

# Disasters

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## Prepare and Respond



## Part 2 Developing a Parish Response Plan



# Assembling the team

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In the tension of an emergency, few decisions can be made by committee. A little advance thinking about potential hazards and appropriate response, as well as a settled command structure, will enable the parish to respond as well as possible to virtually any crisis.

The rector, senior or junior warden or other person should be designated as “in charge.” Plan to consult legal counsel should the crisis require it.

Appoint a parish coordinator and committee to arrange and oversee preparedness efforts, communications and the response to any disaster. Involve the building and grounds committee or other group responsible for property. In addition to clergy, participation of the wardens, vestry members and others is not only appropriate but vital.

**I**n the tension of an emergency, few decisions can be made by committee.

## ***Chief decision maker:***

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address: Street, E-mail

## ***Backup decision maker:***

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address: Street, E-mail

## ***Parish legal counsel:***

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address: Street, E-mail

## ***Team coordinator:***

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name / role

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address: Street, E-mail

One spokesperson should bear primary responsibility for communicating accurate, timely information to the media. Though the first impulse may be to refuse media access, designating someone to work with reporters enables others to go about their work uninterrupted, and it gives

the parish control over the story. In some situations, the media may be the only means of getting information beyond the crisis zone.

Consider assigning backup responsibility so that breaks may be taken. Instruct others that if they are not the designated spokesperson and a media representative contacts them, they should give assurance that questions will be communicated to the spokesperson. Then they should record the media rep's contact information and ask for a response deadline.

***Media spokesperson:***

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address: Street, E-mail

***Assistant spokesperson:***

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address: Street, E-mail

Determine who will annually review church insurance coverage to determine its adequacy and extent of liability, especially with regard to natural disasters, disasters by human hands and the use of parish facilities in the event of a disaster. Store copies of the review with insurance policies offsite. This person may also assess church damage when the disaster or emergency has passed. Normal procedures involve insurance agents for damage claims. The insurance liaison will work with wardens and the vestry to decide priorities and determine the means for necessary repairs and/or replacement of damaged property. (See page 11 for more.)

***Insurance liaison in the parish:***

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address: Street, E-mail

***Insurance provider:***

\_\_\_\_\_  
Company and contact name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address: Street, E-mail

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parish policy number(s)

**Offsite location(s) of insurance policies:**

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The parish team may decide members are needed to fill additional roles:

**Other members / roles:**

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Name / role

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Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

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Address: Street, E-mail

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Name / role

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Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

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Address: Street, E-mail

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Name / role

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Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

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Address: Street, E-mail

Although individuals in the following roles may not need to be part of every team decision, their knowledge and experience make them important to identify in advance of any crisis.

For example, who among parishioners are medical practitioners and other emergency personnel? Who has had CPR training or instruction in first aid?

Ask someone to take responsibility for assembling a parish first aid kit (or purchase the “Unitized Industrial First Aid Kit” in a metal or plastic wall-mountable box for 25-50 people from a local American Red Cross chapter).



***Who in the parish is trained in first aid?***

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address: Street, E-mail

\_\_\_\_\_  
Identifying characteristics of assembled parish first aid kit

\_\_\_\_\_  
Storage location of first aid kit

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date first aid kit was last refurbished

***Who in the parish is trained in CPR?***

***Adult CPR:***

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address: Street, E-mail

***Child CPR:***

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address: Street, E-mail

***Infant CPR:***

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address: Street, E-mail

# Designating a 'crisis control center'

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The parish response plan should designate a place for team members to gather as soon as possible following a disaster. The team will run its response from this location.

If the church facility is selected as the primary location, an alternate location at some distance from the church should be designated as well, in the event that the church facility is affected by the disaster or is unreachable.

***Location of "control center":***

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Address

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Telephone

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Contact person who will give access

***Alternate or backup location:***

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Address

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Telephone

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Contact person who will give access





# Conducting a risk survey

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Considering past crises will be instructive as the team completes the parish preparedness plan. Have team members discuss and provide answers to these two risk-survey items:

*List disasters, crises and emergencies that have occurred locally in the past 10 years:*

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*Discuss the impact of potential disasters by first identifying those that are most likely to occur in the parish and community, including potential areas of vulnerability such as the parish’s physical proximity to a river or possible flood source; railroad tracks, airport or other major transportation conduit; nuclear power plant or chemical manufacturer:*

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# Securing the church facility

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Develop a complete inventory of church property and holdings – written and video or photographic record – and update the inventory annually. Store a copy of these records safely in a second location with this plan, preferably offsite with copies of other irreplaceable records, including copies of insurance policies. In the inventory, indicate which items should be transported offsite and which larger items should be wrapped in waterproof tarps, in the event of a disaster.

## ***Church property and holdings inventory:***

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Name of person who will complete annual inventory

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Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

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Address: Street, E-mail

On a blueprint or drawing of the church facility to be stored with this plan, mark the location of first-aid and survival kits, fire extinguishers, utility cut-offs, building exits, alarm controls, fire-safe storage and “safe spots” (windowless interior hallways or areas of reinforced structure where people may shelter). Use surge protectors for all major electrical appliances. Designate someone who will shut off utility connections if needed, and consider purchasing a generator.



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Person responsible for shutting off utility connections

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Telephone: Home (H), Work (W), Cell (C), Other (O)

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Address: Street, E-mail

When community evacuations become necessary, local officials often alert the public through the media, although other warning methods such as sirens also are used. Formulate plans for evacuation of church staff during the week, and on weekends when member traffic is high. Rehearse and review the plans periodically, and share them with community groups who use the parish facilities.

## ***Last date weekday evacuation plan was rehearsed with staff:***

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## ***Last date Sunday evacuation plan was rehearsed:***

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## ***Community groups / dates they were given evacuation plan:***

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# Planning for crisis communications

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Any parish that has faced a crisis can confirm the necessity of good communications as a part of crisis management. Effective internal communications enable a parish to connect with its staff, membership and the larger church, while a plan to communicate externally with media will enable the parish to control the story and its telling.

In a crisis, the team must accept that some of the following points will not be under their control. However, the more the parish is able to control an interview or media conference, the better its message will be communicated.

Make the most of the reporters who will be badgering the parish spokesperson for information: They are a pipeline to neighbors and members. A firm plan for communications during a crisis will maximize the 24-hour window during which a crisis can be effectively managed. The first statement should be made within two hours if at all possible.

Have the parish response team (or the chief decision maker, coordinator and the spokesperson) prepare short answers to the questions below. The answers will form the basis of the message that the spokesperson will deliver.



**R**eporters are a pipeline to neighbors and parishioners.

1. *What happened?* \_\_\_\_\_
2. *Who was involved?* \_\_\_\_\_
3. *Where did it occur?* \_\_\_\_\_
4. *When did it occur?* \_\_\_\_\_

## Before talking with the media

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If possible, choose a face-to-face meeting to minimize potential miscommunication that can occur in a telephone interview. If the reporter wants an immediate interview, ask for a 15- or 30-minute delay to allow time for some preparation.

- What are the two key points that should be made?
- Personal stories are powerful; use a few to illustrate key points.
- Think about questions the parish hopes won't be asked, then practice answering them.
- What is the latest information media outlets have reported about the crisis? Knowing the facts – and rumors – that already have been made public will help the parish know what to say.

## While talking with the media

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For a TV interview, wear dark, solid-color clothing if possible; note whether the backdrop is appropriate; and look at the reporter, not the camera. The spokesperson's high energy and responsiveness will improve the interview.

- Amid the pain and suffering of a crisis, relate to the humanity and spirituality of the



**A**ssume everything that is said may become public.

situation before talking about bricks and mortar – and never release names of deceased or injured unless families already have been notified.

- If a reporter poses several questions, choose one. Take a moment to think about the answer. Speak clearly and slowly in short, quotable sentences to appear relaxed and confident of the message. If a question is inappropriate, restate the primary message instead.

- Facts or statistics are great, but they must be accurate. Avoid jargon and acronyms. Be honest, and don't guess at an answer.

- Use "bridge" responses to make the desired point:

*"I don't know, but what's important is ..."*

*"I don't know, but what I do know is ..."*

- Never say, "no comment." It can suggest there is something to hide. Try instead:

*"I don't want to speculate on that."*

*"I'll have to think about that. Can I get back to you?"*

- Assume everything that is said may become public. If asked to "chat" while the cameraman shoots "B" roll (non-interview footage or cutaway shots), be aware of body language. If a microphone is still

present, anything said is fair game for use.

## After talking with the media

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- Exchange contact information and encourage follow-up if more facts are needed.
- Respect deadlines if more information has been promised. Return calls promptly.
- Make notes of items that may require clarification, then call or send an e-mail immediately. Include spelling of difficult names and a recap of primary points.
- If a reporter misquotes information supplied by the parish, contact him or her directly, but if the error is minor, let it go.
- Don't allow media matters to distract from the work at hand. Move on to the next task.

### ***Statements were delivered to media representatives:***

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Date/Time: reporter's name, employer and contact info

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Date/Time: reporter's name, employer and contact info

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Date/Time: reporter's name, employer and contact info

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Date/Time: reporter's name, employer and contact info

Most crises are followed by a time of rebuilding. The parish response team should plan a schedule of messages to be delivered in a variety of formats such as prayer services, parish meetings, counseling, bulletin and newsletter progress reports and media releases.

# Responding in faith

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Natural disasters involving loss of life and extensive property damage disrupt the human community in shocking ways, sometimes reducing it to a state of basic survival. The immediate and relentlessly pressing need to provide basic necessities – food, shelter, clothing and medical care – will demand all the energy a community can muster. The church is called to acknowledge and respond to the spiritual upheaval that will be an unavoidable component of any traumatic event.

The basics of church life are centered in Jesus Christ. Our hope for restoration in times of stress invites us to rely on worship and particularly on the presence of Christ with us in the eucharist.

In the aftermath of a disaster, public worship opportunities should be offered as soon as possible. It is particularly important to hold public worship the Sunday following a disaster, even if it is necessary to secure an alternate location for worship because the church has been damaged or compromised. This is an act of Christian hope that affirms that God is at work even in the midst of destruction.

**W**orship is an act of Christian hope and faith in God at work even in the midst of devastation.

***Location of alternate worship location; the last date that permission for its use was confirmed and by whom:***

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It has been said that liturgy helps when we don't know what to say. Individuals and groups can "center" in the familiar words and be comforted by them. Following are liturgical resources offered for use in the event of a disaster:

## Collect

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O God, our times are in your hand. In the midst of uncertainty lead us by your never-failing grace as we seek to be agents of healing and hope.

Walk with us through difficult times; watch over us in danger; and give to us a spirit of love and compassion for those who suffer and mourn.

And finally remind us that you have promised never to leave us, so that even in the valley of the shadow of death your love may be felt, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

– *The Rev. Lyndon Harris, Diocese of New York*

## Proper preface

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For you, O God, are the source of our hope.

In the midst of trying times, You give us comfort, courage and peace, wiping away tears from every eye, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, You make all things new.

## Suggested readings

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*Old Testament reading:* Isaiah 61:1-4 (a garland instead of ashes)

Psalm 46 or 121

*Epistle:* Romans 8:31-39 (Neither death nor life can separate us from the love of God)

*Gospel:* Luke 10:25-37 (Parable of the Good Samaritan)

or Matthew 5:1-10 (Beatitudes)

## Church-in-a-box

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The “church-in-a-box” was developed to serve as the point element of the church’s response to disaster. As such, it is both symbolic and functional.

Episcopalians are defined in a fundamental sense by worship. It is only natural, therefore, that any disaster response begins intentionally with the act of calling the community to prayer. This marks and sets aside a space where people may come away for solace, strength and renewal.

The first “church-in-a-box” was assembled from the components of a military chaplain’s field kit. The essentials of chalice, paten, corporal and purificator may be expanded to include the Holy Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, cruets for wine and water, a bread box, a missal stand, stoles, a cross/crucifix, candles and multiple copies of each rite printed on card stock and laminated for durability. Perishable components such as bread, wine and a freshly filled oil stock should be added to the kit just prior to its use.

Ideally, each “church-in-a-box” should be in the custody of a parish congregation, and its component parts should be in routine use. Regular use is not only good stewardship; it also reinforces the symbolism of the kit – that altar utensils are sent to take a message of hope and solidarity from one congregation to another.

In the final analysis, “church-in-a-box” is more dynamic idea than fixed routine. Each kit will speak with the voice and spirit of the congregation who assembled it. The hope is that we will ever be ready to confront the need, wherever and whenever it may arise, and to bring the gospel to bear on that need in terms that are readily understood and appropriately beneficial.



# Extending a helping hand

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**In the parish:** The early stage of a crisis is not the time to be searching for the parish directory or to discover that a key telephone number is unavailable. A roster of the members and all contact numbers should be kept up to date; in addition to typical use, it may be needed to identify who was affected by or lost in the disaster. Copies should be stored in several protected places and in several formats, and a printed copy should accompany this plan. Include in the list contact information for the parish response team members; the diocese; parish emergency responders; parish neighbors; local media; local government officials; and law enforcement.

Establish a mechanism for reaching all members in the event of an emergency or disaster. At the earliest possible moment, plan to check on parishioners who have special needs. Call chains already in place for getting out news of parish events may be employed for this purpose, but also consider alternative means that may be needed in the event that telephone lines or cell towers are down. For example, ham radio users have made valuable contributions to communications in the aftermath of tornadoes.

*Location(s) where parish roster is stored:*

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*When the parish roster was last updated:*

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**In the community:** Just as the church cares for its own, it is called to respond to the needs of its neighbors. Don't underestimate the ministry of presence to a stricken community; consider opening the church as a community center with available clergy on hand to respond to pastoral needs.

*Other ways in which the parish may choose to be a good neighbor:*

**Stock emergency supplies**, especially water, and arrange to make meals for people in the immediate vicinity. The vestry may discuss certifying the church facility through the Red Cross as an emergency shelter (shower/bathing facilities are generally necessary).

**Encourage parishioners** – especially those who are licensed and/or certified in CPR, first aid, life saving or other emergency services – to become familiar with aspects of relief and recovery in the community, including local helping organizations. The American Red Cross has local chapters, for example, and the ecumenical group National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster ([www.nvoad.org](http://www.nvoad.org)) has state chapters and local branches. County governments also usually have emergency management units.

**Learn who in the neighborhood** may need special assistance during emergencies. For those who have a disability or special need, consider what steps should be taken to ensure personal and household protection in an emergency:



**A**t the earliest possible moment, plan to check on parishioners who have special needs.

- Those who have impaired hearing may need to make special arrangements to receive warning of an emergency or impending disaster.
- Those who have impaired mobility may need assistance in getting to a shelter. If they live or work in a high-rise building, they may need help locating an escape chair.
- Households with a single working parent may need help from others to care for children, both in planning for disasters and during an emergency.
- Non-English speaking people may need assistance planning for and responding to emergencies; they may be directed to community and cultural groups.
- People who do not own vehicles may need to make arrangements for transportation.
- People who require particular medications should keep records of the prescribed type and amount, as well as contact information for doctors, insurance and primary and alternate pharmacies
- People who have special dietary needs may need assistance in assembling an adequate emergency food supply.

## Hosting evacuees

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It seems only right that people who have comfortable homes would consider opening them to evacuees whose homes have been damaged or destroyed in a disaster. While this action is a laudable response to need, the decision to help in this way should be weighed carefully, with knowledge of the pluses and minuses:

- Disaster victims are in emotional and psychological trauma, and their behavior will be affected by what they have experienced, from numbness to anger to panic to depression. Is the potential host family able to accept and respond appropriately? Perhaps the congregation can arrange for Stephen Ministers, or other individuals trained in listening and counseling, to meet regularly with the evacuees.

- What if a member or members of the evacuee family requires ongoing treatment for a medical condition? Would the church locate and assist with visits to a physician, and how would the expense of doctor visits and prescription medications be handled?

- If the evacuees have lost their home or their hometown requires massive reconstruction because of the disaster, is the host family willing to house the evacuees for a considerable time? Or will church members plan a quarterly or other rotation, keeping in mind that uprooting the evacuees every week, two weeks or even once a month could hinder their personal recovery? Arranging for an apartment or residential hotel may prove a wiser option than housing them in a private home with a host family.

- Will the evacuees need financial help? Moving to a new community, even on a temporary basis, means the breadwinner must find new employment. Personal financial records may have been lost in the disaster, so access to funds may be difficult for a time. Can the congregation share in the expense of hosting a family?

These considerations are not raised to discourage anyone from hosting evacuees, only to note that thorough preparation will help tremendously to make the experience a positive one for both the evacuees and the hosts. To that end, a clearly worded agreement, adapted from the one on the next two pages, may be helpful.

**Episcopal Diocese of \_\_\_\_\_**

**Parish: \_\_\_\_\_**

**INVITATION FOR TEMPORARY HOUSING**

The bishop or ecclesiastical authority in this diocese joins with the named parish to invite the \_\_\_\_\_ family to become temporary residents at this address:  
Head of household's full name

\_\_\_\_\_, for a  
Street address , City/State/Zip

period of \_\_\_\_\_, beginning on \_\_\_\_\_ and  
Amount of time , Start date

to end on \_\_\_\_\_. The hosted family is made up of the following related  
End date

individuals, who are listed here by name and age: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Limitations:* The hosted family agrees that only the individuals named above will reside in the provided space, except for occasional guests who are members of the extended family and may stay in the home with the family for a few days at a time.

*Non-rent:* The hosted family will reside rent-free for the time named, as guests of the parish named.

*Contents and inventory:* The contents of the residence will remain the property of the hosting parish unless otherwise designated by the vestry. All furniture, bedding, towels, kitchen appliances and other household contents furnished by the church for the use of the hosted family will be inventoried before the hosted family takes up residence and again before they depart.

*Damages:* All damages to the residence or its parish-owned contents will be the responsibility of the hosted family, and no repairs will be made without prior approval of the vestry.

*Financial contribution and escrow account:* If suitable and appropriate, the hosted family may make regular contributions toward their residential expenses, and such funds will be held in escrow until their departure. The vestry of the hosting parish may return such funds at that time following a property inspection.

*Utilities:* All utilities such as fuel oil, electricity, water, sewer and garbage pickup for the residence will be paid by the host parish. All local ordinances regarding disposal of garbage, trash and refuse will apply.

*Insurance:* The host parish will assume all insurance for the residence, its contents and for the hosted family's residential liability.

*Vehicles:* All vehicles parked on the premises will be licensed and have valid registrations. This includes automobiles, motorcycles, mopeds, scooters, all-terrain vehicles and bicycles. Local restrictions and laws will apply.

*Liability:* The host parish will not be responsible for nor liable for injury, loss of limb, death or dismemberment by the residents if negligent or by irresponsible behavior.

*Gifts:* Any gifts from whatever source received by the hosted family will be considered their personal property.

*Termination of agreement:* This letter of agreement and contract may be terminated at any time for any cause by action of the vestry or other hosting authority whose signature is found below.

*Renewal of agreement:* This agreement may be extended through written and signed addendum by action of the vestry.

*Required signatures:*

Bishop, ecclesiastical authority or diocesan representative \_\_\_\_\_

Rector, vicar or priest-in-charge \_\_\_\_\_

Warden(s) of the vestry \_\_\_\_\_

Vestry representative for the congregation \_\_\_\_\_

Head of household for the hosted family \_\_\_\_\_

Date of agreement \_\_\_\_\_

Notary \_\_\_\_\_

*Copies of the agreement to both parties:* Copies of this agreement will be given as soon as possible to both the parish and the hosted family. If the hosted family is not fluent in English, a translation of this agreement will be provided in a language that is familiar to them.

# Re-evaluating and updating the plan

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It's an important part of recovery to examine and evaluate response to a disaster. The knowledge that is gained may be used to revise a preparedness plan, to make decisions about insurance, construction and communications, and to improve response in case a similar event should occur in the future.

## Mitigation

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According to the American Red Cross, “direct mitigation consists of the actions and measures that prevent or reduce disaster losses ... These steps are usually taken only once and have long-term effects, thereby reducing the amount of assistance people need time and time again after facing the same disasters over and over.”

The Tennessee Emergency Management Agency Web site defines mitigation as “any step taken to reduce the likelihood of a disaster occurring or, in the event a disaster cannot be prevented, lessening its impact.” It gives as examples of mitigation “keeping homes away from flood plains, engineering bridges to withstand earthquakes, creating and enforcing effective building codes to protect property from hurricanes – and more.”



If individuals, families, the parish and the community must travel through the rescue, relief and recovery phases of a disaster, try to note improvements to the plan and to parish processes that could help ease stress should another disaster ever occur.

## Distribution

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As part of the initial evaluation process, distribute the completed disaster plan to key lay leadership in the parish. Conduct an experiential exercise as part of the review session with wardens and vestry, which will help them to understand the importance of making and later updating this plan for the parish.

When finalized, share the plan with the diocesan response team and with local law enforcement and the local emergency center. Review and update the parish disaster plan once a year and then redistribute it.

***Date parish plan was first sent to diocesan office, and dates later revisions were sent:***

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***Annual review date set for parish plan:***

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***Date plan was first sent to local law enforcement, and dates later revisions were sent:***

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