

## MODEL CHURCH DISASTER PREPAREDNESS & RESPONSE PLAN

### INTRODUCTION

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) enables congregations and mission partners of the Presbyterian Church (USA) to witness to the healing love of Christ through caring for communities adversely affected by crises and catastrophic events. In accomplishing this mission, PDA provides training and support in disaster preparedness and response to the church's congregations, middle governing bodies, and interfaith partners. Members of the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance Team are available to assist churches and middle governing bodies in both short and long-term recovery efforts. In addition, emergency assistance grants are available to help meet immediate needs and set up long-term disaster response. PDA is part of the Worldwide Ministries Division of the PCUSA and receives its primary funding from the **One Great Hour of Sharing** offering.

### **I. STEPS TO PREPARE FOR A DISASTER**

1. Develop a directory of pastors to include all necessary communications information: home and office telephone numbers of pastors, church telephone numbers, telephone numbers of clerk of session, cell phone and/or pager numbers for any of the above, E-mail addresses for any of the above. During a disaster many telephone and electric lines are knocked out, therefore, an alternative communications network consisting of pagers, cell phones, and amateur radios may be needed.
2. Establish a "telephone calling tree" to include each member and "friend" of the congregation. One person, the Pastor or a person designated by him/her, is responsible for activating the system when a disaster is imminent, or when an unexpected disaster has occurred.
3. Have a pre-arranged meeting place 25 miles from the church that all members know to go to in case the town you are in is devastated or inaccessible following the disaster.
4. Pre disaster planning with the Presbytery should be accomplished. The Presbytery office should have a disaster plan in effect.
5. Churches, especially those in high-risk areas, are encouraged to elect a permanent **Disaster Response Team (DRT)**, on a three-year rotating basis, to respond to large or small disasters. One way to organize the team is provided below:
  - A. DIRECTOR -- Overall leadership and coordination of the church's disaster preparedness and response plan.
  - B. FIELD WORKERS -- Trained to move directly into locations where a disaster has occurred to counsel survivors, assess damage, and provide immediate relief if needed.
  - C. ADVISORS -- People with different knowledge, skills, and abilities who can assist the church in executing the disaster preparedness and response plan.
6. Churches with established Disaster Response Teams should notify the Presbytery Disaster Assistance Coordinator or the Presbytery office so that a central data bank may be maintained and publicized throughout the church.

7. Share the plan and names of key people with other ecumenical partners active in disaster relief. Presbyteries and member congregations are encouraged to be actively involved in interfaith disaster response networks and Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), or to take a leadership role in forming such organizations.

## **II. STEPS TO TAKE WHEN A DISASTER IS IMMINENT**

1. Activate the calling tree, warning church members of the imminent disaster and suggesting preparation steps to take to minimize damage.
2. Establish an emergency communications center, at the church office, if possible, that will be ready to receive calls and serve as team headquarters as soon as the disaster has passed.
4. Contact the Presbytery office and any local interfaith disaster response network about its plans to respond to the imminent disaster.
5. Prepare yourself, you family, your church, and your home to weather the disaster in the best way possible.
6. If the disaster strikes without warning, such as the Oklahoma City bombing, initiate the appropriate above steps, combining them with the steps in III below.

## **III. STEPS TO TAKE IMMEDIATELY AFTER A DISASTER**

### **1. PASTOR**

- A. Stay where you are until danger passes.
- B. Assess your own damage, and attend to family, loved ones and yourself first.

C. When it is safe, assess the general situation and the physical needs of the people in your congregation and community.

D. Respond to the needs of the survivors, in cooperation with local emergency response agencies--police, fire department, American Red Cross, The Salvation Army, local interfaith response teams, etc.

E. Report your findings to the Presbytery office as soon as possible.

F. Under gird all efforts with spiritual support to the survivors of the disaster. No secular agency is equipped to do this. Play this unique and important role, in cooperation with other pastors, priests, rabbis, and spiritual leaders of the community.

G. When the relief phase of the disaster response begins, coordinate efforts of the congregation on the local level, working in cooperation with other pastors, interfaith response groups, FEMA, civil and governmental authorities, etc.

## 2. DISASTER RESPONSE TEAM DIRECTOR

A. In addition to the above, begin now to give necessary disaster response information to the Pastor.

B. Begin now to keep an updated list of damages of each congregational member.

C. If necessary, set up an emergency communications network, and arrange for temporary staffing of that center.

D. Convene the DRT team for decision making, evaluating those situations that need the most immediate attention.

E. When it is safe, deploy Field Workers to the most critical places to deliver immediate emergency assistance and provide for temporary shelter.

F. Take the initiative in convening, if it has not already been done, an Interfaith Disaster Response Network and other denominational response groups, American Red Cross, The Salvation Army, and FEMA. Coordinate with FEMA and the Seventh Day Adventists before opening warehouses for supplies and materials. Arrange for a phone line and number, with appropriate staffing, for those individuals which have donations to offer. Apply for grants from denominational sources and Church World Service. Establish priorities for the use of grant money. Begin planning for the long haul.

G. Contact the Advisors for long range plans and advice – See description in #5 below.

H. As FEMA and insurance companies respond, begin a list of "unmet needs" which can serve as an assignment guide for work teams who come to assist in recovery. Pay careful attention to the needs of the poor, minorities, handicapped, elderly, the uninsured, and others who might "fall through the cracks" when aid is dispersed.

I. Assess spiritual as well as physical needs. Make plans to meet these, using as a resource # 13 in the list of "Resources for Churches."

#### 4. FIELD WORKERS

A. Stay where you are until the danger passes. Be available to send and receive messages.

B. Assess your own damage first.

C. Monitor damage in your area via news reports.

D. Report damage in your area to the director and come to the initial meeting of the Disaster Response Team. Determine most immediate needs.

E. When it is safe, enter the affected area with emergency relief supplies.

F. Continue to meet with the Director and the DRT, making contacts with assigned church members.

G. Compile a list of needs for your assigned area and convey this to the Director.

H. Report daily to the Director about changing needs.

I. Minister to pastors and key lay leaders. Be particularly sensitive to their needs.

#### 5. ADVISORS

These individuals are responsible for providing specialized professional advice. Such advice will generally have to do with PROTECTION AND SAFETY (of survivors, workers and the Presbytery), POSSIBILITIES (for advocacy, contacts, creative response), and PROPRIETY (what norms, whose turf may be involved.) Advisors will be available in many areas: medicine, law, finance, banking, insurance, engineering, community organization, religion, psychiatry, agriculture, human rights, ecumenical and inter-faith relationships, governmental agencies, private enterprise, the environment, etc.

#### 6. LONG-TERM RECOVERY

It is important to remember that while immediate disaster response times can be counted in terms of days and weeks, long range recovery efforts may stretch into many months and even years. As these efforts continue, pastors and other disaster recovery workers will need pastoral care for themselves and their families, in order that these workers may continue to be effective leaders. Disasters always put great stress on persons and families involved in response and recovery. Presbyteries will need to plan for ways to minister to the special needs of these persons during times of crisis.

## **RESOURCES FOR CHURCHES**

1. Papers and publication of the "Cities at Risk" 1996 Internet conference of the United Nations Secretariat of the International Decade of Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR), found at <http://www.quipu.net>.
2. "National Earthquake Probabilistic Hazard Mapping Program: Lessons for Knowledge Transfer" (WP92, 1996, 84 pp.), order from Publications Clerk, Natural Hazards Research and Applications Information Center, Campus Box 482, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO 80309-0482 (\$4.00 shipping and handling, in addition).
3. "The Extension Agent's Handbook for Emergency Preparation and Response", produced by the Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center at Texas A&M University. Fourth edition is available through FEMA's World Wide Web site: (<http://www.fema.gov>).
4. For presbyteries along our coastlines or in mountainous areas where there are many tourists, there is a new monograph: "Disaster Evacuation Behavior: Tourists and Other Transients:" (Monograph #58, 1996, 375 pp., \$20). May be ordered from National Hazards Research Center above.
5. Papers and session summaries of the 1996 Annual Hazards Research and Applications Workshop, especially R96-14, "Rural Areas and Disaster Planning" and PP96-7, "Disaster Resistant Communities Program." Order from National Hazards Research Center above.
6. A subscription to "National Hazards Observer," a bimonthly magazine published by the National Hazards Center at Boulder, address above. Cost: \$15/year. The magazine contains articles on hazard prevention and mitigation, as well as a review in each issue of helpful Internet sites.
7. A manual entitled: "How to Set Up and Run a Community Disaster Recovery Organization," by Drew Cathell. Edited and distributed by: Charitable Outreach Society (COS), 505 North Poplar Street, Charlotte, NC 28202. (Not for sale, free distribution. Excellent. Order from North Carolina Council of Churches, Interfaith Disaster Response Committee, 1307 Glenwood Avenue, Suite 162, Raleigh, NC 27605-3258).
8. "When Disaster Strikes," a publication of FEMA giving the steps in requesting and receiving Federal disaster assistance. Order by calling the FEMA Office of Congressional Affairs, 202-646-4500.
9. "Responding in Disaster: Work Group Opportunities in Disaster Response," a pamphlet available from PDA, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202-1396. An update on current work group opportunities for local churches and presbytery work teams.

10. "A Guide to Federal Aid in Disasters," FEMA publication #262, April, 1995, available along with other FEMA publications from FEMA Headquarters, 500 C Street, SW, Washington, DC 20472, 202-646-2500, or regional and area offices of FEMA in major cities.
11. "Missouri Interfaith Disaster Response Network: Workteam Manual", Revised, January 1995. Available from PDA at above address.
12. "Presbyterian Disaster Assistance Team Operating Guidelines," available from PDA.
13. "Disaster Counseling Manual for Churches," by Virginia L. Soberg and Pastor Robert A Bremer, March, 1992, North Carolina Council of Churches, Methodist Building, 1307 Glenwood Avenue, Suite 162, Raleigh, NC 27605-3258, 919-828-6501. Contains very helpful information about dealing with the emotional and spiritual needs of people affected by disasters. For presbytery committees, local churches and pastors.
14. "Volunteer Considerations," a three part manual from the Lutheran Disaster Preparedness and Response Committee, 143 Oakdale Drive, Morganton, NC 28655, 704-433-8142, fax: 704-433-1287. Deals with all that you need to know about developing volunteer work groups, including sample forms and planning worksheets of various kinds.
15. "Leading A Workcamp," by Bruno D. Schroeder, United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, Division of the American Missionary Association, Voluntary Service Program, September 1987. Available from PDA. Covers some of the same areas as above, but in a different way with additional information. Well done.
16. Altogether We Triumph: Youth Response to Disaster, @ PDS# 74340-95-019  
A booklet for youth leaders to prepare young people for ministry in disaster situations. Order from Presbyterian Distribution Center, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202- 1396, 800-524-2612.
17. Prepare to Care: Church Response to Disaster, @ a publication of Church World Service, Emergency Response Office, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115, 212-870-3151.