

Disaster Preparedness and Response for Pastors

I. Early Preparation

A. Community Care

Develop contacts with relief agencies (American Red Cross, Salvation Army, etc.) in your area. Know the law enforcement and county emergency management personnel in your area who will have authority in a disaster. Know the existing community service agencies and whether they have a plan to help the needy in a disaster as an extension of normal services. (Law enforcement and emergency management will know who they are.)

B. Church Resources

Involve the Board of Trustees to inventory the church physical facilities to see if they could be of help in an emergency response to community disaster (kitchen to help feed, area for distribution, etc.).

C. Personal Planning

Plan to protect yourself and your family. American Red Cross (ARC) has brochures available to assist your planning.

D. Know Your Community

Every-day crises such as dealing with childhood, adolescence and puberty, marriage and divorce, career development, parenthood, mid-life changes, older adulthood, retirement, etc., can be greatly magnified and many times more traumatic during a disaster. Does your community have immigrants or refugees? What is its ethnic composition? What is its age profile? What is its economic profile? Discuss these factors with community leaders and planners and other leaders of the religious community.

E. Shut-ins

Encourage care givers of shut-ins to have a plan in place for a disaster and/or evacuation.

II. When You Know a Disaster Is Imminent

A. Monitoring

Listen to the radio/television and follow any instructions issued by your County Emergency Management Agency. If they advise evacuation, GO. If you stay you risk not only your own life but the lives of emergency personnel who might have to go to save you.

B. Evacuation

If you must evacuate, first take only what you need to survive. If you can take more, focus on small personal items such as photographs, insurance papers, wills, etc. If going to a shelter, take your own bedding. Notify your district office, district superintendent, or District Disaster Response Coordinator that you are going - and where! It is also good to notify one or two key people of your congregation.

C. Personal Safety

Important: See to the needs of your family first! Whatever your level of involvement with disaster response or your congregation, you will not be effective if you are not certain of the safety of your household. What you do is an example for others regarding their own families.

D. Shut-ins

If you know of shut-ins who need to be evacuated, notify law enforcement or rescue worker and let them handle the actual evacuation.

E. Interim Ministry

If time permits, gather a pocket-sized Bible, church directory, maps, disaster plans, portable communication set, and other items to help you respond to pastor care and/or disaster-related ministry.

III. During the Emergency Phase of the Disaster

A. Personal Assessment

See if anyone in your household is injured. Unless it is safe to remain, stay with your family and property until emergency personnel get to you. If you have material in the international triage colors (red, for a life-threatening condition; yellow, for an injury that is not life threatening; green for All is well.), display them at your front door, entrance to your driveway, or your roof.

B. Personal Judgment

If you are a victim do not rely on your judgment or that of other victims. Listen to emergency personnel and follow their instructions.

C. Stay Alert

Monitor the damage to your parish by listening to news reports, and do not interfere with relief efforts for which you have not been previously trained. It is easier for the district superintendent and/or parishioners to contact you at home or your evacuation location during this phase.

IV. During the Relief Phase of the Disaster

A. Parish Assessment

Check to see if anyone in your church(es) is a victim. Notify other clergy if you know of their parishioners who are victims. Work with law enforcement personnel to get a tour of the damaged area, but **do not interfere** with any ongoing relief efforts. Don't gawk. If a parishioner is a victim, be a presence to that family as you would in any other emergency. Your presence will provide some comfort.

B. Damage Assessment

Determine the amount of damage in your area and attempt to identify who the victims are. Do not be surprised if you are in shock at what you see, and expect to see others in shock as well. Victims and near-victims will want to tell their stories over and over. Use your training as a listener - this is an important function you can fill.

C. Communication

Inform your district superintendent about your situation, that of your church's physical plant, and that of your community. If you are a victim it is important that you let the DS know. If there is damage in your area be prepared to take your DS and/or your District Disaster Coordinator on a tour. If your area is not damaged, offer your services to assist clergy who may be victims or who have victims in their parish.