



Tips & Lessons – Knowing Your Assets

Building a Response Based on your Church's Strengths

On a clear November morning in 2011, a contractor working on a bridge project in the Locust Point neighborhood of Baltimore hit the 12-inch gas main. The neighborhood is self-contained on a peninsula, with only three access roads, the major road being blocked by a bridge project. There are 1200+ dwellings, mostly row houses, but also some apartments, as well as a few small stores, restaurants and bars. The damage to the gas main meant that nearly two thousand neighborhood residents would be without heat until the damage was repaired.

For Baltimore Gas and Electric (BGE) this meant that they would have to seal off the broken main, go into every house and business in the neighborhood to turn off the gas at the meter, purge the gas lines, connect to a different main, test the lines again to make sure there weren't leaks, and return to every house and business to turn back on the gas, light all of the pilots, and check for indoor leaks. It was going to be a lot of work, a lot of going up and down basement steps, and long days without heat.

Of the three neighborhood churches, Episcopal Church of the Redemption has by far the largest parish hall and parking lot. The rector, Rev. Annette Chappell, and her congregation knew that they wanted to help out during this crisis that impacted their community, but weren't sure what they could do.

HOW THEY RESPONDED

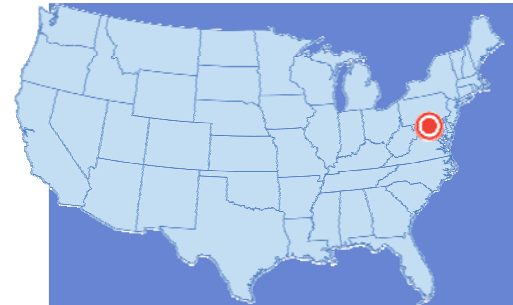
By midnight three days after the main had been hit, nearly every house and business in Locust Point had been safely reconnected. The local utility company got the job done swiftly and safely! Church of the Redemption played an important role in that process.



Biography



The Rev. Annette Chappell is rector of the Church of the Redemption in Locust Point – Baltimore, MD.



Fast Facts



CONGREGATION:
Church of the Redemption
Locust Point in Baltimore, MD

LOCATION: Diocese of Maryland

CONGREGATION SIZE: Avg. 120

DISASTER:
Gas main break

RESPONSE:
Provide a space for community organizing and support to emergency response teams



- One of our parishioners, on the only block that still had gas service (because they were connected to a new high-pressure line), offered her house for anyone needing a place to warm up or to shower.
- I asked the local civic association to put out an e-mail blast asking people to check-in daily on elderly neighbors (who are much more vulnerable to cold temperatures and lack of cooking facilities).
- After that, I didn't have to "do" so much as be available and willing to help:
 - BGE called and asked if they could hold a community meeting that Tuesday night in our parish hall. The meeting was very successful and provided a great space for people to interact with the community and see how their neighbors were faring.
 - In the morning after the gas was turned off at all of the houses and businesses, BGE informed us that our boiler room was ideally situated to do the next job, which was to purge the gas lines. They then worked all day and evening in our boiler room.
 - As people began to arrive home from work, BGE asked if they could park their vehicles in our lot, so that the community wouldn't feel as though all the precious on-street parking had been gobbled by the team.

LESSON: KNOW WHAT YOU HAVE TO WORK WITH

In this particular community disaster, some of what was needed could have been predicted and some was a total surprise. Our most important assets were having a large parish hall with seating for 120 people; a boiler room with the right size gas valves situated on a pipeline accessible alley; a 32-car parking lot; and my own location, next door to the church, allowing me to be available for whatever needs arose.

Until the emergency occurred, we didn't know exactly which assets would be needed and how they would be used (for example the parish hall was used for a community meeting, not for sleeping or feeding people, both of which might be appropriate in other emergencies.) The only asset we didn't already know about was the boiler room, with its particular configuration of valves and alley access. In another situation, those things might not have been important at all. The real lesson our congregation learned was: given that every emergency may require different assets and skills, knowing what is available to you and the having the flexibility to use it is always the most important asset.

Assessing Assets:



- **Use your List:** Church insurance lists can help remind you of what spaces and items are available to for use.
- **Inquire about Assets:** Parishioners may have assets that they're willing to share during a disaster (ex. generator, van).
- **Know Parishioners' Gifts:** Physical items are not the only assets needed. Teachers, case workers, construction workers, Stephen's Ministers, etc. may be helpful in responding to the needs of your community.
- **Review the Guide:** "Preparedness Planning Guide for Congregations and Parishes" in the US Disaster Program resource library for more tips on how to assess your assets

Additional Resources



For more information on using your church as an asset, please see the following online resources:

- "How To: Providing a Temporary Neighborhood Shelter"
- "How To: Use Your Church to House Volunteer Groups"

Share your own disaster response stories or tips to help a community in need at www.episcopalrelief.org