



READY FAITH

Planning Guide

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About the Humanitarian Disaster Institute

The Humanitarian Disaster Institute (HDI) is the country's first faith-based academic disaster research center. As a college-wide interdisciplinary research center at Wheaton College, HDI is dedicated to helping equip domestic and international congregations and faith-based organizations to prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters. HDI carries out this mission through applied research, training, and technical support.

CONTACT INFORMATION

We welcome inquiries from individuals and organizations interested in finding out more about our programs and services, as well as from those interested in collaborating with us.

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Introduction

Natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, fires, and tornadoes can strike a community with little or no warning. An influenza pandemic, or other infectious disease, can spread from person-to-person causing serious illness across the country, or around the globe, in a very short time. Mass shootings, threatened or actual, are rare but have increased in frequency. The harrowing events of September 11 and subsequent terrorist attempts have ushered in a new awareness of terrorist threats. The unfortunate reality is that many congregations in this country may be touched either directly or indirectly by a disaster of some kind at any time, and many congregations are not prepared. Still, research has shown that many people turn to faith and to local congregations for answers and assistance. Knowing what to do when faced with a crisis can be the difference between calm and chaos, between courage and fear, between life and death. The good news is there are steps and actions congregations can take to prepare and recover. The time to plan is now. If you do not have a disaster plan in place, develop one. If you do have a disaster plan in place, review, update and practice that plan regularly.

WHY THIS GUIDE?

Taking action now can save lives, prevent injury, and minimize property damage during a crisis. The importance of developing, reviewing and revising congregational, denominational or association plans cannot be underscored enough. This Ready Faith: Disaster Planning Guide for Churches is designed to help you navigate the disaster planning process. The Guide gives congregations and denominations or associations the critical concepts and components of effective disaster planning. It will stimulate thinking about the disaster preparedness process, and provide examples of promising practices. It does not provide a cookbook approach to congregational disaster preparedness. Each congregation has its own history, culture, and way of doing ministry. Potential threats and risks faced can vary from region to region, and congregation to congregation. As such, congregational

disaster plans need to meet the unique needs of local congregations and communities. Congregation disaster plans also need to address state and local safety laws. Experts recommend against cutting and pasting plans from other faith-based organizations. Other plans can serve as useful models, but what is effective for a large inner city congregation where the population is concentrated may be ineffective for a rural congregation where houses of worship and first responders are far apart.

ORGANIZATION OF THE GUIDE

The Guide is organized into nine sections: Disaster Basics, Role of the Church, Getting Organized, Planning, Mitigation and Prevention, Preparedness, Response, Recovery, and Next Steps. There is a companion workbook with tools and other resources to help you with the tasks described in each chapter. An important feature of the Guide is that it uses a developmental model. In a developmental model, the goal is achieved over time as foundational abilities are put into place first and then built upon later. In the Guide we point out the sequence of actions for developing preparedness and provide guidance in where to begin your community work so that you build for long-term success.

DEVELOPMENT OF THIS GUIDE

The research on what works in congregational disaster planning is in its infancy. While a growing body of research literature is available on crisis management, there is far less hard evidence to support best practices for congregations. Much of the information in the Guide draws heavily on what we know about crisis management in many settings. These promising practices could effectively be adapted and applied to faith-based settings. The Guide also draws from lessons learned from the Institute's disaster research following: (a) Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Gustav, (b) the national H1N1 outbreak, (c) the 2010 Mississippi Delta and 2011 Tuscaloosa Tornadoes, and

(d) the Haiti Earthquake and Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. This research includes extensive surveys and interviews with clergy, congregation leaders, denominational disaster relief and development leadership, congregation members, and community members who have been affected by disasters first hand. The Guide benefits from the Institute's extensive review of other existing faith-based disaster research and resources. Furthermore, the Institute has benefited from input by a multidisciplinary expert panel and many other experts in the field. The Guide also benefits from lessons learned from piloting programs in congregations along the Mississippi Gulf Coast and internationally in Japan that have been affected by disasters.

Disaster Basics

In this section we provide readers with basic concepts and consequences of disasters. Having a basic understanding of disasters will help you to better prepare for disasters by making you more aware of potential threats to your community, as well as resources for reducing threats. Familiarizing yourself with the material presented in this section will help to provide you with key information you can use and share with others to enhance your congregation's and community's ability to bounce back after a disaster.

TYPES OF DISASTERS

Knowing the types of disasters will help you think about the types of threats you face. One church did not see a clear opportunity to serve the community, until a nearby apartment building caught fire and suddenly hundreds of people in the church's own backyard were without food or shelter. The church members realized this was truly a disaster and that they had the space, people, and other resources needed to help their neighbors, if only they had prepared in advance. This was an opportunity missed, but a lesson learned. After deciding that they wanted to be prepared to serve in this way, they formed a action committee and began to think about disasters in a more nuanced and creative way, from flu to hurricanes to heat waves that all have the potential to impact the people in their community.

Disasters range in scope and intensity from incidents that directly or indirectly affect a single community to an entire region to the whole nation (e.g., September 11th). Even if not directly impacted by an event, it is important to remember that congregations and communities may still be severely affected by an incident in another city or state. Recognizing an impending hazard and knowing what to do to protect yourself, your family, congregation, and community

will help you take effective steps to prepare beforehand and aid recovery after the event.

Natural Disasters

Natural disasters such as flood, fire, earthquake, tornado and windstorm affect thousands of people every year. Examples include:

- Earthquake
- Tsunami
- Volcano
- Landslide, mudslide, subsidence
- Flood, flash flood, tidal surge
- Water control structure/dam/levee failure
- Drought
- Snow, ice, hail, sleet, arctic freeze
- Windstorm, tropical cyclone, hurricane, tornado, dust storm
- Extreme temperatures (heat, cold)
- Lightning strikes (wildfire following)
- Foodborne illnesses
- Pandemic/Infectious/communicable disease (Avian flu, H1N1, etc.)
- Fire

There are other types of natural disasters that may occur where you live. In parts of the US West, wildfires are a serious threat. In some cities, heat waves have the potential to kill hundreds of people, especially the elderly and medically fragile. In parts of California and Texas fog can reduce visibility on freeways, setting the stage for multiple car pileups. Think about your area, and then make your own list of disaster threats in your area.

Technological and Accidental Hazards

Technological and accidental hazards include nuclear power plant failures and hazardous materials incidents. Usually, little or no warning precedes these disasters. The number of potential accidental disasters is escalating due to the increased number of new substances, the complexity of systems, and the opportunities for human error while using these

materials. Examples of technological and accidental hazards include:

- Hazardous material spill or release
- Utility interruption or failure
- Nuclear power plant incident (if located in proximity to a nuclear power plant)
- Explosion/Fire
- Transportation accident
- Building/structure collapse
- Entrapment and/or rescue (machinery, confined space, high angle, water)
- Transportation Incidents (motor vehicle, railroad, watercraft, aircraft, pipeline)

Terrorist Hazards

Throughout human history there have been many threats to the security of nations. These threats have brought about large-scale losses of life, the destruction of property, widespread illness and injury, the displacement of large numbers of people and devastating economic loss. Recent technological advances and ongoing political unrest are components of the increased risk to national security. Examples of terrorist hazards include:

- Kidnapping, extortion
- Hostage incident
- Workplace violence
- Civil disturbance
- Bomb threat
- Terrorism

There is a tendency to think of terrorism as something that the government handles and not something people plan for. However, if your church is sending mission teams into certain developing areas, such as Haiti, you may be more at risk than you realize. As you assess your risks and things you must plan for, remember your missions and service teams that could be putting themselves at risk.

CLASSIFICATIONS OF DISASTERS

Disasters are also classified according to several dimensions:

Extent of Destruction

Regardless of area affected, the duration of the event and reconstruction help classify disasters as local, widespread or catastrophic. A fire in a single-family dwelling can be as tragic and disastrous to those involved as a massive earthquake is to its victims.

Primary and Secondary Disasters

A primary disaster is the initial or triggering event. A secondary disaster is a consequence of the original occurrence. For example, earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, and fires are usually primary disasters. Any of these four initial events might trigger secondary disasters. An earthquake can cause a power failure, dam failure, tidal wave, or fire. Tornadoes often result in power outages. Floods and fires can cause a domino effect of destruction.

Natural and Man-Made Disasters

Natural disasters include tornadoes, hurricanes, drought, snow, and ice—any crisis event due to weather conditions. Volcanic eruption and earthquakes are other examples of natural disasters. Man-made disasters can be of major consequence as well—fires, riots, explosions, transportation accidents, terrorist attacks, and war.

The Sequence of Disaster Management

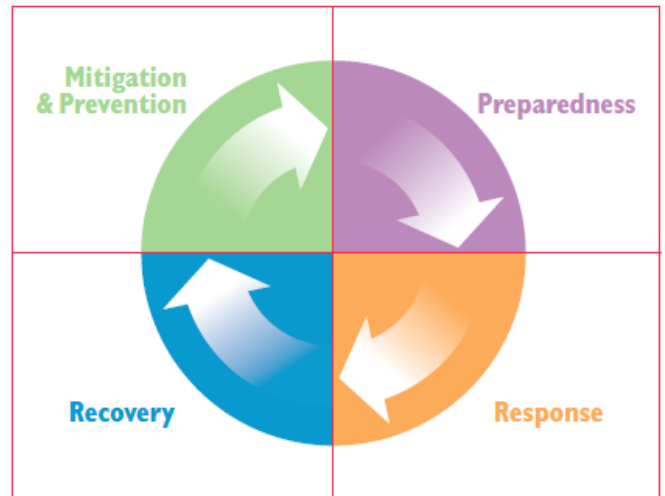
Disasters are generally thought of in terms of the specific event that caused the damage or disruption. By contrast, work on disasters covers a full life span with the extreme event being just one stage. The results of extensive interviews and a review of the crisis literature reveal that experts employ four phases of crisis management:

- **Mitigation/Prevention** addresses what congregations can do to reduce or eliminate risk to life and property;
- **Preparedness** focuses on the process of planning for the worst-case scenario;
- **Response** is devoted to the steps to take during a disaster; and
- **Recovery** deals with how to restore ministry operations after a disaster.

As you can see, disaster planning is a continuous process that considers all phases of disasters (see Figure 1). Each phase represents an opportunity to serve your church and community, and it is not a requirement to address every phase. For example, in Japan, where churches are typically small and resources limited, churches in a region join together into a church network, with each church taking a part of the overall disaster plan. The network emphasizes collaboration, resource sharing, shared training, and more, with each church deciding for itself what role it will play and what resources it can contribute. The emphasis is on planning and preparation.

Good plans are never finished. They can always be updated based on experience, research, and changing vulnerabilities. Congregations may be in various stages of planning. The Guide provides the resources needed to start the planning process and is a tool used to review and improve existing plans.

Figure 1. Cycle of Crisis Planning



Common Reactions to Disasters

One important area of ministry is the care of disaster survivors. Major disasters are traumatic events, and the impact on people and their lives is extensive and varied. The following table illustrates the range and type of reactions and provides an overview of common stress reactions to disasters.

Most people are resilient and experience mild or transient psychological disturbances from which they readily bounce back. How much 'normal stress reaction' is too much? Many of the reactions listed below are commonly experienced by disaster survivors and have limited long-term effects. However, when a number of reactions are experienced simultaneously and intensely, people are more likely to become impaired.

PSYCHOLOGICAL & EMOTIONAL

- Feeling heroic, invulnerable, euphoric
- Denial
- Anxiety and fear
- Worry about safety of self and others
- Anger
- Irritability
- Restlessness
- Sadness, grief, depression, moodiness
- Distressing dreams
- Guilt or “survivor guilt”
- Feeling overwhelmed, hopeless
- Feeling isolated, lost, or abandoned
- Apathy
- Identification with survivors

COGNITIVE

- Memory problems
- Disorientation
- Confusion
- Slowness of thinking and comprehension
- Difficulty calculating, setting priorities, making decisions
- Poor concentration
- Limited attention span
- Loss of objectivity
- Unable to stop thinking about the disaster
- Blaming

BEHAVIORAL

- Change in activity
- Decreased efficiency and effectiveness
- Difficulty communicating
- Increased sense of humor
- Outbursts of anger, frequent arguments
- Inability to rest or “letdown”
- Change in eating habits
- Change in sleeping patterns
- Change in patterns of intimacy, sexuality
- Change in job performance
- Periods of crying
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or drugs
- Social withdrawal, silence
- Vigilance about safety or environment
- Avoidance of activities or places that trigger memories
- Proneness to accidents

PHYSICAL

- Increased heartbeat, respiration
- Increased blood pressure
- Upset stomach, nausea, diarrhea
- Change in appetite, weight loss or gain
- Sweating or chills
- Tremors (hands, lips)
- Muscle twitching
- “Muffled” hearing
- Tunnel vision
- Feeling uncoordinated
- Headaches
- Soreness in muscles
- Lower back pain
- Feeling a “lump in the throat”
- Exaggerated startle reaction
- Fatigue
- Menstrual cycle changes
- Change in sexual desire
- Decreased resistance to infection
- Flare-up of allergies and arthritis
- Hair loss

SPIRITUAL

- Questions about faith
- Self-blame
- Questioning God
- Anger at God
- Realization of mortality
- Withdrawal from faith and religion
- Concern about hereafter
- Questions about good and evil
- Questions about forgiveness
- Redefining moral values and intangible priorities
- Promising, bargaining, and challenging God
- Concern about vengeance
- Comforted by belief that deceased is with God
- Distressed by belief that deceased is separated from God
- Deeper connection to faith
- Search for meaning
- Relying on faith/prayer

Role of the Church

During times of crisis and disaster significant numbers of people turn to local clergy and churches for help. Whether or not people attend a local congregation, many will look to local churches for support. Unfortunately, the degree of preparedness among churches to provide this kind of assistance varies widely. In this section we provide a brief overview of the role of the church in disaster circumstances and provide recommendations that congregations should consider before getting started with forming a disaster ministry.

BENEFITS OF CHURCH PREPAREDNESS ACTIVITIES

This Guide will help churches build resilience to disasters in their community. Engaging in church preparedness and response activities can help not only lead to new ministry and fellowship opportunities, but also can help strengthen current ministry programs. A few other examples of benefits to developing a disaster ministry include:

- Sharing compassion, love, and faith;
- Mitigating property damage;
- Impacting one's congregation and community, and expanding one's ministry;
- Carefully examining and assessing capacity to help, serve and minister to the community in time of need;
- Discovering small things the church can do that result in doing a lot within a community in the right circumstance;
- Networking and participating in the community in tactical ways that will help lessen the impact of future disasters;
- Increasing the level of credibility and influence among local officials;
- Increasing pastor, staff and congregational resilience to disaster;

- Positioning and mobilizing the congregation to serve others in need; and
- Teaching the congregation what to do and how to do it when emergencies arise.

Building Congregational Disaster Resilience

Think about building resilience to disaster for your church and congregation. Resilience is the ability to bounce back and recover quickly from disaster in a healthy manner. An analogy of resilience is an “inflated” beach ball in a swimming pool. When pushed under water, the ball may be stressed (compressed) by the surrounding pressure, but it can resurface quickly near its original shape and position. Church leaders who take action to prepare their church and congregation for disaster recover more quickly; and, more importantly, strengthen their position from which to respond and help the community when disaster strikes. Examples of factors that strengthen congregational disaster resilience include:

- Proactive leadership;
- Clear mission, goals, and values;
- Encouraging opportunities to influence change;
- Clear communication;
- Emphasizing learning;
- Promoting service;
- Clear responsibilities;
- Supportive environment;
- Sense of security;
- Connectedness among staff, lay leaders, and congregation members;
- Meaning-making;
- Commitment to community;
- Volunteerism;
- Resource sharing;
- Access to services;
- Community networking;
- Strong social support systems; and
- Cohesive leadership.

Strengths of the Local Church

Local congregations are uniquely positioned in their communities to assist with disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. Examples include:

- Often first to respond, and last to leave;
- Long-term presence;
- Organizational capacity;
- Local knowledge;
- Duty to care;
- Relationships and relational approach;
- Spiritual focus;
- Ethos of compassion and concern for others; and
- Agent for building sustainable communities.

(Adapted from Micah Network. The role of the local church in disasters and emergencies).

What Can Your Church Do?

There is abundant evidence that churches already play a key role in disaster response in many communities, especially in regions that are at high risk for a disaster. People want to help when disaster strikes their neighbors, and they see the church as the logical starting point for organizing and preparing a response. Churches help in many ways. For example, to name just a few ways, churches can:

- Give hope and meaning;
- Act as a moral compass;
- Address social, economic and political systems;
- Mobilize and resource other congregations;
- Provide physical shelter;
- Organize crews of volunteers to go into disaster areas;
- Help with cleanup and repair;
- Serve meals;
- Distribute supplies;
- Provide spiritual and emotional support;
- Facilitate community action;
- Leverage networks;
- Advocate on behalf of the marginalized;
- Facilitate reconciliation;

- Influence and shape values and principles; and
- Engage volunteers.

Working within your own congregation is a logical place to start a ministry, and a wise choice if this is a new ministry. Consider these examples:

- *Church A* has a large number of young families among its members. Most of these families have both parents working and have their children either in school or day care or both. The geographic area is one that gets severe weather, including tornadoes in the summer and severe blizzards in the winter. The Disaster Ministry Team assessed that few of these families have any formal plan for these disasters, and are generally not aware of the risks to their family. Since the church also has a small Christian school, they decide to make disaster awareness and preparedness a program that can be offered through their school, targeting young families.
- *Church B* is an inner city church with a diverse congregation, including many poor and homeless people. The church Disaster Ministry Team recognizes that these people often have poor health and/or do not engage in prevention services, such as getting shots, and this puts them at special risk in a disaster, such as a pandemic. They decide to develop a public health disaster preparedness ministry that focuses on engaging underserved people in receiving health services.
- *Church C* is an urban church with a large number of elderly members, some of whom are in local long-term care and nursing homes. As a result, the church has an outreach to nursing homes where volunteers make visitation and conduct worship services. The church Disaster Ministry Team learns that this population is very vulnerable in heat waves. They launch an education program about protecting the elderly during heat waves, and combine this with their nursing home ministry so that they can also support the elderly in these facilities, as well as elderly in their own homes.

Churches can also serve as part of a coalition or regional network. Here are examples of how that could work:

- *Church D* is a rural church with a large number of military veterans, both at their church and in the area in general. These people usually talk with their pastors about their war trauma and, partly due to distance, do not consistently get mental health services or work with their local VA. Several churches get together and decide that, together, there are a large number of veterans that would benefit from their support. They contact the regional VA for technical assistance, and form a multi-church veterans ministry that includes offering AA, mentoring from older vets, group meetings, and financial and housing assistance.
- *Church E* is a suburban church in “tornado alley”. Many churches in this area already have emergency response teams, and the local FEMA has an active church coordination council. Church members attend this council and learn that there are several gaps in the services, especially in the area of prevention. Since this church has an active community outreach program, including after-school tutoring for children from immigrant homes, and a meals program for shut-ins, they decide to integrate disaster awareness into these programs.

BEFORE YOU START

As can be seen above, the ways people and their churches help in disasters is more varied than the disasters themselves—the possibilities are endless. However, before you start, it is important that you are prepared to maintain your program once you launch it. Therefore, think about resources and other issues that could impact your ability to maintain your ministry once started.

Imagine your church has decided to develop a community education program on preparing for a disaster. Examples of questions to determine resources needed to carry out the Disaster Ministry Team program goals might include:

- “Are there gaps between church resources available and proposed church Disaster Ministry Team program goals?” If yes,
 - “What quantity of a resource is required?”
 - “When will the resource be needed?”
- “Do you have the physical space?”
- “Do you have people who can answer technical questions?”
- “Do you have lists of other resources that you can refer people to?”
- “What skills are needed to use the resource or carry out the ministry?”
- “Do people have the necessary training, and if not, where will they get it?”
- “Are volunteers prepared to manage people who could become disruptive?”
- “What is the cost for procuring or having the resource available?”
- “Are there any liabilities associated with use of the resource?”
- “Are there additional costs for insurance, or is there any legal liability?”
- “Where will your supply of volunteers come from?”
- “Do you need to do recruitment?”
- “Do you need to minister to the people who will do the ministry?”
- “How will volunteers be supported?”

Getting Organized

This section will help you lay the proper foundation for success. It will help you prepare reasons for support, obtain commitment and support from senior church leadership, identify a Disaster Ministry Coordinator, and establish a Disaster Ministry Team.

DEFINING YOUR DISASTER MINISTRY

Now that you know the varieties of disasters and the life cycle of disasters, the next step is to ask what type of ministry you may have and where to start. Consider the following questions:

- *Are you new to this type of work?* Starting small and learning is the best practice. Develop a program focusing on your own members and learn from that before launching a large program.
- *Do you have ministries that can be incorporated into a disaster ministry?* Ministries to special populations, like young families, the elderly, the medically infirm, etc. can easily be integrated into a disaster ministry. Do you have a food ministry (like “Meals on Wheels”), an outreach to immigrants or refugees, or an education ministry? These ministries can be ideal places to start with when developing a disaster ministry.
- *Do you have people in your church with expertise in this area?* Among your members, are there employees of FEMA, local, state or county public health agencies, or people who work for relief organizations? These people represent an ideal asset for your program, and you should make every effort to recruit them to your ministry. If people are too busy, consider creating special roles for them, such as an advisory panel or a consulting role.
- *Are there churches or other organizations in your area that you can partner with for ministry?* You should not be doing this work alone. Disaster response is a community effort, and a disaster ministry is an opportunity to become an active participant

in serving the community alongside others. Find out what other churches are doing and if there is a niche or special need you might fill. Contact your local FEMA office and find out who is coordinating work with churches.

The bottom line is that, whenever possible, it is best to integrate a disaster ministry into things you already do. This leverages your experience, introduces some creative variety that can increase interest among people in existing ministries, and allows you to avoid duplication of ministry and leadership.

Ministries can also be organized by disaster phases, as follows:

- *Preparation and planning.* Focus on helping people to become prepared for disasters. This can include a variety of activities, such as assessing the physical risks to people in your community. Which homes are not up to building codes? Which people live in flood zones? Are there elderly people who live under dangerous trees and lack the resources to fix the problem? Are there physically fragile people who require special transportation and medical support?
- *Emergency Response.* This is the crisis team, which requires a special group of people with physical and technical skills relevant to the type of disasters you face. Some churches have “chainsaw teams” that clear debris. Some churches provide shelter, some provide support to local fire departments and hospitals to relieve their staff to focus on higher priorities. Meeting with your local FEMA will allow you to identify ways you may help during a crisis.
- *Immediate recovery.* This is a phase that involves support and returning people to stability. Emotional and spiritual care is an important service during this phase, as is helping people repair damage and return to their living situations.

- *Long-term recovery.* During this phase the focus is on continuing support and recovery. This is a time when the crisis teams leave and people can feel forgotten. Staying with people, recognizing that recovery from a major crisis can be a long-term prospect, can be a very valuable ministry. For those who are more technically minded, it can be a chance to assess and learn. Effective preparation requires learning from the past. Who suffered the most in the last disaster and why? What special preparations are needed so they do not suffer again? How well did your ministry work, and how can you improve?

The lesson here is that you do not have to address every phase and meet every need. Recognizing that there are a variety of needs across several phases allows you to consider what focus is the best fit or best opportunity for your ministry. *Start with what you have, focus on an unmet need, collaborate with and learn from others, and slowly build form there.*

Once you have an idea of where to start, we recommend that congregations considering a disaster ministry start by developing a *Disaster Ministry Team*. The activities described in the Guide are best carried out by a team with the support of the leadership of the church. One of the key functions of this team is to identify the types of disasters or crises that may occur and define what events would activate the plan. The team may consider many factors when identifying a focus for their ministry, such as the congregation's ability to handle a situation with internal resources and its experience in responding to past events.

ACTION STEPS:

How to Form a Disaster Ministry Team

Obtain commitment and support from senior church leadership. A disaster ministry is a significant undertaking that should not be started without a clear and public endorsement from church leadership. Obtaining proper commitment and support from church leaders affirms the value of preparedness and promotes cooperation among the ministries. It is also essential when documenting staff and volunteer responsibilities, allocating the budget, setting goals and expectations, demonstrating the importance of the plan, and setting expectations for staff, volunteer and parishioner support throughout the church.

The senior leadership of the church can also lead the disaster ministry, but does not necessarily need to. This will depend on your particular situation. There are no rules here, but there are some recommended practices. If senior leadership is leading the disaster ministry, consider the total demands on your time and what you will need to give up in order to do this ministry.

More often, senior leadership will hand off responsibilities to a ministry leader or *Disaster Ministry Coordinator*. This person should:

- Have a passion for this type of work;
- Have the respect and support of others in the church;
- Have a realistic understanding of the level of commitment and the duration of the commitment; and
- Have a good relationship with and the support of senior leadership.

Identify a Disaster Ministry Coordinator. This person should have strong leadership skills and have the skill and authority to fill the overall responsibility for the development, implementation, and oversight of your church's disaster ministry activities. The following, in addition to those above, are some characteristics you might look for in a Disaster

Ministry Coordinator:

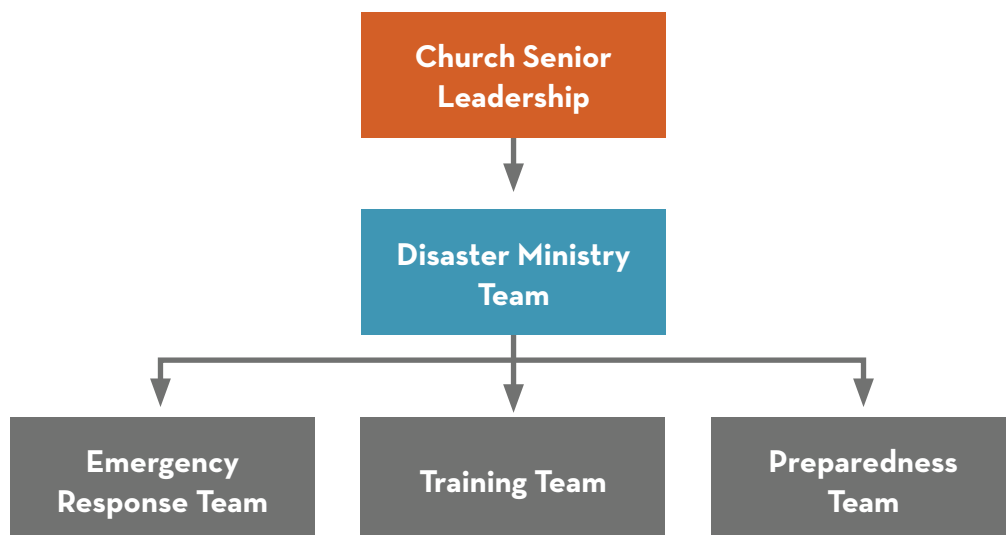
- An effective team builder;
- Good communication skills;
- Good leadership and people skills;
- Flexible and able to work well with others;
- Accessible and available;
- Provide strong administrative leadership;
- Have a genuine servant's heart and compassion for people;
- Facilitate leadership team meetings;
- And, minimally, commit to serve 2 years.

Establish a Church Disaster Ministry Team. Work with the Disaster Ministry Coordinator to create a small team that will help develop and implement your congregation's disaster ministry activities. This is not the same as the volunteers who will actually carry out disaster response services. This is a planning, managing and coordinating team. It is advisable to have a representative from each of the major ministries of the church so that all the major activities of the church are accounted for when planning. Individuals recruited to serve as leaders should possess the following characteristics:

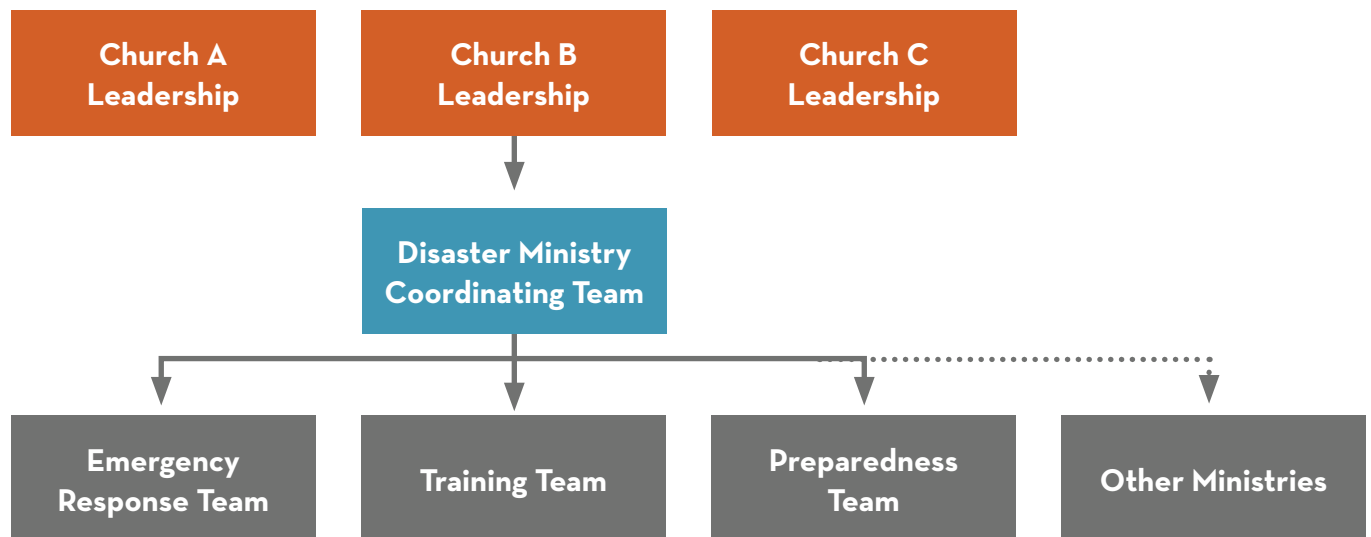
- Have a servant's heart and compassion for people;
- Have a good reputation in the church;
- Have good leadership and people skills;
- Be flexible and able to work well with others;
- Be accessible and available;
- Be given responsibilities that match his or her ministry and/or professional skill sets;
- Complete assigned tasks on schedule;
- Commit to a specified period of time to serve on the Disaster Ministry Team (e.g., 1-2 years); and
- Be able to attend and participate in leadership team meetings.

Although a large group may want to participate in disaster preparedness and response planning, larger groups tend to lose focus. Keep the initial Disaster Ministry Team to approximately 5-10 individuals. Once goals are established, include more members of the congregation as necessary.

If your church is small, you may have the disaster ministry team doing all of the work of the ministry. In a larger church, or in a regional network, the ministry team is more of a coordinating team that supports several specific action teams. In this setting, the ministry might look like this example:



In a regional network of churches, or a collaborating group of churches, the structure might look like this:



Related Resources:

Ready Faith Workbook, “Congregation Disaster Mission”

Ready Faith Workbook, “Disaster Ministry Coordinator”

Ready Faith Workbook, “Disaster Ministry Team: Emergency Information”

Ready Faith Workbook, “Congregants with Disaster-Related Skills/Certifications/Resources”

Planning

This section will help your Disaster Ministry Team establish a disaster mission statement, set preparedness goals, and lay the foundation for success.

Plans need to address a range of events and hazards caused both by nature and by people, such as:

- Natural disasters (e.g., earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, floods)
- Severe weather
- Fires
- Chemical or hazardous material spills
- Mass shootings
- Bomb threats
- Medical and public health emergencies (e.g., pandemics)
- Acts of terror
- Technical disasters (e.g., chemical and oil spills)

KEY PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE DISASTER PLANNING

Disaster planning may seem overwhelming. It takes time and effort, but it is manageable. These principles are crucial to the planning process.

Effective congregational disaster planning begins with the top leadership. Clergy and congregational leadership need to work together to make congregational disaster planning a priority. Congregational leadership helps set the agenda, secures resources, and brings the necessary people together both within the congregation and denomination or association. Lay leaders and other congregational members who are respected and influential in the congregation need to be recruited to help your congregation accept the program and to inform the planning process.

Congregational disaster plans should not be developed in a vacuum. They should be a natural extension of ongoing ministry and be congruent with the congregation's theology. Good planning can help enhance ministry functions. Needs assessments and other data should feed into a congregational disaster

plan. Congregational disaster plans should address incidents that are likely to affect the congregation and community. Coordination with others will avoid duplication and mixed messages, as well as reduce burden on planners.

Congregations should open the channels of communication before a disaster is at all possible. Provide congregational staff, leaders, and congregants with ready access to the plan so they can understand its components and act on them. People who have experienced a disaster often report that they go on “autopilot” during an incident. They need to know what to do in advance, not only to get them through an incident but also to help alleviate panic and anxiety.

Do not reinvent the wheel. Relationships need to be built in advance so that others are familiar with your congregation and disaster plans. Working with and learning from other congregations and community organizations can help you save valuable time, energy, and resources. One place to start with developing these relationships is to look to your membership for these areas of skills and relationships and to branch out from there. Also look for opportunities by organizations that may already be reaching out to faith communities and organizations. For example, you might consider joining a local association of congregations, a chapter of the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (NVOAD), or a disaster interfaith network. This could also include cultivating a relationship with city emergency managers, public works officials, and health and mental health professionals. It is important that they understand your congregation's unique needs, vulnerabilities, and resources, as well as how your congregation will respond in a disaster.

Training and practice are essential for the successful implementation of congregational disaster plans. Drills also allow your congregation to evaluate what works and what needs to be improved.

Don't let the plan become larger than the ministry. A plan is a tool and should be no larger or detailed than is needed for it to be useful. If you are spending more time creating a plan than working on ministry, then it may be too large or complicated a plan. The plan should do the following:

- Support communication, so everyone participating knows what activities are going on and how they fit in;
- Promote accountability, so people know what is expected and when;
- Promote efficiency by tracking what is needed and when, thus avoiding repeating planning exercises at each meeting;
- Help identify problems, and promote problem solving, by showing when things are not going as expected; draw attention to problems by asking why they are occurring before these problems become serious.

ACTION STEPS:

How to Create a Disaster Ministry Vision

A plan starts with a clear vision of what you want to accomplish. This is not just an exercise. A vision is a way of communicating values. People connect with and are inspired by seeing their values put into action. A vision shows how that will happen with this ministry. So, take your time, get people to contribute, and describe a clear vision for your program.

Remember, a vision is a statement of the future. If your ministry is wildly successful, then how will the future be different from the present? This difference is a statement of how your values, as expressed through this ministry, will make a difference in the world.

Develop a Disaster Ministry Mission Statement.

Define a shared vision by prayerfully imagining new ministry possibilities. The mission statement should reflect your congregation's theology and overall ministry priorities and strengths. Example questions

for forming a church disaster ministry mission statement:

- How do we as a congregation understand disasters from a theological perspective?
- How might our theology inform our disaster ministry?
- What is one small thing our congregation could do that would result in doing a lot within our community in the right circumstance?
- What role do we as a congregation want to fill in the event a disaster strikes our community?

Establish church disaster preparedness goals.

Discuss and document what your congregation wants to accomplish in the event of a disaster. *Note:* This is a definition of what you will strive to accomplish after a disaster. The specific steps to accomplish these goals will be defined later in the Guide.

Once you have defined a vision and goals, then the next step is to define the purpose of this planning effort. What do you hope to achieve with this plan? Take one part of the goal that can be achieved in less than a year by one team of people working together on a part-time basis. Once you have defined this, then that becomes the purpose of the plan, i.e. to guide the team in this phase of congregational preparedness.

Seek commitment and support from senior congregational leadership. Meet with key congregational leaders to introduce the need and benefits of congregational preparedness.

Create a Disaster Ministry Team Charter – This is a one-page summary that contains key information about your preparedness project, including the aim of the project, the contact information for your Disaster Ministry Coordinator and the Disaster Ministry Team, team member roles, and a short statement of the plan and timeframe. Even if your team consists of two people, write down the project summary and contact information. This will help communicate the project to others and help members be clear about their roles.

Related Resources:

Ready Faith Workbook, “Congregation Preparedness Plan”

Ready Faith Workbook, “Congregation Disaster Mission”

Ready Faith Workbook, “Plan Implementation Procedures”

Mitigation and Prevention

This section will help your Church Disaster Ministry Leadership Team identify potential disaster vulnerabilities and hazards that could affect your congregation and community. Completing this section will also help your church take steps to mitigate the impact of a disaster.

So, now you have an idea of where to focus, you have considered what assets you might leverage for disaster ministry, and you have considered organizational structure, including if you will be a solo ministry or part of a collaboration. Now we will start to consider ministries in more detail, taking them by disaster phase. We start with mitigation and prevention.

Mitigation and prevention is a less common area for ministry for several reasons. The fruits of this type of ministry can be more difficult to see. Take the example of getting a flu shot. If you do not get sick, how do you know if the shot helped you or if you would not have gotten sick anyway? If you rescue a person from a disaster, the benefit of what you did is clear (you can see the benefit), direct (it is obviously related to something you did) and immediate (you see the benefit right away). It is for these reasons large numbers of people volunteer for emergency relief and relatively far fewer engage in prevention. This is unfortunate because prevention saves lives, and the best way to help someone is to keep them from being in danger in the first place.

Our response to this challenge is to make prevention part of your existing ministry programs. A program for shut-ins can also be a disaster program. A health education program can be integrated with disaster planning (how will you maintain your health when you cannot get to the pharmacy?).

Of course, prevention will not keep a disaster from happening. Not all disasters can be prevented and not all disaster challenges that follow an event can be

planned for or controlled. However, congregations can take actions to minimize or mitigate the negative impact of disasters. For example, congregations in earthquake-prone areas can mitigate the impact of a possible earthquake by securing bookcases and training congregants and staff what to do during tremors. Congregations are encouraged to consider the full range of what they can do to avoid crises (when possible) and lessen the impact of disasters. Assessing and addressing the safety and integrity of *facilities* (e.g., window seals, HVAC systems, building structure), *security* (e.g., functioning locks, controlled access to the building), and the *culture and climate* of congregations through policy and programs are all important for preventing and mitigating possible future crises. Mitigation and prevention require taking inventory of the dangers in a congregation and community and identifying what to do to prevent and reduce injury and property damage.

ACTION STEPS: **How to Conduct a Disaster Risk and Needs Assessment**

Discuss and describe past disasters and emergencies affecting your congregation and community. Being aware of past disasters can help you more accurately predict possible future threats. It is recommended that your team create a descriptive list of significant disasters that have occurred over the last 50 years in your community.

Create a list of potential threats to your congregation and community. Rank order from most-likely to least-likely to occur—document possible future disasters and emergencies. This includes the identification and assessment of the probability of natural disasters (tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes) and industrial and chemical accidents (water contamination or fuel spills) and terrorist attacks. Also locate major transportation routes and installations. For example, is your congregation in a flight path or

near an airport? Is it near a railroad track that trains use to transport hazardous materials? Also address the potential hazards related to terrorism. If you have the time and resources, consider your congregation participating in community-wide risk assessment and mitigation planning.

Identify vulnerable members of your congregation.

Some Disaster Ministry Teams may be able to generate a list of congregation members with special needs from their observations and relationships. Other congregations may want to create and hand out a questionnaire (e.g., before or after a church service) and/or email a questionnaire to their congregation members to more precisely document special needs. Look for themes of reoccurring special needs as well as geographic concentrations of at-risk congregation members. Examples of at-risk members includes the elderly, people with serious or chronic medical conditions, handicapped people, and children.

Identify gaps in resources needed to carry out each Disaster Ministry Team program goal. Start by matching available congregation resources needed

with each specific goal, identify gaps in resources, and describe action steps to address each gap.

Know the congregation's facilities and building.

Assess potential hazards on your property. Conduct regular safety audits. Be sure to include driveways, parking lots, playgrounds, outside structures, and fencing. A safety audit should be part of normal operations. This information should feed into mitigation planning.

Identify current church and community resources needed to carry out your Church Disaster Ministry program – Assess resources needed to begin the preparedness program by reviewing program activities. Identify the resources that are needed for all phases of the program.

Related Resources:

Ready Faith Workbook, “Risk Assessment”

Church Preparedness

This section will help churches learn how to enhance your congregation's preparedness capabilities by developing a Continuity of Ministry and Operations Plan (COMOP). A COMOP includes identifying and assessing resources, writing plans, developing a system to manage incidents and training church leaders and members so they can execute plans.

Disasters have the potential to affect every congregant and community member. Good planning will facilitate a rapid, coordinated, effective response when a disaster occurs. Being well-prepared involves an investment of time and resources—but the potential to reduce injury and save lives is well worth the effort. Congregations should develop a disaster plan that is tailored to its unique characteristics and needs. Set a realistic timetable for the preparation process. While it is reasonable to feel a sense of urgency about the need to be prepared for a crisis, a complete, comprehensive congregational disaster plan cannot be developed overnight. Take the time needed for collecting essential information, developing the plan, and involving the appropriate people.

ACTION STEPS: How to Develop a Continuity of Ministry and Operations Plan

Start by identifying who should be involved in developing the congregational disaster plan.

Include training and drills. Delegating responsibilities and breaking the process down into manageable steps will help the Disaster Ministry Team develop the plan.

Identify and involve stakeholders. A stakeholder is a person who may be impacted in some way by the program, thus they have a “stake” in what is done. Identify the stakeholders to be involved in developing the congregational disaster plan (such as the people who are concerned about the safety of the congregation and the people who will assist when a

disaster occurs). Ask stakeholders to provide feedback on sections of the plan that pertain to them. For instance, ask families to comment on procedures for communicating with them during a disaster.

Become familiar with local emergency management agencies. It can be helpful to work with city and county emergency planners. You need to know the kinds of support municipalities can provide during a crisis, as well as any plans the city has for disaster response. For example, is your congregation in a position to be able to serve as a shelter or supply depot to assist city and county responses to a disaster? Discussing and reviewing this information in advance will help you quickly integrate resources. Participating in local emergency planning gives congregational disaster leaders insight into all the problems they might face in the event of a community-wide or regional disaster and will help your congregation's efforts.

Consider existing efforts. Before jumping in to develop your congregational disaster plan, investigate existing plans (such as those of other congregations or denominations). How are other congregations' plans similar or different from what you hope to accomplish? If the congregation recently completed a disaster plan, efforts may be limited to revising the plan in response to environmental, staff, and congregant changes:

- Has the congregation's building been renovated, or is it currently under renovation?
- Is the list of clergy, staff, leadership, and members current?
- Have there been changes in the congregant population? Have other hazards revealed themselves?

Define roles and responsibilities. How will the congregation operate during a disaster? Define what should happen, when, and at whose direction—that is, create an organizational system. This should involve several people, such as forming a Disaster Ministry

Team. Important tasks will be neglected if one person is responsible for more than one function. During the planning process, both individuals and backups should be assigned to fill these roles.

Determine how your congregation will be affected if any ministry is made unavailable by a disaster, for any period of time. Establish a basis for setting recovery priorities, determining minimum ministry and operations requirements, and selecting appropriate recovery strategies. It can be helpful to survey, interview, or hold group meetings to assist with the prioritization process.

Develop methods for communicating with congregants and community members. Address how the congregation will communicate with all of the individuals who are directly or indirectly affected by the disaster. One of the first steps in planning for communication is to develop a mechanism to notify your congregation that an incident is occurring and to instruct them on what to do. For example, if congregants are evacuated from the building, will staff use cell phones, radios, intercoms, or runners to get information to the staff supervising them? Plan how to communicate with families, community members, and the media. Consider writing template letters and press releases in advance so that messages do not have to be composed during the confusion and chaos of the event. It is easier to adapt smaller changes than to begin from scratch.

Obtain necessary equipment and supplies. Provide staff and leadership with the necessary equipment to respond to a crisis. Consider whether there are enough master keys for different members of the Disaster Ministry Team to have access to facilities. Ask for contact information for the congregation. Maintain first aid supplies. What about food and water for church members and staff during the incident?

Create a plan to protect information technology capabilities. Take steps to protect, back-up, and diversify technologies used to support critical ministry processes.

Encourage individual and family preparedness planning among church members. Implementation includes having a model of congregational leadership preparedness, distributing preparedness educational materials (e.g., checklists), and regular messaging about the importance of preparedness.

Encourage training to equip church leadership and congregation members to carry out role-specific tasks before and after a disaster. Provide or identify initial and refresher training opportunities for church leadership and congregation members in preparedness and emergency responsibilities. Training should also be used as a method to test plans and as a mechanism for revising and updating plans.

Prepare for immediate response. When a disaster occurs, quickly determine whether congregants and staff need to be evacuated from the building, returned to the building, or locked down in the building. Plan action steps for each of these scenarios:

- *Evacuation* requires all people to leave the building. While evacuating to an open lot near the congregation makes sense for escaping the building during a fire that only lasts a few minutes, it may not be an appropriate location for a longer period of time. The evacuation plan should include backup locations and buildings to serve as emergency shelters, or should identify existing shelter locations. Agreements for using these spaces should be negotiated or reconfirmed prior to the beginning of each year. Evacuation plans should include contingencies for weather conditions such as rain, snow, and extreme cold and heat. Your plan should

include transportation options, especially for congregants with restricted mobility.

- If an incident occurs while people are outside, you will need to return them to the building quickly. This is a reverse evacuation. Once staff and congregants are safely in the building, you may find the situation calls for a lockdown.
- *Lockdowns* are necessary when a crisis occurs outside of the congregation building and an evacuation would be dangerous. A lockdown may also be called for when there is a crisis inside and movement within the building will put congregants in jeopardy. All exterior doors are locked, and congregation members and staff stay in the building and lock or obstruct room doors for further protection. Windows may need to be covered.
- *Shelter-in-place* is used when there is not time to evacuate or when it may be harmful to leave the building. Shelter-in-place is commonly used during hazardous material spills. Church members and staff are held in the building, and windows and doors are sealed. There can be limited movement within the building.

Create maps and facilities information. Create site maps that include information about the congregation's sanctuary, offices, meeting rooms, hallways, and stairwells, location of utility shut-offs, and potential staging sites. Emergency responders need copies of this information in advance. During a crisis designate locations— staging sites—for congregants to organize. This will help leadership identify congregants in need of care, take a headcount to make sure everyone is out of the building, and help families to be reunited with their children. Be sure to inform families of release procedures should a crisis or disaster occur during a meeting time. A method should be in place for tracking release of children, ensuring that children are released only to authorized individuals.

Practice. Preparedness includes emergency drills and crisis exercises for staff and congregants. Many congregations have found tabletop exercises very useful in practicing and testing the procedures specified in their disaster plan. Tabletop exercises involve the Disaster Ministry Team, staff, congregational leaders, and lay leaders sitting around a table discussing the steps they would take to respond to a disaster. Often, training and drills identify issues that need to be addressed in the disaster plan and problems with plans for communication and response. Training may also be needed to help manage congregants during a crisis, especially those experiencing traumatic or panic reactions. Careful consideration of these issues will improve your disaster plan and better prepare you to respond to an actual event.

Address liability issues. Consideration of liability issues is necessary before disaster planning can be completed and may protect you and your congregation from a lawsuit. Situations where there is a foreseeable danger can produce liability if the congregation does not make every reasonable effort to intervene or remediate the situation. A careful assessment of the hazards faced by the congregation is critical.

Review lessons learned if your congregation has been affected by a disaster. Review the congregation's disaster experience and apply the lessons learned to the Continuity of Ministry & Operations Plan. Use lessons learned to also clarify your initial Disaster Ministry Team goals and objectives.

Related Resources:

Ready Faith Workbook, “Communication Plan”

Ready Faith Workbook, “Continuity of Ministries and Services”

Ready Faith Workbook, “Evacuation Plan”

Ready Faith Workbook, “Shelter-in-Place”

Ready Faith Workbook, “Church Go-Kit: Emergency Supplies Kit”

Ready Faith Workbook, “Procedures for Encouraging Personal/Family Preparedness”

Ready Faith Workbook, “Drill/Exercise Evaluation Form”

Response

You've planned for a disaster, now what? This section will walk you through a critical series of steps that you and your congregation should carry out in the immediate aftermath of a disaster.

A disaster or threat of disaster is the time to follow the disaster plan, not to make a plan from scratch. This section summarizes some of the major recommendations gathered from experienced practitioners and other experts about points to remember when called on to implement your congregational disaster plan.

ACTION STEPS: **How to Implement Your Congregational Disaster Preparedness Plan**

Expect to be surprised. Regardless of how much time and effort was spent on the congregational disaster plan, the members of the disaster ministry team should know that there will always be an element of surprise and accompanying confusion when a congregation or community is confronted with a disaster.

Assess the situation and choose the appropriate response. Following the plan requires a very quick but careful assessment of the situation. Determine whether a disaster exists and if so, the type of crisis, the location, and the magnitude. Because the disaster ministry team has practiced the plan, leaders are ready to make these decisions. After basic protective steps are in place, more information can be gathered to adjust later responses.

Respond immediately. When a disaster actually happens, make the basic decisions about what type of action is needed and respond immediately. An immediate, appropriate response depends on a plan with clearly articulated roles and responsibilities, as well as training and practice. With proper training,

the disaster ministry team, staff, leadership and congregants will be more likely to respond promptly and appropriately.

Notify appropriate emergency responders and the disaster ministry team. One common mistake is to delay calling emergency responders, such as the police or fire departments. In the midst of a disaster, people often believe that the situation can be handled in-house. It is better to have emergency responders on the scene as soon as possible, even if the incident has been resolved by the time they arrive, than to delay calling and risk further injury and damage. For instance, it is better to have emergency responders arrive at your congregation to find a fire put out than to arrive too late to prevent loss of life or serious property damage. Unless informed otherwise, the disaster ministry team members should proceed with their responsibilities.

Evacuate or lock down the congregation as appropriate. This step is crucial if a disaster strikes your community while in service and should be one of the first decisions made, regardless of the order in which initial decisions are implemented.

- *Triage injuries and provide emergency first aid to those who need it.* The plan should assign congregants and staff with relevant qualifications to determine who needs emergency first aid and provide assistance, such as first-aid or CPR.
- *Provide disaster spiritual and emotional care.* Everyone reacts differently to a disaster. Providing early assistance (e.g., within days or weeks following an event) may prevent or lessen the effects of posttraumatic stress. This might include providing psychological first aid, peer support, or community outreach, for example.

Keep supplies nearby and organized at all times. If you move to another location, remember to take your supplies with you. Monitor the amount of supplies and replace them as needed.

Trust leadership. Trust the internal disaster ministry team members and external emergency responders who have been trained to deal with disasters. Trust will help calm the situation and minimize the chaos that may occur during a disaster. During a crisis, leaders need to project a calm, confident, and serious attitude to assure people of the seriousness of the situation and the wisdom of the directions being given. This leadership style will help all involved to respond in a similarly calm and confident manner.

Communicate accurate and appropriate information. During a disaster, use the channels of communication identified in the plan. The disaster ministry team should communicate regularly with staff and volunteers who are managing survivors. The safety plan cannot be fulfilled during a disaster without timely and accurate information. Additional details about assembly and shelter procedures may also be provided, as determined by the plan or those managing the disaster.

Allow for flexibility in implementing the congregational disaster plan. It is impossible for any crisis plan, no matter how complete, to address every situation that may arise during a crisis. With proper training and practice, emergency responders and staff will be able to respond appropriately and to adapt the congregation's disaster plans to the situation.

Documentation. Write down every action taken during the response. This will provide a record of appropriate implementation of the disaster plan. Also necessary is recording damage for insurance purposes and tracking financial expenditures related to the incident. Keep all original notes and records.

Related Resources:

Ready Faith Workbook, “Congregation Preparedness Plan”

Ready Faith Workbook, “Building Emergency Procedures”

Ready Faith Workbook, “Neighborhood/Community Planning”

Recovery

The goal of recovery is to return to ministry and restore the infrastructure of the congregation as quickly as possible. Focus on the congregants, community members and facilities, and take as much time as needed for recovery.

One of the major goals of recovery is to provide a caring and supportive congregational environment. Congregational staff and leadership can be trained to deal with the spiritual and emotional impact of the disaster, as well as to initially assess the spiritual and emotional needs of congregants and community members. Congregants can also be trained to provide peer support to each other and to the community.

ACTION STEPS: **How to Help Your Congregation and Community Rebound from a Disaster**

Plan for recovery in the preparedness phase.

Determine the roles and responsibilities of leadership and others who will assist in recovery during the planning phase. Congregational staff and leadership may want to get training before a disaster strikes so that during the recovery phase they are able to assess the spiritual and emotional needs of congregants and community members to determine intervention needs. Another approach can be to train congregants and community members in disaster case management. Experience shows that after a disaster churches receive many unsolicited offers of assistance from outside the congregation's community. During planning, you may want to review the credentials of service providers and certify those that will be used during recovery.

Get ministry operations back up and running and return to regular meetings and worship as soon as possible. Experts agree that the first order of business following a disaster is to try to return to regular

ministry meetings and practices as much and as soon as possible.

For example, after Hurricane Katrina, many clergy on the Mississippi Gulf Coast referred to the Sunday after the storm as "Slab Sunday". They were speaking to the fact that many houses of worship were literally left with only a slab where their buildings had been, but still met at or near their normal place of worship, if safe to do so, to share and support one another.

Congregations need to keep congregants and community members informed. Be clear about what steps have been taken in the response and recovery phases. Also let congregants and community members know what support services the congregation is providing or what other community resources are available. Be sure to consider cultural differences when preparing these materials.

Provide disaster spiritual and emotional care for congregants, community members, and responders.

Assess spiritual and emotional needs to determine if congregational staff and leadership can provide appropriate care and support. This will also help identify congregants and community members who need a referral for care from a licensed mental health professional. Thus, because of the likely overwhelming need, in addition to pastoral care and counseling and peer support services, consider other referral resources available in your community.

Focus on rebuilding during recovery. Following a disaster, your building and grounds may need repairing and/or rebuilding. Conduct safety audits to determine the parts of the building that can be used and plan for repairing those that are damaged. This is also a great way to serve your congregants and community. You might consider developing a team of volunteers with construction experience to oversee providing assistance with clearing out, repairing, or rebuilding homes for other congregants

or community members whose homes were damaged during the disaster. Another approach can be to join with another organization that specializes in such services (e.g., Mennonite Disaster Services).

Provide support and care for congregational staff, leadership and volunteers helping with disaster recovery work. It is important to recognize that these individuals are not immune from burnout or distress. In fact, because of their involvement with helping others who have been impacted, they are at risk. Thus, find ways to encourage self-care and healthy coping. This might include encouraging attendance at a self-care training, retreat, or time away from the disaster site. Another approach can be to bring resources, family and friends to the disaster site to minister to and support clergy or others carrying out this important work until they are ready for a break.

Remember disaster anniversaries. Many occasions will remind congregants and community members of the disaster. The anniversary of a disaster will stimulate memories and feelings about the incident. In addition, other occasions may remind the congregation and community about the crisis, including holidays as well as events or occasions that seemingly do not have a connection with the incident. This underscores the notion that recovery may take a longer time than anticipated. Congregational leaders need to be sensitive to their own reactions, as well as to those of congregants and community members in such situations and provide support when necessary. Congregations should consider holding appropriate memorial services or other activities, such a community-wide prayer or worship service.

Evaluate. Evaluating recovery efforts will help prepare for the next crisis. Use several methods to evaluate recovery efforts. Conduct brief interviews with emergency responders, congregation members, and staff. Focus groups may also be helpful in obtaining candid information about recovery efforts. The following are examples of questions to ask:

- Which congregational interventions proved most successful and why?
- Which assessment and referral strategies were the most successful and why?
- What were the most positive aspects of providing disaster spiritual and emotional care and why?
- Which recovery strategies would you change and why?
- Do other professionals need to be tapped to help with future crises?
- What additional training is necessary to enable the congregation and the community at large to better prepare for future disasters?
- What additional equipment or supplies are needed to support recovery efforts?
- What other planning actions will facilitate future recovery efforts?

Related Resources:

Ready Faith Workbook, “Neighborhood/Community Planning”

Next Steps

You must close the loop on the circle. A critical step in disaster planning is to evaluate each incident. What worked? What didn't? How could you improve operations? Take what you have learned and start at the beginning. Update and strengthen the plan, live out a ready faith.

At the beginning of this Guide, we discussed the cyclical nature of crisis planning. Recovery may seem like an end, but it is also the beginning. If you have gone through this Guide and implemented what you needed to meet your congregation's disaster preparedness goals, then it is time to think about what comes next.

ACTION STEPS:

How to Update and Strengthen Your Congregational Preparedness Disaster Plan

Disaster preparedness, like growing in faith, is an ongoing practice. Just as you would make your faith part of your daily life, consider how to integrate disaster readiness into the church's regular work. Further, just as making your faith part of your daily life makes your faith stronger, making preparedness part of your life will strengthen your preparedness. There are many ways to do this:

- If your church goal includes working with the community, remember that this means having a relationship with the community. Consider the many ways you can minister to the community, including:
 - Start a regular ministry (e.g., food pantry) to people who are in need or vulnerable, such as shut-ins or medically fragile individuals.
 - Include your neighbors in your disaster training.
 - If you are able to provide shelter, let the local community know this and invite them to visit your congregation.

- Consider a ministry to the most vulnerable as part of your disaster ministry. As already mentioned, several groups are at great risk in disasters and can benefit greatly from special preparations. There are many resources for helping vulnerable populations, and several are listed in the workbook.

Keep plans current and up-to-date. Plans do not maintain themselves. Make updating and improving your plan something you do on a regular basis, such as monthly, quarterly or annually.

Join or start a community group for disaster preparedness. Look for ways to develop new partnerships or strengthen existing relationships.

If you achieved your goal, make a new goal. A new goal can be to make the one you have more complete or effective, or might be a new way to equip people or expand your ministry.

One very valuable way to strengthen your preparedness and help others is to teach others. Find a congregation in another area that is less prepared than yours and partner with them to help them become better prepared.

Related Resources:

Ready Faith Workbook, "Congregation Preparedness Plan"



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