



## Lutheran Church Charities

Disaster Response • Hearts of Mercy & Compassion • Human Care • K-9 Ministries  
*Working with you to show the Mercy, Compassion, Presence and Proclamation of Jesus Christ*

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For background:

### The Hearts of Mercy & Compassion Ministry of Lutheran Church Charities

For more information:

Office (Toll Free): 866-455-6466

E-mail: [lccmedia@LutheranChurchCharities.org](mailto:lccmedia@LutheranChurchCharities.org)

[www.LutheranChurchCharities.org](http://www.LutheranChurchCharities.org)

#### What Hearts of Mercy & Compassion (HMC) is

In times of loss or serious illness, physical symbols of mercy and compassion can bring comfort to individuals who are suffering, and to families and friends of those who have been lost to violence, accidents, and illnesses. It can also be given to celebrate a victory, honor service, as an expression of love, or to be an encouragement in the face of adversity. This is what Lutheran Church Charities (LCC), through the generosity of donors, provides with the Hearts of Mercy & Compassion (HMC) Ministry.

Standing 40" tall, these are symbols of Christian love and caring that can be seen wherever loved ones wish: outside a home, at the scene of a tragedy, in hospice care, or at senior living facilities, just to name a few. The heart shape is placed over the crux of the cross, and the Christian fish symbol – otherwise known as the *ichthys*, two intersecting arcs that harken to the beginning of Christianity – offer a combination of hope, caring, and God's saving grace. For non-Christians, the crossing arcs are a ribbon expressing a similar message of love and concern and are placed on a post marker.

Well-wishers are encouraged to write their names and messages of support on the painted wooden heart, which accepts permanent marker ink.

Provided to anyone of any faith, or non-faith, for any reason upon request, the symbolic heart and cross came to national attention with the mass shooting at Columbine High School in 1999, where founder Greg Zanis of Aurora, Illinois constructed and delivered what he then called "Crosses for Losses" as memorials to 13 people lost in that massacre (see History, below). Requests for these crosses subsequently came from all over the country, and Zanis complied with the best of his ability.

Today, HMC are often requested to honor a beloved family member, friend, neighbor or co-worker, in addition to larger-scale losses from tragic events.

#### History

LCC was legally given the Crosses for Losses program from its founder, Greg Zanis, who provided these widely seen symbols of memorial to communities reeling from mass shootings (e.g., Sandy Hook, Las Vegas, Orlando, Pittsburgh, Parkland, El Paso) and bombings (Boston Marathon), as well as in the aftermath of natural phenomena (e.g., deadly tornadoes in Lee County, Alabama). By the time of his death in May 2020, Zanis had made and delivered more than 26,000 wooden memorials.



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When in poor health in 2019, Zanis legally gave the program to Lutheran Church Charities, which officially took it over as of January 1, 2020. Tragedies, including losses from the coronavirus pandemic, have volunteers constructing the sturdy hearts and crosses from its headquarters in Northbrook, Illinois as well as fifteen mission partner churches located in nine states to provide them upon request through their outreach ministries. LCC has over 100 volunteers supporting the HMC ministry.

Since its launch, LCC's Hearts of Mercy & Compassion Ministry has responded to the following mass shooting crisis situations, and so many more:

- Molson Coors Company Shooting in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (February 2020)
- King Soopers Store Shooting in Boulder, Colorado (March 2021)
- FedEx Facility Shooting in Indianapolis, Indiana (April 2021)
- Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) Shooting in San Jose, California (May 2021)
- Condominium Tower Collapse in Surfside, Florida (June 2021)
- Christmas Parade Attack in Waukesha, Wisconsin (November 2021)
- Oxford High School Shooting in Oxford, Michigan (November 2021)
- Robb Elementary School Shooting in Uvalde, Texas (May 2022)
- Independence Day Parade Shooting in Highland Park, Illinois (July 2022)
- Club Q Shooting in Colorado Springs, Colorado (November 2022)
- Walmart Shooting in Chesapeake, Virginia (November 2022)
- Star Ballroom Dance Studio Shooting in Monterey Park, California (January 2023)
- Michigan State University Shooting in East Lansing, Michigan (February 2023)
- The Covenant School Shooting in Nashville, Tennessee (March 2023)
- Old National Bank Shooting in Louisville, Kentucky (April 2023)
- Allen Premium Outlets Shooting in Allen, Texas (May 2023)
- Lewiston, Maine Shootings (October/November 2023)

### **Why LCC furthers the impact of Hearts for Mercy & Compassion Ministry**

The mission of LCC is to share the Mercy, Compassion, Presence and Proclamation of Jesus Christ to those suffering and in need.

In times of grief, individuals look for comfort, hope, and reassurance – someone who will walk with and be present with them. Working through churches, LCC provides a Mercy Heart to those in need. The heart itself is universal and conveys love. The color blue is the color of hope. Given as a gift, each HMC provides the love and hope of Jesus through presence and prayer.

Upon request, Lutheran Church Charities, working through churches, can provide an HMC at no charge in one of three sizes:

- Small Heart – 9" w x 7 ½" h
- Medium Heart – 14" w x 11 ½" h
- Large Heart – 17" w x 14" h



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Specialized Mercy Hearts can be provided for Military Service and First Responders:

- **Hearts for Military Service:** This heart is purple, which is a combination of each of the five United States military branch colors (Air Force, Army, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard). Each heart presented also includes a decal from the appropriate military branch, including the United States Space Force through the Department of the Air Force
- **Hearts for First Responders:** The blue heart has the appropriate Thin Line decal; Law Enforcement (Thin Blue Line), Firefighters (Thin Red Line) and other Public Safety Service (Thin Yellow Line).

Since January 2020, the Hearts of Mercy & Compassion Ministry has presented more than 872 Hearts of Mercy; including Thin Blue Line Hearts for Law Enforcement Officers, Thin Red Line Hearts for Firefighters and Thin Yellow Line Hearts for Emergency 911 Public Safety Workers.

HMC is a natural extension to other ministries at LCC, such as Disaster Response, K-9 Ministry, Human Care, and International Ministries – all in support of LCC’s Mission to share the Mercy, Compassion, Presence and Proclamation of Jesus Christ to those who are suffering and in need.

There is no charge for a HMC (nor all other LCC ministries). The cost of each heart is about \$30, which is covered by donations made to LCC for that purpose. They are provided to anyone in need of comfort, hope, and reassurance.

### **About Lutheran Church Charities**

Lutheran Church Charities’ (LCC) mission is to share the **Mercy, Compassion, Presence and Proclamation of Jesus Christ** to those who are suffering and in need. LCC works primarily through churches to help individuals and families. Headquartered in Northbrook, Illinois, LCC serves nationally and internationally. LCC never charges those we serve.

Originally headquartered in Addison, Illinois, and currently in Northbrook, Illinois, Lutheran Church Charities (LCC) was founded in 1947 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit ministry to help support Christian human care ministries of the Church. LCC works throughout the United States and internationally with and in partnership with our churches. LCC is an RSO (Recognized Service Organization) of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. We operate with a “dollar in–dollar out” funding process where every dollar given for a cause or need goes directly to that cause or need, with LCC acknowledging the gift and overseeing that the money is used as intended.

### ***Other work of LCC:***

***Disaster Response:*** LCC Disaster Response deploys, coordinates and manages volunteer teams as they respond to disasters throughout the United States. LCC trains volunteer Lutheran Early Response Teams (L.E.R.T.) through our LCMS congregations in many areas of disaster response. Approximately 850 active LCC L.E.R.T. volunteers are trained, many with expertise in the area of chainsaw, heavy equipment, debris removal, flood recovery with pumps, mucking homes, and how to provide emotional and spiritual care. L.E.R.T food handler certified volunteers can utilize the LCC Mobile Food Kitchen to prepare, cook and serve meals to volunteers and an affected community while deployed. For L.E.R.T. volunteers, disaster response is an essential relief and outreach ministry.



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LCC Disaster Response also offers Congregational Preparedness Training (CPT) to help churches and ministries prepare to reach out to their communities following a disaster or crisis.

**K-9 Ministry:** Lutheran Church Charities has a well-developed network of approximately 130 golden retrievers that are specifically trained, along with their volunteer handlers in Lutheran congregations in 27 states, to provide a vital service to people who have undergone natural- or human-caused trauma (hurricanes, tornadoes, mass shootings, etc.), as well as people in hospitals, nursing homes, and schools. More than a dozen LCC K-9 Ministry comfort dogs are profiled for their work in a wonderful book, “Extraordinary Dogs, Stories from Search and Rescue Dogs, Comfort Dogs, and Other Canine Heroes,” by Liz Stavrinos and John Schlimm (St. Martin’s Press, 2019).

In story after story, the comfort dogs enable victims of trauma and tragedy to experience very human emotions with the support they need. The LCC K-9 Ministries include the LCC K-9 Comfort Dogs, LCC Kare 9 Military Ministry serving the Military, Veterans, and their families, and the LCC K-9 Police Ministry serving police officers and their families.

**Human Care Ministry (Families in Need & Ministries in Need):** Specific appeals to the LCC supporter community help individuals, clergy support staff and congregations. Support may be financial, in-kind donations, people resources, emotional and spiritual. Through LCMS congregations, LCC’s Human Care Ministry supports soup kitchens, food pantries, lending closets, refugees, and veterans, just to name a few.

### **International Ministries:**

LCC works with LCMS Missions to offer support to international partners in disaster recovery, medical missions, construction, collecting and distributing funds for education, feeding, and clean water programs, school tuition just to name a few.

### **Haiti:**

LCC continues to work through our Haiti Mission Partners to send emergency funds to Haiti. They work diligently to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ by assisting wherever possible. Specific initiatives include: Haiti Lutheran School tuition, food for Haitian school children; food for families and elderly at risk, goat cooperatives and agriculture, beds for the elderly, hygiene supplies and hand-washing stations, Haiti Lutheran School teacher salaries, water filters, and shoes for children in tent cities.

### **Israel:**

LCC donors support Four Homes of Mercy, a Christian run home for the emotionally and physically disabled children (many of whom are orphans) and adults in the poor area of Bethany Israel in Jerusalem – the very location where Jesus stayed when he came to that ancient city (home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha, and Simon the Leper).

### **Ghana:**

LCC works through Church Without Walls, a Christian organization that provides clean drinking water that effectively improves upon the country’s poor infant mortality rate, and a medical clinic. Additionally, funds support the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana and its work to expand within the country.

### **Ukraine:**

LCC works with Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Ukraine (SELCU) and the Immaculate Conception Ukrainian Church in Palatine, Illinois, to provide humanitarian relief to various areas in Ukraine during the current conflict, including supporting an orphanage at the Parish of St. Nicholas, Ukraine, Ivano-Frankivsk.