

# Congregational Disaster Preparedness Guidebook



**Lutheran Disaster Response**  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

Photo: FEMA/Andrea Booher

# A Preparedness Guidebook

The purpose of this guidebook is to help congregations take some basic and important steps toward resiliency and intentionality in response to disaster so that they will be better able to serve their communities when disasters strike.

## WHO IS THIS GUIDEBOOK FOR?

Disasters affect almost every aspect of life. For that reason, many types of leaders in congregations will likely find the information in this guidebook helpful from those serving on congregation councils interested in good business practices, to hands-on work crew leaders interested in safety when cleaning out homes, to pastors and other spiritual leaders who are interested in learning how to address spiritual crises of those affected, to anyone interested in building resilience in their community.

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDEBOOK

The goal of this guidebook is for a congregation to develop a written plan that is comprehensive, approved by leadership, taught to members of the community, exercised and renewed regularly. You may find, however, that this goal is best achieved in steps that grow over time and through many conversations.

Throughout this guidebook, leaders will find strategies for disaster preparedness:

- Have a mindset for disaster preparedness
- Know the gifts and resources of the congregation and individuals in your community
- Build relationships within your community
- Care for yourselves so that you are equipped to care for others

This guidebook begins with an overview of foundational information about disasters including descriptions of the roles that the Lutheran Disaster Response program, synods, social ministry organizations, congregations, individuals, emergency management and other community organizations may play in a disaster.

“Developing a Congregational Preparedness Plan” outlines a step-by-step process for congregations to create their unique preparedness plan. Worksheets located in the Appendix correspond to the planning process and will create a congregation’s custom preparedness plan.

The section, “Response,” addresses the long-term recovery process of how congregations, communities and individuals achieve a new normal.

The sections “Emotional and Spiritual Care” and “Worship in times of disaster” provide specific tools for spiritual leaders in congregations who may be asked difficult questions about the role of God in a disaster. This section recognizes that even in the midst of disaster and the ensuing chaos, God calls the church to spiritual and emotional care for the community along with prayer and worship.

Finally, this guidebook offers a section that includes a glossary of terms, links to additional resources and a format for assembling the worksheets to create your own custom preparedness plan.

# Introduction

Disasters vary in scope and cause. They can be the work of humans or triggered by natural disasters. Disasters might be caused by natural events like floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes and epidemics. Disasters change and redefine communities in positive and negative ways.

## UNDERSTANDING DISASTER

### WHAT IS A DISASTER?

The impact of any event is dependent not only on the cause of the crisis, but also the environment to which the crisis comes. Many variables affect the community's ability to return quickly to everyday life: population density, time of year, the frequency with which such events occur, lead time before the crisis strikes and whether the event also affected neighboring communities.

*For the purpose of this guidebook, a disaster is defined as an event beyond the control of those affected, which causes great harm, suffering, and damage and for which those who are affected need outside assistance in order to sustain and rebuild their lives.*

We begin with the assumption that disasters will occur. There will always be devastating events that catch us off-guard and that overwhelm the resources of families, communities and economic and governmental systems, and that challenge our ideas about God and religion.

### WHY WOULD A CONGREGATION PLAN FOR DISASTER?

Congregations proclaim the gospel in many ways in the community in which they live: worship, vision planning, social ministry, youth programs and much more. When a crisis or disaster arises and God's people are hurting and scared, God gives us the gift to share the hope and promise of new life in the midst of devastation.

According to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Social Statement on Church in Society, "Because the gospel of Jesus Christ liberates us from sin, death and evil, the church as the body of Christ is freed to "love the neighbor" (Matthew 22:36).<sup>1</sup> The call of God motivates the church to reach into the world, to be full participants in community, and to care for the earth with all its creatures.

**When something happens in our community, our neighbors will be knocking on our doors whether or not we are prepared to step up to the needs.** It also makes sense to be prepared to care for the people, buildings, information, programs, networks and other resources that are important to us and our community.

<sup>1</sup> [http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%Repository/Church\\_SocietySS.pdf](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%Repository/Church_SocietySS.pdf)



### **ANSWERING THE KNOCK AT THE DOOR**

*Reformation Lutheran Church in West Long Branch, New Jersey was already serving the community in several ways before Hurricane Sandy hit on October 2012. Many people that had participated in its outreach programs and more than 20 member families in the congregation suffered loss of property – some suffering the complete loss of their homes and businesses.*

*Reformation’s power was restored 48 hours after the storm, and they quickly began putting the word out that the congregation was here to help. People came from all around to charge electronics, cook a meal in the kitchen, warm up or find emergency help. The pantry and clothes closet increased hours to seven days a week. Emergency food rations and water were received from the County Food Bank and blankets and other items were distributed.*

*Reformation also began hosting recovery workers – people coming from all over the eastern U.S. to help rebuild as our communities recovered following the storm. Meals and shelter were provided by the church and a shower trailer was provided by Lutheran Disaster Response.*

*The Rev. Matthew Cimorelli, pastor of Reformation Lutheran Church says, “Our congregations have had to rearrange some of our ministry activities and we’ve had to work around volunteer groups at times in order to do our “regular”*

*ministry activities, but the blessing of serving in this new and vital way has far outweighed any such challenges.”*

### **INTENTIONALITY IS KEY**

In order for a congregation to confidently and faithfully offer its resources in the midst of disaster, the congregation itself needs to be able to build resiliency to weather the storm.

Intentional preparation for disaster requires attention to many details: keeping insurance policies updated, creating communication plans, encouraging members to stock emergency supplies at home, keeping the church building and grounds maintained and building community relationships. This guidebook will lead you through the details.

### **Resilience describes the ability to recover and adjust in times of stress, misfortune or changes.**

Resilience is seen in communities that band together, pool resources and find creative solutions in tough times. Resilience doesn’t just happen; it is developed in strong relationships and healthy functioning over time.

**“ISN’T THAT WHAT WE’RE SUPPOSED TO DO?”**

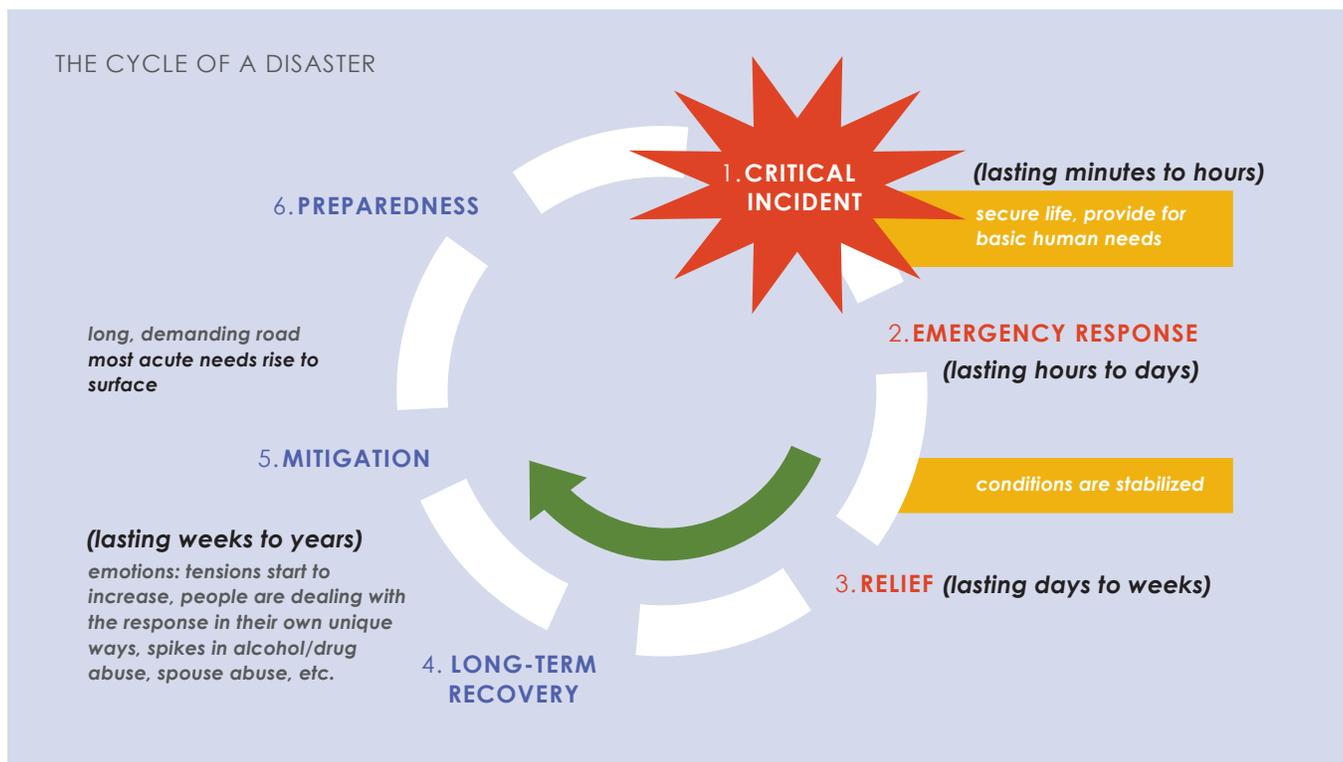
*At the request of the local Lutheran Disaster Response coordinator, St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in East Stroudsburg, Pa., assisted an older couple whose simple dwelling had been declared a total loss after a tree fell on their roof during Hurricane Sandy. Not only did members find alternative housing for the couple for three months, assistance was also provided for obtaining groceries and doing laundry. A member, who was a licensed contractor, determined that the house could be salvaged, so he helped them appeal the decision by the insurance company and oversaw the repairs while other members helped clean out the home. In addition, one member arranged for the couple’s beloved cat to receive its vaccinations so it could be boarded with a vet. Whenever the Lutheran Disaster Response coordinator expressed thanks or compliments to anyone in the congregation, the reply was, “Isn’t that what we are supposed to do?”*

**UNDERSTANDING THE CYCLE OF A DISASTER**

A disaster is not an event that has a discrete beginning and end. There is often a time of anticipation before the event occurs. Once a disaster does strike, the people involved tend to go through fairly predictable stages. The chart below helps to visualize what is meant by the cycle of disaster:

**These stages are best understood as a continual cycle:**

1. **Critical incident** will vary in length and severity
2. **Emergency response** occurs immediately after a disaster and can last minutes, hours or days. This stage includes search and rescue, emergency shelters and feeding programs, grief counseling, pastoral care, volunteer services and reestablishing contact with family and friends.
3. **Relief** starts 12 to 72 hours after a disaster and is characterized by debris removal and clean up, damage assessments, temporary repairs, applications for assistance, community needs assessment, decisions and organization for recovery.
4. **Long-term recovery** begins three to five days after a disaster and can last months to years. This stage is characterized by permanent repairs and rebuilding, bureaucratic complications, volunteer projects and agency coordination.
- 5/6. **Mitigation and preparedness** can help to lessen the severity of the impact of future events increasing the speed and efficiency of rescue, assessment and relief.



### MITIGATION FOR THE KELLER FAMILY

While rebuilding after experiencing the second devastating flood of their house in five months, the Keller family took the following steps: 1) They elevated their furnace and water heater in the basement. 2) Instead of putting up drywall with nails, they screwed paneling into place on the walls. 3) Instead of gluing down the linoleum in their living room/dining room, they simply laid it down and placed the furniture on top of it. When the next flood threatened 12 months later they pulled up a truck, moved what they could to the second floor, loaded the rest of the furniture in the truck and rolled up the linoleum and put that in the truck and drove it all to higher ground. After the flood they unscrewed the paneling, took out the insulation, sprayed and dried out behind it, put in new insulation, screwed back the paneling, rolled out the linoleum and set up house again.

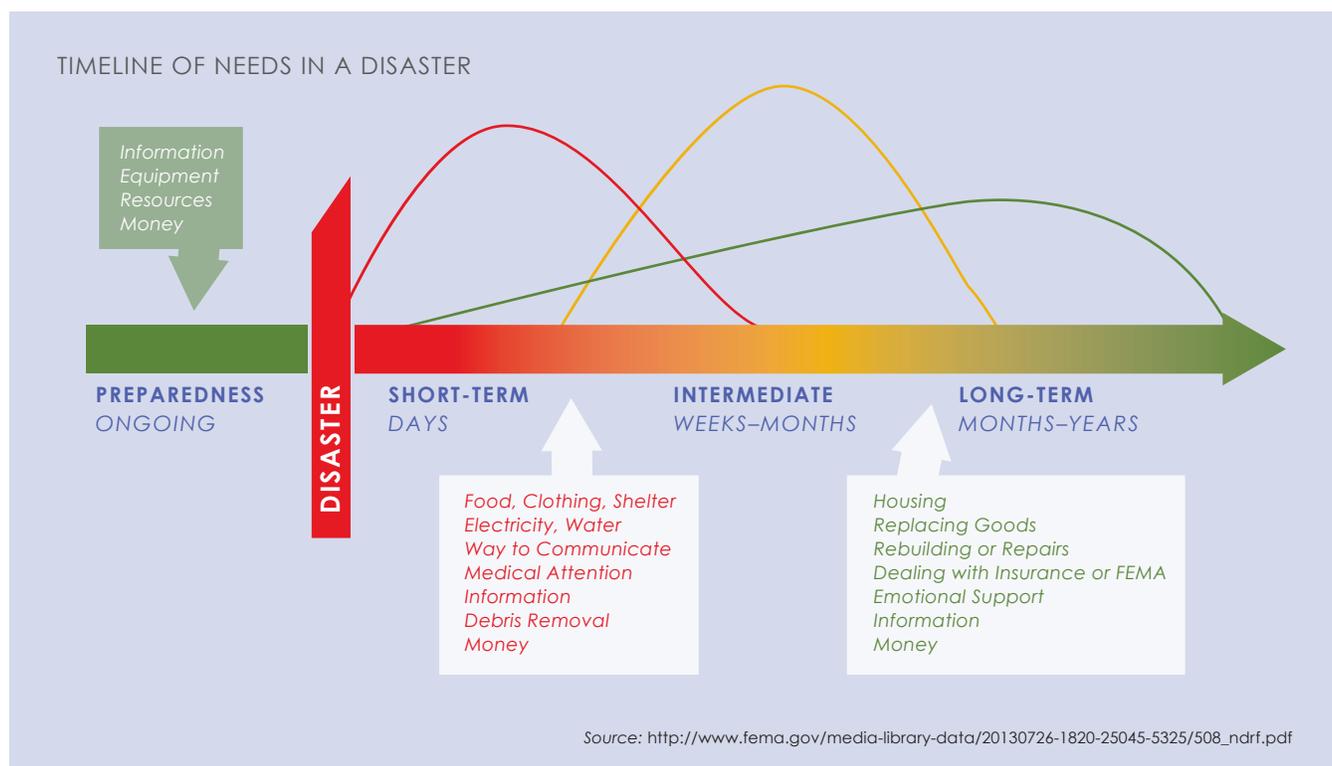
**Mitigation:** In disaster work *mitigation* often refers to steps taken to prevent or lessen the impact of a potentially destructive event.

For example, in areas subject to flooding, such steps might include elevating a house or at least locating the electrical panel, heater, furnace on the first floor instead of the basement. *Mitigation* can also refer to activity taken by recovery workers to help victims of a disaster acquire the needed goods and services for relief and recovery.

### A TIMELINE OF DISASTER NEEDS

Another way to think about the preparedness and recovery is as a continuum of needs. This is illustrated below with a graphic from the National Disaster Recovery Framework, a guide developed by FEMA to promote effective recovery, particularly for those events that are large scale or catastrophic.

Pre-disaster preparedness can happen at any time that a community is operating under normal conditions. “Recovery” phases occur in the midst or aftermath of disaster, outside of normal (or what used to be normal) conditions. Short-term recovery focuses on meeting basic human needs such as food, clothing and shelter. Even while organizations like



the American Red Cross are providing short-term mass care/sheltering, other agencies and organizations like Lutheran Disaster Response are beginning to plan out and address the long-term needs and response of individuals and communities.

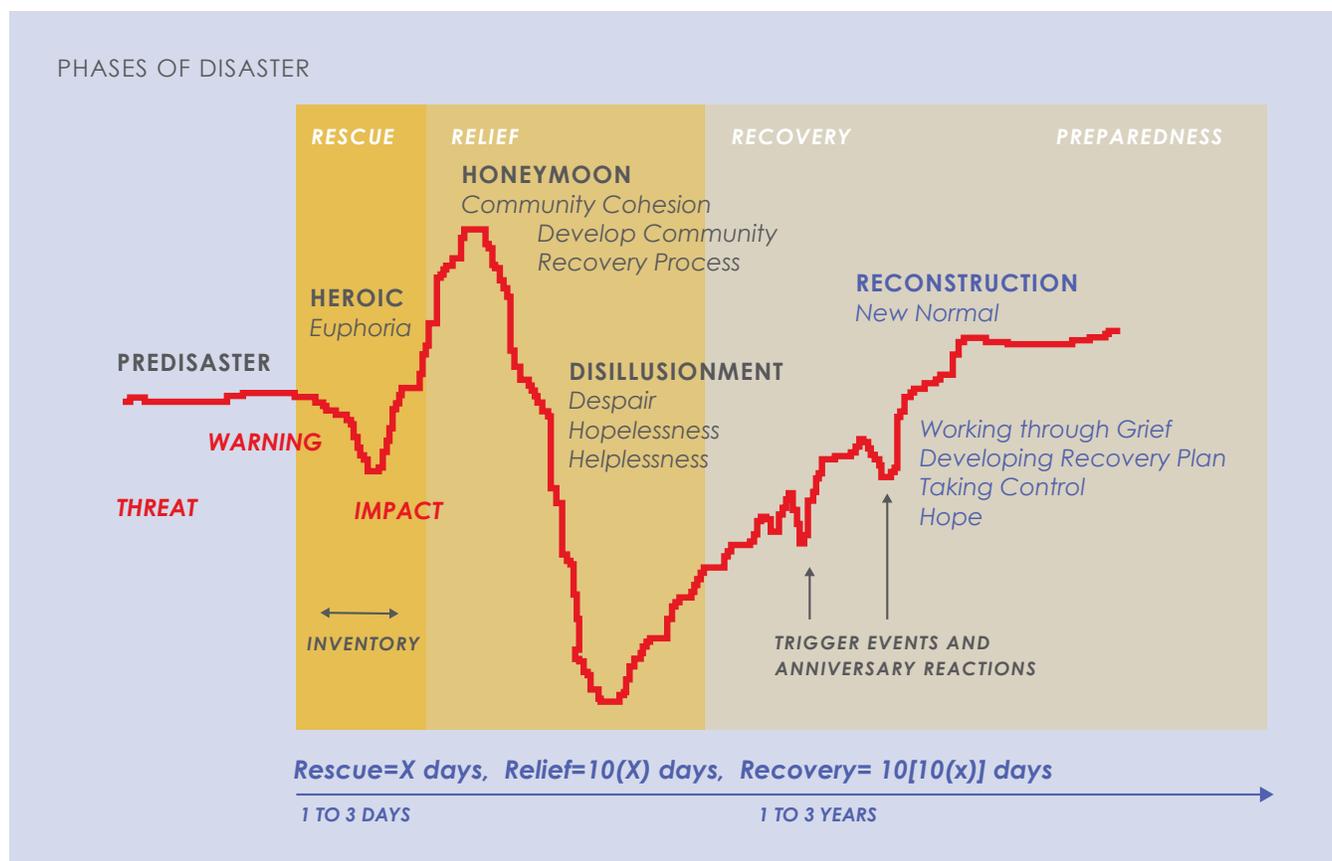
With its call to care for not only the physical needs of the community but also emotional and spiritual needs of the community, congregations also need to be aware of the emotional impact of a disaster.

Following the shock of the impact and assessment after disaster, there is often a spike in positive emotion and energy, a “can do” attitude. People often say, “We stick together and take care of our own. We’re not going to let this get us down!” As time wears on, the magnitude of the disaster starts to sink in and people become exhausted emotionally and physically. Challenges and problems that existed before the disaster are still present and even exacerbated. Snags in recovery efforts develop. Weaknesses in the systems become apparent. All these lead to a fairly rapid and steep drop into disillusionment, despair, hopelessness and helplessness. Sensitive

assistance to survivors of disaster can bring hope as long-term community processes develop. Gradually, people work through the grief, develop recovery plans and reach a new normal.

**ADVOCATING FOR RESOURCES**

*Following the second major flood in five months along the Delaware River in Pennsylvania, the case manager for the Long Term Recovery Committee made personal contact with homeowners along the river encouraging them to register with FEMA and ask for assistance from the Long Term Recovery Committee. Many responded, “We’re River Rats. We know how to handle this and we stick together. We don’t need to apply for help.” Three months later, when it was too late to register with FEMA, a number conceded that they really could not manage the recovery on their own and some asked the committee for assistance. When the next flood struck 15 months later, again devastating their homes, these people promptly registered with FEMA, went to the Disaster Recovery Center to check for available resources, and asked the committee for assistance.*



Recovery from disaster always takes longer than we anticipate and is dependent on any number of community variables. One suggested formula for estimating disaster response is the rule of 10.

Emergency response takes X days.

Short-term relief is estimated at 10X days.

Long-term recovery is estimated at 10(10X) days.

#### THE RULE OF TEN

For example, emergency response lasted approximately six days in New Jersey following Superstorm Sandy, which hit Oct. 29, 2012. Relief lasted approximately 60 days, through the end of the calendar year. Long-term recovery can be expected to take 600 days or nearly two years.

#### HOW DO LUTHERAN CONGREGATIONS AND LUTHERAN DISASTER RESPONSE FIT IN?

Local congregations can play a significant role in long-term recovery by discovering community needs and linking resources grounded in a call from God to love and care for all people. A congregation's location within the fabric of the local community makes it the primary location for preparedness and an essential expert on how the local community will benefit from Lutheran Disaster Response programs and long-term response.

But the congregation is never alone. Congregations are linked to local ecumenical faith communities, the synod and regional networks, local social ministry organizations and the national Lutheran Disaster Response ministry.

#### What is a social ministry organization?

The ELCA and 300 health and human service organizations, also known as social ministry organizations, participate in an alliance known as Lutheran Services in America ([www.lutheranservices.org](http://www.lutheranservices.org)), which serves more than 6 million people each year in the United States and the Caribbean.

Lutheran Disaster Response coordinates the efforts of the churchwide expression of the ELCA, synods, and social ministry organizations as each works to promote preparedness, provide spiritual and emotional care, volunteer coordination and long-term recovery resources to

**Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster is a coalition of voluntary agencies, including many faith groups, that encourages coordination, collaboration, cooperation and communication among member organizations around disaster mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.** Often called VOAD for short, this organization is organized on the community, county, regional, state and national levels.

communities affected by disaster. Lutheran Disaster Response focuses efforts in two areas: long-term response and supporting congregations to partner for disaster preparedness and response in their own communities.

Most synods have disaster plans that will organize the synod to assist in the response. Synod offices connect churchwide gifts with local congregations and help to strengthen local coordination for response and communication. This disaster plan will include the local social ministry organizations that have affiliated with Lutheran Disaster Response in support of response efforts (See [www.ELCA.org/disaster](http://www.ELCA.org/disaster) to find your local social ministry organization affiliate). Social ministry organizations that have entered into a Statement of Understanding with the Lutheran Disaster Response program often have long standing connections with partners in the local Lutheran network, county-and state-level emergency management structures and communities. Many participate in their local or state Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster and have relationships with other disaster response agencies like American Red Cross, Salvation Army, United Methodist Committee on Relief and Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA).

Lutheran Disaster Response brings gifts of networking and resources. They provide grant funding to social ministry organizations and synods in support of local, long-term response. They assist in recovery by lifting up the stories of communities impacted by disaster throughout the whole church. Such stories spur the prayers of the church, help to raise funds for disaster response at a national level and invite engagement in a variety of ways.



Photo: FEMA/Carolyn Deming

### ***FILLING IN THE GAPS***

***On March 2, 2012, an EF-4 tornado struck Moscow, Ohio, killing three people and destroying 252 homes in five counties, with no FEMA disaster declaration and corresponding assistance. Immediately, the Lutheran churches held a spiritual care event where 3,000 people showed up. Three homes were built from the ground up, with the help of Lutheran Services of America Ohio and Lutheran Disaster Response. Over \$30,000 was given, 15,000 hours of volunteer labor served and Home Depot donated \$60,000 of materials. Each house was built with a safe room, hurricane strength shingles and hurricane straps for the next wind storm or tornado to strike the area.***

*Without governmental assistance, the community coordinated a response which included spiritual and emotional care, case management with Red Cross, volunteer coordination for debris removal, donation management, providing school kits and long-term case management. Both ELCA and Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod congregations supported this non-governmental disaster.*

***There are many gifts to share! Write down what your congregation's might be.***

# Part One: Developing a Congregational Preparedness Plan

Developing a congregational preparedness plan is a process. As with most processes, it is not always linear and neat but grows organically as the community discovers its gifts and call to preparedness over time. While the recommendation is for each congregation to develop a comprehensive plan for the community that is owned, taught and exercised, this end goal will likely come in stages.

Task #1: Team, Purpose, Vision and Goals

Task #2: Designate Members for Response Team

Task #3: Conduct a Disaster Risk Assessment

Task #4: Inventory Assets

Task #5: Assessing Vulnerabilities

Task #6: Identify Partners, Agreements and Resources

Task #7: Decision Making Process

Task #8: Create a Communication Plan

Task #9: Emergency Operations

Task #10: Continuity of Ministries

Task #11: Obtain Congregational Approval

Task #12: Educate, Practice and Review

Task #13: Always Going Deeper

## OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS

At first, a few leaders will see the importance of the preparedness plan. However, in order for a plan to be truly useful, congregational leaders, congregation council and staff must become aware of and committed to its importance. Over time, everyone should be committed to its importance for the ongoing utilization of the plan. Even so, as circumstances change, the plan will need to be updated, refreshed and re-introduced to the community.

Be assured, there is value in the process. No matter where you are in the journey toward a comprehensive preparedness plan, the conversations and discoveries you make along the way will assist you in responding when disaster strikes.

Ask people from your community who understand the importance of continuity planning to participate in the process. Think of those who are involved with businesses that have business continuity plans, with emergency management or who are first responders.

A variety of perspectives are valuable when planning. Each person will bring a unique perspective and wisdom to the “what if” scenarios. What if our facility caught fire? What if a tornado went through our town? One only needs to mention the latest national disaster to begin such a discussion.

Once the congregation’s leadership begins to identify vulnerabilities of their community, the congregation can form a team to make a plan to prevent or minimize damage as well as to respond to such an event. Note, it is important to not only imagine ways to prevent loss and get back to business, but also ways to respond to new opportunities for ministry that might present themselves, ways to nimbly answer God’s call.

This section of the guidebook is structured so that the congregation may enter and continue the preparedness process on many levels. **The goal of this guidebook is a written, comprehensive preparedness plan for the congregation that is approved by leadership, owned by the congregation and practiced and reviewed periodically.**

**Each section refers to worksheets on which you can capture relevant information and processes. Discussion questions after each section can assist you in conversation and reflection, even if the congregation has not yet committed to designing a plan.**

*Process isn’t always neat and linear. If you find yourself stuck in one area, move on with the promise to revisit the topic again later.*

WHAT DOES A COMPREHENSIVE PREPAREDNESS PLAN LOOK LIKE?

While each congregation is encouraged to make the plan fit its unique characteristics and needs, here’s a basic outline of what you will have if you follow this guidebook.

## *The Disaster Preparedness Plan*

- A. Vision and scope
- B. Description of the preparedness and response teams
- C. Steps to be taken for preparedness
- D. Response to threat and impact of disaster
- E. Approval of the plan
- F. Education, practice, review and adjustments
- G. Ongoing communication and refinement of the plan

**How do you get to such a plan? Simply put, with a good team.**

To begin, **form a preparedness team.** The preparedness team should consist of a variety of leaders who know the congregation, its structures of authority and resources. If the preparedness team is representative of the congregation and dedicated to collaboration, the work can be divided among its members who can, in turn, enlist others to help accomplish some of the tasks.

**The tasks of the preparedness team are to:**

1. Develop purpose, vision and goals
2. Designate members for a response team
3. Conduct a disaster risk assessment
4. Inventory assets
5. Assess vulnerabilities
6. Identify partners, agreements and resources
7. Decision making process
8. Create a communication plan
9. Emergency operations
10. Continuity of ministries
11. Obtain congregational approval
12. Educate, practice and review
13. Go deeper and refine



*While a congregation may be able to adapt or learn from a template or someone else's plan, it cannot just copy it, put it on a shelf and consider the work done. This is because plans are relevant and useful only if they are:*

1. Developed by people who are concerned
2. Tailored to the geographical situation and needs of the members
3. Implemented and tested to the extent possible, before a disaster strikes
4. Developed to include training for individuals responsible during an emergency
5. Reviewed and updated regularly

**In time, you will also create the foundation for a response team that will be engaged when the time of disaster comes.**

The response team includes individuals who will be key decision makers and implementers, will be activated in times of impending crisis or disaster and will continue to function until the situation is resolved. Tasks include making timely critical decisions, overseeing communication within the congregation and with the media, working with the insurance carrier, and whatever else becomes necessary for the particular disaster.

*Calvary Lutheran Church in West Chester, Pa., created a preparedness plan, even though they had never experienced a significant disaster. Norm recalled that the regional and national church bodies had encouraged congregations to consider making a plan. Additionally, current events in the United States stimulated his interest in addressing this matter. Norm was asked by the senior pastor to develop an Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Response Plan for the congregation. Having 10 years of management experience in which he was responsible for the safety and well-being of site employees in his area of responsibility, Norm felt somewhat qualified to take on this task. Norm recruited other experienced members of the congregation to serve on a small team and then created the plan.*

This is important work! But putting together a disaster preparedness and response plan takes considerable time and energy from many people. It is important that leaders of the congregation not only commit to the process, but also carefully choose and faithfully support the people who will prepare it. Remember, this is a process that will emerge in stages. You may choose to write a simple plan to start and revisit it over time to expand and develop the plan.

As you write your plan, it is also important to understand for whom this plan is being written, who will read it. The plan itself will be used by leaders of the congregation, including those in charge of preparing for and responding to emergencies, crises and disaster. Like a congregation's constitution, the basic plan should be available to anyone who wishes to engage it. Therefore it needs to be explicit enough to clearly lay out expectations, responsibilities and procedures, while not getting bogged down in detail.

Specific procedures, such as instructions for evacuation, may be used to inform and train people who use the facilities and lead activities of the congregation. These, too, need to be clear and concise. These instructions need to be in the plan and communicated to the larger community.

Other pieces, such as the disaster risk assessment or lists of ministries or groups that use the facilities will also be used by leaders with specific responsibilities and will always be works in progress. There are pieces that only a select few need to have, particularly the parts of the plan that include policy numbers, passwords or personal contact information.

As you create your plan, consider what information needs to be available where and for whom. Include this on your worksheets as instructions for communication. The team can decide what information might better belong in a section of the appendix made available to leaders, as opposed in the main text of the plan.

**The best disaster plan is to prepare a process rather than a static document.** Planning for disaster will not be linear whereby one decision will directly follow a previous decision. The preparedness team can expect to leave some questions unanswered at first. Moving forward through the process, even with holes in the information, may offer wisdom with which to go back and refine.

*Now, let's get started.*

# Task #1: Form a Collaborative Team, Clarify Purpose, Vision, Parameters And Set Goals

See page 57 for this task worksheet.

## THE TEAM

The core group of the preparedness team will be in charge of making sure the congregation is ready to respond to a threat of and actual impact of a disaster. This team will also regularly review and update the disaster preparedness and response plan. The preparedness team should be small enough to permit close collaboration and large enough to be representative of necessary stakeholders within and associated with the congregation. The team should not place an undue burden on any single person. The pastor of the congregation is part of the team but should not be chairperson.

In the process of working together, members will develop a common framework and learn each other's vocabulary over time. The team needs to define and assign roles and responsibilities for its members such as: convener or chairperson, record keeper and designated communication person. For the task of creating a comprehensive preparedness plan, the team should agree to meet regularly. The number of meetings necessary to complete a plan will vary depending on the congregation.

*Who should be asked to be on the team? Look around in your congregation for people who would best understand preparedness and disaster, as well as how the congregation functions.*

Members might include:

1. A nurse or other medical professional
2. First responder (paramedic, fire fighter, police officer)
3. Member of the property committee
4. Someone who understands the church's finances
5. Person engaged in ministries with children and the aged

## PURPOSE AND VISION

Next, the team needs to engage in a discussion of its members' understandings and visions of Christian response to disasters in general and specifically for your community. This will enable the team to set its overall goals and define its parameters.

Consider what the congregation senses it is called to be. How might values be reflected in the disaster preparedness and response work? The mission statement of the congregation, synod and the ELCA may be helpful at this point.

Next, define the parameters of your work. Are you simply focusing on maintaining safety for occupants and possessions? Are you limiting your focus to response to needs within the congregation or expanding it to include the neighborhood, a wider area or even to a remote location? How large a situation would it take to initiate your response?

## GOAL SETTING

Finally, state the goals of the planning/preparedness team in broad and simple terms that reflect your congregation and can be agreed upon by each member of the team. These goals will help identify your highest priorities before, during and after a disaster. You may begin with your congregation's mission or vision statement or the working definition of your community's purpose. The goal of the preparedness team can then reflect how the congregation is prepared to continue on in that mission or vision even in the face of unexpected and traumatic circumstances.

*Example of goals might be:*

Protect the congregation's assets (human and otherwise)

Return to "normal" congregational life as quickly and simply as possible

Support impacted parishioners in their recovery

Reach out to vulnerable neighbors (near and far)

Protect and help people

Reestablish Sunday worship as soon as possible

Return church office to operational as soon as possible

## Task #1: Form a Collaborative Team, Clarify Purpose, Vision, Parameters And Set Goals (cont.)

As you move through the process, you might, but do not have to, note objectives under each goal. Objectives are smaller, measurable steps which help to achieve the larger goal.

*For example:*

*Goal:*

- *Protect the congregation's assets*

*Objectives:*

- *Establish and communicate plans for evacuation as well as sheltering in place*
- *Make sure facilities are safe and in good repair*
- *Maintain updated inventory of physical assets as well as adequate insurance coverage*

Don't get too detailed at this point. Your objectives will also be informed by what you discover as you gather other material needed to write the plan. Later in the process, you will return and refine your goals and objectives.

Even in TASK #1, frequently and regularly keep leaders of the congregation informed about the progress of the team and its planning. Ask for input and advice. People are more likely to champion and participate in the plan if they have been aware of the various pieces, understand why they are important and have had the opportunity to share their perspective and wisdom along the way.

*For instance:*

- *Place notes about the team's progress in the church newsletter*
- *Introduce and even try out a piece of the plan such as evacuation of Sunday school, fire drill or a lock down*
- *Review draft goals and objectives with the congregation council for input*

***EXAMPLE FROM HOLY TRINITY  
Created, loved and blessed  
by God and called to be  
a blessing to others, Holy  
Trinity Lutheran Church  
seeks to protect human  
wellbeing and physical  
resources from harm and  
to work cooperatively to  
bring healing and hope  
in times of disaster within  
our community and  
beyond. To do so we have  
established the following  
goals:***

- **Protect our congregation's assets (human and otherwise)**
- **Resume our ministry as quickly and simply as possible**
- **Support impacted parishioners in their recovery**
- **Reach out to vulnerable neighbors near and far**

# Task #1

## DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

What are the possible benefits to your congregation from creating and maintaining a preparedness plan?

When has your congregation experienced a situation where having a comprehensive preparedness plan may have made things easier? *(example: someone collapsing at worship service, a snow storm cancelling worship service, natural disaster, crisis in the community)*

Who comes to mind as someone to be on a preparedness team for your congregation? Why? How will you approach them and connect the need for a preparedness plan with his or her unique gifts and experience?

What are possible goal statements for your congregation's preparedness plan? How are those goals shaped by the regular ministry of the congregation as may be stated in the congregation's vision or mission statement?

What are the best avenues for conversation and education in your community? How might you best educate and listen to the wisdom of the whole community about preparedness planning?

## Task #2: Designate Members for Response Team

See page 58 for this task worksheet.

Since a disaster can occur at any time, early in their work the preparedness team should begin to imagine a response team for when disaster strikes. This team includes individuals who will be key decision makers and implementers of the congregation's preparedness plan when there is an emergency or disaster.

Selection of the individuals to serve on the response team should be made with the input and approval of the leaders of the congregation such as congregation council and ministry staff. Some of these roles may be assigned by position as opposed to an individual person. For instance, the chief decision maker may be designated as the pastor. Inquiry should then be made as to whether each nominee is willing to serve. Some members of the preparedness team may also serve on the response team.

While the response team should reflect the unique circumstances of the congregation, it should include the following roles:

### CHIEF DECISION MAKER

Since, in times of crisis, some decisions may need to be made when there is no time to convene a committee meeting, it is important to have a designated chief decision maker. This person will attempt, whenever possible, to keep the backup decision maker well-informed and include him or her in the process,

involve others in making the decisions, and keep as many as need to know in the loop.

### BACKUP DECISION MAKER

This person functions when the chief decision maker is not available or when asked by the chief decision maker to do so. This person stays informed of what the chief decision maker is dealing with.

### PARISH LEGAL COUNSEL

This person may or may not be a member of the congregation. Duties may involve overseeing and identifying the legal issues surrounding human resources, governance, property and more.

“A Ready Hope: Effective Disaster Ministries for Congregations,” by Kathryn Haeisen and Carol Flores (Alban Institute, 2009) illustrates a number of situations where a congregation should consult its legal counsel and insurance agent before engaging in ministries in response to a disaster: the congregation considers setting up a drop-in day care center, a feeding program, opening a shelter for survivors of disaster or setting up housing for volunteers. While a congregation may already operate a preschool or host potluck suppers, etc., different liabilities may need to be addressed when adapting programs. Local standards for opening a shelter may come into play.

As you brainstorm possible ministries, check on legal implications and liability issues. These do not have to become roadblocks, but do need to be addressed so that the ministry can accomplish its goals. Some of these conversations can take place as part of preparedness

planning, as in, “What will we need to know and do before setting up the particular ministries we think we could provide?”

### SPOKESPERSON TO THE MEDIA

This person is the chief spokesperson for communicating accurate, timely information to the media, which helps to both tell and control the story. In time of crisis, the media may be the only way to communicate to others, especially those outside the crisis zone. This role might also be assigned to the chief or assistant decision maker.

### INSURANCE LIAISON

This person interacts with the insurance carrier.

Other roles on the team may include, but not be limited to a designated person:

- Assemble and restock first aid and other essential supplies
- Turn off the utilities and secure the property of the church, as necessary
- Oversee communication within the congregation

This response team may also maintain and update a list of other people whose knowledge and experience can be of assistance in times of need, such as: medical practitioners, emergency personnel, those who know CPR, have first aid training, can assist in restoration of business operations, etc.

The response team should designate a **crisis control center** (the place the response team will meet if a disaster threatens or occurs) as well as a secondary location.

## Task #2

*At a congregation near Philadelphia, the church sexton died suddenly. Unfortunately, he was the only one who knew the codes for the security system and the procedure for turning on the decades-old boiler. He died in the fall, just as the weather turned cold. A wedding was scheduled in the days after his sudden death. The wedding happened without much-needed heat because the congregation could not find a technician who understood the old boiler in time to warm the sanctuary for the assembly. How many people know the security codes and utility procedures in your congregation? How can they be obtained in an emergency situation?*

### DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

Imagine a natural disaster strikes the area of the church building. Who are the people within the congregation who will most likely respond to the needs of the church building? How will they know to check on the building? How will they know what to do?

Who has access and knowledge of the essential workings of the church buildings: security codes, how to manage the utilities, combination to the safe, access to change the website or voicemail? What if something happened to that person or people? How would church building functions return most quickly?

# Task #3: Conduct a Disaster Risk Assessment

See page 60 for this task worksheet.

In order to make a plan that will fit the congregation, the preparedness team needs to identify the types of crises and disasters to which it is most vulnerable.

Begin by engaging in “what if” thinking and a discussion to identify vulnerabilities. Include recent and potential local threats, hazards, disasters and crises as well as situations in the news. This list can be expanded by consulting a list of local or state risk assessments.

**Write down the risks, no matter how remote.**

Next, assess the risks you have identified by:

**Probability** – or frequency of occurrence

**Magnitude** – extent and severity of expected damage

**Warning** – likely time available to warn occupants

**Duration** – probable duration of threat or hazard

### Follow-up effects

Discuss the particular vulnerabilities of and threats to the particular ministries and the property of the congregation. This is only a beginning and will be expanded later.

HAZARD: TORNADO				
Probability	Magnitude	Warning	Duration	Risk Priority
Highly likely	Catastrophic	Minimal	12+ hours	High
Likely	Critical	6-12 hours	6-12 hours	Medium
Possible	Limited	12-24 hours	3-6 hours	Low
Unlikely	Negligible	>24 hours	>3 hours	NO risk

Example: A tornado may be possible, of critical magnitude, minimal warning and a short duration. This would result in Medium level of risk.

Examples:

#### TORNADO

- Unlikely, but they do occur in our area
- Very little warning
- Major threat is to building and its occupants
- How would we be warned? What are our steps to protect people?
- Are there things to be done inside and outside the building to minimize damage?

#### HURRICANE

- Likely, but usually more than 24-hour warning
- How do we monitor the approach of the storm?
- Are our facilities, particularly the roof, walls and windows well maintained?
- Does our building tend to take on water during heavy storms?

Finally, establish a risk priority of low, medium, high. As a result of this task, the team will have a prioritized list of threats and hazards which will inform the formation of a preparedness and response plan.

The chart above offers a visual way of estimating risk. It is not a mathematical formula. However, it becomes clear when you shade in the values for each hazard; a general level of risk emerges.

## Task #3

### **DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION**

What natural disasters have struck your area in recent years? How have local congregations been affected? (If you do not know, try doing an Internet search with the words “church” and “fire” or other disaster for news reports.)

What human-caused disasters happened in or near congregations? (e.g., shooting during worship, school lock-down nearby, a significant fire in the community, etc.)

Without a preparedness plan in place, how would your congregation respond to a disaster in the community? What would be the impacts of these types of events to various programs?

# Task #4: Inventory of the Assets of the Congregation

## GATHER PIECES NEEDED FOR THE PLAN

Tasks #4–12 constitute the most flexible portion of a congregation's preparedness plan. Some of these pieces are necessary in your particular plan. Some might not be necessary or appropriate. The team will need to assess the worthiness of each piece to your particular situation and include those pieces that are most appropriate for your community into the plan.

The preparedness plan should also specify where the original and copies of each major piece are located because different pieces may be stored at various locations. For instance, the inventory of ministries may be put in the appendix of the plan on the shelf in the church office. The list of current members, financial or physical assets may be kept in the church office with enough copies provided offsite for those who would need to know in case of emergency. While a recommendation for the location of each piece is noted, it is up to you to decide on their placement.

See page 61 for this task worksheet.

## TASK #4: AN INVENTORY OF ASSETS

After collecting the inventory of congregational assets, make sure that in addition to electronic copies you also have hard copies and that some are kept offsite in multiple secure locations. The electricity may go out for a long time and one of the offsite locations may not be accessible.

### HUMAN ASSETS

- All members and contact information*  
Note in the directory or prepare a sub list of those who are particularly vulnerable and relevant notes about specific needs and contact information for those who need to know or are responsible for this person's welfare. For example: the elderly, physically or mentally challenged people, people who are isolated or have limited resources, etc.
- Staff and contact information*
- Parishioners with disaster related skill/certifications and other resources*  
These folks can be useful in times of disaster. For example, first responders, those who speak the languages of surrounding population, Stephen Ministers, social workers, counselors, people who can provide child-care. Identify who has completed background checks and abuse clearances according to your congregation's policy.
- Outside groups which use the building with contact information*

- Partners in the community with contact information*  
For example, other communities of faith, schools, businesses, organizations, synod, local government contacts, etc.

### PHYSICAL ASSETS

- Make and regularly update a list of all physical property including church records and data systems. In addition to making a physical list of these assets, take pictures or make a video. As you do this, make note of any repairs needed or issues to be addressed.
- Consider whether any of these material assets should be archived, and, if so, do so.
- From the above list identify equipment and other physical resources important to disaster response such as vehicles, generator, kitchen, shower, large space for outdoor worship, etc.
- Make a list of items that should be removed if the building is threatened, where they should be taken and by whom.
- Make a list of items to be given special protection if the building is threatened, what steps are to be taken and by whom. (Example: computer should be wrapped in plastic and lifted off the floor.)
- If there are special codes or passwords needed to operate any physical assets, make a list of those or indicate how to access these.

## Task #4: Inventory of the Assets of the Congregation (cont.)

### PHYSICAL ASSETS (cont.)

7. Locate or produce a blueprint or drawing of the church facility. Mark the location of first aid and survival kits, fire extinguishers, utility cut-offs, building exits, alarm controls, fire-safe storage, and “safe spots” (example: windowless interior hallways or areas of reinforced structure where people may shelter).

### FINANCIAL ASSETS

1. What accounts, investments, lines of credit and loans do you have?
  - a. Where are they located?
  - b. What is the contact information?
  - c. Who can access them?
2. Where are the financial records and how are they backed up?
3. What steps does the congregation take to insure that the funds are protected from mismanagement?
4. What steps are necessary for the congregation to gather and distribute disaster-related donations of funds or supplies?

### MINISTRIES ARE ASSETS TO THE COMMUNITY

Identify your many ministries, including groups within the congregation, groups that use the building regularly and activities that take place within the facilities or under the auspices of the congregation. (e.g., worship, Christian education, quilters, prayer group, food bank, AA meetings, home repair ministry)

Identify any certifications the congregation may have, such as those for being a Red Cross Shelter.

*Two ministries at Trinity Lutheran Church in Lansdale, Pa., have led the congregation to offer to serve the community as a hospitality center in times of disaster. On Wednesday nights, the congregation serves a community meal called “Feast” that is open to anyone in the community. The congregation also serves as a “Code Blue” shelter for homeless on the coldest nights of the year. It seemed a natural extension for Trinity to partner with the town for being the designated community hospitality center during significant weather or events. Trinity was proud to open its doors to the community when Hurricane Sandy hit in 2012 as well as for other more localized events over the past five years.*

## Task #4

### REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

God gifts the church and your congregation with what it needs to fulfill the ministry to which God calls. When you consider these gifts as assets, what surprises you? What challenges you?

How is the congregation best using the assets God has entrusted them? What are some areas of growth?

In what new ways can you imagine using these assets to respond to the community when disaster strikes?

What are your most essential ministries and programs to continue, even in the face of disaster (e.g., worship, Alcoholics Anonymous, weekly community supper)?

How might these most critical ministries and programs continue if your church building is compromised during disaster?

# Task #5: Assessing the Vulnerabilities of the Congregation

See page 66 for this task worksheet.

## AN ASSESSMENT OF VULNERABILITIES

Creating a preparedness plan prompts the congregation to look discerningly to the vulnerabilities inherent in congregational property and functioning. Some vulnerability can be mitigated with intentional upkeep and attention.

**Vulnerability:** open to attack or damage, weaknesses, susceptibilities

## PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

How do you ensure that property is kept in good repair?

Who is responsible for making sure that regular maintenance and upkeep happens?

What is the process for identifying needed maintenance, approving expenditures and executing repairs?

When does the congregation's process work best? When does the process break down?

## VULNERABILITIES

What physical vulnerabilities exist in the congregation's physical plant? (e.g., it's located in low lying area, near industrial-use railroad tracks or highways, streets regularly flood, basement takes in water, roof is 25 years old.)

What measures are in place to:

Prevent accidents?

Mitigate liability?

## INSURANCE

Identify insurance coverage levels for:

- Injuries and accidents
- Misconduct or abuse
- Fiscal mismanagement
- Damage to property

What inadequacies or vulnerabilities need to be addressed even if you cannot address them immediately?

## Task #5

### REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Discussions of vulnerabilities and liabilities can become overwhelming. How does your congregation balance a reasoned approach to issues of liability and risk while being faithful to God's call to ministry?

As you consider the vulnerabilities which are inherent in congregational life (the church building, regular gatherings of large crowds of people, shared leadership), how do you make decisions about which vulnerabilities are more critical than others? How do you prioritize the work of addressing vulnerabilities?

How can you use the congregation's assets to shore up vulnerabilities?

## Task #6: Identify Partners, Agreements And Resources

See page 67 for this task worksheet.

### PARTNERS, AGREEMENTS AND RESOURCES FOR TIME OF NEED

When disaster threatens or strikes there is an immediate need for action. The more relationships that are forged and information that is gathered ahead of time, the more efficiently a community can prevent or minimize damage and suffering and bring order out of chaos.

The lists of partners, agreements, resources for and steps to be taken in times of need that are put together for the preparedness plan help create the building blocks necessary for leadership. When relationships are established, the pathways of “working together” are clearer and community organizations, families and government can more easily lend each other a hand. This relationship building may be in the form of participating in a local ministerium or services consortium, of knocking on the door and giving a handshake, inviting the emergency manager to a council meeting, organizing a community festival with others, or any other activity whereby your congregational leadership gets to know others in the community.

*The Joplin Area Ministerial Alliance existed prior to the May 22, 2011, tornado in Joplin, Mo. After the tornado, the alliance quickly met and determined what churches could handle food and feeding, collection and distribution of donations, as well as accepting and housing volunteers. They were already using a communication software system called Charity Tracker ([www.charitytracker.com](http://www.charitytracker.com)), which made distribution of donations easier and helped eliminate duplication of benefits. This network included ministry members and was open to any organization reaching out to the Joplin area.*

### GOVERNMENT

Find out what programs the local, state and national governments can offer. Make a list of services and programs you might benefit from and whom to contact. Get to know key local contacts in the police department, fire department, emergency management office, etc.

*During a recent stretch of very cold temperatures, an apartment building in the suburbs of Philadelphia lost its heating system on Friday, late afternoon. Municipality staff knew of the presence of the large Lutheran congregation across the street from the building. Unfortunately, they did not have an existing relationship with the leadership. They called the church office but only got the answering system. It took several phone calls and emails to find someone who could contact congregational leaders to ask if the church could shelter anyone who could not find a friend or relative with whom to stay during the outage.*

### LOCAL PARTNERS

Identify other communities of faith and organizations with whom you might partner in times of crisis and disaster. Get to know their leaders and resources and brainstorm ways you can be of help to one another and the community. Consider drawing up at least simple statements of understanding about specific ways you could assist one another.

### SYNOD AND NATIONAL CHURCH

Find out how your synod, Lutheran Disaster Response and the ELCA respond if you or your area experience a crisis or disaster, and whom to contact when. Request a copy of the synod's disaster plan, if one exists.

Find your local Lutheran Disaster Response affiliated social ministry organization at <http://www.ELCA.org/Our-Work/Relief-and-Development/Social-Ministry-Organizations>. Make contact with them and establish a relationship.

**Example: If one community of faith or organization cannot use its facilities, the other could offer space for worship, business operations, etc.** A school might be allowed to use classrooms in your church. Your congregation might be allowed to worship in a local gym.

## Task #6

### REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

In disaster, communities are often surprised at the network of willing partners that arises to help in recovery. How is this network strengthened by developing relationships before disaster strikes?

How well is your congregation connected to the community in which you are situated? What contacts do you already have in the school district, local government, other congregations, non-profit organizations, etc.?

How can you strengthen the congregation's presence and shape its identity in the community?

## Task #7: Decision-Making Process

See page 69 for this task worksheet.

THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS FOR CONTINUING AND ADJUSTING CURRENT MINISTRIES AND RESPONDING TO NEW OPPORTUNITIES

While no one can predict what will be needed for a specific disaster, often current ministries and administrative activities need to be adjusted and new opportunities for ministry may arise. Having a discussion about and then including a description of how decisions would be made in the preparedness plan can assist the congregation to adjust more smoothly. When a discussion about potential opportunities for ministry is held prior to a disaster, the congregation may be better able to quickly evaluate and respond to those that present themselves.

Whenever possible, the leadership team should include others in the discussion of these priorities both before and when there is a need to adjust some ministries and activities. When it comes to implementing the decision-making process in time of disaster, a simple statement of the reason for a particular decision, who made it and the circumstances under which and/or the anticipated time the ministry or activity is likely to resume, may assist those impacted to accept and cooperate with the decision.

Decisions will also be needed on when and how to scale back and end various responses to the disaster. Consider how these decisions will be made.

If the crisis or disaster is expected to have enduring effects, the leadership team will also need to assemble those who need to discuss how to address these. For example, if many parishioners have left the area, are out of work, and/or have sustained significant damages to their homes, consideration needs to occur of how that will affect the finances of the congregation and what steps need to be taken to cope with the situation. Once again, having discussions before a disaster about possible effects of such an event will increase the ability of the congregation to survive and recover.

Referring to the potential disasters you have identified, brainstorm what ministries might need to be adjusted and which services might be needed to assist individuals and the community in the relief and recovery stages. Consider inviting the leaders of different ministry areas into the discussion. Decide how the decisions would be made and communicated. Be sure to review the plan with leaders of current ministries.

You may wish to add information, current capacity or goals for setting up work and other mission teams, including those which go outside the immediate vicinity.

**NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR MINISTRY**  
New opportunities for ministry may surface, such as requests from outside agencies, obvious needs of neighbors,

awareness of members of the congregation, etc. In a large scale disaster no one congregation can or should try to provide all the services needed.

A congregation can find it exciting and renewing to begin to identify which opportunities might fit best with the resources and mission of the congregation as well as what would be needed to make the decision and to put these into action as well as to scale them back.

- What kind of approval would be needed?
- Are there any certifications required?
- What safeguards would need to be put into place?

For example, if you decide to offer extended childcare, discuss where you would do it, who might staff it, how you would decide which children were eligible, where you would get the supplies, etc. Make notes from the discussions about adjusting ministries and responding to opportunities so that they can be referred to when a disaster strikes.

Examples of potential opportunities:

- Provide a resting place for first responders
- Serve as a warming station for community members
- Housing for volunteers
- Host a community worship service

There are many opportunities for congregations to take leadership in long-term recovery. This will be explored in more detail in Part Two: Response.

## Task #7

*On Friday, Sept. 22, 2010, the small town (230 residents) of Hammond, Minn., was flooded. There had been 10 inches of rain in the preceding 24 hours and a dam on the river broke 15 miles upriver from Hammond.*

*Of the 100 structures in Hammond, 75 percent were damaged, about one-third of the 81 homes were destroyed. Some people barely escaped with their lives. St. John Lutheran Church was heavily damaged by four feet of water outside and two feet of water inside their building. However, the structure remained sound. In fact, the fellowship hall was deemed the best preserved structure in the flood plain.*

*The pastor from nearby Rushford who had shepherded his congregation in their response to local flooding in 2007, offered his congregation's resources to assist the Hammond church with planning its response. Within eight days, the inside of the church was clean. The mayor and other disaster officials asked the church if they could use the fellowship hall for the disaster recovery center since the weather had turned too cold for them to continue to use the tent which they had set up on higher ground. The congregation agreed and temporarily held church services with its sister congregation, Immanuel, in Pottsdam.*

*Lutheran Disaster Response, Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota and other agencies moved into the fellowship hall. A satellite office was set up with a social worker who served as case manager as well as people who coordinated disaster recovery efforts, including volunteer and materials management. In addition, washers and dryers were brought into the building and a food pantry was set up; for the first two months, meals were served every Saturday for volunteers as well as residents. Ten months after the flood the congregation returned to worship.*

### DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

Imagine that your community was severely impacted by a natural disaster but the church building remains intact although without electricity. How might your church serve the community in its time of need? How might you use the assets that you have to respond to the great need in the community? What steps are necessary to make these imagined plans real?

How might your congregation be prepared to be a center for assistance when disaster strikes? What might you put in place before a disaster strikes? (e.g., purchase a generator, create storage for cots and blankets, maintain a supply of bottled water)

# Task #8: Create a Communication Plan

See page 70 for this task worksheet.

## HOW COMMUNICATIONS WILL OCCUR DURING EMERGENCIES AND DISASTERS

Clear communication is critical during times of disaster, but it is often significantly more difficult than usual. Power and telephone lines may be down causing disruptions in phone and electronic communication. External communication to members of the congregation, the media and the general public is important. Equally important is internal communication between the response team members and others who may be participating in emergency or continuity of operations.

Develop a plan for how communications should flow to and from leadership and within the network of responders and the congregation during emergencies and times of disaster.

**Include but do not limit yourself to the following:**

1. **Stay alert to possible threat**  
Identify how the response team, those in charge of ministries and activities and those within the church facilities will stay alert to possible threats. For example, is there a weather alarm in the administrative office? If the county has

an automated phone notification system in case of emergency, are you on their list?

2. **Communication with leaders during emergency and disaster**

Identify how the response team, those in charge of ministries and activities and those within the church facilities will communicate in times of threat or actual disaster.

Identify how the response team will communicate with emergency management, other community partners and congregation members. Offer alternatives that take into account whether or not electrical power is available.

3. **Communication with members of the congregation**

Phone trees, electronic messaging, methods that don't rely on electricity or cell towers could include message boards at the front of the church, flyers posted at grocery stores or community bulletin boards.

Additional information about crisis communication internally and externally is included in the additional resources section.

*A simple thing like a telephone tree is important to include in a disaster plan. Recently, a Lutheran parish in Eastern New York State experienced some flooding in the community where they are located. The pastor of the congregation spent at least four hours calling each member of her congregation to ensure that they were OK. After all of those phone calls, it was realized that if there had been a telephone tree in place, the process may have gone more quickly.*

## Task #8

### REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Discuss your congregation's current communication plan. How does pertinent information get communicated? How does emergency information (e.g., cancellations) get communicated? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this plan?

How do most people in your community receive information? (e.g., newsletters, Internet, smartphone, etc.) To what means will they turn if there is no electricity or cellphone service?

How will you decide who has the authority to speak on behalf of the congregation when disaster strikes? What traits must this person possess? Who is the best candidate if the pastor, staff or congregational president is not available?

## Task #9: Emergency Operations

See Worksheet on page 71.

In times of emergency, those present will need to listen to the directives of the designated leader of the activity until someone with more authority arrives or communicates with the group. If emergency responders (fire, police, ambulance, etc.) arrive, directives of their leaders take precedence and are to be followed. Procedures created before the event can help mitigate the panic and chaos that is possible with these unforeseen events.

Imagine any number of scenarios where people are occupying the church building and an emergency occurs:

1. Someone collapses in the middle of worship
2. A fire in the boiler room
3. An unstable or violent person in the building
4. Quick moving tornado

Consider the best-case response of leadership, how instructions will be communicated and necessary information that can be shared with outside groups who use the building. For example, a scouting group that meets in the church building when no congregational leaders are present should be informed of what to do if the fire alarm

goes off, the address of the church for communication with emergency personnel and contact information for any other issues during the meeting time.

Basic emergency plans and instructions should be posted prominently near light switches or doorways so that anyone can access the information without wasting time searching for a leader or staff member.

MAKE PLANS FOR THE FOLLOWING SITUATIONS:

***Evacuate:*** all occupants must leave a specific area.

When writing your directives, consider various levels of occupancy, such as weekdays, evenings, Sunday mornings, etc. Decide what steps are to be taken and a rendezvous location for groups. Provide signs for the evacuation routes and place in logical locations. Decide on how and when to practice these procedures.

***Lock Down:*** all occupants inside a facility must remain inside and prevent any unauthorized person from entering the building.

A lockdown may occur when a dangerous situation or person may be within or in the vicinity of the building (e.g., robbery has taken place in the neighborhood and the suspect is still at large.) Consider who needs to be trained in lock down procedures (e.g., office staff, Sunday school teachers, pre-school staff.)

***Shelter In Place:*** all occupants stay within a facility, perhaps for an extended period of time.

Those present in the facility may find it wise or be ordered to stay in the facility when an emergency or disaster occurs in the nearby vicinity and it is not safe to leave the building. For example, a storm may take down power lines or trees or cause a flash flood which makes the roads impossible to navigate safely.

## Task #9

*In July 2011, while vacation Bible school was in session at the Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit, Emmaus, Pa., armed men robbed a nearby bank. One armed suspect escaped on foot into the area and was at large for several hours.*

*After two parents notified the church office, all the children were brought inside and the doors locked. Staff members were notified, but the children were not told. The senior pastor contacted the local law enforcement who initially wanted the church to keep the children until the suspect was caught. However, when the police were told that there was not enough time to notify parents before the normal dismissal time, the police came to coordinate dismissal. Meanwhile, the director of vacation Bible school made an alphabetical list of all students present.*

*At the time for dismissal, the children were kept in the sanctuary singing songs and doing other fun things. Parents were not allowed into the building. Instead, parents stayed in their vehicles, while the director checked parental ID and other staff brought children to the cars that had been cleared. Once in the vehicle, parents told their children the reason for the change in procedure. Pick up of the over 100 children took about 45 minutes.*

*Lesson learned: the police knew that the local high school was in session and notified the principal of the situation. However, the police did not know that the church had vacation Bible school going on and therefore did not notify the church.*

### REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Were you ever in a setting where you had to lock down, shelter in place or evacuate? Were you concerned about finding family and close friends as those policies were implemented? How were your fears relieved?

What would it look like on a Sunday morning if your congregation had to evacuate, lock down or shelter in place? What factors prepare the congregation to weather these emergency situations well? What supplies would be beneficial to have on hand?

# Task #10: Planning for Continuity of Ministry

*See page 72 for this task worksheet.*

Planning for the continuity of ministry includes the steps that must be taken to ensure critical functions and ministries can continue if a disaster of any scale causes enough damage that results in normal day-to-day administrative and ministry functions being compromised.

When a crisis or disaster threatens or occurs, the response team will determine whether it is possible or wise to maintain all current ministries and activities listed in the inventory of ministries (location of info). If the team determines that it is wise to limit some of these, it will determine which ones and communicate these decisions to those in charge of those ministries or activities.

Whenever possible, the response team will endeavor to include others in the discussion of these priorities both before and when there is need to curtail some ministries and activities. The team will also determine whether and how and which administrative activities to continue, such as those that occur in the church office. If the crisis or disaster is expected to have enduring effects, leadership will assemble those who need to discuss how to address these.

## RESPONSE FOR CHALLENGES TO CURRENT MINISTRIES AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR SERVICE

When disaster threatens or occurs, the disaster response leadership team will, in consultation with the congregation council, staff and other leaders of ministries consider new opportunities for temporary or long-term ministries. Such opportunities may surface as requests from outside agencies, obvious needs of neighbors, awareness of members of the congregation, etc.

## DECISION MAKING FOR SCALING BACK AND ENDING DISASTER RESPONSE

As people and the community recover from the disaster, decisions about how and when the congregation will cut back on its responses will be made by the response team in consultation with other congregational leaders, shared with those most directly concerned and then communicated to the congregation.

## Task #10

### REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Looking at the list of current ministries, which would you designate as essential if one of the disasters you listed as top priority were to occur? Which could be temporarily discontinued, scaled back or meet in another location? Which might you expand or initiate?

Do you remember a time you personally, or you as a congregation felt called to take on new and unexpected challenges? Was there any trouble maintaining already existing commitments?

How did you make decisions about where to commit resources and energy?

## Tasks #11–13

### Task #11: Obtain Approval of the Plan

Once the plan is prepared, it is important to obtain official congregational approval and then ownership of the plan. Usually this will be done through the congregation council. Acceptance of the plan may be more efficient if the preparedness team has kept leadership in the congregation involved and informed in the process of preparing the plan.

### Task #12: Communicate, Practice, Review and Adjust the Plan

Once the plan is approved, the preparedness team should plan to teach the community about the plan and encourage practice, review and make periodic adjustment.

It is important to practice the plan regularly since people may forget the steps, circumstances may change, new people may join and the leadership of outside organizations may change.

### Task #13: The Process Grows and Deepens Over Time

As the congregation lives out the preparedness plan, new insights will emerge, vulnerabilities and assets may change, relationships will grow in the surrounding community and the plan will necessarily change.

For example, as a congregation reviews its assets, it often becomes aware of how it could update, expand or strengthen them. It might review whether there is sufficient insurance coverage for its actual physical assets, put a battery operated weather radio in the office, expand partnerships with local emergency management or add information about common responses to the training of Stephen Ministers. Members of the preparedness team can work with others to identify and act on ways to increase the strength of the congregation to avert and respond to disasters.

## Tasks #11–13

### REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Do you remember the last time you applied for a job? A loan? A grant? Did you have to consider assets and weaknesses in order to think more clearly about what you could offer?

What insights came out of considering the tasks in this section that will help you talk to leadership about the importance of planning and about what your congregation has to offer the larger community?

What is the best way to get support of key decision makers in your congregation for the implementation of the plan?