

Creating a Disaster Plan - help your ministry survive unexpected crises

(Brotherhood Mutual Insurance)

Natural disasters, bomb threats, hostage situations - all are emergency events that can significantly disrupt your ministry operations. Well you may not be able to prevent such crises, you can be prepared with a disaster plan that will help your ministry survive the event itself, and return to normal as quickly as possible.

Disaster planning experts recommend that all businesses, churches, and schools have a plan and conduct drills regularly to make sure people know how the plan works. If you don't have a plan, here is how to get started.

Form a team:

Your first step should be to create a team to help you plan for various emergency situations. Include people with experience in fields like emergency services, communications, and the medical field. Have your planning team examine realistic hazards in your area: flights, earthquakes, tornadoes, or hazardous chemicals that are produced, stored, or transported nearby.

Imagine the worst:

Imagine the worst thing that could happen in each type of situation, such as a tornado striking your church on Sunday morning, an armed gunman entering the sanctuary, or a tanker truck crashing nearby, releasing toxic fumes.

- Prioritize each potential emergency based on it's all likelihood of happening, and its potential impact on your ministry.
- Prepare an appropriate response to each one, according to the nature of the emergency.
- Consult experts, such as police, fire, or emergency management personnel, about any special concerns you should include in the plan.

Draft a plan:

Every ministries plan, at the minimum, should include the following information:

- Easily understood emergency procedures
- List of emergency contacts
- Outline of everyone's roles and responsibilities
- Location of emergency supplies
- Business recovery information

Emergency procedures

Here are some basic emergency procedures your plan should include:

- How to report a fire or other emergency
- How to respond to situations involving weapons
- How to evacuate
- How to account for staff, volunteers, and church members after any evacuation
- How to handle severe weather alerts
- How to provide first aid and medical care
- How to meet the special needs of the members and children

Emergency contacts

Create a list of people you will need to contact in an emergency. Make it wallet sized, if possible, and assign someone to keep the information up to date. On the list include:

- Names of people who would respond to an emergency
- Their responsibilities
- Their 24-hour cell and landline phone numbers

Your plan and disaster response kit should also contain an up to date list of important phone numbers such as:

- Police, fire, and emergency management
- EMS, ambulance service and hospitals
- Your church's insurance agent and policy number
- Telephone, gas, water, and electric companies
- Building management and security
- Local small business administration office
- Both State and Federal emergency management agency offices
- Newspaper, radio, and television stations

Roles and responsibilities

Determining everyone's roles and responsibilities in advance helps your ministry handle emergency situations more calmly and effectively. If possible appointed different person to head to each area of responsibility, such as evacuation, communication, and first aid.

Location of emergency supplies:

Your plan should identify where the disaster response kit is kept, so that everyone responding to an emergency can find it quickly. If you do not have one, create one containing items recommended by the federal emergency management agency.

Train workers:

A disaster response plan does little good if nobody knows the procedures it contains. Once you create a plan:

- Train employees and volunteers regularly.
- Contact evacuation drills to familiarize people with their roles and responsibilities.
- Compare notes after drills to identify and address problems that you didn't foresee during the planning process.

Business recovery information:

Part of the planning for disaster includes being ready to resume operations quickly, even without access to your normal worship facility. During the disaster planning process, ask yourself these questions:

- Do we have enough insurance coverage to get back in operation?
- Do we have an up to date the list (stored offsite) of the buildings contents?
- Where will we meet while our church is closed?
- Do we have back up files of membership and financial information stored offsite?
- Which contractors in the area our best qualified to repair, restore or rebuild our church?

Answering these questions now can help your ministry bounce back more quickly after a disaster. You will have more time to minister to your grieving congregation if you already have a recovery plan in place. Emergencies happen all the time. With sound planning, you can reduce the impact of any emergency on both your church members and your ministry.

See www.ready.gov for more information and tips.