



# **Emergency Response** **in the Congregation**

"In caring for people LCMS congregations are active in emergency response and management in their communities."

[www.txdistlcms.org/emergency](http://www.txdistlcms.org/emergency)

# Forward

"In caring for people Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) congregations are active in emergency response and management in their communities."

The LCMS, Texas District President's Task Force on Disaster Response prepared this manual to aid congregations as they reach out to the community in times of natural or man made disaster. Our congregations, as part of their community, have the opportunity and responsibility to aid their friends and neighbors in times of need. Meeting the needs of those whose lives are turned upside down requires meeting both physical and mental needs.

This document is provided to assist congregations to prepare for Disaster.

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## Emergency Response in the Congregation



Photo By David Ricks

*Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. James 2:15-17*

## What Is a Disaster?

A disaster is an occurrence such as a hurricane, tornado, storm, flood, earthquake, volcanic eruption, fire, explosion, building collapse, act of terrorism, or other situation that causes human suffering or creates human needs that the victims cannot alleviate without assistance.

### **Why do we need disaster Response?**

Disaster response is an outreach opportunity. Lutherans reaching out to people in their time of need makes a strong statement about who we are. In 2001 the American Red Cross reported 255 disasters in Texas, affecting 4837 households.

### **What are the phases of a Disaster?**

The four phases of a disaster are Incident, Rescue, Relief and Recovery.

**Incident** is the occurrence of the disaster. It represents the period of time when the disaster is actually taking place.

**Rescue** is the period of time immediately following the disaster. The duration can be hours or days depending on the scope of the disaster. During the rescue phase the focus is on safety and preservation of life.

**Relief** is the phase that begins in the days following the disaster. Volunteers will come together in an interfaith group such as Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) to work together to provide for the immediate needs of the survivors. This may include temporary housing, food, water and other emergency supplies.

**Recovery** is the final phase. This phase focuses on the future. VOAD groups or other interfaith organizations will establish an unmet needs committee to help with the recovery of the community. Houses will be repaired or rebuilt and lives will be put back together.

## Emergency Response in the Congregation



Photo By Russ Vandeverdonk

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Psalm 23:4*

# Create a Disaster plan for your Congregation

## **Appoint or elect a Disaster Coordinator**

- Appoint a member of the congregation to serve as your disaster coordinator. Have him become familiar with local emergency management leadership and be aware of interfaith organizations that would help in a disaster.

## **Have Contingency Plans for Worship**

- If your pastor becomes a victim of the storm have plans for who can lead any services.
- If you have a school plan for the possibility of incapacitated teachers.
- Resume Worship services as soon as possible.
  - If facilities are damaged and can not be used have an alternative plan for church functions. Scout out possible alternative sites such as a school or another church where worship could be held and get an ideal of what they would cost to rent.
  - Special services or a prayer vigil can help members cope with the disaster.
  - Know how to publicize any changes in location or time of services necessitated by a disaster.

## **Create an Evacuation Plan**

- Survey your Buildings and determine the safest place for people to go if they are caught at your facilities in a storm. The best location will be a interior room on the lowest floor of your facilities. If you do not have an interior room choose one with no windows.
- Post clear directions on what to do and were to go in case of a severe storm/ tornado warning
- Develop an evacuation plan in case of fire. Have fire drills so your congregation is familiar with the plan.
- Have a battery-operated radio (preferably a weather radio)and flashlight in an accessible area. If a Church activity is going on during a Severe Storm or Tornado watch have someone monitor the weather.
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## **Post Emergency Numbers by Each Phone**

- Include 911(Law Enforcement and Fire Department if you don't have 911 in your area), poison control ,the chairman of the Board of Elders, The Pastor, and your insurance provider.

## Emergency Response in the Congregation



Photo by Carolyn Mary Bauman

*Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, until the destroying storms pass by. Psalm 57:1*

## Emergency Response in the Congregation

### **Protect your Facility**

- Assign and maintain a list of who, in case of disaster, is assigned to:
  - Secure loose items around the church
  - Cover windows
  - Cut off utilities
  - Take down and secure exterior swinging fixtures such as signs or lights
  
- Should disaster occur have plans to:
  - Inspect the facilities
  - Make temporary repairs to protect them from further damage
  - Call your insurance agency
  - Document the Damage with pictures or video tape
  
- Train your volunteer staff
  - Train Ushers what to do in case of emergency such as a severe storm, fire, or heart attack.
  - Train Sunday School teachers on how to handle the children during an emergency
  - Offer CPR and first-aid classes at the congregation. Have a member trained in first-aid and CPR present at all church events.
  - Check on members who might have been affected by the storm.

### **Protect your Church Records**

- Put your important church records in a fireproof safe or file cabinet. Do not keep money in the safe. Ensure the safe is large enough to hold the kind of files you use to keep your records
- Use a safe deposit box to store important records that are seldom used such as deeds, insurance documents, and mortgage documents.
- If the church computer keeps financial and/or other vital church records, back up the data and store it off site in a safe place.

## Emergency Response in the Congregation



Photo By Louann Ricks

Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. Isaiah 41:10

## Appendix A: Facilities Check List

This is a list of Items that should be checked at least once a year to be sure that your facilities are ready should a disaster strike

### Exits

- Emergency exits are well marked with working lighted exit signs
- All exits are free of obstructions that might impede evacuation
- Emergency exits operate freely and are not chained or locked from the inside.
- Plans are posted for upper floor evacuation (if applicable).

### Fire Equipment

- Fire Extinguishers are fully charged, inspected and tagged
- Extinguishers are available for all types of fires
- Fire alarms are maintained, and checked annually
- Smoke detectors are maintained, and checked regularly
- Kitchens have appropriate fire protection near stove, oven and other appliances.

### Utilities

- Area around breaker boxes and cut offs are clean and accessible.
- All circuit breakers and cut offs are properly marked.
- Wrenches for gas and water cutoffs are properly marked and stored.
- Emergency phone list is current and posted by phones.

### Miscellaneous

- First aid kit is located in central location and well marked
- First aid kit is fully stocked.
- Battery operated radio and flashlights are stored in accessible location.
- Batteries in radio and flashlights are in good working condition
- Emergency equipment like wheel chairs and stretchers are properly maintained.
- Flammable chemicals and materials are properly stored.

## Appendix B: Emergency Phone List

Police ..... \_\_\_\_\_  
Fire ..... \_\_\_\_\_  
Poison Control ..... \_\_\_\_\_  
Pastor's Phone # ..... \_\_\_\_\_  
Chairman, Board of Trustees \_\_\_\_\_  
American Red Cross ..... \_\_\_\_\_  
The Salvation Army..... \_\_\_\_\_  
LCMS Texas District..... \_\_\_\_\_  
Circuit Counselor..... \_\_\_\_\_  
Lutheran Social Services,  
Lutheran Disaster Response.. \_\_\_\_\_  
Other ..... \_\_\_\_\_