

**PRE-DISASTER CHECKLIST FOR LARGE CHURCH**  
**(Average Weekend Attendance of 301 – 2000 people)**

**Phases of Disaster and Response:**

While disaster events have three basic phases, **(1) before, (2) during, and (3) after** the disaster, they may be more appropriately described as having seven phases:

- 1) **Preparation/mitigation**
- 2) **Warning/anticipation**
- 3) **Impact/emergency**
- 4) **Aftermath/inventory**
- 5) **Relief/remedy**
- 6) **Recovery/reconstruction**
- 7) **Evaluation/mitigation**

This checklist is intended to help you help your congregation toward being as prepared as you can be. **People and Property** are your two top priorities. Consider both as you make your plan. Recognize that preparation should never cease and that after an event, you have the opportunity to continue preparing and mitigating before “the next big one”.

**Congregational Tasks in Organizing a Disaster Preparation and Response Plan:**

**Determine** who will develop and implement your plan.

**Review** this checklist and “tweak” it to meet the needs of your church.

**Use** the “tweaked” checklist and other documents to meet your needs and requirements.

**Contact** members of the Presbytery Disaster Response Team through the Presbytery office. If your presbytery doesn’t have such a team yet, start one.

**Educate, train, and prepare** your congregation on how to prepare for a disaster; it’s a matter of life or death.

**Identify** those in your congregation who will need assistance in escaping the perils of a disastrous situation and encourage them to develop their personal plan.

**Network** with community authorities and organizations as you plan.

**PREPARE YOUR CONGREGATION’S PEOPLE:**

**Determine who will develop and implement your plan:**

\_\_\_ Select and empower a **Director of Disaster Preparation and Response**; develop a job description and plan of action for this person. Charge the Director with the overall development, operation, and continuing maintenance of your disaster plan.

\_\_\_ Appoint a team to assist with the development and maintenance of a plan.

\_\_\_ Name the person (and a back-up) who is **empowered to activate your plan**.

\_\_\_ Select a **Media Spokesperson** (and a back-up) for your church.

\_\_\_ Have two trained individuals in each of the following three assignments:

\_\_\_ **Director of Disaster Preparation and Response**, who chairs the disaster team.

\_\_\_ **Disaster Volunteer Coordinator**, who maintains a database of volunteers/skills and members needing special assistance.

\_\_\_ **Resources Coordinator**, who maintains an inventory of property, equipment, and supplies.

**\_\_\_ Determine the needs and talents of each member by developing and completing a member survey and basic contact information:**

\_\_\_ Use the survey to determine members' individual needs, talents, member support services and any other necessary special information.

\_\_\_ Secure or create forms to identify members with special needs.

\_\_\_ Collect cell phone and landline numbers and out-of-area contact telephone numbers for each member.

\_\_\_ Use acquired information to form a database. (Keep hard copies, both on and offsite, in case of power failure.)

\_\_\_ Collect survey and contact data when each new member joins.

\_\_\_ Collect onsite and offsite emergency contact data for each child in the child care facility and/or church school.

**\_\_\_ Establish a phone chain within the congregation.**

**\_\_\_ Map the location of each member's residence.**

**\_\_\_ Use the map to develop small member groups of no more than 15 families based upon proximity of residence.**

**\_\_\_ Assign a primary and secondary leader for each small group, who will:**

\_\_\_ Receive training.

\_\_\_ Establish a communication chain and back-up system for the small group.

\_\_\_ Ensure that members with special needs are registered with the county for evacuation/shelter-in-place purposes.

\_\_\_ Reorganize and update groups at least annually.

\_\_\_ If possible, call their groups prior to oncoming disaster to check on preparations.

\_\_\_ Follow up with the group after a disaster.

**\_\_\_ Using survey information, identify volunteers with special talents and equipment.**

\_\_\_ Develop lists of volunteers ready to assist with specific needs.

\_\_\_ Develop a list of members who can provide self-contained trailers or RV's that could be used at the church to provide temporary comfort stations for volunteers.

\_\_\_ Develop a list of members who own equipment such as chainsaws and generators.

**\_\_\_ Promote pre-disaster planning of church members:**

\_\_\_ Distribute locally/nationally-prepared materials to help each household to meet disaster needs.

\_\_\_ Encourage members to identify a "safe room" within each house and a meeting place where family members can gather outside the home.

\_\_\_ Encourage members to prepare a Disaster Supplies Kit.

\_\_\_ Encourage members who have pets to plan for their pets' needs.

\_\_\_ Familiarize members with mandatory evacuation rules and zones.

**\_\_\_ Stage periodic drills to test your church's disaster plan.**

**\_\_\_ Assign appropriate responsibilities to church staff; remember that they will have personal responsibilities as well.**

**\_\_\_ Pre-arrange for a team to provide emotional and spiritual care for the pastoral staff.**

**\_\_\_ Plan for emergency communication methods:**

- \_\_\_ Agree on a meeting time and location of all leaders following a disaster.
- \_\_\_ Determine availability of four-wheel drive vehicles for contacts between leaders.
- \_\_\_ Identify licensed ham-band (6-meter) radio/phone operators and enlist their services.
- \_\_\_ Have access to cell phone and landline service (use depends on operational services); have chargers (AC & DC) available.
- \_\_\_ Have access to satellite phone service, high-speed web connection (if operational), and FM and weather radios.
- \_\_\_ Identify out-of-area emergency telephone numbers.

## **PREPARE YOUR CONGREGATION'S PROPERTY:**

### **\_\_\_ Develop a complete inventory of church property, including equipment and furnishings:**

- \_\_\_ Prepare a DVD or camcorder tape of the entire inventory.
- \_\_\_ Make several hard copies of the inventory and tapes and store off-site.
- \_\_\_ Store one copy of the inventory and tapes with the church's insurance company.
- \_\_\_ Review and revise the inventory annually.
- \_\_\_ Review insurance coverage annually, and adjust as necessary. Review your current flood zone classification.

### **\_\_\_ Protect church property.**

- \_\_\_ Develop checklists that identify what needs to be done.
- \_\_\_ Identify the person responsible for each task.
- \_\_\_ Obtain and maintain in an appropriate, accessible place, plastic, tarps, duct tape, and twine to cover equipment and special pieces of furniture.
- \_\_\_ Identify equipment that can be moved to an inner room or hallway away from windows.
- \_\_\_ For hurricane preparedness, obtain wind-tested window covers and have mounts for easy installation when needed.
- \_\_\_ Post instructions for turning off electrical equipment and water sources in prominent locations.
- \_\_\_ Consider how to protect items of importance for your worship services.
- \_\_\_ Consider purchasing a generator for emergency use.

### **\_\_\_ Protect church records:**

- \_\_\_ Back up all records, computer files, etc. frequently. Scan old files into a computer. \_\_\_ Back up files kept by volunteers as well as by office staff.
- \_\_\_ Arrange for multiple copies, and store such copies at an off-site location, preferably out of the immediate area.
- \_\_\_ Appoint a person to maintain backups; include this in the person's job description.

### **\_\_\_ Review facility communication systems:**

- \_\_\_ Supply backup and/or alternative means of communication should electricity and/or phone systems be compromised.
- \_\_\_ Identify ham radio operators who can facilitate communication if other means fail.

\_\_\_ Plan communication among church staff, members, and presbytery.

\_\_\_ Plan with your alarm system company (if applicable) for proper use of the system.

\_\_\_ **Determine personnel plans/responsibilities for all church employees, remembering that they will have personal as well as professional needs.**

\_\_\_ **Determine how your facility can be used as a pre-disaster or post-disaster shelter, a distribution facility, or a volunteer center.**

\_\_\_ Evaluate your facility with your local Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and/or American Red Cross (ARC) chapter.

\_\_\_ Work with the EOC and/or ARC to determine what supplies the use of your facility will require.

\_\_\_ Purchase and store necessary supplies; rotate supplies that have limited shelf life.

\_\_\_ Notify the presbytery office if your facility will be used as a disaster shelter.

\_\_\_ **Develop a building evacuation plan for possible disaster scenarios, including when employees or members or outsiders are present, and when few or many are present.**

\_\_\_ If facility houses a childcare program, develop a plan specific to program needs.

\_\_\_ Identify a “safe room” or rooms within the church; have at least one for your childcare facility.

\_\_\_ Identify a meeting place or places outside of the church where church employees/members can gather after exiting the building. Designate a secure one for your childcare facility. Meeting areas should be clear of emergency vehicles.

\_\_\_ Develop a floor plan for each level and/or building of your church.

\_\_\_ Mark exit doors.

\_\_\_ Mark location of fire extinguishers and fire alarms.

\_\_\_ Place plan throughout facility, marking “You Are Here” at each location posted. Show how to get to two nearest exits.

\_\_\_ Check annually for updates and quality of signs.

\_\_\_ **Train church employees, disaster team members, and other key members in emergency first aid, CPR, use of defibrillators, evacuation and safe room procedures, notification procedures, and disaster checklists.**

\_\_\_ **Develop checklists of steps to be taken immediately following a disaster, including calling appropriate authorities and shutting off utilities.**

\_\_\_ **Appoint a committee to inspect church facilities immediately following a disaster.**

\_\_\_ **Develop and post a phone list prominently, next to all phones with outside lines:**

\_\_\_ Church employees.

\_\_\_ Disaster committee members.

\_\_\_ Presbytery staff.

\_\_\_ Others of importance in an emergency, including insurance representatives, police, fire and other public authorities, EOC and ARC representatives, utility companies, and radio and TV stations.

\_\_\_ **Notifications:**

\_\_\_ Develop procedures for alerting building occupants of internal or external emergencies.

\_\_\_ Develop criteria for deciding on evacuation or sheltering in place.

\_\_\_\_ Develop procedures for providing current information on status of worship and church programs on telephone answering machine, website, and to media.

**\_\_\_\_ Develop alternatives, including off-site alternatives, for “normal business practices”:**

\_\_\_\_ Develop an alternative method of notification should phone service be interrupted.

\_\_\_\_ Identify an alternative church office site.

\_\_\_\_ Develop off-site capabilities to keep the church website operational in case church computer systems are damaged or destroyed. Consider identifying an out-of-state person, e.g., winter or summer residents or out-of-town students, to be your phone contact/temporary webperson.

\_\_\_\_ Identify possible off-site locations for church activities.

\_\_\_\_ Identify possible off-site storage for church vehicles.

**\_\_\_\_ Identify and affiliate with operational community and county disaster planning groups, for example, your local or state VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters).**

**When local authorities announce a pending emergency:**

- Activate plans for contacting member groups/members.
- Communicate with presbytery regarding activation of immediate response plans.

**--Adapted from “Tampa Bay Presbytery Disaster Response Plan”,  
Presbytery of Tampa Bay, 4704 Kelly Road, Tampa, FL 33615-5019  
813/868-4800; [www.presbyteryoftampabay.com](http://www.presbyteryoftampabay.com)**