

Episcopal Diocese of Florida

Parish Disaster Preparation and Response Guidelines

(Portions Adapted from the Diocese of New York, Diocese of Southeast Florida, Diocese of Southwest Florida and Diocese of East Tennessee)

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Introduction

The purpose of a disaster response plan is to assure the viability of the parish, its associated ministries and its assets. The emphasis of the plan should be on pre-disaster planning and recovery. To do nothing is not a responsible action for the leadership of the church.

During times of disaster, we may be in the affected area and need help ourselves. If not, we may be able to offer help to others. The Episcopal Diocese of Florida plans to be prepared to both receive help and offer help. This manual is to provide guidance to the Diocese and parishes in the development of their own policies and procedures for whatever situation may arise.

Whenever a disaster does occur, clergy and parishes should communicate with the Diocesan Office first and their Regional Canon. Should communications be down or the Diocesan Office has been relocated, disaster response information will be communicated in the best way possible depending on the circumstances.

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Definition of a Disaster

The American Red Cross defines a disaster as an emergency that causes the loss of life and property, and a disruption in which survivors cannot manage without spiritual, monetary, or physical assistance. Disasters include natural and human-caused events such as a hurricane, tornado, storm, flood, tidal wave, earthquake, drought, blizzard, pestilence, famine, fire, explosion, volcanic eruption, building collapse, transportation accident, civil disorder, nuclear incident, terrorist attack, or the dangerous release of biological agents. A disaster creates hazardous conditions for vulnerable people and communities. Disasters can bring loss of life and injuries; the destruction of property including housing, hospitals, critical facilities, transportation capabilities and businesses; and civic disorder.

I. The Life Cycle of a Disaster: “Years, Not Months”

The American Red Cross has provided a helpful understanding of the life cycle of a disaster. Placing a disaster in perspective, the Red Cross has deemed the life cycle as “Years, Not Months.” The life cycle of a disaster has four phases: Rescue, Relief, Short-term Recovery, and Long-term Recovery.

A. Rescue:

In the Rescue phase the primary task is to save lives and property. Essential personnel in this phase include emergency and law enforcement professionals, such as firefighters, police officers, emergency medical technicians, and those in the direct vicinity of the disaster who are able to provide immediate first aid and to call for help.

B. Relief:

The major task in the Relief phase is to create safe and sanitary conditions for survivors and emergency medical personnel so that they may alleviate the suffering in the direct aftermath of a disaster.

Essential personnel in this phase include government and health care personnel, relief agencies, law enforcement divisions, and faith communities who provide clothing, shelter, health and the necessary medical attention to survivors. For spiritual and pastoral assistance, trained disaster chaplains may be deployed.

C. Short-term Recovery:

The major tasks in the Short-term Recovery phase include the restoration of utilities and services, damage assessment, temporary repairs, feeding, re-establishment of communications, reinforcement of law and beginning the process of the replacement of damaged property. Short-term Recovery is also the time in which pastoral responses of the faith communities begin to assist in grief recovery and nurture.

Government and recovery agencies continue to operate providing access to both supplies and technical assistance programs. Disaster chaplains and communities of faith continue to offer pastoral support.

D. Long-term Recovery:

The tasks in the Long-term Recovery phase include rebuilding lives and communities, grief counseling and grief recovery, dealing with the physical, emotional and spiritual unmet needs, and re-imagining the future. This includes an evaluation of the disaster responses in order to develop possible strategies helpful for the mitigation of future disasters.

Government agencies, disaster response agencies, community social service organizations, and faith communities working together cooperatively and collaboratively will foster healing and the rebuilding of community. Re-imagining the future in this phase is an act of hope and courage.

II. Preparedness for Parishes

A. Clergy and Lay Leadership

Depending on your proximity to a given disaster and/or your role as a part of the diocese, you could be called upon to serve as pastoral caregivers and volunteers in all four phases of the life cycle of a disaster. It is vital that self care and care for one's family be exercised. Burn-out and exhaustion are neither good for you, nor for the people you love and serve. Don't forget to pray, to read Scripture and to practice spiritual disciplines, especially when you feel that you "don't have time." These practices not only help keep you healthy and safe, but they also prepare you to be a "non-anxious presence" for those in your care. You cannot care for others if you do not care for yourself.

The first step in disaster preparedness is to develop a plan; being prepared to respond can lessen the loss of life, hasten the healing process and provide protection to the long term viability of the church and its assets. One of the most important responsibilities for those who lead a parish, both clergy and laity, is being prepared to care for one's congregation in the aftermath of a disaster. This is most effective through advanced planning. The Vestry enacts the Disaster Response Plan to become the policy of the Parish. The Rector holds the authority to activate the Plan. However, it is prudent to designate first and second alternate persons who can act in the absence of the Rector.

Leadership of the laity is essential for the success of any plan. Each parish should have a Disaster Response Committee (refer below). However, the development of the plan need only require the services of 1-2 people who can devote the necessary time and research.

In the event of a disaster, public worship opportunities should be offered as soon as possible. It is particularly important to hold public worship the Sunday following a disaster, even if it is necessary to secure an alternate location for worship because your church has been damaged or compromised.

B. Preparation Phase

General Preparation: The effects of nearly all disasters can be minimized to some degree by some common elements of prior preparation, otherwise known as "good administrative housekeeping." Admittedly, some disasters have next to no prior warning, however, even in these situations, some prior preparation or routine good administrative housekeeping would mitigate the negative effects of a disaster.

Among such "housekeeping" would be:

1. Prevention Planning:

- Fire
- Air quality/particle contamination
- Power interruption
- Facility security
- Workplace vandalism
- Computer systems operations, backups and data security
- Communication system

2. Disaster Team. Create a Disaster Response Team that might include:

- Rector
- Assistant Rector
- Head of School (if any)
- Director of Music
- Senior Warden
- Junior Warden
- Office Administrator
- Treasurer and/or bookkeeper
- Director of Youth
- Sexton
- Altar Guild Chair
- Directors of Brotherhood & Daughters (if any)

While all of these members may not be available at the time of any disaster, they all should be familiar with the Disaster Response Plan and be prepared to exercise a leadership role not only in their assigned specific areas of responsibility, but in those areas normally exerted by any absent or injured member.

In addition, certain assigned members of the Disaster Response Team should be responsible for reviewing the above Prevention Planning aspects on an annual basis. For example, schedule the local fire inspector to tour the facilities.

3. CPR & First Aid Training. Send staff and volunteer members of the parish to CPR training and Emergency First Aid training, while developing a roster of the names and telephone numbers of parishioners who are emergency professionals and medical practitioners for possible reference in the event of a disaster. If sufficient members and staff are trained, some would be available on-site in case of an emergency.

4. Property Inventories. Develop a complete inventory of church and school property and holdings, with both a written list and video or photographic record, if possible. Such records should be stored in a water and fire resistant container/safe and off-site, if possible.

5. Computer Back-ups. In regard to electronic vaulting (computer backups), it is critical that files be backed up daily and that file copies be maintained off-site.

6. Supply Availability. A supply of 4 mil. plastic sheeting, duct tape, bubble wrap and cable ties needs to be purchased and ready at all times, because these supplies will quickly be exhausted in the local stores. It is wise to identify equipment that needs to be wrapped (e.g. organ, computers, copying machines, electrical connectors, telephones, etc) and kept dry and to pre-cut plastic to fit in order to expedite protection of valuable equipment and facilities.

Strong and portable mount-out containers should be kept ready for packing items that would be moved following a decision to evacuate the Church premises, and each container should have an inventory sheet of exactly what goes in the container and who takes charge of it.

7. Critical Records. Secure adequate fire & water resistant storage cabinets and/or safes for all current and critical Parish records, as appropriate, to include but not be limited to: (originals and/or required historic records and documents should be stored off-site through a commercial document storage service or storage facility).

- a. All computer back-up files
- b. The Parish Register books for baptisms, weddings, funerals, church services, and communicants.
- c. Memorial Garden internment and pre-pay records (if appropriate)
- c. Articles of Incorporation and property deeds
- d. By-Laws and Policy Manuals and Ministry Manuals
- e. Computer passwords, communication system passwords, and safe combinations
- f. Emergency Contact Numbers and emergency telephone notification trees.
- g. Membership and participant rosters.
- h. Insurance Policies
- i. Financial Records, including pledge and payment records, not otherwise backed up.
- j. Meeting Minutes (Suggest scan or digitize original documents)
- k. Historical documents.
- l. Confidential personnel files and/or pastoral records, not otherwise backed up.

8. Important Contact Information. Maintain a master information list that includes telephone, cell phone and e-mail address of the following:

- The Rector, Assistant Rector, Vicar, Priest-in-Charge
- Senior Warden
- Junior Warden
- Staff members, both employed and volunteer

- Vestry Members
- Sexton and other maintenance personnel
- All other Disaster Response Committee members
- Leaders of organizations meeting in parish facilities
- Diocesan Office: 904-356-1328 or 888-763-2602
 - Bishop Howard's cellphone 904-699-0970
 - Canon Gay Silver's cellphone 904-403-7801
 - Diocesan web page www.diocesefl.org
- Police Department, non-emergency number
- Fire Department, non-emergency number
- Rescue Squad, non-emergency number
- Insurance Company/s
- Bank/s
- Telephone Company
- Cable Company
- Electric Utility Company
- Water Utility Company
- Natural Gas Utility Company
- Hospitals
- Contracted repair businesses for the church
- County Emergency Operations Center
- Florida Emergency Operations Center (EOC) 1-850-921-0214
- Florida EOC Support Desk 1-850-410-1822
1-850-443-2647 (cell)
- Federal FEMA Hotline 1-800-621-3362
- Florida Emergency Information Line 1-800-342-3557
- Florida Association of Electrical Contractors 1-407-260-1511
- Fl. Plumbing, Heating & Cooling Contractors 1-800-735-2640
- Florida Roofing, Sheet Metal & AC Contractors 1-800-767-3772
- Florida Wall & Ceiling Contractors Association 1-407-260-1313
- National Flood Insurance Program 1-800-427-4661
- National Weather Service Website -- www.NWS.NOAA.gov
- American Red Cross Website--- www.redcross.org
- Florida Division of Emergency Management Website—www.floridadisaster.org

C. Church Property/Asset Protection (annual review)

1. It is important to develop a complete inventory of church property and holdings. Both a written list and a video or photographic record are advisable. Update the inventory annually. Store a copy in a second location, preferably offsite. Use a blue print, diagram, or drawing of the facility with the following clearly marked: safe spots, first aid supplies, fire extinguishers, utility (electric, gas, and water) cut-offs, building exits, alarm controls, and fire-safe storage. Surge protectors are recommended for all major electrical appliances and for the incoming power supply. Depending upon circumstances, purchase of a generator should be considered.
Draw and post a chart of the facilities to show hook-up and shut-off points for all utilities:
 - Water connection and shut-off valves
 - Electricity service entrance and master fuse breaker box
 - Telephone and computer connection service entrance
 - Gas service connection and master valve
 - Security system control connection
2. Annually review the church insurance policy to determine adequate coverage and liability especially with regards to natural disasters, man-made disasters, and the use of the facilities in the event of a disaster. Be sure to keep copies of the church insurance policy in locations other than church.
3. Annually review the building and grounds for high-risk problems. This should include maintenance of smoke/fire alarms, fire extinguishers, security system, and other alarm or protective devices.
4. Establish a priority listing of shutdown procedures. Who will be responsible for shutting down each system? Know the locations of utility controls and items needed for shutting down each system. What will be done with items to be removed from premises?
5. Create a list of valuable property that should be removed if the church facility is threatened. Determine beforehand what these items are and where they are to go for safe keeping. Check your insurance policy to make sure they are covered off-site.

III. Recovery

1. Determine who will assess church damage when the disaster or emergency has safely passed. Normal procedures involve insurance agents for damage claims. Work with wardens and vestry to designate leaders who will decide priorities and means for necessary repairs and/or replacements of damaged property.
2. Determine and prioritize specific emergency needs of parish members and decide which parishioners/clergy will give that assistance.
3. Community Outreach
 - a) Consider utilization of your church facility as a shelter (shower/bathing facilities are generally necessary), feeding center, or storage space. If your facilities warrant, consider becoming a certified disaster shelter. There is a certification process through the Red Cross for becoming an emergency shelter.
 - b) Encourage members to take training courses to become familiar with various aspects of relief and recovery in the community.
 - c) Consider stocking emergency supplies (especially water and a basic first aid supply) at the church facility.
 - d) Utilize the list of congregation members who are licensed and/or certified in life saving, health, law enforcement, fire and emergency services.
4. On the day and days immediately following a disaster:
 - Assemble parish team. Implement parish disaster plan.
 - Pay attention to the needs of your family and loved ones.
 - Practice self-care.
 - Be cognizant of your own emotional state. Pray.
 - Assess damage to home, church and community.
 - Contact your insurance company.
 - Be in communication with local officials and clergy, the Regional Canon and the Diocese. Ask for whatever help you may need.
 - Make contact with parishioners, especially those with special needs and those who have suffered the loss of life.
 - Begin planning opportunities for public worship. Public worship can be instrumental in healing.

- After a disaster strikes a community, the members of the community are overwhelmed. One of the most pastoral responses is to listen. By listening, the pastor is able to assist those affected in the process of “meaning making” as well as to discern what needs they may have. “Meaning making” is the struggle to come to terms with the disaster and the repercussions for life afterwards.

5. Provide relief:

- a) Practice self-care. Pray.
- b) Attend to one’s flock pastorally offering theologically nuanced messages on tragedy and occasions for worship that facilitate “meaning making” and healing.
- c) Use pastoral skills in grief to help process and alleviate the emotional pain of those suffering loss. Active and empathetic listening is key.
- d) If possible, serve as a chaplain at the disaster site and invite your congregation to participate in the recovery efforts.

6. Short-term Recovery

- a) Assess short-term and long-term needs of those in your care. Assess what resources are available for recovery.
- b) Within the limits of any damage, begin to restore the physical facilities of the Church in order to resume its Mission and Ministries.
- c) Seek as a priority the restoration of regular and frequent public worship, providing opportunities for the church members to restore the sense of mission and purpose and community and come to terms with the power and glory of an ever-loving God.
- d) Restore communications with the parish members.
- e) Continue to offer theologically nuanced sermons and worship opportunities for the congregation. These opportunities assist in “meaning making” and integration.
- e) Remember the Disaster Life Cycle: “Years, Not Months.”
- f) Reflect on your experiences and talk about them with your community and family. Are there insights to be considered that might assist in mitigating future disasters?

7. Long-term Recovery

- a) The Rector and Vestry, together with the Staff and members, will pursue all efforts to fully restore the facilities of the Church. They also will restore all relationships with the Community by assisting, within one’s capability and by working with outreach opportunities previously conducted or newly developed as the result of the most recent disaster.
- b) Resume all activities needed to assist other communities who befall similar disasters to that which you are recovering.

IV. Communications Issues

Communication is a vital part of any disaster plan and requires careful planning. In the worst case, electric power, telephone and communication cell towers initially will be unavailable. To handle this situation, it is recommended that the parish web site be created such that it can be accessed by parishioners from their distributed locations (evacuation site or residence). To access the web site, the parishioner (including clergy and lay leadership) will need access to a computer. Advances in technology are such that such access is also available via a wireless, hand-held devices. The parish web site should contain an "Emergency Response" link that will lead to updated information concerning the parish. This can be achieved by providing log-on access to a select set of parishioners so that they can update the web site.

To achieve the necessary level of reliability, the web site server should be located remotely from the church, and preferably in a location that would not be in the common disaster path or area. An alternative to consider is use of the diocesan server for such emergency notifications.

To cover many alternatives, clergy and lay leadership could also utilize e-mail capability with each other during the early recovery stages of the disaster. E-mail service is provided via a different network of servers than that used for the web site. Of course, access to a computer is still required.

An additional communication path would be to set up a mutual assistance agreement with another church such that all parishioners could report their status following a disaster. Wise planning includes an arranged alternate telephone number out of the area to receive and tally the information if the Parish Office remains closed due to destruction, evacuation, or extended power outages. Of course, parishioners would need to be informed of this procedure.

Change the recording on the voice mail service to direct parishioners where to call to report their situation following the storm and other news such as relocation of parish operations if necessary. Voice Mail will be less vulnerable to failure than desktop answering machines.

V. Count-down Procedure for Weather Related Disasters

Establish a count-down sequence to make timely decisions and complete work not later than the following schedule of deadlines. Where the logic of “Plan the Work, Work the Plan” delivers benefits is in not needing to make additional decisions, procure additional supplies, or figure out how to do things. Planned operational movements should proceed directly from scheduled decisions to designated actions.

- 96 hours: Declare and Activate the Plan
 Notify Committee Members of activation
 Start the countdown and observe the clock
 Communicate to the whole parish that preparations are underway

- 48 hours: Back-up all computers with several copies
 Send a copy by express mail to a safe off-site location out of the area
 Place copies to travel off-site with the Rector and Wardens.
 Bring all possible outside equipment into buildings

- 24 hours: Rector or designated alternate makes the firm decision to evacuate or
 remain
 Communicate the evacuation decision to the Diocesan Office
 Notify leaders of event cancellations; communicate cancellations to media
 Set thermostats on refrigerators and freezers as cold as possible
 Put up shutters and wrap all vulnerable equipment in plastic
 Place special notices on the telephone voicemail and website home page
 If evacuating, pack essential and valuable items in designated mount-out
 containers
 If evacuating, remove reserve sacrament materials

- 18 hours: Disconnect all utilities and thoroughly shut down buildings

- 12 hours: If evacuating, leave by now
 All readiness plans should be complete

VI. Inventory for Rapid Deployment Mount-Out Box
(dependent upon what is already stored off-site)

- Administrative office relocation kit, prepackaged
- Copies of all computer back-up media
- Parish record books and service attendance records, all volumes
- Church Roster
- The most essential parish files
- Vestry and Annual Meeting minutes for recent years
- Financial records, contracts, leases, monthly bills and assessment statements, discretionary fund checkbook
- Archival materials about the church
- Stewardship files and pledge cards
- Communion set of equipment
- Home Communion kit
- Minimal vestments for the current and upcoming liturgical season
- The most essential of the Rector's library books
- Complete set of keys
- Church consecration certificate

VII. Recovery Priorities Following The Disaster

- Reestablish communications access and availability for parishioner reporting in as a first priority.
- Walk through the property to assess damage and immediate needs for security.
- Contact the Diocesan Office directly
- Begin contacting parishioners to assess short-term and long-term needs.
- Contact the insurance carrier, utility providers, contractors and government agencies as needed.
- Reestablish the parish routine and schedule.
- Begin cleaning up to reestablish minimal operations.

VIII. Unexpected Disasters

A. Terrorist Activity or Bomb Threats

If a telephone threat is received, remain calm and gather as much specific information as the caller will give (what, when where, why), write it down for accuracy, and call the Police at once.

B. Crisis During Church Services or Parish Events

Remain calm, gather information, and call the Police, Fire Department, and Ambulance Squad as appropriate. Render first aid if you can or locate somebody who can do so. The Priest should not normally be expected to stop worship services unless there is a clear and present danger to those attending. As Leader of the Parish, the Priest's own reaction sets the level of calmness and good sense for all present, so other ushers and leaders do well to know they can and should resolve the emergency to the best of their ability while the Priest continues to lead worship or education. The Priest will make the decision about when to end activity and respond personally to the emergency.

IX. Protection Checklists

Church Sanctuary

- ___ Remove all unattached sanctuary equipment and store it in enclosed rooms.
- ___ Disconnect electric organs; bag connectors in protective bubble wrap.
- ___ Cover the Organ in plastic wrap.
- ___ Cover the Altar in plastic wrap.
- ___ Wrap audio equipment and control room equipment in plastic wrap.
- ___ Wrap projection equipment in plastic and stow equipment that is not tied down.
- ___ Remove sacramental reserve elements.

Kitchens and Parish Halls

- ___ Set refrigerators and freezers at coldest settings.
- ___ Move all loose items into cabinets or drawers.

Sacristy

- ___ Altar Guild moves all vestments and loose items into closed cabinets or closets.
- ___ Altar Guild locks up particularly valuable sanctuary equipment.
- ___ In case of evacuation, Altar Guild packs valuable sanctuary equipment for transportation.
- ___ Altar Guild prepares a transportable kit of minimum equipment and vestments to support potential temporary relocation of worship to another site.
- ___ Stow or pack for transport the Church Services register book.

Church Office

- _____ Prepare back-up media for transport off-site and send a copy to a responsible party outside of the area for additional safety.
- _____ Disconnect all computer equipment; bag all connectors in protective bubble wrap.
- _____ Disconnect all electronic equipment; wrap in protective plastic wrap.
- _____ Place all critical parish records in the safe unless they are being packed to evacuate.
- _____ Stow all loose items in cabinets or drawers.
- _____ Wrap the Secretary's desk, other work desks, copier, and printer in protective plastic.
- _____ Change recorded telephone message to give instructions to members that they should contact the Parish after the storm or emergency passes and how to do so with an alternate method in case the Office cannot reopen.
- _____ Place a message on the Website with emergency contact instructions and how to reach the Office after the storm and an alternate method in case the Office cannot reopen.
- _____ Cover bookshelves in plastic.

Work cooperatively with other worshipping communities in the immediate area to arrange for temporary use of their facilities if needed and make your parish facilities available to them if they suffer disaster. Discuss other ways to support each others' operations if disaster strikes any ecumenical neighbor.

Become sufficiently prepared for eventualities that action can be taken quickly according to plans and with a minimum of decision making or invention.