

Role and Responsibility of the Local Church in Response to Disaster in the Local Community.

When disaster strikes:

The CDRC will notify the appropriate persons that a disaster has occurred and what responses are planned or underway. The Presbytery will be informed as to what has happened in your community and the possibility of involvement. Middle governing bodies need to know as soon as possible who is available to help and how the disaster has affected the congregation, the church building and the ability of the church to minister to the disaster survivors.

Participate in and help organize the faith community response:

All disasters are local. Even in the midst of national organizations and regional and state bodies arriving to help with emergency assistance and relief, the local congregation is the most important body in deterring what happens next. Outside agencies only help for a little while, and much of the aid and support that will be available in the long term will be determined shortly after emergency phase is over. It is essential that the local congregations in the area of a disaster quickly become involved in the faith community's response. Without the involvement of the local congregation – and frequently without the leadership of the pastor or trained laypersons – the long-term response will leave many survivors without adequate resources to rebuild... resources that would readily have been available with a faith community organized to receive them.

Use buildings as shelter, when appropriate:

There are two meanings in English of the word **sanctuary**; a holy place of worship, and a safe place in the midst of danger. Church buildings can be both a place of worship and a vital place of safety and shelter in a disaster.

If your church is remodeling or building a new structure, consider upgrading the facilities to make it useful as a shelter or staging area for those coming to help. Making a building disaster resistant may increase the cost; but it may also lower insurance costs and mitigate damage in a disaster. Churches in particularly disaster prone areas should seriously consider a program of mitigation which includes building renovation and strengthening.

Adding showers and planning the facilities for mass shelter can provide an opportunity for ministry to the community in times of crisis. In addition to survivors, those who arrive following a disaster to restore communications and power lines need facilities to prepare meals, shower and recoup after the day's work. In the recovery phase of a disaster, churches can host workteams from other parts of the country. Churches have been used as service centers in the relief phase and then gone on to provide support for long-term recovery efforts organized by the faith community.

Some churches have done it all! During the Ice Storm in Northern New York in 1998, the Peru Community Church made its kitchen available to the power company for the preparation of food for line crews, its fellowship building for survivors, and its parking lot for wood donated by local maple farmers for home heating in Peru... and as far north as Quebec. Of course, the ability of the Peru Church to respond so quickly and so positively to this crisis depended upon the willingness of the church to be used by the community, the accessibility and usability of the church facilities, and the prompt response of the middle judicatory to the church's request for support.

Taken from PDA materials