



Church Disaster Planning

A Manual for Readiness

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Six Steps for Church Disaster Planning

Acknowledgements and Use of this Manual

In my three years serving the Florida UCC Conference on the Disaster Teams, I could not find a resource of this nature that could help faith communities better understand and prepare for disasters. Therefore, I compiled this Manual. I did not do it alone. My participation in the Volusia County COAD (County Organizations Active in Disaster) and the local LTRG (Long Term Recovery Group) was a source of inspiration and support. I wish to thank Zach Wolgemuth for his input and encouragement as well. Finally, I thank Rev. Dr. Bill Wealand for his many years of dedicated ministry in this area of critical ministry.

Though this resource was originally compiled by me for UCC churches in Florida - with Hurricanes as a specific threat in mind - it has been adapted and can be used by churches anywhere to prepare for disaster emergencies unique to their situation and location. This Six Step Guide is designed to be used principally by churches to prepare and implement a disaster plan specific to their needs; however, it is not intended to be comprehensive or universal – simply a guide to help and assist in disaster planning and preparedness.

Furthermore, it can be easily used as a guide to help churches of any size. To be helpful, the breadth and scope of the work recommended could be intimidating to smaller communities of faith. Nonetheless, accomplishing even some of these Steps will assist your congregation to be more prepared when disasters strike. We must be willing to talk and plan ahead. Please talk, pray, and use this guide and I invite your feedback and suggestions.

Disaster planning must be a collaborative effort. In other words, your whole church community needs to be represented and involved in the planning effort. Being prepared is also a continuous process of assessment, evaluation, and preparation. To be effective, you must never consider the task finished - plans should always be available for improvement and updating. It is in a real sense, then, this Manual must also be a “living” document.

Purpose of the Six Step Guide

The purpose of this Six Steps Planning Guide is to provide an easy-to-use manual to assist pastors, congregations, conference staff, and the Christian community at-large to get prepared for disaster. Disaster planning and preparation is very important for churches no matter where we live. Hindsight tells us that proper planning would have been helpful in past events.

The goals are to:

- (1) Reduce human suffering,
- (2) Adequately protect church property, and
- (3) Promote outreach efforts to assist our neighbors affected by disasters.

Six Steps for Church Disaster Planning

This guide has been developed to allow churches to more effectively meet the spiritual, emotional and human needs of the church community should disaster strike. Being prepared can greatly lessen the traumatic effects experienced both during and after a disaster. Most importantly, proper planning can save lives.

The Six Steps Planning Guide does not seek to replace, duplicate, or eliminate the need for and the value of the efforts of the American Red Cross or any government or NGO/private agency active in emergency assistance. Churches must work collaboratively with these agencies when preparing for a disaster and in bringing assistance to survivors. Prudence dictates that it is our responsibility and duty to plan ahead. It is not a matter of *if* disaster strikes, but *when* it will strike.

Some Initial Questions to Answer:

1. Do you have adequate insurance for all church facilities and do you know how to contact your insurance carrier?
2. Where will you worship if your facilities are damaged or destroyed?
3. How well prepared is your congregation (and its membership) for the next disaster?

These six steps will primarily address the third question. An insurance audit and a plan for the use of an alternative site are highly recommended.

Christ calls us to vigilance and to care for those in need.

We cannot afford to be unprepared.

The Six Steps

1. Understanding
2. Organizing Your Church
3. Protecting the People
4. Preserving the Property
5. Preparing for An Event
6. Educating and Updating

Six Steps for Church Disaster Planning

Step One - Understanding

Introduction

Definition of Disaster:

A hurricane, storm surge, drought, pestilence, fire, explosion, building collapse, transportation accident, or other situation that causes human suffering or creates human needs that the survivors cannot alleviate without assistance.

A disaster is characterized by its

- Direct effects on the physical environment.
- Financial impact.
- Type(s) of response necessary.

Levels of disaster include:

Level of Disaster	Examples include:
• Family Emergency	Home fire
• Local Disaster	Tornadoes and Hurricanes
• State Disaster	Floods and Fires

This *Six Steps for Disaster Planning* will focus primarily on preparedness and response on a local level with ramifications to broader scale disasters.

The Role of the Church in Disasters

At times of disaster, the world-wide United Church of Christ community is there to help. The UCC Disaster Ministries is an invaluable tool to assist with communications and coordination.

Locally, cooperation and collaboration are critical to the development and implementation of any disaster response plan. The Church's ability to communicate quickly with key church and agency personnel, continue or resume regular religious services and activities, and begin relief activity as soon as possible is vitally important to the well being of the entire community.

As a congregation becomes committed to preparing, along with following this plan, I highly suggest members seek training from the local Red Cross and other agencies which provide specific and up-to-date methods of instruction to help equip you.

The role of the church, however, if it is to be the church is not to simply take care of itself. The goal is to help others as well. There will be information on how to get training to do just that in the section "*How You Can Help.*"

A key component is that church staff and volunteers have a brief understanding of the role and protocols of local, state, and federal officials and first responders.

Six Steps for Church Disaster Planning

Sequence of Actions in a Disaster:

Who is Involved? Who is Responsible? Who is “Running the Show”?

The church community needs to understand that in the event of a disaster, the primary responsibility for public safety rests with civil authorities. This includes public safety and welfare essentials such as electricity, police protection and emergency communication. These civil authorities, guided by the State, have in turn established a comprehensive emergency management system with many different public and private sector agency partners - all of which contribute their part in making the system work effectively and efficiently. Let's take a look at it on a state level:

State Emergency Management

To be an effective disaster response player is to understand the emergency management system in your state. **Generally true in most states, at the time of disaster, the Governor issues a proclamation establishing a state of emergency.** Concomitant with this, the Director of the Division of Emergency Management becomes the state Emergency Operations officer and will take on the responsibility to lead and direct state efforts in disaster response for the declared emergency. Coordination of *state* assistance usually takes place at the State Emergency Operations Center. The state then normally has teams that work in disasters – perhaps known as the State Emergency Response Team, SERT for short. These teams and other groups operate under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) from the Governor that coordinates voluntary agency involvement in the disaster response system, particularly for *Emergency Support Function (ESF) 15 – for “Volunteers and Donations.”* All of these efforts at the state level are undertaken to support local disaster relief activities. That is where the real response to disasters happens and the level at which the effectiveness of disaster response is most critical.

Each county usually has an Emergency Coordinator and Team as well. These teams are in charge of local events. All *outside* agencies, state or federal, stand in a support and assistance relationship to this local lead Team or Organization such as a COAD. This creates an unambiguous clear-cut authority structure that is vital in disaster response and recovery situations.

Each church should acquaint itself with the local county emergency management offices. Also, most states have a Division of Emergency Management comprehensive website with a wealth of information on family disaster planning and other disaster preparedness information.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) comes into a community only when the President of the United States declares the geographic area a “**Federally Declared Disaster**” and when requested by state and local authorities. FEMA coordinates its efforts with local voluntary agencies active in disasters and provides financial assistance to individuals and families only. FEMA does not provide disaster relief assistance for damage to church facilities except through insured losses.

A very important concept and system to understand is the “**Sequence of Delivery**” that FEMA follows IF a Federal Disaster has been declared. Picture the following as a sequential flowchart of who helps when:

1. Voluntary Agencies and NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations such as the Red Cross) provide Emergency Food, Shelter, Clothing, Medical Needs, etc.
2. Insurance such as Homeowners, National Flood Insurance Program, etc.
3. FEMA IHP (Individuals and Households Program) is available and applicants can receive more than one type of assistance:
 - Temporary Housing Assistance – applicants can receive financial assistance to reimburse lodging expenses and/or rental assistance for up to 18 months or the program maximum, whichever occurs first.
 - Applicants can receive direct assistance (FEMA mobile home or travel trailer) for up to 18 months. Repair Assistance – owners can receive up to the IHP cap for repairs
 - Replace Assistance – owners with destroyed homes can receive up to the IHP cap towards the purchase of a new home

Six Steps for Church Disaster Planning

- Permanent or Semi-Permanent Construction – owners with destroyed homes can receive direct assistance or financial assistance for the construction of permanent or semi-permanent homes in insular areas outside the continental U.S. and in other locations.

Note: Eligibility is based on a FEMA inspection conducted on the damaged property. Max amount of Individuals and Households Assistance (IHP) is adjusted annually according to the CPI index.

4. There is also FEMA's ONA (Other Needs Assistance) that persons may qualify for to help with medical, dental, funeral, transportation, and other costs.

The reader needs to consult more about the specific requirements and limits of all IHP assistance at: www.fema.gov/recovery-directorate/assistance-individuals-and-households-fact-sheet

Each declared disaster is known in emergency management language as an “incident” and the local person in-charge is the incident commander. All disaster response efforts, including the assistance from state and federal sources, take their orders in a jurisdiction (i.e., county) from the local incident commander. Once again, training is recommended and required for involvement with the structure such as the Incident Command Structure Level 100 & 700.

Special Note: Again, it is important to remember that there is a difference between early “response work” and later “recovery work”. Your faith community needs to realize that the initial disaster and response may be very short-term, but the long-term recovery process could take months or even years. Please consider what your church can do in both phases understanding that the greatest needs may be in the recovery phase. It is therefore very important that you get familiar with your local LTRGs and see real needs, identify how you can help, and also make sure you are not duplicating services. All efforts must be in conjunction with the above mentioned authorities. For more information, see “*How You Can Help.*”

Step Two - Organizing

Setting up a Team - Appointing Leaders

In order to do a church-level disaster planning effort, each church should have a Disaster Planning Committee or Team. Each pastor may approach this step differently depending on the size and makeup of his or her church. Some pastors may appoint only a disaster coordinator, relying on this coordinator to identify and appoint the other committee members, while other pastors may appoint several key persons to the Team, allowing the Team to choose a coordinator. The church may create an entirely new group composed of members having disaster response planning experience. Or, the church may choose to use an existing group such as a Building and Grounds Committee, Property Committee, Trustees, Social Ministry, or Community Outreach to do this work.

Some churches have historically participated in disaster relief activities such as cleaning out homes after floods, cooking food for disaster survivors, or collecting and distributing donated goods. Therefore, a good place to begin the process is to recognize which activities are already taking place at the church, assess their vitality and impact, and include them in the planning.

Although a large group may want to participate, larger groups tend to lose focus. Keep the beginning Team to approximately 6-10 persons. Later, once goals are established, including more members of the church to carry out specific tasks may be necessary. The roles of members, and the basic goals of the will need to be chosen. This should be documented and recorded and become part of the Disaster Planning Team records. For example, they may want to elect a chair, a vice chair, a donations manager, a volunteer coordinator, and/or a fundraising coordinator. While these roles may be assigned at a later date, at a minimum, the Team should decide on a Volunteer Coordinator at this time.

Six Steps for Church Disaster Planning

The Importance of a Church Volunteer Coordinator

The key position of Volunteer Coordinator should be appointed early in the process. Members' hidden talents and gifts are a goldmine of potential for aiding the community after a disaster. The church may have doctors, nurses, crisis counselors, childcare workers, skilled contractors, boat owners, etc. All of these areas of expertise can be utilized after a disaster. Likewise, most churches are filled with people that may not have specialized skills, but are more than willing to take on less specialized tasks. All volunteer help is essential; and, like the body of Christ, no part of the body is more important than any other - in a disaster, as in life, as Paul reminded us in 1st Corinthians 12, we all need each other.

The role of the Volunteer Coordinator is also crucial for collaboration with neighboring churches. A small disaster that may affect either one or two churches can be better addressed when two churches join forces to help the community recover.

The Volunteer Coordinator also can be responsible for setting up activities such as canvassing neighborhoods and the church community for vulnerable members or assembling care kits to give to families who have lost everything. Appointing a person and determining the scope of this position prior to a disaster is a critical step. Without a Volunteer Coordinator it will be nearly impossible to coordinate a church-wide effort to help those in need. Many UCC congregations have already participated in the Church World Service cleanup, health, and school kits drives.

Scope of the Church's Involvement

Disasters tend to ignore geographical boundaries. That reality brings up several important questions that the Church Disaster Planning Team should discuss. That discussion should also be shared with your Conference officials:

- Will the church and volunteers respond to other areas outside of the geographical boundaries of their congregation or community?
- Is the church willing to partner with another church or even work in collaboration with the churches and groups in its ministry for mutual disaster support?

The Team should meet several times a year.

Disseminating and Documenting Information

Regardless of the quality and comprehensiveness of the Team's work, the church community must be informed of the disaster planning effort. This means documenting the work of the Committee or Team and disseminating that information to the entire congregation. Churches with active disaster preparedness and response planning have often lamented that with each disaster they are "reinventing the wheel" because of a lack of documenting what was done during past disasters, making it difficult to learn from past mistakes and successes.

What's most important is that you keep records of the disaster planning process and its work. Keep good records of the Team's activities. It is especially critical to keep a concise record of activities during and after a disaster so that future disaster relief efforts don't need to be organized from scratch. Appointing a secretary or a record keeper will facilitate this important step.

Step Three - Protecting the People

While having disaster supplies is important, your most important church assets are your people. This step will help guide you in putting into place plans and safeguards for making sure they're protected.

Six Steps for Church Disaster Planning

Church Staff - Establish pre-disaster communications system and plan.

Whether your congregation is small or large, your staff (both clergy and laity) is central to a successful disaster planning effort. They are an integral part of understanding and implementing your Plan.

Church Contact List

Most importantly, create a Contact List, Phone Directory, or Phone Chain. This should contain the current contact numbers and email addresses for everyone on the staff and membership as well. The contacts should include office, home and cell phone numbers. The Emergency Contact List needs to be made available to all the appropriate personnel that will be involved in an emergency response. This list should be updated just before hurricane season and updated or checked periodically during the season to make sure that all phone numbers are still current. These lists will be a critical means for post-disaster church communications.

Some churches now participate in a One-Call service wherein they can leave a message to be disbursed to members within a few minutes. Social media (Facebook and Tweeter for example) are also growing and reliable resources for communication when a disaster strikes. As a matter of fact, Facebook has created a brochure for how to use their medium to help in times of disaster. Once on Facebook and logged in, simply search for "Disaster Response on Facebook" and you will find helpful posts, resources, files, and documents to download or print on the subject.

Church Volunteer Base

Volunteers are a key component during disaster preparedness and relief activities. Volunteer response to disasters within the past decade especially by faith-based groups has enormous and vitally important. And volunteers remain an important and critical element in the long term recovery. Many churches sent volunteer groups to assist locals in the clean-up and rebuilding. The importance of having a good volunteer base in the local congregation is no less important. Volunteers can assist in clean up after a disaster, check on elderly members and friends who may need assistance, or manage an emergency center at the congregational-level. A good way to get a start on this is to create a Volunteer Talent Bank. The Volunteer Coordinator or the Disaster Planning Committee can use the Volunteer Talent Bank to determine which members may offer assistance before, during, and after times of disaster.

While surveying, you should remind members that completing the survey form does not commit them to respond to every disaster. The Volunteer Talent Bank should be updated at least once a year. Other questions you may want to ask include:

- *How often will the church update this information?*
- *What sub-categories of talents should you use?*
- *Should the church create and maintain a database to store the volunteer information?*

As America has changed, so have our churches. Recognizing this, make sure that you have provided for bi-lingual capabilities if needed; or, you may even choose to form specific bi-lingual volunteer teams. Your Bank could well be greater than just those who are members and should again be available to help those in other churches and in your community. See more specific suggestions in *How Your Church Can Help*.

Identify the types of volunteer teams your church will support. Some of the types of teams that have proven to be useful and have been used in other places include:

Some general questions to ask:

- How will the church mobilize the pool of volunteers?
- Who is designated as the Volunteer coordinator?
- Is your church coordinating with your UCC Conference and local agencies with its plans?
- How will you recruit and screen volunteers following the disaster?

Six Steps for Church Disaster Planning

Vulnerable Members Inventory

The next and last step in profiling and protecting members is to identify those who are most vulnerable. The fact of the matter is that some members have no one except the Church to turn to in times of disaster. For example, there may be an elderly widow with no close relatives nearby and whose public life revolves around church activities. Before a disaster strikes, the church needs to determine who these vulnerable people are so they can establish outreach programs targeted towards helping them. These vulnerable members include shut-ins, the elderly who are unable to drive or otherwise have limited mobility, and members with special needs, such as those that need specialized medical equipment (e.g., oxygen tanks), etc. These members should be identified before disaster strikes. These people are particularly vulnerable during times of disaster when electrical service can fail for an extended period of time.

The church also may be able to identify neighborhoods that are high risk by utilizing information obtained from social service programs in the community. Are there neighborhoods that routinely flood? What about persons who do not speak English? Make sure these people are identified.

Once the inventory is complete, the Disaster Team, in consultation with the pastor(s), needs to decide what steps and actions the church should undertake in the event that a hurricane is approaching.

Likewise, many counties maintain a list or registry of special needs citizens and households along with evacuation plans to special needs shelters. You should contact the local emergency management offices or the local Red Cross and find out what your community provides. You should find out about eligibility requirements (usually based on disability) and citizen registration. You should be sure that local members are aware of what is available in the community. However, research has shown that many elderly - for a variety of reasons - do not make use community-based support. They tend to be more comfortable with people and with settings with which they are more familiar. This could make a faith-based vulnerable person outreach effort even more valuable and important.

Step Four - Preserving the Property

Now that you've put together a profile of your church people, the next step is to inventory the property of the church. As with people, before you can plan effectively, you need to know what you have that needs to be preserved. This step will take you through the process of profiling and preserving your church's property and records. Comprehensively listing these items should include each of the following elements:

- Analyze the Facilities - layout and configurations.
- Compile inventory and assessment of property, buildings, and physical contents;
- Document church activities.
- Conduct a hazards analysis of the church and community setting

The following will take you through each of these four elements to profile your church.

Analyze the Church Facilities

Begin by locating blueprints or drawings of the facilities. These drawings will show the boundaries of the property and the layout of all the buildings including internal rooms and corridors. If you have difficulty locating these documents, you can create a crude layout for planning purposes. Mark and number all rooms and building exits. Using the blueprint or layout, then move from room to room, taking an inventory of all equipment, furniture, and data, and noting emergency-related items (i.e. exits, smoke detectors, windows, etc.).

Six Steps for Church Disaster Planning

Some questions and considerations to guide your analysis of church facilities include:

- Examine the exits and exit routes. Are all the exits marked on the drawings? If not, mark them.
- Are the room locations exactly as marked?
- Have there been any modifications to the facility that are not reflected on the plans?
- Has landscaping changes any of the exits to the buildings?
- Are there any new playing fields that do not appear on the drawings?
- Note the doors on the drawings. Are any of the doors kept locked during the day?
- Is the sprinkler system connected to the main water supply?
- How will shutting down the water system impact the sprinklers?
- Is the fire alarm system local only? Is it connected to the fire department or alarm company?
- Is there an independent power source for the alarm system?
- Is there an independent power source? Do you have a back-up generator(s) system?
- How will shutting down the central power impact communications? Determine and plan for alternatives forms of communicating.

Compile Inventory of all Church property, buildings and contents

Property and Equipment

While examining the facility, you also need to document all physical contents. This inventory will prove to be invaluable in the event that your church experiences any loss or damage. The documentation should be written, videotaped, or photographed. The inventory should be created in at least at least two different media (e.g., written and video). Move room by room and list all appliances, equipment, and furniture. List all equipment including computers, printers, telephones, fax machines, answering machines, lawn equipment, kitchen equipment, activity equipment, as well as blankets, batteries, flashlights, or other disaster-related materials. Include all furniture from the offices, classrooms, storage, fellowship rooms, and sanctuary. In other words, you need a comprehensive inventory of what you have.

Records and Church Archival Materials

One the most important possessions at your local church are the legal documents and membership records in addition to other valuable archival material documenting church history and events. These records are irreplaceable. What is most important is that you identify the location of these records and include them in your inventory. Special procedures should be taken to protect these records and documents at the time of a disaster.

Special Considerations for Computer Systems and Software

Most church business is typically conducted on computers. Because of the integral importance of computers, the information they store and the tasks they perform, you need to protect these resources in the event of a disaster. This section explains the major steps that should be taken to prepare for disruptions and speed up the recovery process.

Inventory Hardware

Create a document that lists every piece of computer hardware your organization owns and would need to replace if damaged or destroyed. Include the make, and model as well as the serial number. Also document all printers and other peripherals (scanner, zip drives, USB drives, etc.). Another form of documentation would be to keep a book containing all the purchase receipts with details of the hardware. Also document all other technology equipment, i.e., phones, faxes, cell phones, etc.

Six Steps for Church Disaster Planning

Other important computer-related items to cover:

- Maintain a list of vendors and contact information. For example, “Do you use a company for web hosting? What company provides email service?”
- Document all passwords needed to access files and store offsite.
- Phones: know how to program phones to forward to another number, change voice mail messages, retrieve voice mail, and any other necessary features.
- Be able to update your website from outside your office.
- Ensure that all employees should know how to access their email from alternative sites.

Protecting Computer Data

Whether your office has one computer or hundreds, once data is lost, it's almost always lost forever. There will never be a full recovery without data.

Analyze your data backup routine.

Create backups, verify the data, and take it off-site. This can be as simple as having someone regularly taking the backup home.

Do a backup, test for validity, and restore.

If you're going to bother doing backups, you need to test to ensure that you can actually restore the data. Decide how frequently you will test the backup-up system. Some recommend testing restoration every six months, by bringing the entire system down and then restoring it to see that everything is working properly. Be sure that your backups include all important and pertinent files.

Determine what kind of archival system(s) of the backup media you will maintain.

For example, one disk used repeatedly will not provide an archive. You may need to establish a rotation system to get to, at a minimum, one-month old data. Always keep a copy off-site as a theft of the only existing backup tape won't help with data restoration.

Other Data Options

Make your databases web-based. For example, use an ASP (application service provider) or house your database online, so that nothing is stored in-house.

Other Options to Consider

- Store essential data on portable computers. However, this raises other security concerns such as theft, damage, or lost computers. It also raises issues of security of documents and data that you don't want others to access. The laptops will still require some form of backup.
- Purchase an external, easily portable way to backup data and take offsite, for example use cloud storage, an iPod or a USB external hard drive.
- Investigate an off-site location for storage of hard copies and physical records.

Address power and server issues

A UPS (uninterrupted power supply, also known as a battery backup system) will supply a limited amount of power in the event of an electrical outage. Ideally, server power switches and routers have power backups so that in the event of power loss, you are able to shut down your network without causing damage to the server and other equipment.

Six Steps for Church Disaster Planning

Set up a free email account (Hotmail, Yahoo, Gmail, etc.) for emergency use. This sets up an account on a remote server that will remain in operation and be accessible regardless of what is happening locally. Document this and share this email address with key personnel.

Document Church Activity

Protecting people and property are important. Of almost equal importance is a full understanding of the activities that take place at your church. In order to do this, create a master schedule of activities keyed to specific rooms, buildings, or areas in order to have a better understanding all the activities occurring at the facilities. After creating this master schedule of activities, check it regularly (e.g., monthly, semi-annually, annually), updating as needed. You should also be aware of any special information about the group(s) that use the facility for each activity. For example, you should know the age groups of persons involved in activities, as well as noting where the activities are located. Safely evacuating a group of young children will require much more supervision and planning than moving a similarly sized group of adults.

After creating a master schedule, answer the following questions:

- How does the church know that the buildings are empty at the close of all activities?
- Is there a checklist procedure that is followed every night?
- What about social service activities? Are they concentrated in a single location?
- Is there a food pantry, thrift store or social services office at the church?

Do not forget to list these places on a list of activities.

It is also important to focus on the capacity of buildings. Your inventory of church facilities should also document the capacity of all buildings or rooms used to gather large numbers of people. Include, but do not limit it to, gymnasium, fellowship hall, sanctuary, etc.

Conduct a hazards analysis of the Church and Community

Once you have examined the facility, become familiar with its routine schedule, accounted for communication, updated your phone tree, and identified vulnerable members, it is time to identify and assess church vulnerability to disaster - particularly hurricanes and severe storms and how these could affect the church facility.

The very first resource available to you at no cost is to invite your local fire department in to check facilities for potential hazards or shortfalls due to construction, layout, and usage. Also, the Team needs to consider the factor of facility location. Locate a map and use this map as a tool in determining risks that certain disasters may pose in your community.

Look back over the past 10 years and make a list of all disasters or emergency situations that have impacted the community. Floods caused by storms, or even prolonged rain pose the greatest natural disaster threat to the community. Determine if the church (or certain members) is in the floodplain or is vulnerable to storm surge.

Six Steps for Church Disaster Planning

Step Five – Preparing for an Event

Getting the Church Ready

A final checklist that can help the Team prepare the congregation is to use an objective resource such as that available from the Red Cross. Please check out the Ready Rating Guide to be found at: <http://www.readyrating.org/>

I have recently discovered another great resource for churches from Georgia Emergency Management entitled, *Praise and Preparedness*, found at: www.praise.ga.gov.

It is important to help prepare both your congregation's facilities and your members for their own dwellings. Communication and information are the keys to getting ready. Not only should you have been sharing the purpose and goals of this process and the results with your members, but you should also be helping them get ready in their own homes. There are numerous resources guides through FEMA, etc. that have items to compose survival kits, etc. for every household to possess.

Getting the Members Households Ready

One of the best resource databases for members is to go to the FEMA website and check out the lists and suggestions there. As a reminder, they can be found at: www.fema.gov/plan-prepare-mitigate

Mass evacuations in an event may not be possible or necessary. We need to help members “**Shelter in Place.**” Some general guidelines are:

Get a Kit – When preparing for a possible emergency situation, it's best to think first about the basics of survival: fresh water, food, clean air and warmth, medicines, etc.

Make a Plan – Make sure you have a family emergency plan. Your family may not be together when disaster strikes, so it is important to plan in advance: how you will contact one another; how you will get back together; and what you will do in different situations. It is best to have a non-local contact person to facilitate this effectively.

Be Informed – Being informed about the different types of emergencies that could happen where you live, and appropriate ways to respond to them will impact the decisions you make and the actions you take.

Get Involved – After preparing yourself and your family for possible emergencies by getting a kit, making a plan and being informed, take the next step and get involved in preparing your community. You can contact any of the below agencies to find out how to help yourselves and your community prepare for disaster.

Again, another valuable resource database is to be found at: www.cwsqglobal.org/get-involved/kits/

Where Your Church Can Go for Help

UCC Disaster Ministries

The Disaster Ministries office is a great national and international resource. You can call their offices in Cleveland, Ohio or access their website at www.ucc.org/disaster.

City/County Office of Emergency Management

The Office of Emergency Management (OEM) provides the means by which the locality can prepare for, respond to and recover from disaster situations. This mission is accomplished by establishing systems, policies and procedures to ensure interagency coordination and communication.

Six Steps for Church Disaster Planning

American Red Cross

Red Cross disaster relief focuses on meeting people's immediate emergency disaster-caused needs. When a disaster threatens or strikes, the Red Cross provides shelter, food, and health and mental health services to address basic human needs. In addition to these services, the core of Red Cross disaster relief is the assistance given to individuals and families affected by disaster to enable them to resume their normal daily activities independently.

FEMA

Their mission is described as:

to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from and mitigate all hazards.

You can learn a great deal more about FEMA at: <https://www.fema.gov/about-agency>

Long Term Recovery Groups (LTRGs)

Disaster recovery for many disaster survivors goes on long after media coverage has stopped and in most cases long after local emergency management has returned to normal operations. The success of long-term community recovery depends a great deal on how well the local community comes together to address its problems. Long Term Recovery Groups (LTRGs) are available to help with both short and long-term recovery and to coordinate their efforts with those being provided through local agencies, federal and state assistance programs so as not to duplicate benefits and to leverage every dollar to maximum effect. There is an excellent resource to be found through the National VOAD's POC (Points of Consensus) documents on starting and running a LTRG to be found at:

http://www.nvoad.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/long_term_recovery_guide_-_final_2012.pdf

Please check for your local LTRG through the state organizations listed in the Addendum.

One Great Hour of Sharing is an offering supported by many denominations. They have a resource guide on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/onegreathourofsharingucc

How You Can Help

Spirituality is an essential part of humanity. Disaster significantly disrupts people's spiritual lives. Nurturing people's spiritual needs contributes to holistic healing. Every person can benefit from spiritual care in time of disaster. I highly recommend the National VOAD's POC (Points of Consensus) document and guidelines on this ministry to be found at:

http://www.nvoad.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2014/04/POC_DisasterSpiritualCare.pdf

Faith community leaders have an important role in planning and mitigation efforts. By preparing their congregations and themselves for disaster they contribute toward building resilient communities. Training for the role of disaster spiritual care provider is essential before disaster strikes. As has been previously stated, a church by its very nature is both communal and missional. How will you help others in need in times of disaster?

General purpose teams

- Evacuation assistants
- Shelter assistants
- Cooks and food distributors
- Child care
- Emergency housing
- Clean-up crews

Professional teams

- Counselors
- Construction
- Medical
- Legal
- Caseworkers

Six Steps for Church Disaster Planning

Special Note: It is important to realize that one church cannot do everything well or try to be involved with all areas of intervention and assistance. Therefore, it is important that churches choose 1 or 2 areas they feel especially passionate about and gifted for and commit to excellence in those areas. Your gifts and calling will be made comprehensive in concert with other faith communities and their area of focus and assistance.

Individually, members can seek training on a local, state, and national level for preparedness and certification. FEMA has a series of web-based courses available on-line for free that deal with a wide variety of emergency management topics, including basic courses on emergency management and disaster preparedness. Interested members of a church should be encouraged to access these courses to be found at: <http://www.fema.gov/plan-prepare-mitigate>

Check with the other appropriate web sites such as those listed in the Addendums and contact local agencies for opportunities to learn and be better prepared. Again, a list of guiding documents on housing, volunteers, etc. can be found through the National VOAD website at: <http://www.nvoad.org/resource-center/>

Collectively, individual faith communities, based on their assets (identity, mission statement, facilities, member's gifts/resources, etc.) may choose to decide to serve as a place for shelter, emergency food, respite care for children, the elderly, pet refuge, etc.). Please share your commitment(s) with your UCC Conference Office and area organizations such as the Red Cross. Also, get involved with local VOADs (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster), COADs (County Organizations Active in Disaster) and LTRGs (Long Term Recovery Groups).

Step Six – Educating and Updating

The task of being ready is a constant one. I have often said, "Isn't it ironic how the inevitable is unmentionable until it is unavoidable?" Talk about your plans and look for ways to get better. Bring people into the conversation. New resources and challenges will emerge. Plans and inventories will need to be periodically reviewed and updated. Having simple exercises can help as well. Finally, it is my hope that the review and use of this Manual in and of itself will be a vital part of the education process.

A Checklist

Have you conducted an Insurance Audit?

Do you have a plan in place for an alternative place for worship?

Does your congregation have a Disaster Preparedness Team in place?

Have you updated your Communications plans and records?

Have you identified vulnerable members and have a plan to contact them and evacuate them if needed?

Have you done a thorough building analysis, inventory and hazards identification?

Have you chosen a way to preserve and backup sensitive and vital records?

Have you helped members prepare their households?

Six Steps for Church Disaster Planning

Have you identified your assets of people and property that could be available to help in times of disaster?

Have you coordinated your efforts with the Conference and local organizations such as the Red Cross?

Primary Contact Information for UCC

United Church of Christ National Office for Disaster Ministries

www.ucc.org/disaster

Zachary Wolgemuth, Executive for UCC Disaster Ministries

1-216-736-3211

Addendum of Additional Resource Organizations

American Red Cross (ARC)

www.redcross.org

1-800-435-7669

Church World Service (CWS)

www.churchworldservice.org

1-800-297-1516

National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (National VOAD)

<http://www.nvoad.org>

The Humane Society of the United States

www.hsus.org

1-202-452-1100

The Salvation Army (TSA)

www.disaster.salvationarmyusa.org

1-800-SAL-ARMY

1-800-725-2769

The United Way (UW)

www.uwof.org

1-850-488-8287

September 25, 2015
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