



Preparing for
Disaster
*A Guide for Lutheran
Congregations*

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worldrelief.lcms.org/disaster.htm

Foreword

This manual is prepared by Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR), a ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. LDR helps congregations be effective and important participants in their communities' recovery from disaster.

As part of the community, congregations have opportunity and responsibility to respond to disaster. The deep human needs and psychological scars left after a disaster require care beyond the restoration of physical needs. Putting lives back together after a disaster requires care, hope and love. Counseling, understanding and direction enable people to cope with their anger, guilt, tests of faith, loneliness and turmoil.

A time of crisis is often the best time for Christians to demonstrate the reality of God's healing grace through caring and sharing. However, it should never be a time of trying to convert others to your faith.

This manual is provided to assist congregations prepare for disaster. It asks questions such as: What is a disaster? Is your facility ready? Are your church record protected? Does your congregation have evacuation plans? What can your congregation do to prepare to care for members and others in your community in response to disaster?

Acknowledgments

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Preparing for Disaster: A Guide for Lutheran Congregations

	Page
LDR and Your Congregation’s Preparation	5
Why Develop a Disaster Preparedness Plan?	6
What is a Disaster?	7
What Happens in a Disaster? (Rescue)	8
What Happens After a Disaster (Relief)	8
What Happens in the Long-Term? (Recovery)	8
Caring through Christ	9
Preparing your Congregation for Disaster	11
1. Identify Potential Disasters	11
Natural Disasters	11
Technological Disasters	11
Violence	11
2. Prepare the Facility for a Disaster	12
A. Post emergency numbers by each phone	12
B. Review insurance policies annually	12
C. Protect facilities	12
D. Protect church records	13
3. Plan for Evacuation of Facility	14
4. Train Church Staff for Preparation and Response	15
5. Prepare to Serve Church Members	16
6. Plan to Resume Worship Services ASAP	16
7. Prepare to Serve Your Community	16
8. How to Assist Neighboring Communities	19
A. Check with the area Lutheran Disaster Response coordinator	19
•Check with the area Lutheran Disaster Response coordinator to determine what is needed before doing anything	19
B. Prepare with Distant Neighbors	19
9. Your Congregation’s Ministry during Disaster	21
A. Rescue Response	21



B. Relief Response 21

C. Recovery Response 22

10. Helping Your Members Prepare for Disaster 23

More About LDR 24

References, Resources 24

Appendix A: Congregation Facility Safety Checklist 25

Appendix B: Congregation Safety Checklist 27

Appendix C: Family Disaster Plan 28

Appendix D: Family Disaster Plan Checklist 30

Appendix E: Maintaining the Family Disaster Plan 31

Appendix F: Considerations for a Disaster Plan 32



LDR and Your Congregation's Preparation

This manual was prepared by Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) to assist congregations prepare for disaster.

LDR works through **Regional Coordinators** who serve specific geographic areas. A current listing is available on the web site. Coordinators can guide congregations in their preparation for disaster. The coordinator can help congregations plan preparedness training, assist pastors to understand their roles in times of disaster, develop cooperative relationships with the regional offices of disaster response organizations, develop plans to use the facilities and resources of other Lutheran agencies in the region, national agencies and the church bodies.

Your disaster response activities should be carried out in full cooperation with Lutheran social service organizations, other denominations through interfaith groups, governmental agencies and voluntary disaster response organizations.

Additional information about LDR's workings can be found on the web site: **www.ldr.org**.

Why Develop a Disaster Preparedness Plan?

A disaster plan is a guide for your congregation to:

- Protect property
- Continue services
- Care for members
- Recover or repair disaster-related damages
- Communicate information

A plan is relevant and useful if it is:

- Developed by people who are concerned
- Tailored to the geographical situation and needs of the members
- Implemented and tested, to the extent possible, before disaster strikes
- Developed to include training for persons responsible during an emergency
- Reviewed and updated regularly

The planning process is more important than a document on a shelf. During the group planning process, individual concerns are expressed, priorities are set and values assigned to people's needs and to property. Planners get to know each other's gifts and capabilities, and energy is generated for caring for one another in a crisis.

Establishing a disaster preparedness committee in the congregation ensures that congregational members are prepared, that the pastor and church leaders have made advance commitments to help others in times of disaster and that congregational activities are coordinated with those of the community.

What is a Disaster?

A *disaster* is an event beyond the control of the individuals affected resulting in great harm, suffering, destruction and damage. It disrupts personal and community life, involves a significant number of people and causes physical, emotional, economic, social and/or spiritual crises. A disaster damages a community's ability to sustain life without outside assistance.

Natural disasters involve the forces of nature and creation—flood, windstorm, fires caused by lightning, tornado, earthquake, etc. *Human-caused disasters* occur as a result of violent actions by individuals or groups against people and/or property. Human-caused disaster includes such things as explosions, the collapse of a structure or the release of hazardous material.

Presidentially declared disasters impact ten thousand to several hundred thousand people. These major disasters require emergency relief efforts beyond the ability of local communities and churches to respond. A presidentially declared disaster makes federal relief assistance available.

A *catastrophic disaster* event is presidentially declared and larger in scope. It involves a large number of deaths and injuries and extensive damage or destruction of facilities. Catastrophic disasters involve an overwhelming demand on state and local response resources and mechanisms. Federal relief is available.

Generally, disasters strike without warning. Each disaster is different in magnitude and impact on the affected area. People react differently and local authorities are often hard pressed to manage the impact of the disaster on the community.

While state and national relief efforts are being mobilized, the local church has an opportunity to reach out and minister to those in need—whether Lutherans or non-Lutherans. The Church's response to a disaster is a commitment and witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ to assist those affected by the disaster.

What Happens in a Disaster? (Rescue)

A disaster may strike with or without warning. In the moments, hours and days surrounding a disaster, the concern is for safety and preservation of life. Those affected by disaster seek temporary relief and assistance—often provided by the American Red Cross and Salvation Army. Local police and civil defense forces are often strained to carry out their tasks. Respected community leaders, including clergy, help victims deal with the reality of danger and guide survivors to assistance.

What Happens After a Disaster? (Relief)

The relief process begins in the days following a disaster. Concerns for safety, life and health remain high priorities. Government and the American Red Cross are active. Other relief activities are organized.

Voluntary organizations (such as Lutheran Disaster Response) begin to participate. The LDR coordinator in your area will bring Lutheran partners and local Lutheran leaders together to share information and organize a skeletal plan of response in cooperation with fellow ecumenical and secular partners. Your congregation should participate as requested.

Congregations may offer immediate shelter. (See www.redcross.org to become a certified shelter.)

Congregations may provide food and other items through a planned distribution system. Distribution may involve joint planning with other churches.

What Happens in the Long-Term? (Recovery)

The long-term response to disaster focuses on the future. Homes are being rebuilt and repaired. Community committees for unmet needs are set up. Plans are made for clothing, furniture and equipment while relief activities continue.

Depending on the scope and scale of the disaster, recovery usually takes three to five years. Rebuilding continues but support diminishes as the event becomes old news.

Congregations in the community continue to play an important role. Often disaster volunteer groups, including those organized through LDR, are involved in the rebuilding.

Caring through Christ

The deep human needs and psychological scars left after a disaster require care beyond the restoration of physical needs. Putting lives back together requires real care, hope and love. Counseling, understanding and direction are needed to enable persons to cope with grief expressed as anger, guilt, loneliness and turmoil.

Care is given through effective listening. William J. McKay, author of *Beginnings: A ChristCare Group Experience Group Member Guide*¹ by Stephen Ministries, offers these points in a session entitled, “Listening as an Act of Love.” “Listening means paying attention to the other person—real attention, the kind that drops everything else and ignores distractions to focus on what the other person is saying and feeling.”

McKay continues to define the task of listening by highlighting Six Important Facts about Listening summarized below.

Fact 1: Listening is hard work. Your full attention and focus are on the person speaking.

Fact 2: Listening is an important way to show care. Giving your time and effort says to the other that they are valuable to you.

Fact 3: Listen to more than just words. Notice facial expressions, body language and tone of voice.

Fact 4: Listening involves talking too. Say just enough to demonstrate attention and encourage the other person.

Fact 5: Listening also involves a response, such as asking appropriate questions. Ask open-ended and clarifying questions.

Fact 6: The goal of listening is to draw out the other person, not to find solutions or smooth over a problem. Listen with patience and care to help the other discover solutions to problems.

People suffering loss are particularly open to hearing and accepting the Gospel through the care of those living it out. As members and ministry groups from your congregation serve victims, they are sharing Christ.

The Church may take the initiative in reaching out to those who are in denial or depression. Some will be unable to seek assistance.

¹ Used by permission. This book is part of the ChristCare Small Group Ministry System, developed by Stephen Ministries, St. Louis, Missouri. For more information on this book, ChristCare, or other caring materials from Stephen Ministries, contact www.stephenministries.org.

Care should also be extended to the caregivers (including pastors) who may also suffer grief as they deal with human loss. LDR provides respite care and services for caregivers. See www.ldr.org.

Preparing your Congregation for Disaster

1. Identify Potential Disasters

Use this list to identify potential causes for disaster in your community. Place a check mark in the box to indicate potential for this to happen in your community.

Natural Disasters

- Flood
- Hurricane
- Tornadoes
- Earthquake
- Extreme heat
- Thunder storms/lightning
- Fire danger during/after disaster

Technological Disasters

- Hazardous materials
- Railroad accidents
- Highway and trucking accidents
- House and building fires
- Radiological accidents
- Nuclear power plant emergency
- Terrorism

Violence

- Family violence
- Community violence
- Spouse abuse
- Child abuse
- Racism and ethnic conflict
- Economic and poverty issues

2. Prepare the Facility for a Disaster

For further reference see **Appendix A: Facility Safety Check List**

A. Post emergency numbers by each phone.

- Include 911 (or area equivalent), the poison control center, law enforcement and the fire department. Make sure a phone is accessible in each area of the building at all hours.

B. Review insurance policies annually.

- Insurance policy meets the minimum requirements of your synod and mortgage holder. When was the last estimate on the value of church property? How accurate are the figures?
- Insurance policy covers the cost of recent additions or high value items such as stained glass windows?
- Insurance policy covers the cost of temporary rental of another facility in the event your church is severely damaged or destroyed?
- Insurance policy covers the cost of temporary rental housing for the parsonage family in the event that the parsonage is severely damaged or destroyed? (Your church policy may not cover the cost of replacing the clergy's personal items; the pastor should provide his/her own renter's policy. But a renter's policy may not cover the pastor's personal items in the church.)

C. Protect facilities

- Maintain a list of who (in case of impending storm) is assigned to:
 - Cut off the utilities
 - Cover the windows
 - Take down or secure any exterior swinging fixtures such as signs or lights
 - Secure loose items around the church

- **Should a disaster occur:**

- Inspect the congregation's facilities.
- Make temporary repairs to protect them from further damage or looting.
- Call your insurance representative.

Note 1: A quick survey should be made to identify the types of items that need to be secured and any trees or branches that pose a direct threat to church property. Most of the damage from storms comes from fallen trees or branches.

Note 2: No one should check on the church during a storm. Members and the pastor should remain indoors at home or in a shelter.

D. Protect church records

Church records are a vital part of your church organization. Safeguarding them should be a matter of simple routine and limited expense. (If your records are not kept safe, what you do to restore them will seem like a disaster itself.)

Here are simple things to do now.

- Put your vital records in a fireproof safe and mark them “for church records only.” Do not keep money in the safe. Ensure the safe is big enough to hold the kind of oversize books that are normally used. Also ensure the container is watertight.
- Use a safe deposit box for those records (such as deeds, insurance papers and mortgages) that are not used frequently.
- If your church uses a computer for its finances or other vital functions, be sure your treasurer backs up his/her work and takes the backup home. The regular membership and other specialized data can be stored in the safe, or the secretary can take the backups home.

3. Plan for Evacuation of Facility

For further reference see **Appendix B: Congregation Safety Check List**

1. Identify the nearest storm shelter.
2. Post clear directions on what to do and where to go in case of a severe storm/tornado warning.
3. Practice evacuation/fire drills.
4. Have a working weather radio or battery-operated radio in an accessible location in the church. Ensure that someone is listening during watches while church functions are in progress.

4. Train Church Staff for Preparation and Response

- Assign a member of the congregation to serve as the congregation's disaster response coordinator. (The congregation's vice-president may have this duty). This person should be acquainted with local emergency management leadership, coordinate and guide the congregation through its preparation and response.
- Have a contingency plan in the event that the pastor becomes a victim of the storm. Your synod/district office may be of help or a layperson should be prepared to lead the service(s).
- Prepare lay leaders as alternates to lead the worship services and teach church school if pastor/teachers are incapacitated.
- Hold first-aid and CPR classes at your church for adults and youth. Encourage ushers, elders, youth leaders and teachers to attend.
- Train ushers in case of emergency such as fire or heart attack.
- Train Sunday school and daycare staff for emergencies/disasters.
- Have a member trained in first aid and CPR at each church activity.
- Determine the special needs of people in your congregation (i.e., vision, hearing, physical impairments, heart conditions, etc.) to help prepare for special evacuation procedures when disaster strikes. Survey members and programs to identify special concerns to deal with during and following a disaster.
- Develop a plan to check on members to assess needs after a disaster.

5. Prepare to Serve Church Members

- Help your members learn what to do—be calm, heed warnings, follow instructions of public safety/emergency management leaders, be safe and know how to help each other.
- Collect emergency/disaster-preparedness needs such as emergency lights, flashlights, first-aid kits, blankets.
- Designate a group to call shut-ins before a storm and to follow up afterward. In the event of an evacuation, this group could also call the local county emergency management office to tell them of those needing special transportation.
- Create a prayer/life phone tree of people who will pray and give blood in case of emergency/disaster.
- Know resources within your congregation and within your community; identify functions; know how to access them.

6. Plan to Resume Worship Services ASAP

- The Church ministers through prayers, Scripture reading and the sacraments. Be prepared to resume worship services immediately even in temporary or damaged facilities.
- Know how you will publicize the fact that church services will be held. Many people will be listening to the radio; this may be the best method for getting the word out. Also publicize pastoral care.
- Determine a suitable alternative worship site, such as a school, and get an estimate of what it would cost to rent. If possible, get an informal arrangement that would allow your church to relocate quickly. This might be a reciprocal agreement with another local church, or even a funeral home, to share a facility.

7. Prepare to Serve Your Community

- **Develop processes for raising funds** for disaster response and for receiving funds from outside sources. Be sure to check with Aid Association for Lutherans and Lutheran Brotherhood for fund raising ideas and matching fund possibilities.

- **Arrange a reciprocal agreement** with another church/facility as a place to meet and worship; these benefits both parties in case of major damage or destruction.
- **Arrange agreements to work with the Red Cross**, other emergency-management agencies and your closest Lutheran social-ministry organization(s).
- **Become a Red Cross Emergency Shelter.** Before seeking to become a shelter, get the approval of the administrative body of your congregation. The American Red Cross may use church buildings close to the disaster area as temporary shelters. Prior certification is required. Work with your local Red Cross chapter to meet requirements for a certified site. (Also see www.redcross.org)
- **Decide if the church can be used to house volunteers.** Make the decision prior to a disaster. Plans should be made for minimizing the impact to local church programs. Teams must be totally self-sufficient with food, water and bedding. Let LDR know of your willingness to house volunteer teams.
- **Mobilize a Community Interfaith/VOAD Response.** Does your community have an Interfaith Disaster Response Committee? Does your congregation participate? If no such committee exists, call a meeting of religious leaders in a ministerial association or an already established interfaith group to discuss how the organizations can work together in a disaster. (The LDR coordinator in your area can help you organize this meeting.) Through this group, along with other churches or religious organizations, develop a plan to reach out to the most vulnerable people in the community—elderly, single parents with children and those with special needs. Federal, state and voluntary agencies respond in various ways following a disaster. Lutheran Disaster Response will assist your congregation in working with these agencies. The community may form a Voluntary Organization Active in Disaster (VOAD) committee to coordinate meeting immediate needs through various disaster response organizations. Local religious leaders are encouraged to be actively involved with the VOAD. The VOAD, with help from religious leaders (pastors and lay), assists victims in registering with FEMA. This kind of support is especially critical for disaster victims to effectively manage the insurance or government forms.

- **Develop a plan to receive, organize and distribute food** and other needed items including cleaning supplies, hygiene supplies and baby supplies. (Rarely is clothing needed; usually all clothing needs are easily met locally.)
- **Organize Workers.** Organize volunteer work crews to help in your area in times of disaster. Organize a church volunteer team to assist disaster victims outside your immediate area. See www.ldr.org for more information on volunteer teams.
- **Work with Other Lutheran Congregations in Your Community.** Form an agreement with Lutheran congregations or other neighboring churches to work together in response to disaster. LDR can help with this.
- **Identify the resources** (including human resources) of each congregation. Update annually.

8. How to Assist Neighboring Communities

If your congregation would like to help a community that has experienced a disaster, the following steps should be considered:

A. Check with the area Lutheran Disaster Response coordinator

- Check with the area Lutheran Disaster Response coordinator to determine what is needed before doing anything.
- **Don't just go!** Unexpected or uncoordinated volunteers only add to the problem. Offer to send volunteer work teams as they are needed and can be scheduled. Volunteers are often needed to assist with clean up, debris removal and preparation of meals for volunteers. Skilled volunteer construction workers are always a critical long-term recovery need.
- **Don't send stuff!** Clothing, furniture and other “stuff” often cause major problems for recovering communities. Make certain you have discussed your collection efforts with on-site emergency managers or volunteer organizations before you attempt to collect goods. If you are asked to send specific items, *respond only to the specific request and know how to prepare and ship the goods*. Most communities are not equipped with unloading, storage, sorting and distribution facilities for goods that are shipped in by well-intended groups. Manpower to handle these goods is often very limited. Victims may not have a place to store these goods because their homes have been destroyed. Too often, unsolicited goods end up in a landfill.
- **Send cash!** Cash contributions through the church are the most effective way to help victims. Cash contributions allow trained case managers to help victims with their most pressing needs in a timely way. Cash contributions also help stimulate the local economy (through purchasing locally) that may have been seriously damaged by the disaster. Contributions can be directed to specific disaster areas through Lutheran Disaster Response.

B. Prepare with Distant Neighbors

- Set up a companion congregation plan.

- Establish partnerships with a congregation in a disaster-prone area and one in a relatively safe area.
- Designate contact persons in each congregation. The companion congregation may provide temporary housing during a disaster. It is also a source of volunteers and a link to other congregational ministries.

9. Your Congregation's Ministry during Disaster

See your area LDR coordinator for assistance as needed. The coordinator will have information about the region and can assist congregations in working out their preparedness plans. This section gives an outline of possible congregational involvement in the event of a disaster.

A. Rescue Response

- Contact is made with your Lutheran Disaster Response coordinator and/or your district/synod office.
- Church buildings close to the area may be used as temporary shelters. Your facility must be pre-approved by the Red Cross (see www.redcross.org).
- Unaffected members may respond by serving at shelters, feeding centers and clean-up sites.
- Your pastor may respond to needs of people suffering injury or families mourning losses.
- Survey the staff and members to determine those affected and assess their immediate needs. Care of most vulnerable: elderly, single parents and mentally ill will be a priority.

B. Relief Response

The LDR coordinator serving the area will help congregations respond to disaster by organizing the efforts of many Lutheran responders. Your congregation has unique resources to share and care. Victims will be encouraged through your prayers and personal care. Support your pastor's availability at the scene, at the morgues and with rescue workers.

- **Volunteers:** Volunteers are needed to work at clean up, at feeding centers and shelters. Encourage all not affected by the disaster to volunteer.
- **Listeners:** Your members can provide listening ears to those affected. People need to tell their story again and again to help them through the trauma and grief. Church members need to be listeners.

- **Encouragers:** Your members can encourage those affected to apply for assistance. Publicize the disaster assistance help number. Help those unable to apply.
- **Planners:** As plans for long-term recovery begin, Lutheran congregations and other denominations form a cooperative response and recovery plan. Find out what your congregation's role is.
- **Counselors:** The local Lutheran social ministry organization (e.g., Lutheran Social Services, Community Services, Lutheran Child and Family Services, Lutheran Services Florida, etc.) is your partner in the church's response. Call upon it to plan for its role in providing counseling and other services after a disaster.
- **Financial Supporters:** Direct financial assistance through your district, synod or Lutheran Disaster Response. You may publicize and receive special offerings to be used to help those affected. (Contact Aid Association for Lutherans and Lutheran Brotherhood for fund raising ideas.)
- **Mindful Beings:** Always be mindful of safety and curfews and adhere to all civil authority requirements. Discourage rumors. Share accurate information.

C. Recovery Response

The Church stays in disaster response ministry for several months, sometimes longer than a year. People affected have the chance to improve the physical, social and spiritual dimensions of their lives during reconstruction. The church can see to the needs of the whole person. The church also provides volunteers to assist in reconstruction. This long-term effort is usually best accomplished through an ecumenical approach in the community. One source minimizes duplication and waste and simplifies the procedure for victims.

10. Helping Your Members Prepare for Disaster

For further reference see **Appendix C: Your Family Disaster Plan; Appendix D: Family Disaster Plan Checklist; Appendix E: Maintaining the Family Disaster Plan; Appendix F: Considerations for a Disaster Plan**

Prepare members/families for disaster by encouraging family disaster preparation plans. Conduct disaster preparedness training, which would include preparation of the survival kit.

To request free family protection publications, write to or log on to:

- FEMA, P.O. Box 70274, Washington, D.C. 20024.

Ask for: *Are You Ready? Your Family Disaster Supplies Kit* and *Emergency Food and Water Supplies*.

- Red Cross Family Preparation Check List. See **www.redcross.org**.

Choose Car disaster kit and/or Home disaster preparedness

- Other helpful websites

www.ldr.org

www.churchworldservice.org

www.fema.gov

- Helpful search words for the internet: Disaster response; Disaster recovery

More About LDR

LDR becomes involved in disaster response when the needs of the natural/manmade disaster event exceed the community's ability to respond. Involvement may also be initiated when both ELCA and LCMS communities are directly affected or wish to assist in their community's recovery. Appropriate resources may be made available for any size disaster.

LDR's mission and goal are to enable individuals, families and congregations impacted by disaster with their rescue, relief and recovery needs. Resources are normally not available for rebuilding and restoring church facilities.

References, Resources

Disaster Preparedness and Response: A Course Book For Church Leaders
by Church World Service
copyright 2000
Emergency Response Program
c/o Associate for Training, 475 Riverside Dr. #606, New York, NY 10115
Tel. (212) 870-3151

Making Sense Out of Sorrow: A Journey of Faith
by Foster R. McCurley, Alan G. Weitzman
Publisher: Trinity Pr Intl; ISBN: 1563381133; (March 1995)

Act of God/Active God
Recovering from Natural Disasters
Author: Gary L. Harbaugh
ISBN: 080063215X
Publication Date: 2/21/2001
Publisher: Fortress Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota

“Prepared to Care”—for pastors responding to natural and human-caused disasters.
Available through Lutheran Disaster Response.

Disaster training is available through the local Red Cross and on the internet through FEMA. Congregation leaders are encouraged to obtain training.

Appendix A: Congregation Facility Safety Checklist

Exits

- Marked and lighted?
- Free from obstructions?
- Any doors or passages locked?
- Any obstructions that may impede evacuation?
- Plans existing for upper floor evacuation?
- Contingency plans for handicapped persons?

Electrical and Gas Equipment

- Where are the breaker switches or fuse boxes?
- Are all breakers marked?
- Are switches and outlet boxes covered?
- Are electrical units grounded?
- Any circuits overloaded?
- Any equipment in use after hours? Where?
- Where is gas main or meter shut-off valve?
- Where is gas wrench located?

Miscellaneous

- Location of keys for all doors and buildings?
- Location of first aid kit?
- It is fully stocked?
- Who is responsible for maintaining it?
- Location of wheelchair and/or stretcher?
- Who is responsible for maintaining it?

- Location of battery operated radio?
- Who is responsible for maintaining it?
- Location of emergency water and food supply?
- Who is responsible for maintaining it?

Firefighting Equipment

- Extinguishers fully charged, inspected and tagged?
- Extinguishers appropriate for type of use?
- Ordinary fires?
- Grease and oil?
- Electrical?
- Are fire alarms maintained and checked regularly?
- Are smoke detectors maintained and checked regularly?

Chemicals

- Are there any combustibles stored in the facility?
- Where? Are they stored correctly?
- Paint
- Solvents
- Cleaning fluids
- Thinners
- Toner
- Propane
- Toxic or corrosive materials

Emergency Phone Numbers

- Is the list current and posted visible from outside?
- Does the EMS and Fire Department know the different areas of your facility to enable them quick access?

Appendix B: Congregation Safety Checklist

- Identify storm shelter
- Post clear directions in the church: what to do and where to go in case of severe storm/tornado warning
- Talk about these preparations (doing everything you can for the safety of the congregation is ministry)
- Do a storm drill or at least recess at the last hymn of the service to the place of shelter. Explain the leadership's concern for everyone. End with a prayer.
- Make sure a working weather radio or battery-operated radio is accessible in the church (not locked in the church office after hours). Ensure that someone is listening to the radio during watches while church functions are in progress to give warning.
- Identify other emergency/disaster preparedness needs such as: emergency lights, flashlights, visible and complete first-aid kit(s), blanket(s).
- Arrange for a first-aid class to be held at the church and encourage participation by youth and adults. Encourage youth leadership and those who teach to attend. Use the same strategy for CPR.
- Post clearly visible emergency numbers by every phone including: 911 (or area equivalent), poison control center, law enforcement and fire department. Make sure that a phone is accessible in each area of the building at all hours.
- Create prayer and life phone trees of those who volunteer to pray and those who volunteer to give blood in an emergency or disaster.
- Start the conversation for a congregational disaster plan. Contact LDR or ELCA Domestic Disaster Response for materials and help. Ask for a representative to meet with your council/committee.

Remember the Church is present in the community before, during and after a disaster. Other people and agencies come and go, but through the Church, God is present in powerful witness.

Appendix C: Family Disaster Plan

Disaster preparedness begins in the home. Local officials and relief workers may not arrive at once. Families must be able to cope with disaster by preparing and working as a team.

Following the suggested steps below will help you create your family's plan. Knowing what to do is the best protection. It is also your responsibility.

1. Know the threats to your community. Contact your local emergency management or civil defense office or the American Red Cross.

- Ask what types of disasters are most likely to happen. Request information on how to prepare for each.
- Learn about your community's warning signals: what they sound like and what you should do when you hear them.
- Ask about animal care after a disaster. Animals may not be allowed inside emergency shelters due to health regulations.
- Find out how to help elderly or disabled persons, if needed.
- Find out about the disaster plans at your workplace, your children's school or daycare center and other places where your family spends time.

2. Create a disaster plan.

- Discuss the need to prepare with your family. Explain to children the danger of fire, severe weather and earthquakes. Plan to share responsibilities and work together as a team.
- Discuss the types of disasters that are most likely to happen. Explain what to do in each case.
- Pick two places to meet:
 1. Right outside your home in case of a sudden emergency, such as a fire.
 2. Outside the neighborhood in case you can't return home. Everyone must know the address and phone number.

- Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to be your “family contact.” After a disaster, it’s often easier to call long distance than locally. Other family members should call this person and tell them where they are. Everyone must know your contact’s phone number.
- Discuss what to do in the event of an evacuation. Plan how to take care of your pets.

Appendix D: Family Disaster Plan Checklist

1. Post emergency telephone numbers by all phones in the house (fire, police, ambulance, etc.).
2. Teach children how and when to call 911 or other local Emergency Medical Services number for emergency help.
3. Teach each family member how and when to turn off the water, gas and electricity at the main switches.
4. Make sure you have adequate insurance coverage.
5. Teach each family member how to use the fire extinguisher (ABC type), and show them where it is kept.
6. Install smoke detectors on each level of your home, especially near bedrooms.
7. Conduct a hunt for hazards in the home. During a disaster, ordinary objects in your home can cause injury or damage. Anything that can move, fall, break or cause a fire is a home hazard. For example, a hot water heater or a bookshelf can fall. Inspect your home at least once a year and fix potential hazards. Contact your local fire department to learn about home fire hazards.
8. Stock emergency supplies and assemble a Disaster Supplies Kit. Keep enough supplies in your home to meet your needs for at least three days. Assemble a Disaster Supplies Kit with items you may need in an evacuation. Store these supplied in sturdy, easy-to-carry containers, such as backpacks, duffle bags or covered trash containers.
9. Take First Aid and CPR classes.
10. Determine the best escape routes from your home. Find two ways out of each room.
11. Find the safe spots in your home for each type of disaster.
12. Practice and maintain your disaster plan.

Appendix E: Maintaining the Family Disaster Plan

1. Quiz your kids every six months so they remember what to do.
2. Conduct fire, emergency evacuation and other emergency drills.
3. Replace stored water every three months and stored food every six months.
4. Test and recharge your fire extinguishers(s) according to manufacturer's instructions.
5. Test your smoke detectors monthly and change the batteries at least once a year.
6. Check and maintain supplies needed:
 - A three-day supply of water (one gallon per person per day) and food that won't spoil.
 - One change of clothing and footwear per person and one blanket or sleeping bag per person.
 - A first aid kit that includes your family's prescription medications.
 - Emergency tools including a battery-powered radio, flashlight and plenty of extra batteries.
 - An extra set of car keys and a credit card, cash or traveler's checks.
 - Sanitation supplies.
 - Special items for infants, elderly or disabled family members.
 - An extra pair of glasses.
 - Important family documents in a waterproof container.

Appendix F: Considerations for a Disaster Plan

Utilities—Locate the main electric fuse/ breaker box, water service main and natural gas main. Learn how and when to turn these utilities off. Teach all responsible family members. Keep necessary tools near gas and water shut-off valves. Turn off utilities only if you suspect damage to the lines or if you are instructed to do so. If you turn the gas off, you will need a professional to turn it back on.

Neighbors helping neighbors—Working with neighbors can save lives and property. Meet with your neighbors to plan how the neighborhood could work together after a disaster until help arrives. If you are a member of a neighborhood organization, introduce disaster preparedness as a new activity. Know your neighbors' special skills (e.g., medical, technical) and consider how you could help neighbors who have special needs, such as disabled and elderly persons. Make plans for childcare in case parents cannot get home.

Evacuate immediately if told to do so—

- Listen to your battery-powered radio and follow the instructions of local emergency officials.
- Wear protective clothing and sturdy shoes.
- Take your Family Disaster Supplies Kit
- Lock your home.
- Use travel routes specified by local authorities—don't use shortcuts because certain areas may be impassable or dangerous.
- If you have time -

Shut off water, gas and electricity before leaving, if instructed to do so.

Post a note telling others when you left and where you are going.

Make arrangements for pets.

If disaster strikes, remain calm and patient. Put your plan into action.

- Check for injuries.
- Give first aid and get help for seriously injured people.
- Listen to your battery-powered radio for news and instructions.
- Evacuate if advised to do so. Wear protective clothing and sturdy shoes.
- Check for damage in your home.
- Use flashlights—do not light matches or turn on electrical switches if you suspect damage.
- Check for fires, fire hazards and other household hazards.
- Sniff for gas leaks, starting at the water heater. If you smell gas or suspect a leak, turn off the main gas valve, open windows and get everyone outside quickly.
- Shut off any other damaged utilities.
- Clean up spilled medicines, bleaches, gasoline and other flammable liquids immediately.
- Confine or secure your pet.
- Call your family contact—do not use the telephone again unless it is a life-threatening emergency.
- Check on your neighbors, especially elderly or disabled persons.
- Make sure you have an adequate water supply in case service is cut off.
- Stay away from downed power lines.

Materials adapted from Catholic Charities USA's, "Disaster Response UPDATE"