

Radical Hospitality:

HOUSES OF WORSHIP RESPONDING TO DISASTER

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Editor's note: This chapter deals with preparing the members of one's house of worship for either of two events, or both: The first is preparing for one's own disaster within one's house of worship (fire, flooding, etc.); the second is preparing the worshipping members to help others in the event of a disaster elsewhere in your community.

I. Introduction

While the world's great religions rarely agree on the particulars of faith, they do agree on the importance of service. To love one's neighbor as oneself is one of the benchmarks of the Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and virtually all of the world's religions. Service, for communities of faith, comes naturally. This was proven to be true during the tragedy of September 11, 2001, and has been re-proven many times since then.

Communities of all faiths from all over the metropolitan New York area, as well as those from around the world, worked together to respond to the crises of the moment. September 11, 2001 happened and it was covered by every media outlet in the world, but the equally important story is the story of September 12: the day we decided to get out of bed as individuals and as a nation to respond to the terrorists' violent attacks with hearts of compassion and service, to find and rescue any survivors and, ultimately, to lovingly recover the remains of the dead. For the communities of faith, September 12 and the ensuing months were shining moments of hope in

the midst of despair, of courage in the midst of terror, and of hospitality in the midst of devastation.

Many faith communities and faith-based organizations provided a wide variety of services through numerous venues throughout the recovery effort after 9/11. And while our offerings were not perfect, what we were privileged to witness was nothing short of a glimpse of the kingdom of God in which all God's children of differing faiths and perspectives pulled together to make a difference. We were called to serve and serve we did. We called it *Radical Hospitality*: to give without any expectation of anything in return.

But how does one prepare for such events? How do communities of faith offer hospitality? There is a wide variety of possibilities when responding to the needs of a disaster-stricken community and this spectrum of response will be considered in this chapter. Certainly not every house of worship will need to transform its sanctuary into a respite center, but some will.

What does preparedness look like for a local house of worship? How does one prepare one's community of faith for responding to the needs of a wider community dealing with a disaster – whether man-made such as a terror attack, or natural, such as a hurricane or tornado or an earthquake. Being prepared to serve in such a time is an act of radical hospitality – embracing the great commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself.



Being prepared to respond can lessen the loss of life, as well as hasten the healing process.

In this chapter, I offer some thoughts on preparedness for houses of worship and explore what one might expect to experience in the life-cycle of a disaster at the level of a local house of worship. I have also interspersed some thoughts on best practices as they pertain to a house of worship's readiness to serve in the event of a disaster.

PREPAREDNESS PHASE

II. Preparing your House of Worship to Respond

As religious leaders in your community, you will have a unique opportunity to be agents of healing in the event of a disaster. This chapter is intended to be a resource to aid in spiritual care and emotional support for your community. Depending on your proximity to a given disaster, you could be called upon to serve in a variety of ways as pastoral caregivers and volunteers in all phases of the life cycle of a disaster. It is vital that self-care be exercised. Burnout and exhaustion are neither good for you, nor for the people you love and serve. Don't forget to pray, to read your tradition's sacred texts and to practice spiritual disciplines, especially when you feel that you "don't have time." These practices not only help keep you healthy and safe, but they also prepare you to be a "non-anxious presence" for those in your care. You cannot care for others if you do not care for yourself.

A. Preparing for a disaster in which your house of worship is directly affected (when it's happening to you)

The first step in disaster preparedness is to develop a plan for your own house of worship in case the disaster happens to you. Being prepared to respond can lessen the loss of life, as well as hasten the healing process. One of the most important responsibilities for those who lead is being prepared to care for the members of one's house of worship in the aftermath of a disaster. This is most effective through advanced planning.

Each house of worship should develop a disaster plan for itself. It's a good idea to review that plan with the local fire safety official and law enforcement for an evaluation.

The leadership of the laity is essential for the success of the plan because you, as the religious leader, will be overwhelmed by the demands on your time should a disaster happen to you. Encourage and delegate leadership to the laity, who are your best resource. Remember – people want to help and need tasks they can accomplish to feel helpful and not helpless!

Houses of worship are encouraged to have members trained for CPR and Emergency First Aid. These courses are readily available through the local chapter of the Red Cross and other such organizations. It's also helpful to collect the names of members who are emergency professionals and medical practitioners for possible reference in the event of a disaster.

Developing a plan for your house of worship for its own needs

Steps for developing a plan (*please see Appendix B of this chapter for a disaster plan template*):

1. Appoint a disaster response coordinator and a disaster response committee for your house of worship who will coordinate and oversee preparedness efforts, communications, and any actual response to an emergency or disaster. Preparedness should not be limited to the religious leader. The participation of lay leaders is not only appropriate but vital. The administrative committee responsible for property, if there is one, is a natural choice for involvement here.
2. Begin by making an inspection of the buildings. Are exits clearly marked? Are fire extinguishers up-to-date? Do the smoke alarms have fresh batteries?



In the event of a disaster, public worship opportunities should be offered as soon as possible.

3. Have the disaster response committee complete the following risk survey. Preparedness means anticipating possible emergent situations based on an understanding of the disaster history of your geographic location.
 - A. List the local disasters and emergencies that have happened in the last ten years in your area.
 - B. Identify what disasters and emergencies are most likely to occur in your community. Identify potential areas of vulnerability. Consideration should be given to physical proximity to potential dangers. Examples include the proximity to a river or other significant body of water and the potential for flooding, or the proximity to a nuclear power plant and the radius of potential fallout.
 - C. Discuss with religious and lay leadership the potential impact of such disasters.
4. Formulate plans for evacuation in case of an emergency or disaster. There should be a plan for evacuating the buildings during the week (emphasis is on staff and personnel), and on the day of worship when member traffic is high. These plans should be rehearsed and reviewed on a periodic basis. They should also be shared with all groups that use the facilities like Alcoholics Anonymous or a Boy and/or Girl Scout troop.
5. Write the disaster plan and distribute it to key leadership.
6. A communications network is essential. Each house of worship should establish a communications mechanism for reaching all members in the event of an emergency or disaster, providing for a means of communication both during and after an incident. A roster of members, along with all available contact numbers should be kept up to date and copies of this list should be stored in several protected places. Members with

special needs should be checked on at the very earliest possible moment.

7. The house of worship's disaster plan should be reviewed and updated annually.
8. Encourage members to maintain "GO Kits" and to prepare a family emergency plan. Guidelines for the creation of a GO Kit and for the development of a family emergency plan are provided in the appendices.

Being prepared to care for one's own house of worship is crucial. Then, if possible, houses of worship should be opened as community centers with available religious leaders on hand to respond to the pastoral needs of the community in the aftermath of a disaster. The ministry of presence, especially in the event of a disaster, should not be underestimated. In the event of a disaster, public worship opportunities should be offered as soon as possible. It is particularly important to hold public worship as soon as possible following a disaster, even if it is necessary to secure an alternate location for worship because your building has been damaged or compromised. This is an act of hope that affirms that God is at work even in the midst of the destruction.

Being prepared for a disaster is an important pastoral obligation. By preparing for a disaster, the house of worship is demonstrating God's love for both its own members and for the surrounding community.



An outreach to the community strengthens the capacity for emergency responders to perform more quickly and with better support.

B. Responding to the Needs of the Community

After developing a preparedness plan for one's own house of worship, it is helpful for houses of worship to consider serving as a ready respite center for the local community if the need should warrant. An outreach to the community strengthens the capacity for emergency responders to perform more quickly and with better support. A house of worship can become a respite center for the community by:

1. In advance, and in consultation with the members of your house of worship, consider whether your building and/or facility has the capacity to be a shelter (shower/bathing facilities are generally necessary), feeding center, or storage space in a disaster. If your facilities warrant, consider becoming a certified disaster shelter. There is a certification process through the Red Cross and the Office of Emergency Management for becoming an emergency shelter. Do not be afraid to contact them for the details and to see whether your house of worship can help in this way.
2. Encourage your worshipping members to take training courses available through the Red Cross and the Office of Emergency Management in order to become familiar with various aspects of relief and recovery in the community.
3. Consider stocking emergency supplies (especially water) at your facility.
4. Keep an up to date list of worshipping members who are licensed and/or certified in life saving, health, law enforcement, fire and emergency services in case there is a need to call on them.

GUIDELINES AND INTERVENTIONS FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERS

It sounds simple and obvious, but the first step is to identify whether the disaster is happening to you or to the wider community – adrenaline can inhibit thought and work against you. Take a deep breath and gather as much factual information as possible.

RESPONSE PHASE

On the day and days immediately following **a disaster to the house of worship:**

- Find out as much as you can about the nature of the disaster.
- Assemble disaster response committee.
- Implement house of worship's disaster plan.
- Pay attention to the needs of your family and loved ones.
- Practice self-care. Remember, you cannot care for others if you do not care for yourself.
- Be aware of your own emotional state.
- Pray.
- Assess damage to home, house of worship, and community. Contact your insurance company.
- Be in communication with local officials. Ask for whatever help you may need.
- Make contact with worshipping members, especially those with special needs and those who have suffered recent loss of life in their families.
- Begin planning opportunities for public worship. This is an act of hope and faith in God at work even in the midst of devastation. Public worship can be instrumental in healing.
- Practice self care.
- Attend to the members of one's house of worship pastorally offering theologically nuanced messages on tragedy and occasions for worship that facilitate meaning making and healing.
- Use pastoral skills to help those suffering loss. Help them process and alleviate emotional pain. Active and empathetic listening is key.



Radical hospitality is very demanding at times, but the irony is that we receive so much more than we give.

- If possible, serve as a chaplain at the disaster site and invite the members of your house of worship to participate in the recovery efforts.

After a disaster strikes a community, the members of the community may be overwhelmed. One of the most pastoral responses is to listen. By listening, the religious leader is able to assist those affected in the process of “meaning making” as well as to discern what needs they may have. “Meaning making” is the struggle to come to terms with the disaster and the repercussions for life afterwards. This is a long-term process.

RECOVERY PHASE

- Assess short term and long term needs of those in your care. Assess what resources are available for recovery and make connections for the members of your house of worship.
- Continue to offer theologically nuanced sermons and worship opportunities for your house of worship. These opportunities assist in meaning, making, and integration.
- Remember the Disaster Life Cycle: “Years, Not Months.”
- Reflect on your experiences and talk about them with your community and family. Are there insights to be considered that might assist in mitigating future disasters?

Practicing the “other-directed love” essential for radical hospitality is a fine art. It requires preparedness and a willing spirit for service. Radical hospitality is very demanding at times, but the irony is that we receive so much more than we give. In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks there was, naturally, much concern over how our children were coping with the trauma. The average child must have watched the towers attacked countless times as it was played over and over again on the news. Before he died, someone asked Mr. Rogers for his wisdom on how to help the children cope and heal. His response was to tell them to keep their eyes on the helpers, the courageous men and women of our fire departments, police departments, emergency medical services and others. Sage advice. **May we also keep our eyes on the helpers as we seek, in our own way, to serve as helpers too.**

Editor's Note: the resources and websites provided here are provided by the authors as resources for issues raised in this chapter. For a list of all the resources provided in this manual, please refer to Chapter 10, just before the Reference Section.

RESOURCES

American Red Cross in Greater New York: www.arcgny.org

Church World Service: www.churchworldservice.org

FEMA Website: www.fema.gov/areyouready/why_prepare

Go-Bags (essentials to have packed and ready to take with one in the event of a disaster):

Ready New York: http://home2.nyc.gov/html/oem/html/ready/prepared_gobag.shtml

Lutheran Disaster Response New York: www.ldrny.org

NYC Office of Emergency Management:

Ready New York

CERT

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/oem/html/home/home.shtml>

New York Disaster Interfaith Services (NYDIS): www.nydis.org

This Chapter has the following Appendices:

Appendix A: Go Bag Contents

Appendix B: House of Worship Preparedness Checklist

Appendix A: Go Bag Resources

Ready-2-Go BACKPACK Contents, aka, (GO Bag):

Standard Backpack – 600 denier polyester with water repellent vinyl backing, dual zippered main compartment, two front pockets, two side pockets with Velcro closure and padded back straps. 12” X 15” X 5”

Safety	First Aid	Personal Hygiene Kit*	Vital Information
1 Contents Bag*	1 First Aid Guide	1 Toothbrush	1 ID Holder – zippered vinyl pouch with split ring (attach to backpack)*
1 Life Light Flashlight	1 Tweezers	1 Toothpaste	3 ID and Personal/Family Information Cards – PVC*
1 Battery Operated Glo-Lite-waterproof*	5 Bandage Strips	1 Razor	1 DNA/Fingerprint/Photo Identification Kit*
Energy Bar–400 Cals.	1 Knuckle Bandage	1 Comb	1 Zippered Vinyl Portfolio with imprinted document checklist (14” X 11”)*
Emergency Drinking Water w/pouch	1 Fingertip Bandage	2 Wash up Towlettes	1 Pen – Sharpie Waterproof Twin Tip*
2 16.9 oz. Bottled water	5 Gauze Pads	1 Purell Hand Sanitizing Wipe	1 Note Pad and Pencil with vinyl cover*
1 Signal Whistle	1 ABD Pad	1 Shout Wipe	1 Disposable Camera*
1 N95 Disposable Respirator	1 Roll Adhesive Tape	1 Sewing Kit	1 Disaster Response Brochure
1 pr Nitrile Protective Gloves	2 Antiseptic Wipes	1 Kleenex Travel Pack	
1 pr Industrial Gloves	2 Wash up Towelettes		
Rain Poncho w/hood	2 Alcohol Wipes		
1 Mylar Blanket	2 Safety Pins		
1 Hand Warmer Packet	1 Pain Reliever Packet		
1 Ice Pack			
1 Ice Pack			
1 Safety Vest			
1 Reflective Arm Band*			
1 Multi-Function Tool - pliers, knife,screwdrivers, saw, bottle opener*			
1 Radio/Flashlight/Compass on Lanyard*			
Additional radio batteries			
Carbon Monoxide Detector Disposable*			
Duct Tape			

* Imprintable. Many items OSHA and/or US Coast Guard Approved

Note: The list of contents on this page has been developed by Lutheran Disaster Response New York (LDRNY) on the basis of research and interviews with emergency managers.

Additionally, a simpler list can be found by entering ‘go bags’ on the search field at the www.nyc.gov website, which also has additional preparedness links.

Appendix B: House of Worship Disaster Preparedness Checklist

(Adapted from the Episcopal Diocese of East Tennessee)

The following table is a useful model for keeping track of what needs to be done and who is responsible for getting it done, as well as when the item is completed or the issue is resolved. It provides space for any details that others should know that would be helpful and/or for the next time that an item needs to be done:

Item/Issue	Person responsible for taking action	Action to be Taken	Date Completed	Notes

We have put the actual preparedness checklist into this format – feel free to adapt it in the way that is most helpful to you.

1. Committee/Task Force		
Coordinator(s)	Phone Numbers	Notes
1.		
2.		
Members	Phone Numbers	Notes
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
etc		

2. House of Worship communications network		
Persons responsible	Phone Numbers	Notes
1.		
2.		
3.		
etc.		
Methods of communication	Persons responsible	Phone numbers
1.		
2.		
3.		
etc		

3. Annual review date of Disaster Preparedness Plan: _____

4. Regular meeting schedule: _____

Appendix B: House of Worship Disaster Preparedness Checklist

5. Last 10 years disaster history					
Type/Event	Date		Notes		
1. 2. 3. 4. 5. etc.					
6. Disasters most likely to occur					
Type	Potential Impact on House of Worship's building or facility		Potential Impact on Community		
1. 2. 3. 4. etc					
7. Inventory of Property and Holdings					
Inventory Date	Photos	Video	Person(s)	Phone Numbers	Inventory storage
1. 2. 3. etc.					
8. Insurance Provider(s)					
Carrier(s)	Policy Numbers		Contact	Phone Numbers	Notes
1. 2. 3. etc					
9. Insurance Review					
Date	Person(s) Responsible		Phone Numbers	Date Completed	Notes

Appendix B: House of Worship Disaster Preparedness Checklist

10. Property Survey				
High Risk Problems	Smoke/Fire Alarms	Fire Extinguishers	Security System	Items on surge Protectors & locations
1. 2. 3. 4.				
Musical Instruments	Insured	Waterproof covering?	Location(s)	Wiring?
1. 2. 3. etc.				
Furniture	Insured	Waterproof covering?	Locations	Notes
1. 2. 3. etc.				
Vestments/Robes (Religious leaders)	Insured	Location	Water/Fireproof location	Notes
1. 2. 3. etc.				
Vestments/Robes (Choir)	Insured	Location	Water/Fireproof location	Notes
1. 2. 3. etc.				
Records/Documents	Off-site location	Copies in office	Photos made?	Notes
1. 2. etc.				
Computers	Backed-up	Person responsible	Offsite Storage Location	Notes
Other				

Appendix B: House of Worship Disaster Preparedness Checklist

11. Shutting Down The Facility			
Electricity	Shutoff location	Instructions How	Notes
Fuses Circuit breakers Building Feed Other			
Gas	Shutoff Location	Instructions How	Notes
Appliances Building Feed Other			
Water	Shutoff Location	Instructions How	Notes
Water Main Bathroom Bathroom Showers Showers Kitchen Other			
Heating	Shutoff Location	Instructions How	Notes
Furnace Oil Gas Electric Other			
Alarm	Shutoff Location	Instructions How	Notes
Other	Shutoff Location	Instructions How	Notes

11. Exit signs and exits clearly marked.

Yes ___ No ___

12. Emergency Lighting tested annually.

Yes ___ No ___

13. Copy of disaster plan sent to: House of Worship's overseeing body.

Yes ___ No ___

14. Copy of disaster plan and floor plan(s) filed with local emergency agencies
(Fire Department, Police Department, EMS)

Yes ___ No ___

Appendix B: House of Worship Disaster Preparedness Checklist

American Red Cross Affiliation/Training

15. Is the House of Worship able to be any of the following:

15A. Shelter provider? Yes ___ No ___.

15B. Storage provider? Yes ___ No ___.

15C. Mass care food center? Yes ___ No ___.

15D Other: _____.

Person responsible for coordinating congregants to take American Red Cross Courses:

Name: _____ Phone Number: _____

17. Emergency Supplies					
Food Type	Amount	Expiration Date	Location	Person Responsible	Phone Number(s)
1. 2. etc.					
Water	Amount	Expiration Date	Location	Person Responsible	Phone Number(s)
Clothing	Type		Location	Person Responsible	Phone Number(s)
1. 2. etc.					
Assess for Need	Person Responsible		Phone Number(s)	Notes	
Distribution	Method		Person(s) Responsible	Phone Number(s)	Notes
1. 2. etc.					

