



A Disaster Planning Manual for Faith Communities – Six Steps for Readiness (2021)

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Originally submitted to the Florida Conference of the UCC, adapted for the DPRMT (Disaster Preparedness and Response Ministry Team) of the Indiana/Kentucky Conference of the UCC, and able to help any faith community anywhere to prepare.

Purpose of the Six Step Guide

My hope is that you will find this as an easy-to-use resource to assist us as faith leaders (both clergy and laity), individual congregations, mosques, synagogues, and broader faith officials at-large to get prepared for disaster. Disaster readiness is very important - no matter where we live. Hindsight tells us that proper planning and preparation would have been helpful in past events to both reduce loss and save lives.

The goals of this guide are to:

- (1) Reduce human suffering,
- (2) Adequately protect the property of faith communities, and
- (3) Promote outreach efforts to assist our neighbors affected by disasters.

This guide has been developed to empower people of faith to more effectively meet the spiritual, emotional and human needs of their community should disaster strike. Being prepared can greatly lessen the traumatic effects experienced both during and after a disaster. **Most importantly, proper planning can save lives.**

This resource does not seek to replace, duplicate, or eliminate the need for and the value of the efforts of the American Red Cross or any government or NGO/private agency active in emergency assistance. Faith communities must work collaboratively with these agencies when preparing for a disaster and in bringing assistance to survivors. Prudence dictates that it is our responsibility and duty to plan. It is not a matter of *if* disaster strikes, but *when* it will strike. Finally, information is critical but most important are relationships and building trust among all of God's children and diverse groups, cultures and communities.

Some Initial Questions to Answer:

1. Do you have adequate insurance for all your facilities, and do you know how to contact your insurance carrier?
2. Where will you evacuate and worship or gather if your facilities are damaged or destroyed?
3. How well prepared is your faith community (and your neighbors) for the next disaster?

These six steps will primarily address the third question. An insurance audit and a plan for evacuation and use of an alternative site for gatherings will address the first two questions.

The Six Steps

1. Understanding
2. Organizing Your Faith Community
3. Protecting the People
4. Preserving the Property
5. Preparing for An Event
6. Educating and Updating

Step One - Understanding

Introduction

Disasters may be natural or human-made in origin. A Working Definition of a “All-Hazard” Disaster is as follows:

“An all-hazard disaster includes all types of natural acts such as earthquakes, forest fires, floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, environmental spills/hazards and terrorist events such as biological, chemical, radiological, and nuclear attacks. A disaster is a sometimes unforeseen and often sudden event that causes great damage, destruction, human suffering and possibly loss of life which requires assistance to aid victims and survivors.”

A disaster is characterized by its

- Direct effects on the physical environment.
- Financial impact.
- Type(s) of response(s) necessary.

Disasters occur on different levels which can be illustrated with the following examples:

- Family Emergency Home fires or car accidents
- Local Disaster Floods/storms, eruptions/earthquakes, spills, or terrorist events
- State Disaster Flooding, Wildfires, environmental events
- National/International Disaster Refugees and Pandemics

This *Six Steps for Readiness* manual will focus primarily on the education, preparedness and response of faith communities to disasters on a local level both within their communities of faith and in the communities surrounding them.

The Role of the Faith Community in Disasters

The role of the faith communities, by their very nature and purpose, is not to simply take care of itself. The goal is to help others as well. Locally, cooperation and collaboration are critical to the development and implementation of any disaster response plan. The ability of individual faith communities to communicate quickly with key faith-based and secular/public agency personnel, continue or resume regular religious services and activities, and begin relief activity as soon as possible is vitally important to the well-being of the entire community.

As a faith community becomes committed to preparing, along with following this plan, I highly suggest members seek training from the local Red Cross and other agencies which provide specific and up-to-date methods of instruction to help equip you. There will be information on how to get training in the section “*How You Can Help.*”

At times of disaster, the world-wide faith community is usually there to help as well. For those in the United Church of Christ, the UCC Disaster Ministries is an invaluable tool to assist with communications and coordination (see Addendum). Other denominations and faiths may have similar agencies and offices. You need to get familiar with these resources. **A key component is that staff and volunteers have a brief understanding of the role and protocols of local, state, and federal officials and first responders.**

Sequence of Actions in a Disaster:

Who is Involved? Who is Responsible? Who is in Charge?

The faith community needs to understand that in the event of a local disaster, the primary responsibility for public safety rests with civil authorities. This includes public safety and welfare essentials such as electricity, police protection and emergency communication. These civil authorities, guided by the State, have in turn established a comprehensive emergency management system with many different public and private sector agency partners - all of which contribute their part in making the system work effectively and efficiently. Let’s look at it on a state level:

State Emergency Management

To be an effective disaster response player is to understand the emergency management system in your state. **Generally true in most states, at the time of disaster, the Governor issues a proclamation establishing a state of emergency.** Concomitant with this, the Director of the Division of Emergency Management becomes the state Emergency Operations officer and will take on the responsibility to lead and direct state efforts in disaster response for the declared emergency. Coordination of *state* assistance usually takes place at the State Emergency Operations Center. The state then normally has teams that work in disasters – perhaps known as the State Emergency Response Team, SERT for short. These teams and other groups operate under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) from the Governor that coordinates voluntary agency involvement in the disaster response system, particularly for *Emergency Support Function (ESF) 15* – for “*Volunteers and Donations.*” All these efforts at the state level are undertaken to support local disaster relief activities. That is where the real response to disasters happens and the level at which the effectiveness of disaster response is most critical.

Each county usually has an Emergency Coordinator and Team as well. These teams oversee local events. All *outside* agencies, state or federal, stand in a support and assistance relationship to this local lead Team or Organization such as a COAD (Community Organizations Active in Disaster). This creates an unambiguous clear-cut authority structure that is vital in disaster response and recovery situations. *There is a reference to the COAD in St. Charles County, Missouri and their website in the Addendum, which contains many good resources and explanations.*

Each community of faith should acquaint itself with the local county emergency management offices. Also, most states have a Division of Emergency Management comprehensive website with a wealth of information on family disaster planning and other disaster preparedness information.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) comes into a community only when the President of the United States declares the geographic area a “**Federally Declared Disaster**” and when requested by state and local authorities. FEMA coordinates its efforts with local voluntary agencies active in disasters and can provide financial assistance through three programs, Individual Assistance, Public Assistance and Mitigation Programs.

For information on individual assistance, I refer the reader to the following site:

<https://www.fema.gov/assistance/individual>

The Public Assistance Program, which includes support to Houses of Worship that may not have insurance eligibility, is determined by registration with FEMA and SBA (Small Business Administration – who may provide low interest loans to individuals and households if eligible.

I refer the reader to the excellent site from FEMA with downloadable brochures (Including one for Houses of Worship):

<https://www.fema.gov/assistance/public/policy-guidance-fact-sheets#pappg>

A very important concept and system to understand is the “**Sequence of Delivery**” that FEMA follows **IF** a Federal Disaster has been declared. Picture the following as a sequential flowchart of who helps when:

1. Voluntary Agencies and NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations such as the Red Cross) provide Emergency Food, Shelter, Clothing, Medical Needs, etc.
2. Insurance such as Homeowners, National Flood Insurance Program, etc.
3. FEMA IHP (Individuals and Households Program) is available and applicants can receive more than one type of assistance:
 - Temporary Housing Assistance – applicants can receive financial assistance to reimburse lodging expenses and/or rental assistance for up to 18 months or the program maximum, whichever occurs first.
 - Applicants can receive direct assistance (FEMA mobile home or travel trailer) for up to 18 months. Repair Assistance – owners can receive up to the IHP cap for repairs.
 - Replace Assistance – owners with destroyed homes can receive up to the IHP cap towards the purchase of a new home.
 - Permanent or Semi-Permanent Construction – owners with destroyed homes can receive direct assistance or financial assistance for the construction of permanent or semi-permanent homes in insular areas outside the continental U.S. and in other locations.

Note: Eligibility is based on a FEMA inspection conducted on the damaged property. Maximum amount of Individuals and Households Assistance (IHP) is adjusted annually according to the CPI index.

4. There is also FEMA’s ONA (Other Needs Assistance) that persons may qualify for to help with medical, dental, funeral, transportation, and other costs.

The reader needs to consult more about the specific requirements and limits of all IHP assistance by clicking on the links found at:

<https://www.fema.gov/assistance/individual/program>

Each declared disaster is known in emergency management language as an “incident” and the local person in-charge is the incident commander. All disaster response efforts, including the assistance from state and federal sources, take their orders in a jurisdiction (i.e., county) from the local incident commander. Once again, training is recommended and required for involvement with the structure such as the Incident Command System through IS100.c, IS200.c and National Incident Management System through IS700.b.

Special Note: Again, it is important to remember that there is a difference between the phases of early “response work” and later “recovery work”. Your faith community needs to realize that the initial disaster and response may be very short-term, but the long-term recovery process could take months or even years. Please consider what your faith community can do in both phases understanding that the greatest needs may be in the recovery phase. It is therefore very important that you get familiar with your local LTRG (Long Term Recovery Group) and see real needs, identify how you can help, and make sure you are not duplicating services. All efforts must be in conjunction with the above-mentioned authorities. For more information, see the “*How You Can Help*” section below.

Step Two - Organizing

Setting up an Organizing Team

In order to do a local faith community-level disaster planning and preparation, each community should have a Disaster Planning Team. Each faith leader may approach this step differently depending on the size and makeup of his or her community. Some may appoint only a disaster coordinator, relying on this coordinator to identify and appoint the other committee members, while others may appoint several key persons to the Team, allowing the Team to choose a coordinator. The organization may create an entirely new group composed of members having disaster response planning experience. Or, they may choose to use an existing group such as a Building and Grounds Committee, Property Committee, Trustees, Social Ministry, or Community Outreach to do this work. **It is important to note that this initial effort is short-term in focus and duration in order to get started.**

Some faith communities have historically participated in disaster relief activities such as cleaning out homes after floods, cooking food for disaster survivors, or collecting and distributing donated goods. Therefore, a good place to begin the process is to recognize which activities are already taking place, assess their vitality and impact, and include them in the planning. Although a large group may want to participate, larger groups tend to lose focus. Keep the beginning Team to approximately 6-10 persons. Later, including more members to carry out specific tasks may be necessary. The roles of members and the basic goals of the Team will need to be chosen. This should be documented and recorded and become part of the Disaster Planning Team records. While various roles may be assigned later, at a minimum, the Team should include a Volunteer Coordinator at this time.

The Importance of a Volunteer Coordinator

The key position of Volunteer Coordinator should be appointed early in the process. Members’ hidden talents and gifts are a goldmine of potential for aiding the community after a disaster. Your community may have doctors, nurses, crisis counselors, childcare workers, skilled contractors, vets and pet boarders, boat owners, etc. All these areas of expertise can be utilized after a disaster. Likewise, there are many people that may not have specialized skills but are more than willing to take on less specialized tasks. All volunteer help is essential and welcome.

The role of the Volunteer Coordinator is also crucial for collaboration with neighboring organizations. A small disaster that may affect either one or more places of faith will be better addressed when they join forces to help the community recover. The Volunteer Coordinator also can be responsible for setting up activities such as canvassing neighborhoods and the community for vulnerable members or assembling care kits to give to families who have lost everything. Appointing a person and determining the scope of this position prior to a disaster is a critical step. Without a Volunteer Coordinator, it will be difficult to coordinate an effort to help others.

Scope of Your Community's Involvement

Disasters tend to ignore geographical boundaries. That reality brings up questions that the Organizing Team should discuss. That discussion should also be shared with your faith leaders and officials at large:

- Will the community and volunteers respond to other areas outside of the geographical boundaries of their community?
- Are you willing to partner with or work in collaboration with people of other faiths and groups in its ministry for mutual disaster support?

The Team should meet several times to get organized and address (and hopefully accomplish these Six Steps). Obviously periodic or annual checks thereafter upon your plans and goals are necessary to reassess and make needed revisions or changes.

Disseminating and Documenting Information

What's most important is that you keep records of the disaster planning process and its work. Keep good records of the Team's activities. Regardless of the breadth and scope of the Team's work, the faith community and broader civic authorities must be informed of the disaster planning results. This means documenting the work of the Team and disseminating all information gathered, and lingering questions and concerns. It is especially critical to keep a concise record of activities during and after a disaster so that future disaster relief efforts don't need to be organized from scratch.

Step Three - Protecting the People

While having disaster supplies is important, your most important asset is your people. This step will help guide you in putting into place plans and safeguards for making sure they're protected.

Staff - Establish pre-disaster communications system and plan

Whether your faith community is small or large, your leadership (whether clergy or laity) is central to a successful disaster planning effort. They are an integral part of understanding and implementing your Plan.

Member Contact List

Most importantly, create a Contact List, Phone Directory, or Phone Chain/Tree. This should contain the current contact numbers and email addresses for everyone on the staff and membership as well. The contacts should include office, home and cell phone numbers. The Emergency Contact List needs to be made available to all the appropriate personnel that will be involved in an emergency response. This list should be updated or checked annually to make sure that all phone numbers are still current. These lists will be a critical means for post-disaster communications.

Some organizations now participate in a One-Call service wherein they can leave a message to be disbursed to members within a few minutes. Social media (Facebook and Tweeter for example) are also providing reliable resources for communication when a disaster happens. As a matter of fact, Facebook has created a brochure for how to use their medium to help in times of disaster. Once on Facebook and logged in, simply search for "Disaster Response on Facebook" and you will find helpful posts, resources, files, and documents to download or print on the subject:

<https://www.facebook.com/disaster/>

Faith Community Volunteer Base

Volunteers are a key component during disaster preparedness and relief activities. And volunteers remain an important and critical element in the long-term recovery. Many civic and communal organizations send trained volunteers to assist locals in the clean-up and rebuilding. Volunteer response to disasters within the past decades, especially by faith-based groups, has also had an enormous impact and been vitally important. Volunteers can assist in clean up after a disaster, check on elderly members and friends who may need assistance, or manage an emergency center at the neighborhood level. A good way to get a start on this is to create a Volunteer Talent Bank. The Volunteer Coordinator of a local faith community's Disaster Planning Team can use the Volunteer Talent Bank to determine which members may help before, during, and after times of disaster.

While surveying, you should remind members that completing the survey form does not commit them to respond to every disaster. The Volunteer Talent Bank should be updated at least annually. Other questions you may want to ask include:

- How often will you update this information?
- What sub-categories of talents should you use?
- Should the church create and maintain a database to store the volunteer information?

As our nation and world have changed, so have our faith communities. Recognizing this, make sure that you have provided for bi-lingual capabilities if needed; or, you may even choose to form specific bi-lingual volunteer teams. Your Bank could well be greater than just those who are members and should again be available to help those in other faith communities in your local neighborhood and beyond. See more specific suggestions in "*How You Can Help*."

Identify the types of efforts your faith community will support. Some general questions to ask:

- How will you mobilize the pool of volunteers?
- Who is designated as the Volunteer coordinator?
- Are you coordinating with your broader faith leaders and local agencies with your plans?
- How will you recruit and screen volunteers following the disaster?

Vulnerable Persons and Neighborhoods Inventory

The next and last step in profiling and protecting is to identify those who are most vulnerable – both among your members and neighbors in the community. We can be too quick to forget the human in humanitarian. The fact of the matter is that some persons have no one except their faith community to turn to in times of disaster or may be isolated and alone in the neighborhood. For example, there may be an elderly widow with no close relatives nearby and whose public life revolves around your community's activities. Before a disaster strikes, you need to determine who these vulnerable people are so they can establish outreach programs targeted towards helping them. These vulnerable members and neighbors include shut-ins, the elderly, and the excluded or overlooked who are unable to drive or otherwise have limited mobility, and may have with special needs, such as those that need specialized medical equipment (e.g., oxygen tanks), etc. These members should be identified before disaster strikes. These people are particularly vulnerable during times of disaster when electrical service can fail for an extended period.

Also, in consultation and coordination with secular authorities, you can identify neighborhoods that are high risk by utilizing information obtained from social service programs in the community. Are there neighborhoods that routinely flood? What about persons who do not speak English? Make sure these people are identified. Once the inventory is complete, the Disaster Team, in consultation with your leader(s), need to decide what steps and actions the faith community could undertake if a potential disaster may be approaching.

Likewise, many counties maintain a list or registry of special needs citizens and households along with evacuation plans to special needs shelters. You should contact the local emergency management offices or the local Red Cross and find out what your community provides.

You can work to help make sure that your neighbors are aware of what is available in the community. However, research has shown that many elderly - for a variety of reasons - do not make use of community-based support. They tend to be more comfortable with people and with settings with which they are more familiar. This could make a faith-based vulnerable person outreach effort even more valuable and important.

Another important group, too often forgotten or overlooked are children – the silent witnesses and victims of disasters. There are preparation resources for school-aged children – whether in-school or on break. In 2020, FEMA provided some great tools with their STEP (Student Tools for Emergency Preparedness) program to help:

file:///C:/Users/Bill/Documents/Disaster%20Resources/STEP+Overview_2020.pdf

All other materials on STEP and related resources can be found at:

<https://community.fema.gov/PreparednessCommunity/s/step-material-download-request>

All materials for information, planning and preparation for all ages and many emergency situations can be ordered free of charge at US Government Publishing Office found at: <https://orders.gpo.gov/icpd/ICPD>

Step Four - Preserving the Property

Now that you've put together a profile of your people and community, the next step is to inventory your property. You need to know what you have that needs to be preserved. This step will take you through the process of profiling and preserving your faith community's property and records with these elements in mind:

- Analyze the Facilities - layout and configurations.
- Compile inventory and assessment of property, buildings, and physical contents;
- Document activities hosted.
- Conduct a hazards analysis of your facility and surrounding community setting

The following discussion will take you through each of these four elements to profile your situation and needs.

Analyze the Facilities

Begin by locating blueprints or drawings of the facilities. These drawings will show the boundaries of the property and the layout of all the buildings including internal rooms and corridors. If you have difficulty locating these documents, you can create a crude layout for planning purposes. Mark and number all rooms and building exits using the blueprint or layout. Then move from room to room, taking an inventory of all equipment, furniture, and data, and noting emergency-related items (i.e. exits, smoke detectors, windows, etc.).

Some questions and considerations to guide your analysis of your facilities include:

- Examine the exits and exit routes. Are all the exits marked on the drawings? If not, mark them.
- Are the room locations exactly as marked?
- Have there been any modifications to the facility that are not reflected on the plans?
- Has landscaping changed any of the exits to the buildings?
- Are there any new playing fields that do not appear on the drawings?
- Note the doors on the drawings. Are any of the doors kept locked during the day?
- Is the sprinkler system connected to the main water supply?
- How will shutting down the water system impact the sprinklers?
- Is the fire alarm system local only? Is it connected to the fire department or alarm company?
- Is there an independent power source for the alarm system?
- Is there an independent power source? Do you have a back-up generator(s) system?
- How will shutting down the central power impact communications? Determine and plan for alternative forms of communicating.

Compile Inventory of all property, buildings and contents

Property and Equipment

While examining the facility, you also need to document all physical contents. This inventory will prove to be invaluable if you experience any loss or damage. The documentation should be written, videotaped, or photographed. The inventory should be created in at least two different media (e.g., written and video). Move room by room and list all appliances, equipment, and furniture. List all equipment including computers, printers, telephones, fax machines, answering machines, lawn equipment, kitchen equipment, activity equipment, as well as blankets, batteries, flashlights, or other disaster-related materials. Include all furniture from the offices, classrooms, storage, fellowship rooms, and sanctuary. In other words, you need a comprehensive inventory of what you have.

Records and Archival Materials

One the most important possessions of your local community of faith are the legal documents and membership records in addition to other valuable archival material documenting history and events. These records are irreplaceable. What is most important is that you identify the location of these records and include them in your inventory. Special procedures should be taken to protect these records and documents at the time of a disaster.

Special Considerations for Computer Systems and Software

Most business is typically conducted on computers. Because of the integral importance of computers, the information they store and the tasks they perform, you need to protect these resources in the event of a disaster. This section explains the major steps that should be taken to prepare for disruptions and speed up the recovery process.

Inventory Hardware

Create a document that lists every piece of computer hardware your organization owns and would need to replace if damaged or destroyed. Include the make, and model as well as the serial number. Also document all printers and other peripherals (scanner, zip drives, USB drives, etc.). Another form of documentation would be to keep a book containing all the purchase receipts with details of the hardware. Also document all other technology equipment, i.e., phones, faxes, cell phones, etc.

Other important computer-related items to cover:

- Maintain a list of vendors and contact information. For example, “Do you use a company for web hosting? What company provides email service?”
- Document all passwords needed to access files and store offsite.
- Phones: know how to program phones to forward to another number, change voice mail messages, retrieve voice mail, and any other necessary features.
- Be able to update your website from outside your office.
- Ensure that all employees should know how to access their email from alternative sites.

Protecting Computer Data

Whether your office has one computer or hundreds, once data is lost, it's almost always lost forever. There will never be a full recovery without data.

Analyze your data backup routine.

Create backups, verify the data, and take it off-site. This can be as simple as having someone regularly taking the backup home.

Do a backup, test for validity, and restore.

If you're going to bother doing backups, you need to test to ensure that you can restore the data. Decide how frequently you will test the backup-up system. Some recommend testing restoration every six months, by bringing the entire system down and then restoring it to see that everything is working properly. Be sure that your backups include all important and pertinent files.

Determine what kind of archival system(s) of the backup media you will maintain.

For example, one disk or jump drive used repeatedly will not provide an archive. You may need to establish a rotation system to get to, at a minimum, one-month old data. Always keep a copy off-site, as a theft of the only existing backup won't help with data restoration.

Other Data Options

Make your databases, if possible, web-based. For example, use an ASP (application service provider) or house your database online, so that nothing is stored in-house. If that is not possible, then:

- Store essential data on portable computers. However, this raises other security concerns such as theft, damage, or lost computers. It also raises issues of security of documents and data that you don't want others to access. The laptops will still require some form of backup.
- Purchase an external, easily portable way to backup data and take offsite, for example use cloud storage, an iPod or a USB external hard drive.
- Secure an off-site location for storage of hard copies and records in safes and safety deposit boxes.

Address power and server issues

A UPS (uninterrupted power supply, also known as a battery backup system) will supply a limited amount of power in the event of an electrical outage. Ideally, server power switches and routers have power backups so that in the event of power loss, you can shut down your network without causing damage to the server and other equipment.

Set up a free email account (e.g. Hotmail, Yahoo, Gmail, etc.) for emergency use. This sets up an account on a remote server that will remain in operation and be accessible regardless of what is happening locally. Document this and share this email address with key personnel.

Document Activity

Protecting people and property are important. Of almost equal importance is a full understanding of the activities that take place at your place of worship and service. In order to do this, create a master schedule of activities keyed to specific rooms, buildings, or areas in order to have a better understanding of all the activities occurring at the facilities. After creating this master schedule of activities, check it regularly (e.g., monthly, semi-annually, annually), updating as needed. You should also be aware of any special information about the group(s) that use the facility for each activity. For example, you should know the age groups of persons involved in activities, as well as noting where the activities are located. Safely evacuating a group of young children will require much more supervision and planning than moving a similarly sized group of adults.

After creating a master schedule, answer the following questions:

- How do you know that the buildings are empty at the close of all activities?
- Is there a checklist procedure that is followed every night?
- What about social service activities? Are they concentrated in a single location?
- Is there a food pantry, thrift store or social services office at your site?

Do not forget to list these places on a list of activities.

It is also important to focus on the capacity of buildings. Your inventory of facilities should also document the capacity of all buildings or rooms used to gather large numbers of people such as the sanctuary, fellowship hall, gymnasium, etc.

Conduct a hazards analysis of Your Setting and the Surrounding Community

Once you have examined the facility, become familiar with its routine schedule, accounted for communication, updated your records, and identified vulnerable members, it is time to identify and assess vulnerability to your facility itself. How could a disaster – particularly severe storms - affect the facility?

The very first resource available to you at no cost is to invite your local fire department in to check facilities for potential hazards or shortfalls due to construction, layout, and usage. Also, the Team needs to consider the factor of facility location. Locate a map and use this map as a tool in determining risks that certain disasters may pose in your community.

Look back over the past ten years and make a list of all disasters or emergency situations that have impacted the community. Floods caused by storms, or even prolonged rain pose the greatest natural disaster threat to the community. Determine if your facility (or certain members) is in the floodplain or is vulnerable to storm surge.

Step Five – Preparing for an Event

Getting Ready

A final checklist that can help the Team prepare their community is to use an objective resource such as that available from the Red Cross. Please check out the Ready Rating Guide to be found at:

<https://www.readyrating.org>

I discovered a longer template resource than this document for faith communities the Praise and Preparedness initiative from Georgia Emergency Management found and downloaded at:

<http://www.pcsda.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Emergency-Operations-Plan-Template-from-Praise-and-Preparedness.pdf>. In addition, the city of Los Angeles Emergency Management Department has a great (much larger) resource found at: <http://prep4faith.com/>

It is important to help prepare not only your faith community's facilities but also your members and neighbors own dwellings. Communication and information are the keys to getting ready. There are numerous resource guides through FEMA, etc. that have items to compose survival kits, etc. for every household to possess.

Getting Households Ready

One of the best resource databases for members is to go to the FEMA website and check out the lists and resources there. As a reminder, they can be found at: www.fema.gov

Mass evacuations in an event may not be possible or necessary. We may need to help members and neighbors **"Shelter in Place."** New guidelines for doing so have been released and found at:

https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_shelter-in-place_guidance_5-25-2021.pdf

Some simple step-by-step guidelines to follow:

Get a Kit – When preparing for a possible emergency, it's best to think first about the basics of survival: fresh water, food, clean air and warmth, medicines, etc.

Make a Plan – Make sure you have a family emergency plan. Your family may not be together when disaster strikes, so it is important to plan: how you will contact one another; how you will get back together; and what you will do in different situations. It is best to have a non-local contact person to facilitate this effectively.

Be Informed – Being informed about the different types of emergencies that could happen where you live, and appropriate ways to respond to them will impact the decisions you make and the actions you take.

Get Involved – After preparing yourself and your family for possible emergencies by getting a kit, planning and being informed, take the next step and get involved in preparing your community. You can contact any of the agencies in the addendum to find out how to help yourselves and your community prepare for disaster. Again, another valuable resource database for outreach or mission projects is to be found at: <https://cwskits.org/>

Where You Can Go for Help

Your local Church Conference or Region's Website

For IKC UCC Disaster Preparedness

For those in the Indiana Kentucky Conference of the UCC, please check:

<http://ikcucc.org/ministries/disaster/>

Your National Church or Denomination's Website

For the UCC - UCC Disaster Ministries

For those in the United Church of Christ denomination, the Disaster Ministries office is a great national and international resource. You can call their offices in Cleveland, Ohio or access their website at www.ucc.org/disaster. Your faith community may have their own coordinator or office to assist you.

Your Local Authorities and their Websites

City/County Office of Emergency Management

The Office of Emergency Management (OEM) provides the means by which the locality can prepare for, respond to and recover from disaster situations. This mission is accomplished by establishing systems, policies and procedures to ensure interagency coordination and communication.

National Groups (full list of web sites and resources at the end of this document)

American Red Cross

Red Cross disaster relief focuses on meeting people's immediate emergency disaster-caused needs. In addition to these services, the core of Red Cross disaster relief is the assistance given to individuals and families affected by disaster to enable them to resume their normal daily activities independently.

Federal Emergency Management Agency

Their mission is described as: *Helping people before, during, and after disasters.*

You can learn a great deal more about FEMA at:

<https://www.fema.gov/about-agency>

Long Term Recovery Groups (LTRGs)

Disaster recovery for many disaster survivors goes on long after media coverage has stopped and, in most cases, long after local emergency management has returned to normal operations. Long Term Recovery Groups (LTRGs) are available to help with both short and long-term recovery and coordinate efforts and assistance. There is an excellent resource to be found through the National VOAD's POC (Points of Consensus) documents on starting and running a LTRG to be found and downloaded at:

<https://www.nvoad.org/wp-content/uploads/LTRG-POC-Final.pdf>

National Disaster Interfaiths Network is a great resource for everyone:

<http://www.n-din.org/>

How You Can Help

Every person can benefit from spiritual care in times of disaster. I highly recommend the National VOAD's POC (Points of Consensus) document and guidelines on this ministry to be found and downloaded at: https://www.ifound.org/files/8914/7741/3317/national_voad_disaster_spiritual_care_guidelines_final.pdf

Faith community leaders have an important role in planning and mitigation efforts. By preparing their congregations and themselves for disaster they contribute toward building resilient communities. Training for the role of disaster spiritual care provider is essential before disaster strikes.

As has been previously stated, a church by its very nature is both communal and missional. How will you help others in need in times of disaster? For example:

General purpose teams

- Evacuation assistants
- Shelter assistants
- Cooks and food distributors
- Childcare and pet sheltering
- Emergency housing
- Clean-up crews

Professional teams

- Counselors
- Construction
- Medical
- Legal
- Caseworkers

Special Note: It is important to realize that one organization cannot do everything well or try to be involved with all areas of intervention and assistance. Your gifts and calling will be made comprehensive in concert with other faith communities and local volunteers and their area of focus and assistance.

Individuals can seek training. FEMA has a series of free web-based courses available on-line that deal with emergency management, including basic courses on CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) and the (ICS) Incident Command System structures (IS-100.C and IS-200.C and IS-700.B):

<https://training.fema.gov/emicourses/>

Check with the other appropriate web sites such as those listed in the Addendums and contact local agencies for opportunities to learn and be better prepared. Again, a list of guiding documents on housing, volunteers, etc. can be found through the National VOAD website at: <http://www.nvoad.org/resource-center/>

One of the sad and growing realities in our world is the plight of refugees and asylum seekers. "The plight of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers has grown more desperate over the past year. The conditions which drive people from their homes – such as war, famine, persecution, and lack of economic opportunity – have all been exacerbated by the pandemic," said the Rev. Joshua Baird, leader of the UCC [Global H.O.P.E.](#) team... There are 79.5 million people displaced worldwide, including more than 29 million refugees, more than half of whom are children."

<https://www.ucc.org/37-u-s-churches-speak-as-one-in-solidarity-with-migrants-and-refugees/>

Church World Service, in their recent Press Release **Ecumenical Declaration to Expand Welcome** also cites this growing and pressing need. I refer the reader to this important document:

https://cwsglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/March-2021_-Ecumenical-Declaration.pdf

Collectively, individual faith communities, based on their assets (identity, mission statement, facilities, member's gifts/resources, etc.) may choose to decide to serve as a place for shelter, short-term housing, emergency food, respite care for children, the elderly, pet refuge, etc. Please share your commitment(s) with your UCC Conference Office and area organizations such as the Red Cross. Also, get involved with your state level VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster), community/county level COAD (Community Organizations Active in Disaster) and LTRG (Long Term Recovery Group).

We can make a difference IF we can work, plan and pray together as faith communities. Check out **Houston Responds** link in the Addendum and the great results they have had getting 500 faith communities across the southwest become more aware and active in a response network.

Step Six – Educating and Updating

The task of being ready is a constant one. I have often said, “Isn’t it ironic how the inevitable is unmentionable until it is unavoidable?” Talk about your plans and look for ways to get better. Bring people into the conversation. New resources and challenges will emerge. Plans and inventories will need to be periodically reviewed and updated. Having simple exercises can help as well. **Sadly, we must also recognize that disasters disproportionately affect the poor, the disadvantaged and people of color.** We must do better. Extra care needs to be intentionally taken to reach out, include and empower those communities to reduce and mitigate their losses and struggles in the event of disasters. Finally, it is my hope that the review and use of this imperfect Manual will be a vital part of the education and preparation process.

A Checklist

Have you conducted an Insurance Audit?

Do you have a plan in place for an alternative place for worship or meeting?

Does your faith community have a Disaster Preparedness Team in place?

Have you updated your Communications plans and records?

Have you identified vulnerable members and neighbors and have a plan to contact them and evacuate them if needed?

Have you done a thorough building analysis, inventory and hazards identification?

Have you chosen a way to preserve and backup sensitive and vital records?

Have you helped members prepare their households?

Have you identified your assets of people and property that could be available to help in times of disaster?

Have you coordinated your efforts with broader faith leaders and local organizations such as the Red Cross?

Acknowledgements and Use of this Manual

In my years serving on various Disaster Preparation and Response Teams, I could not find a practical resource of this nature that could help faith communities better understand and prepare for disasters. Therefore, I compiled information and created an initial Manual. I have adapted this Manual many times and believe it is now more interfaith in scope - to be used principally by faith communities to prepare and implement a disaster plan specific to their needs; however, it is not intended to be comprehensive or universal – simply a guide to help and assist in disaster planning and preparedness. *Any follow-through and consequences are the sole responsibility of each individual faith community.*

Sadly, I also recognize the limitations and exclusiveness exhibited too often in the past by authorities by not including and enabling women, persons of color, and indigenous people in the process of collaboration and preparation of materials and readiness. **I suggest the reader listen to Vincent Davis’s podcast listed in the Addendum.**

These guidelines can be easily used as a guide to help faith communities of any size. To be honest, the breadth and scope of the work recommended could be intimidating to smaller communities of faith. Nonetheless, accomplishing even some of these steps will assist you to be more prepared when disasters strike. We must be willing to talk and plan. Please talk, pray, and use this guide and I invite your feedback and suggestions. Being prepared is also a continuous process of assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation. We can never be fully prepared. This Pandemic over these past 16 months has illustrated our need to be connected and prepared. To be effective and current, we must never consider the task finished - plans should always be available for improvement and updating. Thoughts and strategies about what has been effective need to be shared so we can all learn and benefit. In a real sense, then, this Manual (and all finite resources) must also be viewed as a “living” document.

It is amazing what can be accomplished if we work together and do not worry about who gets the credit. I did not write this Manual in isolation. There are many to thank. My participation both in Florida’s Volusia County COAD (Community Organizations Active in Disaster) and the local LTRG (Long Term Recovery Group) called VIND (Volusia Interfaiths/Agencies Networking in Disaster) were a source of initial inspiration, information and support.

I wish to thank Zach Wolgemuth, former Executive for UCC Disaster Ministries, for his input and encouragement and the Daytona LTRG coordinator, Rev. Dave Troxler of VIND. I want to recognize the Rev. Dr. Bill Wealand for his inspiration and many years of dedicated service in this area of critical ministry in the Florida Conference of the UCC. I am also grateful for the support and assistance of Rev. Greg Denk of the IKC DPRMT. Most recently, I wish to thank and recognize Lesli Remaly, Minister of Disaster Response and Recovery for the UCC, for her guidance and assistance. Last but certainly not least, I wish to thank my wife Lisa for her support and love for me in my life and all my ministry endeavors and commitments.

SPECIAL NOTE: This Manual is provided for general use and assistance to aid communities of faith everywhere. No portion, however, may be copied and used for any paid presentation or publication without my expressed written consent.

Primary Contact Information for UCC Communities

United Church of Christ National Office for Disaster Ministries

www.ucc.org/disaster

Addendum of Additional Resources and Organizations

American Red Cross (ARC)

www.redcross.org

Brethren Disaster Ministries

<https://www.brethren.org/bdm/>

Center for Disaster Philanthropy

<https://disasterphilanthropy.org/>

Church of Jesus Christ (Latter Day Saints)

<https://providentliving.churchofjesuschrist.org/emergency-preparedness-and-response/stake-ward-emergency-planning-guide?lang=eng>

Church World Service (CWS)

www.cwsglobal.org

Crisis Cleanup (Requires Registration)

<https://crisiscleanup.org/login>

Episcopal Relief & Development

<https://www.episcopalrelief.org/what-we-do/us-disaster-program/us-disaster-program-preparedness-resources/>

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

<https://www.fema.gov/>

Houston Responds – Mobilizing Churches for Disaster Response

<https://www.houstonresponds.org/>

National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (National VOAD)

<http://www.nvoad.org>

New York Disaster Interfaith Services

<https://www.nydis.org/>

<https://www.nydis.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/09-NYDIS-Self-Care-Tip-Sheet.pdf>
(Downloadable Guide)

Planning and Readiness

<https://www.ready.gov/>

https://www.fema.gov/pdf/areyouready/areyouready_full.pdf (Downloadable Guide)

St. Charles, Missouri COAD

<http://www.communitycouncilstc.org/disasteremergency-planning-coad>

The Global H.O.P.E. Team of the UCC

The Global H.O.P.E. team in United Church of Christ Wider Church Ministries brings together the UCC's refugee and migration ministries, volunteer engagement, disaster response and recovery, and sustainable development work. The acronym H.O.P.E. makes clear the team's vision: Humanitarian. Opportunities. Progress. Empowerment.

<https://www.ucc.org/what-we-do/wider-church-ministries/global-hope/>

The Humane Society of the United States

www.hsus.org

The Salvation Army (TSA)

www.disaster.salvationarmyusa.org

The United Way

<https://www.unitedway.org/>

Vincent B. Davis, Founder of Preparedness Matters Consulting and serves as Director of Disaster Services for Feeding America, Podcast

<https://soundcloud.com/andrew-boyarsky/e16-preparedness-matters-with-vincent-davis>

World Vision

<https://www.worldvision.org/our-work/country-profiles/united-states>

***Please note that these organizations (and links) are for reference purposes only. They may change and do not ensure assistance where you are located.**

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**The Greensburg, Kansas Fire department following an F5 tornado hit.
May 4, 2007.
Photo Credit: AF SGT. Greg Rudi**



http://www.publicdomainfiles.com/show_file.php?id=13508836216081

**Sudanese refugees at Sam Ouandja Camp in the Central African Republic.
November 13, 2007.**



http://www.publicdomainfiles.com/show_file.php?id=13984450219015

**Senior Airman Lauren Sinclair gives the thumbs-up sign with Afghan refugees.
Photo Credit: AF Tech. Sgt. McGowen Anderson**



http://www.publicdomainfiles.com/show_file.php?id=1352055301157

**Flames of a Simi Valley fire in Southern California.
Photo Credit: AF Senior Master Sgt. Dennis W. Goff**



http://www.publicdomainfiles.com/show_file.php?id=13512805818722

**Sgt. Keith Berry searching for survivors after Hurricane Katrina in August 2005.
Photo Credit: AF Sgt. Bill Huntington**



http://www.publicdomainfiles.com/show_file.php?id=13509677414378