

# Disasters

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## Prepare and Respond



### Part 1 Introduction



# Emergency NOW!

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*Call your priest:*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Priest

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: Home (H), Work (W)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Cell (C), Other (O)

*Call the diocese:*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Diocesan disaster response team coordinator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: Home (H), Work (W)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Cell (C), Other (O)

Other diocesan response team members and their roles:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name / Telephone

*Call local emergency personnel:*

**911: for police, fire or ambulance**

\_\_\_\_\_  
*County or other local emergency number*

## **Disaster Preparedness and Response in Province IV of the Episcopal Church**

*Published Lent 2009*

*Parishes and dioceses of the Episcopal Church may adapt this manual as needed for their own use, with credit to Province IV.  
If photos are retained, please also retain credits in Part 5, pages 7-8.*

*Find the latest revision on the World Wide Web at [www.provinceiv.org](http://www.provinceiv.org)*

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# Dear Friends

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*A letter from Province IV disaster coordinators*

**I**n the face of disaster, our lives change. There may be loss of life, serious injury, damage to home or church and the scattering of people in our community. Long after the disaster captures media headlines, the physical, emotional and spiritual struggle to rebuild and recover continues. The situation is made worse if there has been no forethought or preparation, though we know that natural and human-generated disasters may befall any part of our church, nation or world, often without warning.

**T**his resource manual has been developed to bring awareness about the need for adequate preparation and planned appropriate response when a disaster occurs. It was born out of several years of work, interviews and planning by the Disaster Preparedness and Response Network of Province IV of the Episcopal Church. The manual was based on the premise that the impact of a serious disaster on our church communities challenges their ability to respond in life-giving ways – and at a time when such response is desperately needed.

**W**hat you will find in these pages has been implemented and is available throughout our province. We hope this manual will be a help to you in your preparation for the disaster that we pray will never come. It is our prayer that all the preparation will be unnecessary; however, please consider that disaster preparation will provide an insurance policy of sorts, that you have done all you can do to protect what is important to you.

**S**pecial thanks and recognition must go to the Rev. Canon Chuck Robertson, canon to the presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, for his encouragement in this project. Those listed below have been instrumental in the project as well.

**Diocese of Alabama**  
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**Diocese of South Carolina**  
The Rev. Ed Rosenlieb

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Ms. Linda Schlepp-Gray

**Diocese of Southwest Florida**  
The Rev. Ted Edwards

**Diocese of Tennessee**  
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**Diocese of West Tennessee**  
The Rev. Don Brooks

**Diocese of Western North Carolina**  
The Rev. Larry Britt

**Network Coordinator**  
Ms. Sharon Jones, Ph.D.



# What is a disaster?

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The American Red Cross defines a disaster as an emergency that causes the loss of life and property and a disruption in which survivors cannot manage without spiritual, monetary or physical assistance. A disaster can bring injuries and loss of life; the destruction of property including housing, hospitals, critical facilities, transportation capabilities and businesses; and civic disorder.

Disasters and other crises include, for example, fire – whether in a building or a wildfire; a hazardous materials spill or other transportation accident; a chemical or biological threat; pandemic; a nuclear incident; an earthquake; a terrorist attack; or a riot or other civil unrest. Weather-related crises could strike in the form of extreme heat; drought or water shortage; severe winter weather; tornado; hurricane or flood. (For assistance in responding to any of these specific disasters, please see Part 4 of this manual, “What to Do When Disaster Strikes.”)

A disaster creates particularly hazardous conditions for vulnerable people and communities, and the location of a disaster can demand special handling. The American Red Cross has defined the life cycle of a disaster as years, not months, over which time a community progresses through phases of rescue, relief and recovery.

**T**he American Red Cross has defined the life cycle of a disaster as years, not months.

## Rescue

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In the first phase, the primary task is to save lives and property.

Essential personnel include emergency and law enforcement professionals such as firefighters, police officers, emergency medical technicians and those in the immediate vicinity who are able to call for help and provide first aid.

## Relief

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The major task in the second phase is to create safe and sanitary conditions for survivors and emergency personnel so that they may alleviate suffering in the aftermath.

Essential personnel in this phase include government and health-care personnel, relief agencies, law enforcement divisions and faith communities who provide clothing, shelter, health and medical attention to survivors.

## Recovery

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In the short-term during a major crisis such as a widely experienced weather event, individuals must recognize the need to be self-sufficient initially. (See recommendations for families and individuals in Part 3 of this manual).

Short-term recovery includes the restoration of utilities and services, damage assessment, temporary repairs, feeding, re-establishment of communications, reinforcement of law and beginning the process to replace damaged property.

Over the long term, lives and communities are rebuilt, counseling offers ways to cope

with physical, emotional and spiritual needs, and disaster responses are evaluated to develop or reshape strategies for addressing future occurrences.

Government agencies, disaster response agencies, community social service organizations and faith communities will work together cooperatively and collaboratively to foster healing and rebuilding of the community. Re-imagining the future in this phase is an act of hope and courage.

# The church's role during a disaster

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Being prepared for a disaster is an important pastoral obligation. By preparing for a disaster, the congregation is demonstrating God's love for its own members and for the surrounding community. Just as parishes should give thought to what preparations are necessary while the weather is fair and the world hums along normally, so too must the broader church consider what is needed.

"Disasters can and do occur – often without warning," East Tennessee Bishop Charles vonRosenberg wrote in his introductory letter to a diocesan preparedness manual. "But if we prepare, we can face nearly any disaster backed by knowledge, skills and a network that will quickly and efficiently assess and address needs."



## Episcopal Relief and Development

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Episcopal Relief and Development, the relief arm of the Episcopal Church, is active around the world as it responds to disasters and offers aid. In the United States, ERD provides an array of services and educational tools, and it encourages all Episcopalians to participate in these efforts. (For more information, see [www.er-d.org/UnitedStates/](http://www.er-d.org/UnitedStates/).) To learn how to receive grants and other assistance from ERD during a disaster, contact your bishop's office.

## Help from the province

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Province IV of the Episcopal Church comprises 20 dioceses in the Southeastern United States. The province has begun a plan of preparation within and among its dioceses that aims to take stock of the most probable needs in an overwhelming emergency. The plan seeks to make available resources and skills among sister dioceses in the province.

The Disaster Preparedness and Response Network of Province IV holds annual conferences among diocesan coordinators. These events have built trust and common experience and given opportunities for discussions of best practices and skill sharing.

"Rarely does any one diocese have all the skills or resources to answer the sudden and overwhelming needs arising in an emergency or disaster," wrote the Rev. Don Brooks of West Tennessee. Networking allows dioceses to provide reciprocal aid based on firm and trusting relationships that have been built over time.

"We know [our partners] understand what to do in an emergency situation and are prepared to assist as they can," wrote Dianne Britton of East Tennessee.

## Help from the diocese

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Many Province IV dioceses have teams available to respond to a disaster. The diocesan response team comprises individuals, both pastoral and administrative, who have been appointed by the bishop and are prepared to coordinate the diocesan response to any disaster occurring within its geographical area.

Diocesan offices, please see page 15 in this section of the manual for a brief discussion about

disaster preparation for the workplace. Parish representatives, please record contact information for your diocesan disaster coordinator and response team members on page 3. Should disaster strike, make those few calls immediately. The team members will meet in a pre-determined location, will assess the event and discuss responses with the bishop and then will initiate appropriate action – all as speedily as humanly possible.

A spokesperson will then communicate details of the response throughout the diocese and with governmental and law enforcement agencies and media representatives as appropriate.

## **Response chaplains**

**What is a response chaplain?** Response chaplains are clergy, religious or laity who have taken CPE or CISM courses, progressed through a screening interview and disaster preparedness orientation and are certified to respond in the event of a disaster. Invitations to serve as response chaplains will be issued on a periodic basis, and training opportunities will be provided.

**Who can become a response chaplain, and how?** The opportunity to serve in response to a disaster is open to diocesan clergy, religious and laity. An individual letter of agreement that sets out the terms, conditions and policies under which chaplains will respond will be signed by the approved training agency and the individual response chaplain. There will be an annual refresher course for those involved in this ministry. All clergy, religious and laity who have an interest in becoming response chaplains are invited to call the diocesan office for more information.

**Diocesan policy for response chaplains:** For urgent and compelling reasons of safety, it is diocesan policy, as well as that of the local emergency management authority, that no clergy are to deploy themselves to the scene of a disaster without proper training and as part of a coordinated disaster response.

**Where response chaplains serve:** Response chaplains are not first responders to any emergency or disaster. A response chaplain may serve in a family assistance center, in respite centers for uniformed personnel, and after additional screening for suitability, in temporary morgues. If a response chaplain is brought onto the actual site of a disaster, he or she must be escorted onto and off the site by uniformed personnel at the uniformed personnel's request, subject to the local emergency management authority's rules.

**Training course:** A training course will be offered by an agency that is qualified to train chaplains for disaster response in accordance and conformity with the local emergency management authority's standards of care provided by chaplains across faiths and denominational affiliation. It will provide basic training in how to be with victims, families and members of the uniformed services during and after a disaster, as well as details on how to work as part of an overall response team.

*Certified response chaplains in the diocese:*

---

Name

---

Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

---

Address: Street, E-mail

---

Name

---

Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

---

Address: Street, E-mail

---

Name

---

Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

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Address: Street, E-mail

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Name

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Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

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Address: Street, E-mail

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Name

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Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

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Address: Street, E-mail

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Name

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Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

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Address: Street, E-mail

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Name

---

Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

---

Address: Street, E-mail

---

Name

---

Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

---

Address: Street, E-mail

## Respite clergy

Respite clergy are provided, usually from one diocese to another and for a specified time, to allow a “breather” for parochial clergy whose church has experienced a disaster or significant crisis. Dioceses are encouraged to use the following text within a letter of agreement between respite clergy and the dioceses they are to temporarily serve, and to be sure the vestry of the recipient congregation understands the letter’s terms.

### Letter of agreement for respite clergy

between \_\_\_\_\_  
Clergy name

and \_\_\_\_\_  
Diocese

on behalf of \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of church

in \_\_\_\_\_  
City and State

*The signatures below make this a contractual agreement for ministry, with these terms:*

**Endorsement:** The sending diocese and the receiving diocese will agree upon and endorse the ministry of the respite clergy.

**Length of stay:** A defined length of stay or ministry should be established with appropriate dates of occupancy or residential duties defined.

**Compensation:** This is a pro bono ministry; all compensation will be the responsibility of the sending parish, diocese or institution.

**Insurance:** All appropriate insurance will be maintained at all times by parties of this agreement.

**Nonsuccession:** The respite clergy will not be considered for any call or further ministry directly related to this temporary assignment.

**Reimbursement:** If appropriate, some reimbursement may occur to the respite clergy by the host institution.

**Records and pastoral care:** All sacramental actions and pastoral services will be recorded in local parish records if available; if not, such documentation will be provided to the host bishop.

**Duties:** The respite clergy will function with full authority under the ecclesiastical authority of the host bishop.

**Exit interview:** If convenient, an exit interview will occur before the departure of the respite clergy.

**Termination or cancellation of contract:** This letter of agreement may be canceled at any time by either party, without cause.

**Pastoral issues and relationships:** Every attempt will be made to resolve any pastoral issues or pastoral relationships by the respite clergy before his or her departure from the host church.

**Closure and departure:** A defined departure date will be established and notice provided before the respite clergy departs.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Host bishop

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parish representative

\_\_\_\_\_  
Respite clergy

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## For diocesan offices

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This brief planning guidance for diocesan offices is directed toward preparation for disasters and resumption of diocesan operations at diocesan-owned and -operated facilities – generally considered to be the diocesan office. Other diocesan facilities such as camps and conference centers need disaster plans of their own but are not part of this section.

Diocesan office staff members also are encouraged to review the remainder of this manual, which addresses the disaster preparation of parishes and of individuals, for more material that they will find helpful.

### Purposes to be achieved

- Establishing the chain of command for an orderly evacuation of diocesan staff
- Securing buildings, vehicles, records, computer files and other property
- Communicating disaster plan initiation to all clergy for matching execution of parish disaster plans
- Assigning staff responsibilities, activities and reports when plan use is completed
- Providing guidance and training for individual disaster preparedness planning
- Coordinating re-assembly of diocesan staff in previously identified remote location(s)

Disaster planning is contingency planning. Under the urgent day-to-day pressures of diocesan operations it is easy to put off, so it must be given special attention by diocesan leadership as an internal matter. Disaster potential is continuous, and it will not wait until a more convenient time.

There is not a building or property in all of Province IV that is not vulnerable in some way. Some of those vulnerabilities are common to all facilities, and some are environmentally driven by the property location.

An initial activity to begin planning is to assess the vulnerabilities of the diocesan office and what steps would be needed to resume or relocate diocesan operations. Rapid resumption of diocesan operations is essential, because nobody who looks to the bishop and staff for leadership will perform better than the leaders do.

Remember P5: *Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance.*

### Risk assessment

Risks presented to the diocesan office facility will vary by region as well as by the actual location of the office. The church insurance arm of Church Pension Group provides assistance in this area (see [www.cpg.org/products/services/riskmanagement.cfm](http://www.cpg.org/products/services/riskmanagement.cfm)), and local civil officials also are valuable resources.

Risks include those that can occur at any time, such as fire, lightning strikes, tornado, earthquake, computer failure and theft. Seasonal risks vary by region and specific location, ranging from hurricanes and tropical storms with attendant storm surge, to forest fires and river flooding. Risks to civil order may arise in riots, terrorist incidents or online piracy.

## Planning considerations and best practices

When constructing a disaster plan for the diocesan office, assigned responsibilities need timelines for accomplishment. In addition, to prevent staff changes from driving a plan out of date, tasks must be assigned to jobs rather than to named individuals. Backup assignments are advised.

The diocesan office plan should govern only the diocesan facilities and staff. It should include directions for re-establishing diocesan office operations at an alternate location, and it should accommodate the intentions of the bishop and limited staff to move forward to disaster locations even if the diocesan office function does not move.

The plan should be sufficiently brief that staff will know it and can put it into motion quickly, without needing to take time to read it. The principle is that the effort put into making the plan now will reduce the time needed later to accomplish its activities when a disaster occurs. “Plan the Work; Work the Plan.”

In the event of a weather-related event, create a storm countdown timeline with a decision system that identifies who will start the clock with alternate authorized decision-makers when the primary leadership is unreachable.



Ongoing plans are needed for offsite secure storage of both electronic and written records, deeds, financial records and insurance policies. Backup copies at multiple locations are appropriate, and at least one offsite location should be at some remote distance, perhaps with a partner diocese.

Compile a portable traveling box of essential supplies so that diocesan operations can be resumed elsewhere, and assign custody of the supplies to a staff position.

Keep and regularly update an inventory of valuable and/or historic items – things for which an insurance claim might be filed later. Photographs and video documentation are important.

Enough copies of the plan should be provided so that each staff member will have a copy at their work site, in their vehicle’s glove box and at home.

While rosters of clergy, parish lay leaders and personnel information should not be part of the plan because they go out of date quickly, staffers are well advised to update their copies of contact information for clergy and lay leadership on a regular basis, and to keep a copy of this information at home.

A wise but admittedly expensive investment is a portable, stand-alone satellite communications system that can be used either at the office or moved forward into a disaster area.

Finally, include in the diocesan office plan those items of importance to the particular diocese and its bishop.

## For parishes

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The parish, as the basic body of believers in the Episcopal Church, is called to good stewardship of church property. Many churches are historical sites; their value cannot be measured only in dollars. Moreover, each parishioner is called to be the keeper of his or her brother and sister, and in particular to care for the “least of these.”

These considerations become especially important when crises or disasters occur. If a plan is in place and church employees and parishioners know the roles they are expected to fill, people won't be forgotten, and damage to the church facility will not overwhelm the congregation's ability to respond.

### **Clergy and lay leadership will respond as they ...**

- Assemble a team and implement the parish disaster plan.
- Communicate with parishioners, with church neighbors, with the larger community and with the broader church.
- Listen. Listening can facilitate the process of “meaning making” – the struggle to come to terms with the disaster and its repercussions – and help to discern the needs of those affected, especially those with special needs and those who have lost friends or family members.
- Pray; plan opportunities for public worship. Worship is an act of Christian hope and faith in God at work even in the midst of devastation. Public worship can be instrumental in healing.
- Pay special attention to the needs of family and loved ones. Practice self-care.
- Mobilize trained response chaplains to provide spiritual and pastoral assistance.
- Maintain communication with clergy and diocesan colleagues, and with local officials, being sure to ask for whatever help may be needed.
- Assess damage to home, church and community. Contact insurance companies and perhaps an attorney.
- Invite parishioners to participate in recovery efforts.

These items are explored in greater detail in Part 2 of this manual.

## **For parishioners**

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### **Individuals may be called upon to ...**

- Assist in grief recovery and nurturing.
- Assess short- and long-term needs of fellow parishioners and community neighbors and match them with available resources.
- Use specialized training and skills to assist in unique ways.
- Reflect on experiences and discuss them with community and family. Use insights to revise the parish response plan and to mitigate future disasters.

More information to assist with individual and family disaster preparedness may be found in Part 3 of this manual.