**United Church of Christ**

**Disaster Preparedness Plan**

Drafted by Administration Team Fall 2017

**Why Develop a Disaster Preparedness Plan?**

A disaster plan is a guide for your congregation to:

Protect property – Responsibility: Administration Ministry Team’s ongoing maintenance and repairs of the church building/property as well as the removal of outside loose items before a storm

Continue services – Responsibility: Pastor and Diaconate Ministry Team

Care for members – Responsibility: Shepard’s ongoing mission of care for church members

Recover or repair disaster-related damages – Responsibility: Administration Ministry Team

Communicate Information – Responsibility: Pastor and Moderator both internal and external

A plan is relevant and useful if it is:

Developed by people who are concerned

Tailored to the geographical situation and needs of the members

Implemented and tested, to the extent possible, before disaster strikes

Developed to include training for persons responsible during an emergency

Reviewed and updated regularly

**What is a Disaster?**

A *disaster* is an event beyond the control of the individuals affected resulting in great harm, suffering, destruction and damage. It disrupts personal and community life, involves

a significant number of people and causes physical, emotional, economic, social

and/or spiritual crises. A disaster damages a community’s ability to sustain life without

outside assistance.

*Natural disasters* involve the forces of nature and creation—flood, windstorm, fires

caused by lightning, tornado, earthquake, etc. *Human-caused disasters* occur as a result

of violent actions by individuals or groups against people and/or property. Human caused

disaster includes such things as explosions, the collapse of a structure or the

release of hazardous material.

*Presidentially declared disasters* impact ten thousand to several hundred thousand

people. These major disasters require emergency relief efforts beyond the ability of local

communities and churches to respond. A presidentially declared disaster makes federal

relief assistance available.

A *catastrophic disaster* event is presidentially declared and larger in scope. It involves a

large number of deaths and injuries and extensive damage or destruction of facilities.

Catastrophic disasters involve an overwhelming demand on state and local response

resources and mechanisms. Federal relief is available.

Generally, disasters strike without warning. Each disaster is different in magnitude and

impact on the affected area. People react differently and local authorities are often hard

pressed to manage the impact of the disaster on the community.

While state and national relief efforts are being mobilized, the local church has an opportunity

to reach out and minister to those in need. The Church’s response to a disaster is a commitment and witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ to assist those affected by the disaster

**2. Prepare the Facility for a Disaster**

1. **Post emergency numbers by each phone.**

Include 911 (or area equivalent), the poison control center, law enforcement and

the fire department. Make sure a phone is accessible in each area of the building

at all hours.

**B. Review insurance policies annually.**

Insurance policy meets the minimum requirements of your denomination and mortgage

holder. When was the last estimate on the value of church property? How

accurate are the figures?

Insurance policy covers the cost of recent additions or high value items such as

stained glass windows?

Insurance policy covers the cost of temporary rental of another facility in the

event your church is severely damaged or destroyed?

**C. Protect facilities**

Maintain a list of who (in case of impending storm) is assigned to:

Cut off the utilities

Cover the windows

Take down or secure any exterior swinging fixtures such as signs or

lights

Secure loose items around the church

**Should a disaster occur:**

Inspect the congregation’s facilities.

Make temporary repairs to protect them from further damage or

looting.

Call your insurance representative.

***Note 1:*** A quick survey should be made to identify the types of items that need to be secured and

any trees or branches that pose a direct threat to church property. Most of the damage

from storms comes from fallen trees or branches.

***Note 2****:* No one should check on the church during a storm. Members and the pastor should

remain indoors at home or in a shelter.

**D. Protect church records**

Church records are a vital part of your church organization. Safeguarding them

should be a matter of simple routine and limited expense. (If your records are not

kept safe, what you do to restore them will seem like a disaster itself.)

Here are simple things to do now.

Put your vital records in a fireproof safe and mark them “for church records

only.” Do not keep money in the safe. Ensure the safe is big enough to hold

the kind of oversize books that are normally used. Also ensure the container

is watertight.

Use a safe deposit box for those records (such as deeds, insurance papers

and mortgages) that are not used frequently.

If your church uses a computer for its finances or other vital functions, be

sure your treasurer backs up his/her work and takes the backup home. The

regular membership and other specialized data can be stored in the safe, or

the secretary can take the backups home.

**4. Train Church Staff for Preparation and Response**

Assign a member of the congregation to serve as the congregation’s disaster

response coordinator. (The congregation’s vice-moderator may have this

duty). This person should be acquainted with local emergency management

leadership, coordinate and guide the congregation through its preparation

and response.

Have a contingency plan in the event that the pastor becomes a victim of the

storm. Your conference office may be of help or a layperson should be

prepared to lead the service(s).

Prepare lay leaders as alternates to lead the worship services and teach

church school if pastor/teachers are incapacitated.

Hold first-aid and CPR classes at your church for adults and youth. Encourage

ushers, elders, youth leaders and teachers to attend.

Train ushers in case of emergency such as fire or heart attack.

Train Sunday school and daycare staff for emergencies/disasters.

Have a member trained in first aid and CPR at each church activity.

Determine the special needs of people in your congregation (i.e., vision,

hearing, physical impairments, heart conditions, etc.) to help prepare for

special evacuation procedures when disaster strikes. Survey members and

programs to identify special concerns to deal with during and following a

disaster.

Develop a plan to check on members to assess needs after a disaster.

**Acknowledgments**

The materials in this manual were compiled with the help of resources from: Church World

Service, Lutheran Social Services of the South, Lutheran Family Services Virginia,

Lutheran Services Florida (LSF) and Christine E. Iverson.