they have, tend the land carefully, and preserve our history by passing it down through generations.”*

This wildfire caused more than a loss of homes and land, but a loss of identity, loss of heritage, and a loss of ohana as known here. Everyone on the Island of Maui has been affected directly or indirectly by these fires, and all are suffering and mourning their losses.

An estimated 12,000 people are displaced, with people in shelters that will be closing soon, placed in hotels by the American Red Cross for the next 45 days, or living in their vehicles, tents in the park, on the street, or with family and friends. With businesses destroyed, there is also a massive loss of jobs, income, and tourism.

Lutheran Church Charities received an invite from **Rev. Michael Lange of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod California Nevada Hawaii (CNH) District, CNH District Disaster Response Coordinator (DDRC) Phil Zabell, and Leif Sjostrand, Congregational President from Emmanuel Lutheran Church & School in Kahului on Maui** to assist this congregation in how to respond effectively in their community from this devastating disaster.

Rev. Chris Singer, LCC President/CEO, Jeanette Singer, and Kathy O’Day, LCC Director of Disaster Response, arrived in Maui on Thursday, August 17. They immediately met with **Russell Wilson, Head Elder, Diane Wilson, Church Secretary, and Josh Rempfer, Emmanuel Lutheran School Principal**, to discuss what they were experiencing and hoping to accomplish during our stay.



“I want to thank you for helping LCC ‘Be There’ with those who were suffering and in need from the wildfires in Maui. The loss and grief was described as a dark cloud hanging over Maui,” shared Rev. Singer.

“I heard stories of survival from displaced residents receiving free meals who lost their properties. One adult son who had been visiting his parents raced to their home with the fire bearing down onto their neighborhood. His parents were not

in the house and, with just mere minutes, he grabbed a few photos that he could carry and ran to a safe distance onto the beach and watched his parents’ home burn. His mother and father recounted the details to me through tears. A hotel worker shared that their home was burned

to the ground and that his wife and children were now being housed at the hotel where he worked.

There were so many stories shared with our ministry team, who sat with each person in their grief. Our very presence alone brought so much comfort. Each person was moved to gratitude that could only be expressed by tears as we told them of the outpouring of financial support, the hundreds of prayers being lifted on their behalf, and LCC's commitment to continue to be there through ongoing support of their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being."

On Friday, we met with the school staff. Rev. Singer led devotions and explained LCC's role and partnership with Emmanuel. **Rev. Rod Hall** and **Jeanette Singer, Licensed Counselors**, offered individual emotional and spiritual care opportunities to them and their students. Pastor Rod and Jeanette were invited to visit and talk to students in three classrooms. The children expressed many things they had heard from their parents and were reassured to "have faith in God." Several staff members were also ministered to privately.

From August 12 LCC Making a Difference Newsletter

REMEMBERING THE TRAGEDY IN LAHAINA, HAWAII

In November of last year, **Lutheran Church Charities (LCC)** and **Emmanuel Lutheran Church and School in Kahului** came together to assist with establishing a new memorial site in Maui for the victims of the wildfires that occurred in August 2023, killing more than 100 people.

With the support of our generous donors and the hard work of our volunteers, **LCC Hearts of Mercy & Compassion** were placed at the memorial site located off Hokiokio Place, just one block from the entrance into the Lahaina community, honoring the lives lost. Goodfellow Construction on Maui has allowed for the use of the land on which the memorial was placed.



Recently, **Pastor Mitchell Gowen, 1st Vice President of the California-Nevada-Hawaii District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS)**, his wife Nancy, and **DCE Kayla Lohman** from **Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Oahu** visited the memorial site of the 100 people who died in the Lahaina fire. This memorial was set up through the efforts of Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Maui with assistance from Lutheran Church Charities.

Kayla wrote a Psalm on each one, while Nancy and Pastor Gowen wrote Isaiah 43 and said a short prayer over each cross. Pastor Gowen noted that even months later, the

damage is still quite palpable. He was able to talk to one of the families living on the beach and learn how this tragedy continues to affect them.

From Jan.10, 2024 LCC [Making a Difference](#) Newsletter