

MODEL PLAN
for
DISASTER PREPARATION AND RESPONSE
for the
CHURCHES OF

I. OVERVIEW

In the event of a natural or other disaster, proper planning and preparation can reduce the ultimate damage from the event, keep the church ministry functioning on an interim basis, inform the membership during an evacuation period and enhance the recovery efforts upon return to the church campus. It should be realized by all that no plan can anticipate all of the issues that might occur as a result of a large-scale disaster. This plan provides guidance for:

- κ the preparation of the church, church ancillary buildings, and grounds,
- κ the orderly shut down of church operations,
- κ the safekeeping of church records,
- κ a format for interim operations and, most importantly,
- κ a clear communication process for the church leadership during an emergency.

It should also be recognized that there are many disaster events possible where there will be no warning of the event. In these cases the efforts towards planning, training of personnel, and an open communication process to the members of the church are of paramount importance.

The following plan identifies actions that need to be taken before and after a disaster event and assigns responsibility for those actions to key members of the staff or church leadership.

PRE-EVENT ACTIONS

Physical preparation
Record duplication and safekeeping
Communications
Closedown procedures

INTERIM ACTIONS

Selection and operation of a possible remote site
Staff policies
Communications

Operating needs
Management and structure control
Contact information and procedures

POST-EVENT ACTIONS

Clean-up process
Authorization to act
Management structure and control
Insurance

II. PRE-EVENT ACTIONS

Pre-event actions for disaster response planning center on the objectives to provide for the safety of the church staff, to function as a service organization for an interim time during possible evacuation, to assist members in the formation of family preparation plans, and to resume the ministries of the church immediately following the disaster event. In order to meet these objectives, the church session should establish the following policies and action checklist.

CONGREGATION DISASTER RESPONSE COORDINATOR (CDRC)

The session should select a member to serve as the Congregation Disaster Response Coordinator (CDRC). It should be the responsibility of the CDRC to coordinate the preparation of initial plans, coordinate with the session, coordinate with the Presbytery Regional Disaster Response Coordinator (PRDRC), assist with communications during interim operations, and assist the pastor and session with recovery efforts.

CLOSING OF OPERATIONS AND RELEASE OF STAFF

The safety and well being of church staff is very important and accordingly, the day-to-day operations of the church office will close upon notice by government agency of a voluntary evacuation order. The staff upon completing an orderly shutdown of their respective work areas will be allowed to leave at this time. A recorded message to inform the congregation of the church closing shall be left on the telephone system by the church receptionist and a group e-mail will be forwarded to the session and to all church members. The telephone message should include the time and date of the church closing, reference to the church web site, and address or telephone number for interim communications during and immediately following the disaster event.

PREPARATION OF CHURCH SANTUARY, ANCILLARY BUILDINGS, AND GROUNDS

The sanctuary, ancillary buildings, and church grounds shall be secured by the property manager (sexton or elder in-charge of property) at the time of temporary ceasing of operation. Security operations should include:

- κ Removal of any loose exterior items
- κ Shut-off of any natural gas or propane gas service
- κ Shut-off of water service to main and ancillary buildings
- κ Lock exterior doors (dead bolt if available)
- κ Disconnect electrical power from all appliances and computers
- κ Move computers to storage closet or other enclosed space
- κ Cover any organ or piano with tarps

PRÉSERVATION OF RECORDS AND DOCUMENTS

The operating records of the church should be backed up at least weekly and a copy of these records, as well as historical records, should be held in the possession of the church treasurer at a remote location from the church. The safekeeping and planning for the removal of these records and checking account book should be the responsibility of the treasurer.

The property records, building documents and all property insurance policies of the church should be collected and held in the possession of the church property manager (elder in charge of property). A copy of all of these records should also be kept at a remote site.

The membership records of the church should be backed up weekly. The chair of the membership committee (elder in charge of membership) should retain a copy of all membership documents.

The clerk of session should retain and be responsible for the safeguarding of the session minutes book and any legal documents.

The chair of the personnel committee (elder in charge of personnel) should be responsible for the collection and safeguarding of all personnel records.

COMMUNICATION WITH THE CONGREGATION

The congregation should be informed regarding the planned actions of the church prior to any disaster event. Planning sessions with the entire congregation should be conducted to inform the congregation of procedures that will be implemented by the church prior to a disaster event.

Upon the closing of church operations, all telephone calls should be routed to a temporary answering service. An interim web site with pertinent shutdown

information should be activated. The initiation of the answering service and the interim web site should be the responsibility of the receptionist. Access and response to telephone messages should be the responsibility of the pastor. It is recommended that a communication chairperson take responsibility to plan and implement these procedures and that the CDRC be kept fully informed of all communications.

The CDRC should communicate directly and inform the PRDRC regarding any planned disaster response actions of the church.

DEVELOP THE EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST

The CDRC should develop an emergency contact list with listing of key personnel and agencies. At a minimum this list should contain the emergency contact telephone numbers for the following:

- κ Pastor
- κ Session members
- κ Staff personnel
- κ Congregation Disaster Response Coordinator
- κ Presbytery Regional Disaster Response Coordinator
- κ Presbytery Disaster Response Coordinator
- κ County Emergency Response Coordinator
- κ Local American Red Cross
- κ FEMA
- κ Insurance carrier
- κ Local electrical power / gas provider
- κ Local water provider
- κ Bank
- κ Police Department
- κ Fire Department
- κ Emergency Medical Service Provider

PREPARATION OF A FAMILY ACTION PLAN

Each church should develop an emergency training program to educate members and families concerning preparations that they should make before a disaster event and those actions to take during and following such an event. The following is a listing of essential tasks that should be included in the formation of a family action plan:

- κ Conduct training sessions for members and families,
- κ Prepare personal contact lists,

- κ Prepare family disaster preparedness checklists,
- κ Develop a family checking family network with a reporting procedure.
- κ Inform members about the church's overall plan,
- κ Educate families on the importance of preparing a portable emergency supplies kit to include
 - ◆ water
 - ◆ food
 - ◆ battery powered radio
 - ◆ NOAA weather radio
 - ◆ extra batteries
 - ◆ flashlight
 - ◆ first aid kit
 - ◆ whistle
 - ◆ dust masks
 - ◆ moist toweletts
 - ◆ wrench or pliers
 - ◆ can opener
 - ◆ plastic sheeting
 - ◆ duct tape
 - ◆ unique family needs such as prescription medications
 - ◆ garbage bags with plastic ties
 - ◆ important family documents in waterproof container

III. INTERIM ACTIONS

Following the closing of operations of the church in anticipation of a disaster event (storm) the church session should prepare policies and a plan that provides for the interim operation of the church in a remote location and the ongoing management structure for church activity. The need address the broad range of possible damage scenarios and the uncertainty of a recovery schedule makes flexibility and communications a key factor in this portion of the disaster response plan.

INTERIM SITE LOCATION

It is recommended that each church establish a remote site location for the operation of the church during a disaster event. It is important that this site is established prior to any disaster and that its location and communication means be made known to all members.

SESSION MEETINGS

The Session should establish procedures to conduct a meeting, conduct a teleconference meeting, or conduct a web-site e-mail meeting at regular intervals. The moderator should be responsible for setting the procedures for these various types of meetings and should communicate this information in advance to the Session.

MANAGEMENT CONTROL

The management of the church resources should be administered at the direction of the Session through the treasurer. The treasurer should have pre-authorization from the Session to provide for the regular banking and personnel services as required to meet interim needs. This authorization should include single check signing authority on drafts up to a designated amount (to be determined by the Session). The treasurer should also be provided with authority for the assignment of normal personnel benefit administration.

COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE CONGREGATION

The pastor should direct communications with the members of the congregation. The communications plan should include e-mail accessibility, the church web site, and telephone answering service.

Updated status reports should be provided on the web site.

AUTHORIZATION OF EMERGENCY ACTIONS

The chairperson the property and grounds committee should be given written authority to represent the church to both government and insurance entities. This authorization should provide the ability to make decisions impacting church facilities that are of an emergency nature and that require immediate attention. It should be understood that the chairperson of the property and grounds committee should be in communication with the session of the church at the earliest possible time to provide notification of such decisions and to seek authorization of non-emergency actions.

STAFF POLICIES

The session should establish policies for the payment of staff for normal wages and benefits during the interim time in the event of a disaster

IV. POST-EVENT ACTIONS

RECOVERY

The range of recovery actions in response to a disaster event may range from relatively minor clean up to total destruction of facilities to loss of life. It is important, therefore, to train staff and church members regarding possible steps towards recovery.

Recovery may take many avenues. All of these avenues should be considered important. Spiritual and psychological recovery should be considered along with recovery of physical facilities. Planning teams should, therefore, be organized and trained ahead of time to implement recovery efforts.

EMERGENCY REPAIRS

Prompt temporary repair to facilities is important in that it may mitigate long-term damage. The boarding up of broken windows, tarp over of damaged roof areas, and similar actions that prevent further damage is essential first step in recovery.

Pre-event purchase of repair supplies and tools should be encouraged. These supplies and tools should be stored in a secure area.

The chairperson for buildings and grounds should be given responsibility to make an initial evaluation of damages. Authorization should be put in place to allow the chairperson to make emergency purchases, to contract for emergency repairs, and to make initial contact with insurance providers. Planning should be implemented to establish alternative responders with authority to act in the event that the chairperson for buildings and grounds is not available.

Consideration should be given towards obtaining pre-event contact with a licensed general contractor such that the contractor will be available to perform emergency contractual repairs to church facilities.

INSURANCE NOTIFICATION AND CLAIMS

The chairperson for buildings and grounds should do the notification of a damage claim to the insurance carrier. This chairperson should be authorized and designated as the official contact with insurance carriers prior to a disaster event. The clerk of session should be designated as the second

tier designee authorized to act for the church in claim notification and claim settlement with the insurance carrier.

- CLEAN UP

Clean up operations may range from the very simple to very complicated, from pick-up of downed tree limbs to replacement of entire buildings. The chairperson for buildings and grounds should be empowered to make an initial evaluation of the scope of damage and make a preliminary assessment and recommendation to the session regarding steps for clean-up, repairs, or replacement.