

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO Forester

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Approaching retirement,
Rev. Dr. Daniel L. Gard
reflects on his tenure at CUC



Kathy O'Day

Deaconess Certification '17

Being able to adapt when the unexpected happens is part of what makes Deaconess Kathy O'Day perfect for her line of work. O'Day was serving her call as a lay minister at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Greeley, CO, and was in the process of completing her deaconess certification at Concordia-Chicago when she received the call to serve as Director of Disaster Response for Lutheran Church Charities (LCC), based in Northbrook, IL. She had many years of experience in disaster response working for Catholic Charities USA. "I wasn't expecting a new call, but after prayerful consideration, I moved and began serving in my new role at LCC," she says.

When a disaster strikes in the U.S., O'Day monitors the situation and gets to the scene early. She is joined by a group of trained LERT (Lutheran Early Response Team) volunteers. "We have just over 1,000 active LERT members in the LCMS Northern Illinois District ready to deploy at any time. I conduct LERT trainings and coordinate disaster response deployments for the Northern Illinois District (NID) as well as support other LCMS Districts as invited. LCC LERT volunteers respond with chainsaws and heavy equipment for tree removal or pumps for mucking out after a flood."

Last December, O'Day was getting ready to head to Taylorville, IL after tornadoes hit the area, where she would assess the damage, meet with homeowners

and make sure they had all the necessary equipment to clear away debris. "In order to make the most of the volunteers' time, you want to ensure that the necessary supplies are available when they arrive on site," she says.

LCC Disaster Response must be invited to the area of a disaster by a local LCMS church. "We work with that local church so they can be the beacon of hope throughout the community," says O'Day.

During Hurricane Michael last fall, the Living Water church building in Mexico Beach, FL, was destroyed. "There was no physical structure left at all. But the church isn't a building, it is people," says O'Day. During training, O'Day emphasizes the need for LERT volunteers to "be the church" to those they serve.

While she often meets people who are facing the worst hardships in their lives, O'Day calls on her training as a deaconess to bring them comfort. "I listen to their stories and offer to pray with them. I'm not there to sensationalize their situation—I'm there to help," she says. In the typical news coverage of a disaster, she notes, "you don't always see the love, care and mercy shown to people. LERT volunteers are reaching out, and there are many opportunities to share the compassion of Christ."

1. LCC Director of Disaster Response Kathy O'Day meets with Pastor Dave Gieseking at the site of the Living Water church building in Mexico Beach, FL in November 2018.