

# Disaster Preparedness for Houses of Worship

2015 WHOLE COMMUNITY CONFERENCE

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# Introductions

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The Humanitarian Disaster Institute is a research, training and consulting center engaged in all causes of disasters, including risk reduction, trauma, vulnerability and disparities.



# Principles

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Disaster preparedness is a ministry as well as a task.

Vulnerability is fundamentally an issue of justice, and faith communities are called to confront injustice. Thus, disaster work can be part of your current ministries, not an addition.

Linking disaster strategies to the mission of the church leads to a broader and more sustainable engagement.

Failing to address vulnerable populations in our programs adds to disparities. The faith community is in a unique position to recognize this problem.



# Why Disaster *Ministry*?

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“Disaster preparedness” speaks to important tasks that support the ministry of the church. They are part of good stewardship and the responsibility of the church to protect the people who come to the house of worship.

“Disaster ministry” speaks to the core mission of the faith community.

Work with local agencies, but do not let that collaboration define your ministry. 60% of disasters never come to the attention of the media, and the majority of preparedness and resilience programming does an inadequate job at addressing vulnerable people.

The best way to see vulnerable people is to have a relationship with those who are exposed and vulnerable.



# Rethinking Disasters

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We must stop thinking of disasters as single events. Focusing on events is a distortion that results from the media. It causes us to fail to see the full extent of human suffering and the varied nature of vulnerability.

Disasters are best understood in three parts:  
An event + Exposure + Vulnerability

The effects of disasters cascade over time, with the most vulnerable among us experiencing consequences for a long time.

These points are essential for understanding disasters as a ministry.



# First Presbyterian Emergency Preparedness Team

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Started with a Sunday School class on disasters and vulnerable people. Led to a group in the church saying “we should do something about this”

Formed a team that proposed a multi – level, long term strategy:

- Work with staff on implementing the new church preparedness plan
- Promote concept of “disaster awareness” to existing ministries
- Identify and develop capacity for support of vulnerable members of the church
- Increase member awareness of disaster risks and preparedness through quarterly publications and information table
- Coordinate with Presbyterian Disaster Assistance and local agencies
  - (example – Have EMT from local fire house on committee)

# Example: From Active Shooter to Ministry

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Translated “Active Shooter” into “Disruptive Event”

- Active shooter very low probability, but disruptive people and events actually occur often
- Positioning the program around a higher probability event makes it much more likely the preparedness will be maintained
- Linked to people in need who may have an unexpected crisis

Quickly found that there is no consistent training for ushers, no protocols for managing disruptions

Needed system for numbering entrances and buildings in multi-building campus.

Brought police and fire over for a tour

Working on training and communications systems.



# Start with Own Members

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What are the likely threats? Heat and Flood, followed by tornado

Who is vulnerable and what do they need?

Modified church member database to tag people as vulnerable. Invited people to fill out a form and also include ways that they see themselves as vulnerable.

Putting caller tree in place to proactively reach vulnerable people, and then follow up.





# Make Your Ministries *Disaster Aware*

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Speak to existing ministries and ask (1) who do you serve, (2) how are they vulnerable, and (3) how might your ministry “pivot” to serve these people in a disaster?

Addresses concern that disasters are an “add-on” and not central to ministry.

Promote concept of disasters as an “indicator” rather than the focus. *Disasters reveal the need for the church to be engaged in the community.*



# Examples of Disaster Aware Ministries

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Visitation expanded to include

- disaster alerts
- Assessment of risks
- Sharing preparedness information

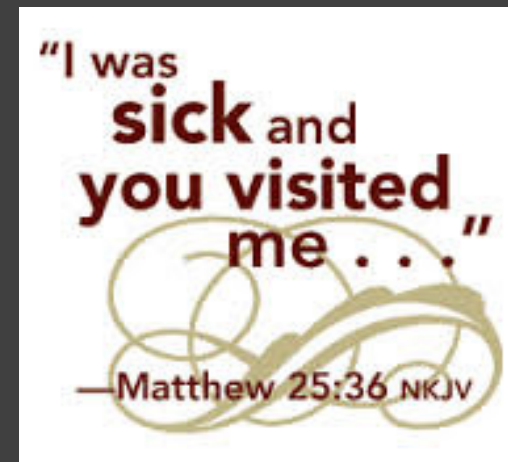
Youth Ministries

- Adopting refugee families (highly vulnerable)
- Cleanup
- Educate families through the children

Integrate disaster awareness into missionary support

Provide guidance during major disasters, i.e. how to help without becoming a SUV.

Promote long term perspective rather than reactive response



# The Special Case of Climate Change

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We have well developed weather data that allows for reliable predictions at the local level.

While the evidence for climate change in general is well established, the science is not yet mature enough for accurate local prediction.

Therefore, climate change preparedness requires a more flexible approach because it is less predictable. Using the same preparedness model as with extreme weather is not enough to be prepared for an unknown future.

A ministry focus on vulnerable people is an ideal compliment to climate change related disaster preparedness.

Example – Oppressive heat in Chicago...  
Mortality is predicted to triple (or more) in 30 years.



# Resources

HDI Disaster Ministry Conference, June 7-10, Wheaton College

HDI website: <http://www.wheaton.edu/hdi>

Aten & Boan (2016) *Disaster Ministry Handbook* Inter-Varsity Press (Coming February 2016)

