

1. INTRODUCTION

A Caring Response to Disaster Is Part of a Shared Commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ

You and your church are vital links in a huge network of caring responders to disaster from a faith basis. Your church, in cooperation with Church World Service, channels resources to partner organizations in the U.S. and more than 70 countries to carry out disaster response to those most in need to the glory of God.

Church response to disaster is a shared commitment and witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ to assist those affected by disaster through spiritual, physical, and psychological care. However, in working together, all faith groups in the wider religious community are invited and welcome to participate in the cooperative effort.

Church World Service



Church World Service Can Help

This is one in a series of five manuals published by Church World Service to guide churches as caring response partners in disaster. This manual focuses on how to:

- Prepare yourself, your family, and your church for disaster.

What is a Disaster?

Disaster. Any occurrence such as a hurricane, tornado, storm, flood, tidal wave, fire explosion, contamination, civil strife, war, or other human-caused technological/environmental event that produces human suffering or creates human needs that survivors cannot alleviate without assistance.

You and your church can make an important contribution in helping people recover from disaster. This manual shows you how. Above: a church group prepares disaster recovery kits.

- Prepare your church to work together with other churches and faith groups in your community or region to respond to those in need.

See inside front cover for complete list of manuals.

Prepare to Care:

“*I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink...*”

Matthew 25:35



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After disasters, the church's unique role is to assist people most in need, according to Kenlynn Schroeder, former Director of the Disaster Response program at Church World Service, and William Chappel, volunteer for Midwest flood relief.

Doing the Church's Unique Work with Other People of Faith

Churches have a long history of working together to respond to emergency needs. They have helped build, rebuild, and renew communities after disasters. God's people know of the saving grace and power of God and of God's love for all creation. God has turned chaos into creation, slavery into freedom, wilderness into community, exile into new covenant, suffering into servanthood, hopelessness into promise; and God can turn disaster into opportunity.

After World War II, U.S. churches decided that working together is good stewardship of resources and prevents duplication. In 1946, member denominations formed Church World Service as the coordinating organization to respond to disasters and the needs of refugees. The American Red Cross and the federal government, if the President declares a disaster, look to your church and Church World Service to coordinate church and interfaith efforts in the response.

Your church—in cooperation with the wider religious community—has a unique role to play among other disaster agencies because people of faith recognize all human beings to be created equally by God. People of God advocate for equitable allocation of resources to those according to need after disaster strikes:

- standing on the side of the oppressed to offer advocacy with and for those most in need.
- seeking out unmet needs of people who were vulnerable and marginalized before the disaster.
- providing a larger vision of life that includes emotional and spiritual care as well as physical rebuilding.
- assisting in long-term recovery of those in need, regardless of the type of disaster which occurred.
- restoring or building community relationships (if they were not there before the disaster).



The Gospel of Jesus Christ calls us in the church to disaster response as a way of helping people in need.



Andrea Wolf for Church World Service

Myth: "It won't happen to me."

*Fact: **When** disaster strikes, not **if**.*

In the Bible we meet a God who is creator, judge, liberator; a God who is with the people, bearing them up, forgiving them, restoring them and dying for them so there can be new life for all. We have the responsibility to help the survivors and care-givers know about this call to new life in justice, liberation, and transformation.

In the midst of the trauma of a disaster, churches nurture spiritual recovery. This can be as important as physical rebuilding of homes.

The task is not to display uniqueness; the task is to be faithful to the call of God. Our uniqueness is our call by God to serve. It is a gift to be offered to the survivors, care-givers, and their community regardless of race, religion, class, gender, or political affiliation.

The benefits and accomplishments of the whole community of faith

together are greater than the sum of the accomplishments of each individual congregation. Recovery from disaster requires involvement of everyone in a community and cooperation is essential. Every person and organization has something to offer—prayers, volunteer service, cash, and/or material aid contributions.

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Reuters via Religious News Service

After a disaster, churches and other faith groups can be most effective by working together. Interfaith organizations demonstrated this following the 1994 Los Angeles earthquake.

Prepare to Care:

