



Forged by Fire

BY PAUL ERNEWEIN WITH MISSION EDITOR BRIANNE STAHLECKER

We take so many things for granted until they are no longer there — family, friends, jobs, homes — even something as simple as a meal. If you have lived through a major disaster like a hurricane, tornado, flood, or wildfire, you know the feeling that follows. It is almost like an out-of-body experience. Confusion about what to do next invades. How do we start trying to recover? Something as simple as a warm meal, once taken for granted, is missed.

In Forged by Fire serving lines, we hear stories and see the faces of people who are simply lost: seniors who haven't had a warm meal in weeks; families who had food insecurity issues before the disaster; families struggling just to find one meal a day. Yet, they are thankful that we are there serving them.

Even in "the greatest country in the world," people and communities

can get overlooked in disasters. Paths of destruction during hurricanes can be so wide that it is virtually impossible to cover every community with relief efforts. This is where churches and volunteer organizations become vital. That is how Forged by Fire started. In the Gulf Coast, major disasters have affected our lives. Our leadership team and many of our volunteers have "been there."

Our feeding ministry has its roots in providing that very basic need for human survival — food. We don't serve just average food; we serve food cooked with love — delicious food that can be found in your grandmother's or mother's kitchen. Every time we serve, we try to serve food like that.

Since its beginning, Forged by Fire has prepared and served food for over 150,000 people. Because of generous donations from individuals and organizations like

LWML, we have never had to stop cooking due to lack of funding. God truly provides for all our needs!

Those receiving our meals often ask, "Why?" and "How are you able to do this?" What an opportunity to share Christ while being the hands and feet of our Savior Jesus! Our answer is always the same, "Because we can." This is who we are in Jesus. We serve. It really is that simple.

Where does the LWML fit in? Smaller communities are the ones often

overlooked by major relief organizations in recovery work. The LWML Mission Grant for Forged by Fire Services, prayed for and approved at the LWML Convention in Milwaukee, will help serve those communities. The mobile, self-sufficient kitchen will allow us to cook and serve from the roadside. A smaller team of volunteers will be able to comfortably serve up to 500 people. What a blessing this unit will be to those in need! We cannot thank you enough. *Q*

To learn more about our work, please visit forGEDbyfireservices.com. We are an active Lutheran Early Response Team (LERT). To learn about opportunities to volunteer with the LCMS after a disaster strikes, and learn more about LERT, visit lcms.org/how-we-serve/mercy/disaster-response. Your prayers and your service are vital to our work that we share together.

Rev. Paul Ernewein, a 2007 graduate of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, serves as pastor of The Village Church Lutheran in Lacombe, Louisiana and as president and managing director of Forged by Fire Services. He also serves as a zone pastoral counselor for the LWML Louisiana-Mississippi District. Because he has experienced multiple hurricanes, tornadoes, and flooding events firsthand, he and his wife are committed to helping those in need after these devastating events.