

Disaster Preparation: Checklist for Churches

The role of the church is elevated in a community during a crisis. Your church needs a plan that is put in place before a disaster strikes. Just like insurance, hopefully the church will never need it, but preparations in advance can lessen the impact of a crisis and make the church more able to help its members and neighbours in need.

- Does the church have an evacuation plan?
- Is your church “barrier free” for disabled persons, including installation of wheelchair ramps?
- Are working smoke alarms and fire extinguishers in place and checked regularly?
- Are several well-stocked first aid kits available and clearly visible?
- Is anyone in the congregation trained in first aid or CPR? Can you identify them?
- Have ushers been trained to handle an emergency like a fire, earthquake, seizure or heart attack?
- Are emergency phone numbers posted at telephone locations?
- What special-needs individuals are in your congregation? Do you know how they might need assistance during an emergency or evacuation?
- Have you reviewed your insurance policy in the last six months?
- Does each room of your church have an evacuation map posted that shows how to get out (ie during an earthquake, flood or fire) or where to hide (ie from a windstorm)?
- Does the church have emergency lighting or flashlights in case of a power blackout?

Your Church Building

- Do you know what kinds of disasters are most likely to affect your municipality and the area where your church is located?
- Does the church have adequate insurance that covers the types of disasters most likely to affect it? For example, do you need earthquake insurance?
- Is your insurance policy reviewed and updated annually?
- Does the church have all computer files and records backed up to the internet or to a second location?
- Has the fire department walked through the church building to assess its preparation for an emergency and to make safety recommendations?
- Has someone been designated to protect the church’s assets, such as audio-visual equipment, furniture, computers, office equipment etc?
- Does the church have a plan to secure doors, loose items, windows, pictures, pulpits etc?

- Does the church have a plan to shut off gas, water and other utilities and to secure breakable windows etc?
- Do multiple people have the necessary knowledge to secure the church building, such as *where* the utilities are and *how* to shut them off?
- Can the baptismal tank be filled with water in an emergency?
- Does the church have photo records of its assets for insurance purposes?
- Does the church have a backup generator?
- Does the church have water and food supplies available?
- Who has the keys to the church?
- Has a written plan or diagram been posted to tell people how to out of the church?

Helping the Congregation

- Do you have a map that identifies where members of the congregation live so that church staff and volunteers know who might have been affected by a disaster? For example, who lives near rivers or bodies of water that might flood? Who lives near the site of a major fire?
- Does the church make special note of seniors, single parent families, people with health or mobility issues, people without transportation, newcomers and others who might have difficulty escaping a disaster or finding a place to stay if evacuated?
- Do you have an up-to-date contact list includes all members of the congregation and a 'prayer chain' method of contacting everyone to ensure they are safe and/or to assess their needs?
- Is the church aware of members' families and friends living locally who might provide backup accommodation or support in an emergency

Helping the Community

- Does the church have a disaster response plan that covers:
 - How the church's congregation members will be cared for in an emergency?
 - How the church building will be protected/secured or used during an emergency?
 - Realistic priorities for how the church congregation will get involved to help the community?
- Can your church facilities be used as a meeting centre during an emergency?
- Does the church have an inventory of its facilities and equipment that might be useful in a disaster?
- Has the church registered with local disaster response teams to make them aware of how the church could be used in a crisis?

- If not, do you know what upgrades you could make to the church to allow it to be used as a meeting centre or for other purposes?
- Do you have an inventory of skill sets for each congregation member, such as carpentry, plumbing, medical knowledge, CPR & First Aid, contracting, first responder training, etc?
- Do you know what equipment congregation members have that might be useful in an emergency, such as shovels, backhoes, cars, boats, saws, construction equipment etc?