

Preparing Your Church For the Unexpected

By Reid Doster

Coordinator, CBF Louisiana

Select A Local Church Disaster Response Coordinator

Your church should select a Disaster Response Coordinator with the following traits:

- An understanding person who handles pressure.
- Willing to put forth a measured amount of effort.
- Able to communicate and make decisions.
- Desires to help people in need.
- Your Disaster Response Coordinator:
 - Assesses areas of strength that can be utilized in your church during a disaster.
 - Informs your church of disaster response needs and activities.
 - Coordinates possible use of church facilities as a training center, crisis counseling ministry, temporary shelter, and supply or distribution center during disaster response efforts.
 - Organizes a “Buddy System” for those needing special care and assistance.
 - Educates and promotes personal and family emergency preparedness.
 - Establishes a church disaster response inventory for human and material resources.
 - Participates in training opportunities. (e.g. Red Cross’ “Introduction to Disaster Services”)

Leadership Team

- Disasters may require the use of church facilities, so it would be good to have the Trustees represented.
- There may be expenditures, so it would also be good to include a finance committee representative.
- Include members who have a sense of calling to this particular type of ministry.
- These people must be able to make decisions.

Resources Inventory

Your church is stronger and has more resources than you realize.

- What facilities do you have? A kitchen, fellowship hall; day care; food bank/pantry; areas for counseling victims or areas that could be temporary shelters; large bathrooms; computer and internet availability; or a worship center for the weary victim to find quiet time to worship?
- Do you have a church van; parking lot that could be a staging area for response groups; a temporary center; or place for a shower trailer?
- Identify the human and material resources of your church family (see reverse).

Once your church has selected a [Disaster Response Coordinator](#), formed a [Response Leadership Team](#) and taken a [Resources Inventory](#), please inform your state CBF Disaster Response contact person – Reid Doster (985) 778-6049 or reid_doster@hotmail.com

Are You Ready?

- Do you have a church preparedness checklist?
- Emergency phone numbers posted near phones?
- Regular check of alarms, fire extinguishers, emergency lighting and generator?
- Several well-stocked, clearly visible first aid kits?
- A planned evacuation route if necessary?

- Do you know the special needs of people to assist with individually-tailored evacuation procedures?
- Are there homebound or very low-income members, perhaps without family support, who lack the means to evacuate?
- Do you have a reciprocal agreement with another church or facility as a place to meet if your church sustains major damage?
- Have you made contact with local disaster response agencies (American Red Cross/Salvation Army), VOAD, and other faith groups responsive in disasters?
- Are your church properties adequately insured?
- Do you have duplicate computer data files, important papers, and records safely stored?
- Have you given thought to how you might protect certain office equipment or special furnishings, if time allows?
- Have you thought to keep on hand a supply of drinking water in the church facility?
- Do you have phone numbers or email addresses with which to contact members if they evacuate?

Pre-Event and Post-Event Checklist For Pastor and Staff

Before the Event:

- Identify vulnerable church members:
 - Aged, living alone?
 - Living in trailers?
 - In an area prone to disaster, e.g. flooding?
- When they might be at risk, attempt to warn your more vulnerable members.
- If there is any discussion about allowing your church to be used as an official community shelter, do your homework and understand what could be required.

After the Event:

Determine (by phone or visit) the status of members most impacted by the storm. In case of large-scale disaster, a follow-up of the entire congregation should be done. Church members should be encouraged to notify the church regarding their whereabouts. Pre-decide upon a plan for this.

If you are unable to reach Reid Doster at the above numbers, call or email Charles Ray, CBF Disaster Response Coordinator (USA) at (501) 680-2722 or cray@cbfar.org.

Be Prepared to Deal With Hard Questions

Disaster can bring undue stress on the victims of disaster and push them to the brink of despair.

Reactions can vary widely from one day to the next.

Here are some typical questions:

“Why is God doing this to us?”
 “Why is there such pain in the world?”
 “Why does God permit such suffering?”
 “Are we being punished?”

You might want to think about how you will answer.

Conclusion

Surveys indicate 90% of U.S. citizens, including church memberships, are in denial concerning personal readiness and response to any potential crisis, whether man-made or natural.

While schools are preparing children and faculty, and businesses are preparing employees, who is preparing the vast majority of your congregation? If you don't, who will?