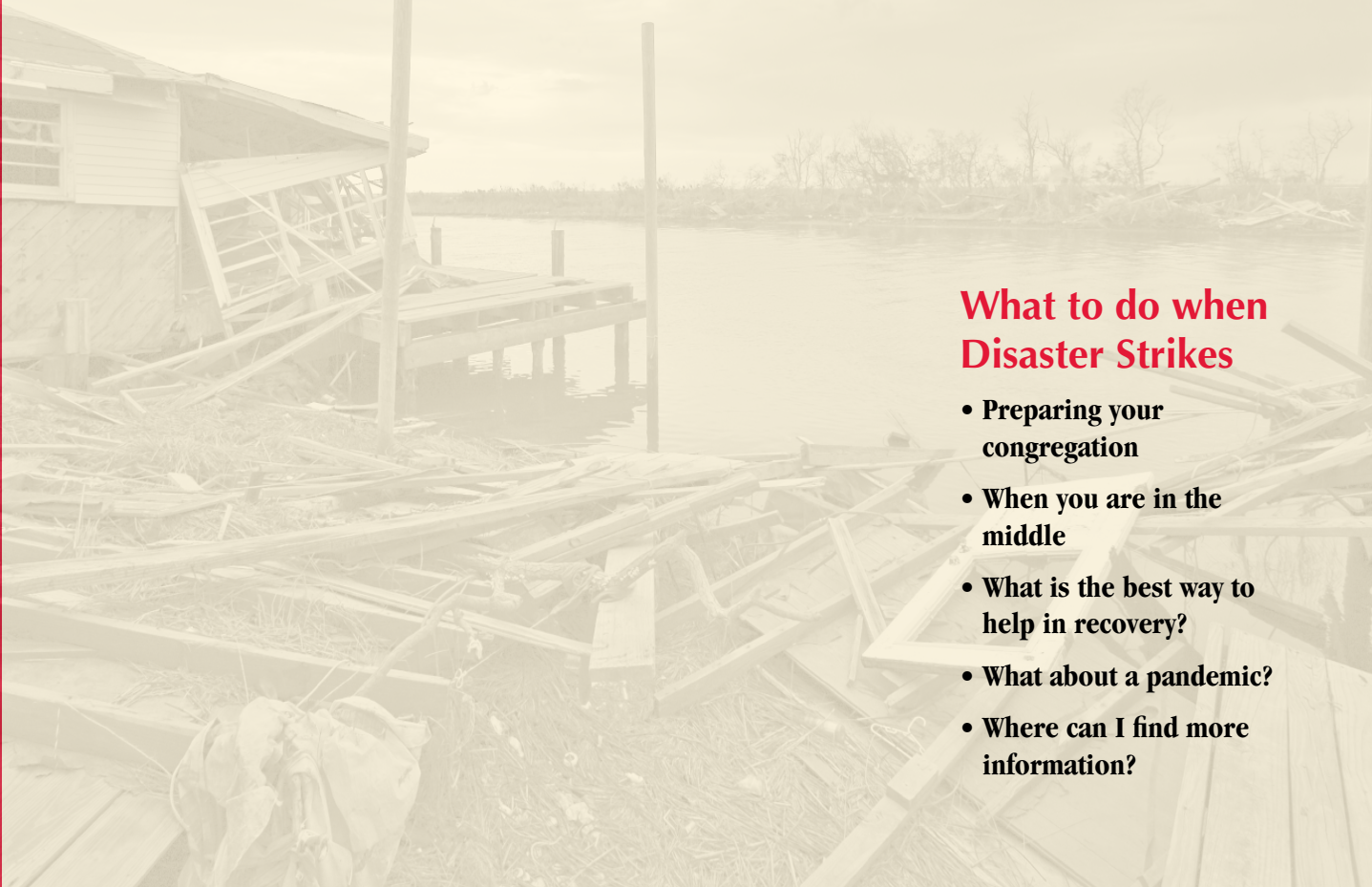


VIRGINIA  
COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

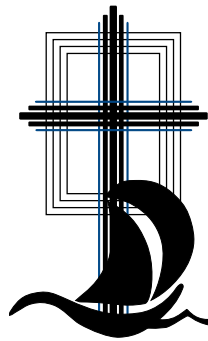
# The Changing Role of the Church in Disasters

A Reference Guide for Virginia Churches



## What to do when Disaster Strikes

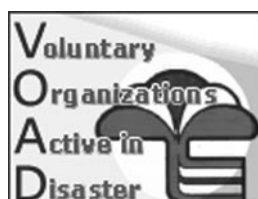
- Preparing your congregation
- When you are in the middle
- What is the best way to help in recovery?
- What about a pandemic?
- Where can I find more information?



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“Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on earth. So God said to Noah, ‘This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.’”

Genesis 9:16-17

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Since the Christian faith insists that God is intimately concerned with each individual life (Matt. 10:29-31), we cannot assume that God is indifferent or detached when the disaster comes. If we have no answers to these questions, does this imply either that God is vindictive rather than loving, or that God is weak rather than strong, or that God is absent rather than present with us? Clearly disasters, any crisis large or small, call into question our most fundamental understanding of God. In most disasters there seem to be plenty of room for blame, but in the final round we will always come back to God. Where was God? Why did God allow this terrible thing to happen? As we in the faith community plan and prepare for disasters we must first stop and realize that every crisis is a matter of faith.

The best possible way of preparing to endure a disaster and to rebuild after a disaster is to form caring, loving communities that watch out for each other. This is one way of describing the faith community in its local expression. There are many fine resources available that tell us how to store food, identify resources and gain appropriate training. This resource emphasizes the unique resources of the faith community: worship, prayer and spiritual care. Emergency planners tell us that individuals should be prepared to be on their own for 72 hours. What would it mean if, as congregations, we planned to be on our own for that same period? What if we knew who in our congregation needed transportation, assistance in getting around, had special medical needs and we planned to make certain that they were part of a Church Disaster Response Plan?

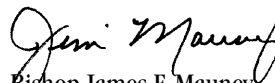
While this resource highlights preparation and responding to all hazards, we have included a special section for an outbreak of pandemic flu. It is imperative that each congregation develop an ‘all hazards’ awareness and preparation. This resource finally focuses more on the ‘household of faith’ as the point of preparation and response rather than individual households. The first step in any planning or response is stop and seek God’s **guidance** through prayer. Only then in the calm presence of our Lord will we understand what needs to be done. We have included a resource section with web links and references where you can find additional information to assist in your preparations.

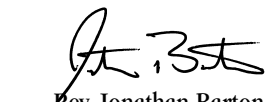


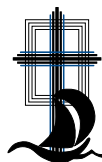
# Principles of Spiritual Response

- Prayer
- Respect for diverse faith traditions
- Forgiveness and reconciliation
- Commitment to confidentiality
- Complete prohibition of proselytizing or evangelizing in the context of Disaster Spiritual Response
- Respect for social diversity
- Description of professional boundaries that guarantee safety of clients
- Mechanisms for ensuring that caregivers function at levels appropriate to their training and educational backgrounds

Adherence to these principles is essential for Spiritual Response in a setting as public and as vulnerable as a community facing disaster. Victims of disaster deserve to receive Spiritual Response in a manner appropriate for their own lives, cultures and faith traditions. When Spiritual Care Providers from numerous agencies and organizations provide such care in a consistent professional manner, the service is embraced and cherished by communities in need.

  
Bishop James E. Mauney  
President

  
Rev. Jonathan Barton  
General Minister



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“If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,’ even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.”

Psalm 139:11-12

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When Christians gather, whether to celebrate, to grieve, to give praise and thanks or to raise their concerns to God, the first thing we usually do is pray. That is true in times of disaster, and in times of preparation. Life and love and relationship flow from God who loved the creation and each of us into being. We also entrust healing and restoration to God’s gentle hands.

“Loving Savior, you have known the anguish of feeling estranged from friends and family and from life. Walk alongside me, giving me hope that tomorrow can be better. Help me see the beauty that presents itself to me. Give me patience as I accustom myself to new surroundings. Help me feel at home, even here. Amen.”

— from *Meeting God in the Ruins: Devotions for Disaster Relief Volunteers*, p. 17

### Hymns of comfort and hope

*Amazing Grace*

*Children of the Heavenly Father* “...safely in his bosom gather...”

*Faith of our Fathers* “...living still, in spite of dungeon, fire and sword...”

*Have no Fear, Little Flock*

*If You but Trust in God to Guide You*

*Lord of All Hopefulness*

*The Lord’s My Shepherd* “The Lord’s my shepherd; I’ll not want...”

*The King of Love My Shepherd Is* “...whose goodness faileth never...”

*What a Friend We Have in Jesus* “...all our sins and griefs to bear...”

### Selected Scripture

Psalm 23 “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...”

Psalm 27 “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear?...”

Psalm 46 “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble...”

Psalm 121 “I lift up my eyes to the hills; from where is my help to come?  
“My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth...”

Isaiah 35:1-10 “The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad...”

Isaiah 43:1-3a “...Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine...”

Lamentations 3:55-58 “I called on your name, O Lord, from the depths... you heard my plea...”

Mark 4:35-41 Jesus stills the storm

John 14:1-6 “Do not let your hearts be troubled...”

Romans 8:31-39 “...if God is for us, who is against us?... [nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

2 Corinthians 4:6-9 “...we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed...”



## Preparation

Hurricanes, airline crash, tornado, mass shooting, flood, and terrorism epidemic are events that happen somewhere in the world on a regular basis. Whether they are acts of nature that overwhelm our resources, outbreaks of disease, accidents, or deliberate acts of human evil that challenge our core beliefs, these events call forth our deepest spiritual resources.

In moments of quiet reflection we may say with the Apostle Paul that 'nothing can separate us from the love of God.' But events such as these not only defy this belief they provide us with the practical opportunity to become instruments of the love of God to our neighbors through our response. Disasters reveal our level of preparation. This resource is designed to suggest ways of preparing for and providing pastoral care in the midst of and in the aftermath of a disaster.

## When a Disaster is Far Away!

This is the most likely situation you will face. You will learn about the disaster through the international media with follow-up reports from a relief agency such as Church World Service or the American Red Cross. It is likely impossible that someone in your congregation will be directly involved in such an event.

This level of disaster provides you with the opportunity for preparation. Much of disaster preparation focuses on the response and recovery phases of emergencies. Addressing spiritual and emotional issues alongside the physical facets of preparedness are worthwhile areas of focus.

- Become familiar with the national and international relief agencies that provide the most effective response and relief to disaster victims. Develop a relationship with them now.
- People will want to focus on the provision of physical relief, so they will need encouragement to stay focused on the issue of spiritual care.
- Name and talk about the natural range of feelings people likely experience when they think about the possibility of an emergency. These will range from, "I'll be overwhelmed ... I won't know what to do ... I'll freeze/panic ... I won't be able to cope ..."; to the other end of the spectrum, "I'm well prepared ... I'm competent ... I'll get through this ... I'm in control." Talk about how the helpless feelings and reactions to disaster can be managed.
- Have your facility evaluated to become a shelter in the event of a nearby or local disaster. Taking the steps of physical preparation will increase the opportunity to discuss spiritual care, including identifying the most vulnerable members of your congregation who will likely need spiritual care as well as other types of care.



## When a Disaster is Nearby!

This is the situation where you can provide the most care. You will most likely learn about such events not only through the local media but also through individuals who may be affected or who have family members who are directly affected. It is likely that your congregation could be called upon to provide resources through relief agencies, other non-profit institutions or even government agencies.

- A nearby disaster will drive home the point that bad things can happen to people you know in a community much like your own! This is a great opportunity for your community to receive training in disaster relief skills and to evaluate its own level of preparation for severe natural disasters. The local chapter of the American Red Cross is the best place to turn for this training and resources. ([www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org))
- Become familiar with your state or regional Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster network. ([www.nvoad.org](http://www.nvoad.org)) Consider having a member of the faith community become active in this volunteer network.
- Offer your community's facility as a temporary shelter to immediate victims or arriving relief workers. Provide respite pastoral care to the religious professionals in the community affected by the disaster.
- Activate your care plan for the members of your own congregation who are the most vulnerable in such events, refining the plan as necessary given the circumstances of the disaster.

## When a Disaster is at Your Door!

This is the condition in which you will provide limited care and receive significant care. If this event is a natural disaster you have probably had some warning of its approach and taken some precautions. If a human agent causes this event, the shock and surprise will initially paralyze your response. You, members of your faith community, your place of worship and your home could instantly become casualties or first-responders given the nature of the event.

- You and your congregation will experience a variety of emotional responses. Shock, disbelief, grief, helplessness, powerlessness, irritability, survivor guilt and unpredictable mood swings are but a few normal responses to disaster.
- Some more serious responses may include poor concentration and memory problems, impaired thinking, making poor decisions, obsessive self-criticism and preoccupation with protecting loved ones.
- The good news is that only a minority of survivors will ultimately develop conditions that reach full-blown diagnostic thresholds for post-traumatic stress disorder, clinical depression or anxiety.



This number can be significantly reduced by the rapid application of spiritual care as well as physical relief.

## Questions for Discussion

Consider how your faith community would respond to one of these scenarios.

- A public health physician asks your pastor to identify the twenty most vulnerable members of the community who will be vaccinated against a smallpox outbreak.
- A tornado touched down on a nearby middle school one year ago. Several children were severely injured. How will your faith community remember the anniversary?
- Stress among clergy families directly affected by the Gulf Coast hurricanes of 2005 is significant. What can your congregation do to provide respite care?



# Getting Your Congregational Family Ready for an Emergency

## Communications Plan and Inventory of Assets

Identify the hazards and threats for your neighborhood, and what your congregation and its members would need to do during an actual emergency. Can the building serve as a shelter? As a feeding station? Is it Red Cross-certified? What special skills and needs do members have? Identify elderly and medically needy members; also nurses, doctors, trained responders. Encourage the members to decide on a family meeting place if they cannot return home, and to designate an out-of-town friend or relative as a point-of-contact. Specific needs of households should be considered, such as an evacuation destination for pets or transportation for medical equipment.

## Local Instructions

Before, during and after a disaster, it is critical that you listen for the most local, up-to-date information from emergency officials. Local media will convey instructions from local, state and federal government partners concerning evacuation orders, how to safely stay where you are, and what to do when the emergency has passed. *ASSUME POWER WILL BE OUT, AND YOU WILL NEED A BATTERY-OPERATED RADIO.* Ham radio operators may serve as critical communication facilitators. Cell phones won't work if towers are down or power is out.

## Evacuation Routes

Coastal residents should become familiar with their designated evacuation routes and know where they will go if ordered to evacuate. Emergency officials have designated hurricane evacuation routes for Hampton, the Eastern Shore, Norfolk, Poquoson, the Middle Peninsula, the Northern Neck, Virginia Beach and York County. Inland residents should know where to go if ordered to evacuate their area. Flash floods can develop in a matter of minutes. Know where to go!

## Emergency Supply Kit

Putting together emergency supply kits takes little time and money, but it will provide your congregation what they need when it counts. Put together a kit for the parish, for members of the congregation. You might have a kit-assembly party! An emergency supply kit includes essential items to last three to five days.





“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’ He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ Then the wind ceased, and there was dead calm. He said to them, ‘Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?’ And they were filled with great awe.”

Mark 4:38–41

## What to Do If You Want to Help

Those of us aching to help can contribute wisely toward disaster relief and recovery efforts. Consider the following before you volunteer your time, talents and goods.



- **Pray for the survivors and those that will be helping them.**
- **Get precise information and confirm what is needed before making a plan to respond to disaster. If you have a role as a leader or communicator, take that responsibility seriously.** Contact an experienced relief organization, like the American Red Cross or your Denomination contacts or faith community to find out what is the best way to assist. Before collecting donations of items or traveling to the disaster area to help, ascertain what donations are needed, where they will go and who they will be distributed to. In a community struggling to respond to and recover from a disaster, an influx of unexpected or unneeded volunteers and donations can make the process even more difficult.
- **Financial contributions are preferred because they allow the most urgently needed items to be purchased as close to the disaster site as possible.** Buying locally boosts a weakened economy and ensures supplies get to victims quickly. Cash contributions can often be matched by benevolent organizations which can double the effect of your generosity, or more.
- **Avoid duplicating services unless needed.** Your congregation or group may be uniquely positioned to do one thing well. Figure out what need corresponds best to your resources and work with disaster response organizations to provide that ministry.
- Unless you experience the disaster first hand it will likely fade from memories before long term recovery is completed. Remember recovery is a long process and some will never recover. Some disaster response organizations have speakers who are eager to share their disaster relief and recovery experiences. Invite persons who experienced the disaster first hand, or who may have been on a recent mission trip to **learn how you can help with recovery over the long haul.**

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”  
Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.”

Isaiah 6: 8



“Then the Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.’”

Job 2:3

## Pandemic Flu

The dictionary defines *Pandemic* as: adj. 1. Widespread, general, universal. 2 Medicine. Epidemic over an especially wide geographic area – n. A pandemic disease.

**Pandemic Flu** – Pandemic Influenza is a global outbreak when a new virus appears in humans and spreads easily from person to person. The current concern is with the highly pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N1. As of the fall of 2006 this strain of influenza has not changed into a form that would allow for person-to-person transmission.

### An outbreak of Pandemic Flu presents special challenges to congregations.

- How do we as a community of faith minister to the large numbers that will be sick?
- How do we continue to be a worshipping community during an outbreak?
- How might this affect our worship service, the sharing of communion?
- Should we close our church and not visit our members?

All of these questions are important to ask as congregations begin to develop a plan of action for a pandemic flu outbreak.

### To plan and prepare for a Pandemic Flu the following should be observed:

- Persons with the flu, or merely signs of the flu (fever, cough, runny nose, muscle pain), should cover mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing; keep their hands away from their eyes, nose and mouth. Also:
- Stay home and avoid contact with others.
- Wear a surgical mask when around others.
- Keep personal items separate, i.e. clothing, bedding, eating utensils, pens, and computers.
- Have touched items disinfected with water with chlorine bleach (1 gal.: 1/4 c.)
- Have laundry done with very hot water.
- Call health care professional for assistance (advice, prescriptions, etc.), to report high fever, shaking chills, coughing with thick mucus, dehydration, worsening of chronic conditions.

### As part of planning and preparation the following should be gathered:

- Masks (1 per person), disposable gloves, thermometer, alcohol-based hand sanitizer, liquid soap, chlorine bleach, basin, paper towels, tissues, toilet paper, disposable diapers, garbage bags, over-the-counter medications for probable symptoms, fluids/ fluids with electrolytes (sugar, baking soda, salt, lemon juice, unsweetened Kool Aid), easily digested foods (fruit juices, soup, broth), care log.

**“Any community that fails to prepare with the idea that somehow, in the end, the federal government will be able to rescue them will be tragically wrong.”**

*Michael Leavitt,  
U.S. Secretary of  
Health and Human Services  
at Maryland State Meeting  
2/24/06*



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## Non-profit Disaster Response Links

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| <a href="http://www.NVOAD.org">www.NVOAD.org</a>                                   | National VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters) - links to VA VOAD and SE VA VOAD |
| <a href="http://www.vavoad.com">www.vavoad.com</a>                                 | Virginia VOAD website   |
| <a href="http://www.disasternews.net">www.disasternews.net</a>                     | Disaster News Network - news of disasters and voluntary organizations' response               |
| <a href="http://www.reactintl.org">www.reactintl.org</a>                           | REACT (Radio Emergency Associated Communications Teams), linking amateur radio operators      |
| <a href="http://www.redcross.org">www.redcross.org</a>                             | American Red Cross  |
| <a href="http://www.CWSERP.org">www.CWSERP.org</a>                                 | Church World Service Emergency Response Program   |
| <a href="http://www.ldr.org">www.ldr.org</a>                                       | Lutheran Disaster Response  |
| <a href="http://www.LFSVA.org">www.LFSVA.org</a>                                   | Lutheran Family Services of VA: link to LDR-VA  |
| <a href="http://www.pcusa.org/pda">www.pcusa.org/pda</a>                           | Presbyterian Disaster Assistance  |
| <a href="http://www.salvationarmyusa.org">www.salvationarmyusa.org</a>             | Salvation Army  |
| <a href="http://http://gbgm-umc.org/umcor/">http://gbgm-umc.org/umcor/</a>         | United Methodist Committee on Relief  |
| <a href="http://www.vaumc.org">www.vaumc.org</a>                                   | VA Conference, UMC  |
| <a href="http://www.vbmb.org">www.vbmb.org</a>                                     | Baptist General Association of Virginia   |
| <a href="http://www.brethren.org">www.brethren.org</a>                             | Church of the Brethren  |
| <a href="http://www.friendsdisasterservice.org">www.friendsdisasterservice.org</a> | Friends Disaster Service  |
| <a href="http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org">www.catholiccharitiesusa.org</a>     | Catholic Charities  |

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## State Links

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|---|---|
| <a href="http://vaemergency.com">http://vaemergency.com</a> | Virginia Department of Emergency Management |
| <a href="http://www.virtualeoc.org">www.virtualeoc.org</a>  | Virginia state situation report website     |

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## Federal Links

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| <a href="http://www.cdc.gov">www.cdc.gov</a>                       | Centers for Disease Control - many resources on flu pandemic/preparedness  |
| <a href="http://http://weather.gov/akq">http://weather.gov/akq</a> | NOAA National Weather Service - the latest on weather, warnings, storms, hurricanes, etc.                                      |
| <a href="http://www.fema.gov">www.fema.gov</a>                     | Federal Emergency Management Agency  |
| <a href="http://www.osha.gov">www.osha.gov</a>                     | OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) - includes info on working as volunteer in hazardous environment          |
| <a href="http://www.ready.gov">www.ready.gov</a>                   | US Department of Homeland Security   |
| <a href="http://www.pandemicflu.gov">www.pandemicflu.gov</a>       | One-stop access to U.S. Government avian and pandemic flu information. Managed by the Department of Health and Human Services. |





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