

7. WHEN DISASTER STRIKES: CARING THROUGH RESPONSE

“Contact your pastor and encourage your church leaders to call an emergency meeting of all other religious leaders in the community and alert Church World Service.”

When prepared, you and your church can provide many different kinds of help in each of the stages of natural or human-caused disasters.



Your first step when a disaster strikes: bring leaders of the religious community together to review the situation and plan a coordinated response.

The Three Stages of Natural Disaster

I. Natural Disaster Stage One—Emergency

First respondents in the emergency stage may be family, neighbors, congregations, local fire and police departments, search and rescue teams, and the American Red Cross. This is usually a very dangerous time. The survivors and the professional rescue people can be endangered if those with good hearts, who are not part of a responding organization, are in the way.

The emergency stage usually lasts one to three days, but in more severe disasters it can continue for up to two weeks. In this case, the next two stages—relief and recovery—are also prolonged commensurably.

What You and Your Church Can Do When You Are Affected by Disaster

Before trying to help others, make sure you and your family are secure when directly affected by disaster in any way.

Your church facility may be needed to provide temporary shelter. If your church has a pre-agreement with American Red Cross, ARC will already have your church location and contact. If you are trained in emergency medical services or are licensed as a mental health counselor, let emergency services know you are standing by.

Contact your church pastor and encourage your church leaders to call an emergency meeting of all other religious leaders in the community and alert Church World Service. Find out what happened and to whom. You have skills and your church has resources which could contribute to the cooperative response to those in need. Decide together if you need a formal cooperative response.

Contact the American Red Cross and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), if the disaster is Presidentially declared, and apply for assistance whether you think you need it or not; encourage others to do the same. (When their offers of assistance cease, you and others may find that you wish you had applied.) FEMA and other Federal assistance programs are activated when the President of the United States issues a disaster declaration.

Organize to Work Together—

Call An Emergency Meeting

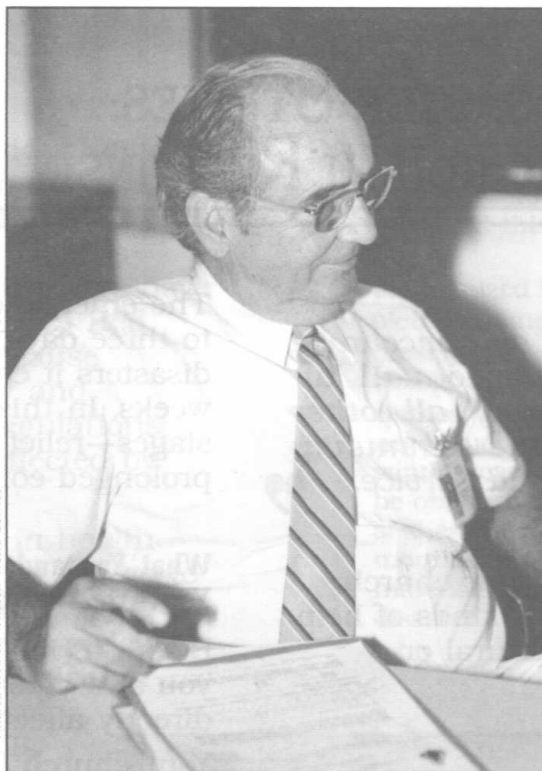
In times of major disasters in your community, immediately contact your regional church executives, ministerial association, or councils of churches, and your Church World Service Disaster Resource Consultant or Church World Service/New York.

Join with your church to call an emergency meeting of religious leaders in a ministerial association or already-established interfaith group. Invite all leaders in the wider religious community, even if they have not previously worked together.

Purpose of the Interfaith Meeting

Open and close the meeting with an interfaith prayer. Claim your unique shared theological values, history, and roles in the suffering and helping community.

- Recognize the importance of working together in your shared ministry to those affected by disaster.
- Estimate the human needs—immediate relief and long-term recovery. Determine the desire for a common and cooperative response to community human needs.
- Explore the available resources (local, regional, state, or territory) of the religious community including those to provide emotional/spiritual/pastoral care.



Andrea Wolf for Church World Service

Church World Service Disaster Resource Consultants provide valuable information about how other communities have recovered from disasters.

“Your experienced Church World Service Disaster Resource Consultant can advise on the organization of the response, interfaith worship, fund raising, planning program and budget, and working with Red Cross and FEMA, if declared.”

- Obtain and review information about human needs and available resources from other helping organizations.
- If and when needs are greater than resources in your area, the Church World Service Disaster Resource Consultant can share information about national resources available through Church World Service.
- Begin to match resources to needs without duplication or waste.

You Need to Know:

Who was affected? _____
part of the city? _____

_____ most of the town? _____ much of the county? _____ much of the state _____ all of the state plus other state(s)? _____

Primary homes? _____

Vacation homes? _____

Insurance Rate? _____

Who are the most vulnerable people (marginalized before the disaster)? _____

Where are they located? _____
Is the disaster over? _____

_____ or ongoing? _____ Is it in part or wholly a human-caused technological/environmental disaster? _____ kind of hazard(s) _____?

How to Find Answers Quickly

Get a damage assessment report from the American Red Cross (ARC) or call Church World Service/New York at 212-870-3151. The initial report will be only a “windshield” survey with preliminary statistics, but it will give you the information you need to make initial decisions.

Key Decisions to Make

Are marginalized people affected so that a formal coordinated, cooperative church or interfaith response is needed? If so, how should you organize? Is there an already existing interfaith group which might take this responsibility? A new group or sub-group of an existing interfaith organization?



Begin fund-raising immediately after a disaster and make plans for long-term recovery.

If you decide to respond to the disaster through an interfaith group, you need to:

- write and publicize a short mission or purpose statement for the shared disaster response.
- fundraise immediately and save resources for longer-term recovery.
- project the needed program.
- establish criteria for assistance.
- project needed staffing of the organization (seek experienced volunteers first).
- quickly project a budget (it can be revised up or down later).
- plan a volunteer management program which includes recruitment, training, placement, management, nurturing, and evaluation.

If you make the decision as a group to organize formally, plan to liaison with ARC and FEMA, if Presidentially declared, for a fully-coordinated response.

You and Your Church Are Not Alone

You and your church are not alone in disaster recovery. There will be many groups and organ-

izations involved which can complicate and confuse the response. You, your church, and your interfaith counterparts live and work in your community and should claim your right to be in charge.

You know your community, its needs and its available resources. When you, your church, and other religious leaders work together, you can claim the unique role of the religious community in disaster response for more effective recovery of the whole person.

“In successful recovery, emotional and spiritual renewal and transformation are as important—or even more important—than physical rebuilding.”

How Church World Service Can Help

Church World Service Disaster Resource Consultants (DRCs) in your area or Church World Service/New York can advise about steps to take to begin to bring order to the chaos that is disaster.

Your experienced Church World Service DRC can advise on such things as organization of the response, interfaith worship, fundraising, liaison with ARC and FEMA, if declared, and planning program and a budget for long-term recovery and transformation of the whole person and whole community.

Church World Service can also help locate available resources and may send

blankets, “Gifts of the Heart” kits, and an initial one-time cash grant to churches working together or an interfaith group (seed money if a coordinated response is needed). Church World Service, an international network of churches and ecumenical/interfaith groups, can also share valuable experience from other disaster sites to help you plan most efficiently and effectively when you may not know how to begin.

See “How You and Your Church Can Help Disaster Survivors Outside Your Community” (page 22 in Section 5) to learn how to help if a disaster strikes outside your community.