

Emergency Guidelines for Churches

Emergency Planning and Preparedness
Alabama - West Florida Conference
United Methodist Church
<http://awfumc.org>



This document is coming to you from the Trustees of the Alabama-West Florida Conference in hopes that it will spark a conversation in your church on emergency preparedness. We pray that you never have a need for such a plan, but being prepared is the first step in minimizing the negative outcome of accidents, fires, natural disasters, and criminal behavior. We recognize that there can be no one-size-fits-all recommendation and that every church will have challenges and needs that are unique. Use this document or create your own, but don't fail to make a plan. Pray with us for the protection of your people and property and then do everything you can to make it so.

Evacuation Plan

I. General Considerations

A. Getting Started

Churches can contact their local fire department and/or prevention division for more information on how to make your facility safe from fires and other emergencies. Ask your local fire department to come out and assist you with

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your emergency plans. Here are some basic fire prevention principles to get you started:

- ³⁵/₁₇ Do not block exits.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Ensure all exit doors are unlocked during services.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Ensure all exit signs and emergency lights are properly working.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Service all appliances on a regular basis to ensure they are properly functioning.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Regularly check all extinguishers to ensure they are up to date and working. Determine if you have adequate extinguishers.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Have working smoke detectors, or alarm systems.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Do not clutter service rooms.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Do not use multiple extension cords, or cheap extension cords.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Have exit plans posted in all of your facilities.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Conduct a fire drill twice a year, after the service.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Educate your members to ensure that every member knows the emergency plans.
- ³⁵/₁₇ **Develop an emergency plan for your worship facility.**

B. Making a plan

Today's churches need to formulate an emergency plan in order to assist congregations with the orderly evacuation of your facility in the event of an emergency. The complexity of the plan depends on the size of your building and the number of members that attend your services. Having a plan and practicing your plan will greatly increase the chances of a successful outcome during an emergency. Church leaders should consider the following in making their plan:

- ³⁵/₁₇ An evacuation route for each major portion of your facility. Example, one route for the sanctuary, one route for Sunday school rooms, one route for offices, etc.

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³⁵₁₇ Duties of monitors (ushers, leaders, etc.).

³⁵₁₇ Designated meeting places on the outside of building.

³⁵₁₇ Floor plans, if applicable.

³⁵₁₇ Written instructions.

³⁵₁₇ Special features or appliances, if applicable.

C. Establishing the team

The size of the evacuation team will depend on the size of the building and the number of people attending your service. Churches should utilize current officers of the church, which are easily identifiable and easily trained. These current officers could be pastors, staff members, ushers, nurses, etc. The names of each function may be changed or combined as needed; however, each function needs to be addressed during an emergency.

³⁵₁₇ Fire Warden – Responsible for establishing the emergency evacuation plan and training the rest of the evacuation team. It is recommended that the Fire Warden be an able bodied member who has experience in the fire service. The Fire Warden should also be responsible for the following:

- Ensure that the building meets fire prevention code: no locked doors during assembly, fire extinguishers in working order, fire alarm system operational, no blocked exits, etc.
- During an emergency establish what the emergency is and direct floor wardens what action should be taken. (Check alarm panel or pull station, investigate strange odors, etc.)
- Ensure **911** is activated and given the proper information
- Instruct emergency personnel of any members still believed to be in the building and what actual conditions are.

³⁵₁₇ Evacuation Warden – Responsible for the safe and orderly evacuation of people within their area of responsibility: worship center, Sunday school, etc. Floor Wardens should also conduct a quick visual search while ensuring everyone is out.

- Floor Wardens should also close doors in order to reduce the spread of smoke and fire.

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- Ensure all members are at the designated meeting place and conduct as accurate a roll call as possible.
- Instruct emergency personnel of any members unaccounted for and last known location.

³⁵/₁₇ Assistant Evacuation Warden – Responsible to assist Floor Warden, or fill in during the absence of Floor Warden.

II. Procedures and Responsibilities

³⁵/₁₇ Take immediate charge of every member in your assigned area. Take all emergencies seriously until told by the Fire Warden otherwise. Notify the Evacuation Warden of any fire code violations or any improvements that should be made to the plan.

³⁵/₁₇ Designate the means of egress as well as any outside meeting areas before an emergency.

³⁵/₁₇ Ensure an adequate staff of Wardens is available, based on church attendance.

³⁵/₁₇ See that the evacuation from rooms to exit is orderly, without crowding, and at a uniform speed. Be careful to ensure that members do not stumble or trample each other, which would impede safe evacuation.

³⁵/₁₇ Check all areas to ensure complete evacuation – double check younger Sunday school rooms as smaller children are scared and tend to hide.

³⁵/₁₇ Once everyone is at the designated meeting area outside, conduct a roll call and notify emergency personnel of any missing members and their last known location.

III. Fire Emergency

A fire may or may not include visible flames or strong burning orders. The fire emergency might simply be a pulled station within your facility, but the facility should be evacuated until such time as the emergency is deemed over by the Fire Warden or emergency personnel.

A. Person discovering fire:

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³⁵₁₇ Sound the alarm by activating the alarm system or notifying the Fire Warden or the nearest person who can **call 911**.

³⁵₁₇ Extinguish the fire only if you can do so safely and quickly.

³⁵₁₇ Use an approved fire extinguisher utilizing the PASS method; Pull, Aim, Squeeze, Sweep. Ensure that you remain safe, keeping yourself between the fire and the nearest exit.

³⁵₁₇ After the fire is extinguished, ensure **911** has been called.

³⁵₁₇ Make sure doors are closed, and leave the building. B.

If the fire cannot be extinguished:

³⁵₁₇ Confine the fire by closing all the doors.

³⁵₁₇ Pull the nearest fire alarm, or notify the Fire Warden.

³⁵₁₇ **Call 911.**

³⁵₁₇ Alert other members

³⁵₁₇ Get out of the building.

³⁵₁₇ Meet the emergency personnel when they arrive, and notify them of the location of fire or emergency.

C. Building occupants should:

³⁵₁₇ Close doors in your immediate areas.

³⁵₁₇ Evacuate the building by the nearest exit. Assist others in exiting the building.

³⁵₁₇ Do not use elevators.

³⁵₁₇ Proceed to the designated meeting area outside.

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³⁵₁₇ Do not return inside the building.

D. For persons evacuating the immediate fire area:

³⁵₁₇ Feel door from the top to the bottom. If the door is hot, do not use this exit.

³⁵₁₇ If the door is cool, crouch low to the floor and open door slowly. If smoke is present, close door and use another exit.

³⁵₁₇ Stay low (crawl) if attempting to exit in a smoke-filled area.

³⁵₁₇ Find the stairwell or exit route and proceed out of the building.

³⁵₁₇ Proceed to the designated meeting area outside.

³⁵₁₇ Do not return inside the building. E.

Responding to alarm bells

³⁵₁₇ Fire Warden will immediately respond to the alarm panel or pulled station to investigate the emergency.

³⁵₁₇ Evacuation Wardens will begin to organize their areas and begin to evacuate the area according to the evacuation plan.

³⁵₁₇ If the Fire Warden discovers a false or accidental alarm, notify Evacuation Wardens to discontinue the evacuation plan.

³⁵₁₇ If a fire or emergency is discovered, **call 911** and continue an orderly evacuation of the facility.

IV. Medical Emergencies

Action should be taken in all medical emergencies. Upon being notified of an emergency, or observing an emergency, the following action should be taken:

³⁵₁₇ If you are able and qualified, render first aid to the patient or find someone who can provide patient care.

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³⁵/₁₇ Activate the EMS system by **dialing 911** and provide the call taker with the following information:

- State the emergency
- Give complete address of the church, and the location of the patient
- Give pertinent information about the patient; age, sex, symptoms exhibited, previous medical condition, medications taken, and any assistance given

³⁵/₁₇ The individual providing the information should stay on the line until the call taker advises to end the call.

³⁵/₁₇ Stay with the patient until EMS arrives. Have another church member meet the emergency personnel in order to direct them to the patient.

V. Violent Incident

Violent incidents, including acts of terrorism, assaults, and anti-religious aggression, can occur at any time and with little warning. Members of your local church should consider the following in order to minimize the loss of life and or injuries:

³⁵/₁₇ Report any emergency situations to law enforcement authorities immediately by **dialing 911**.

³⁵/₁₇ Make every attempt to secure yourselves and others in a safe location.

³⁵/₁₇ Lock as many doors behind you as you go.

³⁵/₁₇ Ensure all members are evacuated immediately.

³⁵/₁₇ Do not attempt to confront the individual.

³⁵/₁₇ When talking to the call taker, try to remain calm and give the following information:

- What is happening
- Location of the incident

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- Who is involved
- Number of aggressors involved and their last known location
- Type of weapons involved, if any
- Your name and address

VI. Bomb Threats

Occasionally churches receive a telephone call or a report of a bomb at their worship facility. All reported bomb threats should be taken seriously and reported immediately to the police department by **calling 911**.

A. Verbal threats received by a church indicating an imminent threat.

³⁵/₁₇ Remain calm, listen and take notes.

³⁵/₁₇ Have your facility evacuated in a calm manner. Churches may utilize their fire plan in order to evacuate the building.

B. Threats received by telephone.

³⁵/₁₇ Remain calm, listen, and take notes.

³⁵/₁₇ Have your facility evacuated in a calm manner. Churches may utilize their fire plan in order to evacuate the building.

³⁵/₁₇ Remember what you hear.

³⁵/₁₇ Keep the caller talking while someone **calls 911**.

³⁵/₁₇ Check the caller ID on your phone and record phone number.

³⁵/₁₇ Try to get as much information as possible. If the caller stays on the line and you are not in imminent danger, ask these questions:

- Where is the bomb?
- What does it look like?
- Why did you choose this building, motive?
- When is it set to go off?
- Why would you want to hurt innocent people?
- Can you tell me the reason you are doing this?

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³⁵/₁₇ Record a description of the caller's voice:

- Male or female
- Juvenile or adult
- Local, foreign, southern, etc.
- Speech impediment, slurred speech, etc.
- Excited, quiet, calm, etc.
- Possible education level

³⁵/₁₇ Listen for background noises such as railroad, metro, streets, etc.

³⁵/₁₇ Do not discuss the call with anyone except the police department.

VII. Hazardous Materials Incident

Hazardous materials are any materials that may be spilled or released, including chemicals, radioactive materials, or biological materials and are harmful to the environment. Fortunately there are relatively few hazardous materials in most church facilities that will harm the environment or endanger occupants.

A. Simple spills

³⁵/₁₇ Simple spills should be cleaned up by personnel causing the spill, if no hazard is present. Simple spills include; materials that do not spread rapidly, does not endanger occupants or the environment, and trained occupants can clean up.

B. Major spills

Major spills include materials that spread rapidly, that endanger occupants or the environment, and that emergency personnel must respond to.

³⁵/₁₇ **Call 911.**

³⁵/₁₇ Evacuate and assemble at a safe distance, to the designated meeting place (similar to a fire emergency).

³⁵/₁₇ Account for all members.

³⁵/₁₇ Provide information to emergency responders.

³⁵/₁₇ Remain outside the building until told to return by emergency personnel.

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VIII. Evacuation of persons with disabilities

The evacuation of persons with disabilities can prove to be a challenging task for worship facilities. Not every emergency that involves moving members with disabilities can be planned for. However, churches should anticipate the need to effectively evacuate members with disabilities. Fire Wardens should coordinate with evacuation wardens in order to assure that adequate resources are available for these types of evacuations. The following should be considered when evacuating members with disabilities:

- ³⁵/₁₇ Identify members with special needs within your congregation.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Consult these individuals, if possible, about their special needs and how to best provide assistance.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Ensure adequate devices are available for your facility should the need arise. These would include extra wheelchairs, stair lifts, or chairs depending on the size and configuration of your facility.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Use the buddy system if possible; consider using ushers or other able-bodied members. This plan should be arranged before an incident, and would be for regular attendees.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Consider using at least two people for every wheel-chair-bound person.

IX. Writing the Plan

The last step in the process is to sit down with your ministry team and write down your plan. The Emergency Evacuation Plan should be simple enough for everyone to understand and practical enough to accomplish your tasks for each type of emergency. Your plan should include:

- ³⁵/₁₇ Specific address of your facility.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Names of wardens, and their specific jobs and areas of responsibility.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Steps members will take to activate **911**.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Specific evacuation routes.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Designated meeting place outside the building.

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³⁵₁₇ Specific plans to handle members with disabilities.

³⁵₁₇ Maps of evacuation routes.

³⁵₁₇ Contact numbers of wardens for emergency personnel.

Emergency Evacuation

