

Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management

Volume 8, Issue 1

2011

Article 32

Role of Pastors in Disasters Curriculum Development Project: Preparing Faith-Based Leaders to be Agents of Safety

Randolph Rowel, *Morgan State University*
Larry A. Mercer, *Washington Bible College*
Gladys Gichomo, *Morgan State University*

Recommended Citation:

Rowel, Randolph; Mercer, Larry A.; and Gichomo, Gladys (2011) "Role of Pastors in Disasters Curriculum Development Project: Preparing Faith-Based Leaders to be Agents of Safety," *Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management*: Vol. 8: Iss. 1, Article 32.

DOI: 10.2202/1547-7355.1872

Available at: <http://www.bepress.com/jhsem/vol8/iss1/32>

©2011 Berkeley Electronic Press. All rights reserved.

Role of Pastors in Disasters Curriculum Development Project: Preparing Faith-Based Leaders to be Agents of Safety

Randolph Rowel, Larry A. Mercer, and Gladys Gichomo

Abstract

FEMA's Emergency Management Institute higher education initiative states that a broad range of college students and professionals need courses that introduce them to disasters and what to do about them. Hundreds of universities have since developed emergency management courses or degree programs at their schools; however, none of these institutions are bible colleges. Because of the critical role of faith-based organizations during response and recovery phases of disasters, a closer examination of ways to make training more accessible to their leaders is warranted. Although a plethora of training opportunities and resources are available to faith-based leaders, very few training initiatives incorporate theological principles for crisis management or target institutions that educate a large portion of leaders of faith communities such as bible colleges and seminaries. The purpose of this article is to introduce emergency management educators and practitioners to a curriculum that addresses barriers to engaging faith-based leaders and volunteers in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery activities. The article also describes the course development process and content of this culturally appropriate curriculum intended for use in higher education bible colleges and seminaries. Lastly, authors discuss how this course helps to ensure that the legacy of faith-based leader's involvement in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery will not only continue but will be done more effectively. By informing faculty and administrators of emergency management programs about this initiative, insight on where existing and future programs should focus their efforts is offered.

KEYWORDS: disaster preparedness, higher education, culturally appropriate training, faith-based organizations, curriculum development, bible colleges

Author Notes: Randolph Rowel, Morgan State University School of Community Health and Policy. Larry A. Mercer, Washington Bible College. Gladys Gichomo, Morgan State University School of Community Health and Policy. The development of this curriculum was supported by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (Grant Number N00014-D6-1-0991) through a grant awarded to the Center for Study of Preparedness and Catastrophic Event Response (PACER) at the Johns Hopkins University. Special thanks to Dr. Myrtle Evans-Holland (Morgan State University), Kenneth Cole (Washington Bible College), and the Florida State University Learning Institute for their assistance throughout this project.

An increase in the severity and frequency of natural disasters and the damages they cause is a major concern today. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) reports that as of October 2010, there had been seventy-six declarations of disasters in the United States compared to fifty-nine in all of 2009 (FEMA 2010a). From the wake of San Francisco Earthquake's fire in 1906, to the terrorist attacks on September 2001, to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, natural and man-made disasters have left a lasting impact on the American people. This has led researchers, government, businesses, and the American people to ask questions and demand answers that lead to solutions to improve how this nation prepares, responds, and recovers when disaster strikes.

In the search of solutions, one area worth examining is the role of faith-based organizations (FBOs) before, during, and after a disaster. According to Elizabeth Ferris (2005),

While there is no generally accepted definition of faith-based organizations, they are characterized by having one or more the following: affiliation with a religious body; a mission statement with explicit reference to religious values; financial support from religious sources; and/or a governance structure where selection of board members or staff is based on religious beliefs or affiliation and/or decision-making processes based on religious values (312).

Research on the role of FBOs is ongoing and essential in the disaster preparedness and management arena. Traditionally, FBOs have provided services to individuals, families, and communities for quite some time. Disaster preparedness activities were even evident during biblical times. When the pharaoh of Egypt was told that his country would endure seven years of famine, which would severely affect the health of his nation (Genesis 41:28–31), he appointed a faith-based leader named Joseph to prepare for this event by storing grain for food in many cities throughout Egypt (Genesis 41:41). Because a large supply of grain was stored before the famine began, this act of disaster preparedness saved millions of lives. Today FBOs are not as involved in preparedness planning, but the trend of providing disaster response and recovery services continues. Key to the continuation, improvement, and increased engagement of FBOs in disaster-related services is having their leaders grounded in emergency management principles and practices.

As the risks and impacts of natural and man-made disasters increase, so does the need for informed leadership. FEMA's Emergency Management Institute (EMI) higher education initiative states that "in order to build disaster resistant and resilient communities a broad range of college students and professionals need courses that introduce them to hazards, risk, vulnerability, disasters, and what to do about them" (FEMA 2010b). Since the inception of EMI in 1994,

hundreds of universities have developed emergency management courses or programs at their schools. None of these institutions, however, is a Bible college or seminary. Considering the leadership training needs of faith leaders and the potential reach of these institutions, this is cause for concern. For example, the Association for Biblical Higher Education (2011), a national accreditation agency for Bible colleges and seminaries, comprises about two hundred postsecondary institutions throughout North America and represents an aggregate student enrollment of 35,000. In addition, tens of thousands of alumni from member institutions serve as vocational and lay Christian leaders on every continent and in every walk of life.

Despite the reach of FBOs and the plethora of training opportunities and resources available to faith-based leaders, very few (if any) training initiatives have targeted future leaders matriculating in Bible colleges and seminaries. Because of the critical role of FBOs during response and recovery phases of disasters, a closer examination of ways to make training more accessible to their leaders is warranted.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

This article introduces emergency management educators and practitioners to a curriculum that addresses barriers to engaging faith-based leaders and volunteers in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery activities. It also describes the course development process and content of this culturally appropriate curriculum intended for use in higher education Bible colleges and seminaries. Lastly, it discussed how this curriculum helps to ensure that faith-based leaders' involvement in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery will not only continue but be done more effectively. This information should help faculty and administrators of emergency management programs determine where existing and future programs should focus their efforts.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

FBOs and many other volunteer groups have been providing disaster relief services since as far back as the eighteenth century, long before these services were coordinated by any one government agency (Rubin 2007). Although thousands of volunteer organizations are presumed to be providing disaster-related services throughout the United States today, no official count is available. A review of mission statements of organizations belonging to the National Volunteers Active in Disaster (NVAOD), however, reveals that 30 of 49 (61 percent) of its members are faith based (NVOAD 2010). Furthermore, of the 41 disaster-related services listed by NVOAD, 38 (93 percent) are provided by one or more of its faith-based members. This snapshot of FBO involvement in disaster relief does not include

the countless number of FBOs whose response to disasters usually goes undocumented and unnoticed.

Jeannette Sutton (2003) notes that the provision by FBOs of physical, moral, and spiritual care after Hurricane Katrina was unprecedented and continued long after other relief agencies had left. A Homeland Security Institute (2006) study reported that after Hurricane Katrina, FBOs undertook large, varied, and demanding activities, such as providing shelter, food services, medical services, personal hygiene services, disaster relief site, mental health and spiritual services, physical reconstruction, logistics management, transportation management, children's services, and case management. Other disaster-related services that FBOs provide are community disaster education, advocacy, damage assessment, donations management, funeral services, sanitation services, and debris removal, as well as connecting disaster victims with their families (FEMA 2011).

For countless disasters that occur nationally and internationally, the important role of leaders and volunteers from the faith community is undisputed; however, there are a number of barriers to increasing their effectiveness before during and after a disaster (Koenig 2006). Some of these barriers are the lack of a collaborative approach to integrate FBO services with emergency management planning, limited training for faith-based leaders, and limited access to culturally appropriate educational materials.

Barriers to Engaging FBOs: Collaborative Approach

Despite their current level of involvement, FBOs need to be more engaged in the full range of disaster-related services. Failure of government agencies and other sectors to collaborate with FBOs or integrate FBO-based disaster-related services is a major gap in emergency management planning. A recent study by the Committee on Private-Public Sector Collaboration to Enhance Community Disaster Resilience (2010) recognizes the importance of engaging the "full fabric" of the community, including representatives from the business community, FBOs, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and other civic-minded groups, in planning disaster services. The need to collaborate emerges out of the recognition that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The committee reported that successful collaboration requires that those who deal with crises such as poverty, crime, violence, and serious illness be represented. Because addressing such crises is part of their mission, FBOs are uniquely qualified to sit at the "table of preparedness" to plan for and deliver disaster relief services to the public, especially those who are disproportionately affected by disasters. *The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned* report (Townsend 2006) notes

similar concerns, indicating that the contributions of volunteers and NGOs, including FBOs, should be better integrated into the broader national effort.

Barriers to Engaging FBOs: Leadership Training

Because of the critical role of FBOs before, during, and after disasters, training for leaders and laypersons is essential (Daphne and Juan 2008). According to McCabe et al. (2008), opportunities for specialized disaster training of faith leaders and other spiritual caregivers are limited. A study examining strategies to engage FBOs in advance preparation for disasters (Canclini, Shannon, and Dillard 2009) echoes this sentiment, reporting that FBOs are willing to help but (1) need training and (2) have insufficient knowledge that could put them or others in harm's way. These findings are consistent with one of the recommendations of *The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina*, which notes the importance of involving FBOs and other NGOs in emergency management training and exercises.

Faith community volunteers are effective and eager to help because of their specific mission, their strong motivation to be responsive to whatever people need, and their closeness to and familiarity with the communities they serve (Homeland Security Institute 2006). However, despite their effectiveness, there is room for improvement.

Barriers to Engaging FBOs: Culturally Appropriate Training

The faith community needs not just training but training that is culturally appropriate. According to the Homeland Security Institute, one of the reasons that faith communities were effective in their response to Hurricane Katrina was that volunteers felt a "higher calling" to serve, which thus bridged many of the social and cultural gaps that prevent groups from working together. The term "higher calling" refers to a divine call to service and therefore has religious implications. Faith community volunteers working under a higher calling are usually affiliated with religious institutions and rely on their faith-based leaders to provide spiritual guidance and advisement and to set the tone for how they should respond to crises of all types. Consequently, emergency management training for leaders of FBOs is crucial.

Unfortunately, most of the training designed for faith-based leaders does not appeal to the divine call to service, even though this is the driving force behind their actions. Leaders of Christian-based organizations might find training more appealing if biblical principles for crisis management were applied along with principles of emergency management. Although agencies such as FEMA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the American Red Cross do their best to provide information and training for faith community leaders about all

phases of disaster planning and practice, theological principles for crisis management are seldom included.

This oversight can lower the quality of disaster-related services and lead to an underuse of one of the most valuable emergency management assets: the faith community. Karyn Trader-Leigh (2008) reports that after Hurricane Katrina, the government did not fully engage FBOs or their resources, which led to various gaps in service. Her study further notes that the government and nonprofit organizations failed to use clergymen and churches, especially African Americans, as key resources in responding to the needs of the people.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AND DESIGN

The Role of Pastors in Disasters (ROPID) curriculum development project began with a unique partnership between the School of Community Health and Policy (SCHP) at Morgan State University, an urban public university in Baltimore, Maryland, and Washington Bible College (WBC), a private faith-based college in Lanham, Maryland. To ensure that the curriculum development process included persons with biblical and public health research experiences, staff persons were hired with expertise in both areas. Shortly thereafter, an ad hoc advisory committee was formed consisting of persons representing WBC, SCHP, National Red Cross Headquarters, the National Center for Study of Preparedness and Catastrophic Event Response (PACER), and the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START).

Before meeting with the committee, the president of WBC and the director of SCHP's Why Culture Matters Disaster Research Project developed a joint project mission statement. WBC also developed a course outline with biblical principles for crisis management in mind. These items were sent to committee members for review and feedback. Then, using committee feedback and the joint project mission statement as a guide, staff and other contributors began to develop a culturally appropriate curriculum for faith-based leaders. Researchers also engaged other PACER investigators on this project. Where applicable, they used information from a PACER-sponsored online disaster awareness course for undergraduate students.

Guided by theological, public health, and emergency management principles, curriculum developers designed a six-module, fifteen-lesson course to train faith-based leaders to be agents of safety. In addition to developing seven theological themes related to disaster readiness and response, the course also incorporated principles of emergency management enunciated by the Emergency Management Roundtable (Blanchard 2009). A description of each module is contained in Table 1.

Table 1: Course Module Description

Modules/Number of Lessons	Description of Module
1. Biblical and Theological Foundations 3 Lessons	Ensures that the course is culturally appropriate for faith-based leaders by providing a theological foundation of disasters within the context of the Bible and challenges students to apply theological themes to church life activities
2. Introduction to Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery 2 Lessons	Defines common terms used in the field and provides students with an opportunity to share their perceptions about disasters. Discusses myths commonly associated with disasters and how they impact the faith community.
3. Types of Hazards, Impact, Disaster Response Systems 2 Lessons	Provides students with a brief overview of types of natural and human-caused hazards (e.g., hurricanes, accidental chemical spills, and terrorist attacks) and examines public and psychological response to these events.
4. Disaster Response Systems 1 Lesson	Provides an overview of local, state, and federal response systems with emphasis on how they function and interact with each other before, during, and after a disaster.
5. Faith-based Organizations' Role and Structure 2 Lessons	Introduces students to the role of faith-based organizations and their organizational structure, and helps students understand what makes faith-based leaders uniquely qualified to provide services before, during, and after a disaster occurs.
6. Faith-based Leaders' Call to Action 5 Lessons	This practice based module introduces a framework for developing comprehensive disaster planning strategies and gives students an opportunity to assess personal preparedness in their home, congregation, and community.

DISCUSSION

As this nation experiences an increase in the severity and frequency of natural disasters, a proliferation of health and economic consequences is inevitable. The combined decadal economic and insured losses from natural disasters have increased by a factor of nearly six since the 1980s (Committee on Private-Public Sector Collaboration to Enhance Community Disaster Resilience 2010).

Traditionally, the contributions of faith-based communities have been found most often in the areas of disaster response and recovery and, to a lesser degree, in preparedness. The ROPID curriculum that has been developed helps to ensure that the involvement of faith-based leaders in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery will not only continue but be done more effectively. It accomplishes this by addressing barriers to effective faith-based leaders. Module 4 provides an overview of local, state, and federal responsibilities, and Module 5 offers a thorough review of the role of faith-based communities throughout the disaster

cycle (Module 5). To ensure that faith-based leaders find their place at the table of preparedness, Module 6 introduces students to a framework for developing comprehensive disaster planning strategies and gives them assignments to review local plans, interview local emergency management and public health practitioners, and identify ways in which members of their FBOs can get involved.

By addressing the training assumptions noted by Canclini et al. (2009), this course is also designed to have a “higher calling” appeal, which is the primary reason why many volunteers from the faith-based community are drawn to provide disaster-related services. Integrated throughout the course are overt reminders that the reservoir of volunteers in the faith-based community and their eagerness to help are assets. By increasing students’ knowledge about disaster terminology and myths (Module 2), types of hazards and their impacts (Module 3), emergency management operational protocol (Module 4), and interfaith skills (Module 5), faith-based leaders can better inform volunteers about how to avoid duplication of resources and keep themselves and others out of harm’s way.

Another approach that is used to appeal to the higher calling of faith-based leaders and volunteers is to introduce them to key theological themes that support them as agents of safety for members of their religious groups and the surrounding communities (Module 1). Each theme is supported by scriptural references that challenge students to apply theological themes to church life activities (e.g., Bible school, Sunday school, worship service). Information provided in this module is critical to making this course culturally appropriate and addresses a need voiced by both scholars in the religious and research arena—that is, to move the religion *from theology to practice* and to move the research *from theory to practice*.

COURSE STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

Compared with other attempts to train faith-based leaders and communities to work more effectively with emergency management preparedness, response, and recovery efforts, the ROPID course is unique in three ways. First, it is the first emergency management course designed by a traditional higher education institution (Morgan State University) in partnership with a Bible college (WBC). Second, in an attempt to improve practice, the course merges theological principles of crisis management with theoretical principles of emergency management. Third, it introduces students to community resilience concepts that emphasize the need for collaborative partnerships that include the full fabric of the community.

The ROPID curriculum is limited in that the key theological themes that support faith-based leaders as agents of safety are designed specifically for Christian religions. Although it discusses challenges and opportunities for interfaith work, it does not identify religious principles that could explain how non-Christian groups are mobilized to respond to crisis. Having theological principles aligned to

specific types of religious groups and integrating these principles throughout the curriculum is what makes the course both culturally appropriate and appealing. Consequently, the course loses some of its appeal for non-Christian groups that use other theological principles to support their role in helping others in crisis situations. Lastly, although the course solicited feedback from faith-based leaders throughout its development and completion, a thorough evaluation of the course and a plan to make the course more accessible to faith-based leaders are needed.

CONCLUSION

The ROPID course has the potential to enhance how faith-based leaders become more effective as agents of safety throughout all cycles of disaster (preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery). With the number and severity of disasters on the rise, the important role of faith-based leaders in motivating their members to get involved cannot be overstated (Homeland Security Institute 2006; McCabe et al. 2008; Townsend 2009). Furthermore, private and public sector collaboration that engages faith-based leaders in local, state, and federal planning activities is essential if communities are to become disaster resilient.

For centuries, society has benefited from volunteers who at times risk their lives to fulfill the higher-calling allure to provide spiritual care during a crisis. In reality, those motivated to serve because of this higher calling will provide these services during emergencies regardless of their levels of expertise in emergency management. Therefore, it would behoove emergency management educators and administrators to identify more strategies to educate and train faith-based leaders and volunteers to become more efficient at what they will inevitably do: “fill the gaps when the geographic scales, intensities, and durations of [disasters such as] Hurricanes Katrina and Rita [overwhelm] the existing disaster response resources” (Homeland Security Institute, 2006, 1).

REFERENCES

- Association for Biblical Higher Education. About ABHE. Accessed June 12, 2011. <http://www.abhe.org/aboutus>.
- Blanchard, B. Wayne. January 26, 2009. *FEMA Emergency Management Higher Education Program Description: Background, Mission, Current Status, and Future Planning*. Emergency Management Institute National Preparedness Directorate, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Department of Homeland Security. <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/edu/brochure.asp>.

- Cain, Daphne S., and Juan Barthelemy. 2008. "Tangible and Spiritual Relief after the Storm: The Religious Communities Response to Katrina." *Journal of Social Service Research* 34 (3): 29–42.
- Canclini, Sharon, Judy Shannon, and Kay Dillard. January 2009. "A Model for Engaging the Faith Community in Advance Preparation for Disaster." *Journal for Homeland Security*. <http://www.homelandsecurity.org/journal/Default.aspx?t=320&AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>.
- Committee on Private-Public Sector Collaboration to Enhance Community Disaster Resilience. 2011. *Building Community Disaster Resilience through Private-Public Collaboration*. Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press.
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). 2010a. Declared Disasters by Year or State. http://www.fema.gov/news/disaster_totals_annual.fema.
- FEMA. 2010b. Emergency Management Institute Higher Education Program. <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/edu/>.
- FEMA. 2011. IS-288: The Role of Voluntary Agencies in Emergency Management. <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/is/is288.asp>.
- Ferris, Elizabeth. June 2005. Faith-based and Secular Humanitarian Organizations." *International Review of the Red Cross* 87 (858). http://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/irrc_858_ferris.pdf.
- Homeland Security Institute. December 18, 2006. *Heralding Unheard Voices: The Role of Faith-Based Organizations and Nongovernmental Organizations during Disasters*. HSI Publication Number: RP006-44-01. Arlington, Va. http://www.homelandsecurity.org/hsireports/Herald_Unheard_Voices.pdf.
- Koenig, Harold G. 2006. *In the Wake of Disaster: Religious Responses to Terrorism and Catastrophe*. Philadelphia, Pa.: Templeton Foundation Press.
- McCabe, O. Lee, Adrian M. Mosley, Howard S. Gwon, George S. Everly, Jeffrey M. Lating, Jonathan M. Links, and Michael J. Kaminsky. 2008. "The Tower of Ivory Meets the House of Worship: Psychological First Aid Training for the Faith Community." *International Journal of Emergency Mental Health* 9 (3): 171–180.

- National Volunteers Active in Disaster. 2010. <http://www.nvoad.org/>.
- Rubin, Claire B. 2007. *Emergency Management: The American Experience, 1900–2005*. Fairfax, Va.: Public Entity Risk Institute.
- Sutton, Jeannette. 2003. *A Complex Organizational Adaptation to the World Trade Center Disaster: An Analysis of Faith-based Organizations*. University of Colorado–Boulder. http://www.colorado.edu/hazards/publications/sp/sp39/sept11book_ch16_sutton.pdf.
- Townsend, Frances F. February 2006. *The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned*. Washington, D.C.: The White House. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/02/20060223.html>.
- Trader-Leigh, Karyn. 2008. *Understanding the Role of African American Churches and Clergy in Community Crisis Response*. Washington, D.C.: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies Health Policy Institute.