

PRE-DISASTER CHECKLIST FOR THE SMALL CHURCH (Average Weekend Attendance = <50 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. It is long and detailed, and you will want to rework it to make it your own. **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.

___ Recruit at least two people to back up the director and assist with the development and maintenance of a plan. They should also take charge of the following tasks:

___ **Maintain a database of volunteers/skills and members** needing special assistance.

___ **Maintain an inventory of property, equipment, and supplies.**

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

___ Select one person to be **Media Spokesperson** for your church.

___ 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 two or more small member groups of no more than 10 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 someone(s) to provide emotional and spiritual care for the pastor.

___ 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.

___ 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 and/or officers 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 someone 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**