



# EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

## Parish Disaster Preparation and Response Guidelines

Updated in May 2010

### INTRODUCTION

Every parish needs to have thought through and planned for action in the event of disaster so that people, property, and assets can be protected and parish operations resumed as soon as possible. Some disasters can be anticipated and preparations made, especially for disasters related to destructive weather, and these diocesan guidelines are primarily written to accommodate the threat of hurricanes and the vulnerability of every building within the Diocese to hurricane damage. Preparations will also assist in response to situations which give no warning: terrorism, toxic substances, regional disease outbreaks, fire, and flood damage. The driving logic is that it is too late to plan and train when the disaster warning has been issued. P<sup>5</sup> – Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance.

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**ISSUES – Areas for planning and preparation include the following:**

**Organizational Preparations and Planning**

- Every Parish needs to establish a Disaster Planning and Response Committee. Membership should include the Rector, Wardens, Sexton, individuals with special knowledge and expertise about the parish plant, representatives of organizations that contract to use parish facilities, and parish staff members. Every member can and should expect designated tasks to accomplish when the Disaster Response Plan is activated.
- The Vestry enacts the Plan to become the policy of the Parish.
- The Rector holds the authority to activate the Plan, and designated first and second alternate persons need to be identified in case of the absence of the Rector.

**Congregational Safety and Monitoring**

- Parish membership and participant rosters need to be kept current and accurate and include alternate points of contact for members. Include residential locations with grid square coordinates.
- A simple reporting system needs to be created for members to report their condition, location, and safety after the disaster occurs.
- A separate roster of members with specialized talents and skills needs to be created.
- A roster of members with special needs should be created to assist in relocating them if necessary.

**Supply Availability**

- A supply of 4 mil. plastic sheeting, duct tape, and cable ties needs to be purchased and ready at all times, because these supplies will quickly be exhausted in the local stores. It is wise to identify equipment that needs to be wrapped and kept dry and to precut plastic to fit in order to expedite protection of valuable equipment and facilities.
- Strong and portable mount-out containers should be kept ready for packing items that would be moved following a decision to evacuate the Church premises, and each container should have an inventory sheet of exactly what goes in the container and who takes charge of it.

**Financial and Administrative**

- Prepare and box up a traveling kit containing minimal supplies necessary to reestablish the Parish Office at another temporary location: Computer storage media containing master copies of

documents such as worship bulletins, newsletters, parish rosters; parish letterhead and envelopes; pens and pencils; stamps for church address and bank deposits; discretionary account, etc.

- Computers should be backed up often with copies of the backup kept both on-site and off-site.
- Financial records, to include pledge and payment records, should be backed up as well.
- Copies of the following items should be kept at a secure location off-site, and the originals should be kept together in a safe location so that they can be gathered and moved quickly:
  - Articles of Incorporation
  - Parish By-Laws
  - Insurance policies
  - Minutes of Vestry and the Annual Meeting of recent years
  - Key files
  - Parish Record Books and Service Attendance Books
  - Parish Directory
  - Computer passwords, communication system passwords
  - Emergency contact numbers

### **Plant and Property**

- Review that buildings are properly insured.
- Draw and post a chart of the facilities to show hook-up and shut-off points for all utilities:
  - Water connection and shut-off valves
  - Electricity service entrance and master fuse breaker box
  - Telephone and computer connection service entrance
  - Natural gas service connection and master valve
  - Security system control connection
- Create an instruction sheet of directions to isolate buildings from external utilities.
- Build a file of still photographs and video recordings of property, buildings, and valuable contents with several copies and kept off-site.
- Prepare designated packing containers and contents list for each container ready for rapid evacuation. A checklist of contents is found in Appendix 6.
- Steps to protect immovable items of church property are listed in Appendix 5

## **Important Contact Information Listing**

Every member of the Committee should hold a copy of a list containing the following contact information with telephone numbers, cell phone numbers, and email addresses. Send this list to the Diocese as well.

- The Rector
- Senior Warden
- Junior Warden
- Staff members, both employed and volunteer
- Vestry Members
- Sexton and other maintenance personnel
- All other Disaster Response Committee members
- Leaders of organizations meeting in parish facilities
- Diocesan Office: 941-556-0315 or 800-992-7699
  - Bishop Smith's cellphone
  - Canon Durning's cellphone
  - Archdeacon McManis' cellphone
  - Jim De La's cellphone
- Police Department, non-emergency number
- Fire Department, non-emergency number
- Rescue Squad, non-emergency number
- Insurance Company
- Electric Utility Company
- Water Utility Company
- Natural Gas Utility Company
- Contracted repair businesses
- County Emergency Operations Center (see Appendix 2)

## **Communications Issues**

All parishioners should hold a telephone number where to report their status following a disaster and should know to originate such a report. Wise planning includes an arranged alternate number out of the area to receive and tally the information if the Parish Office remains closed due to destruction, evacuation, or extended power outages.

Change the recording on the voice mail service to direct parishioners where to call to report their situation following the storm and other news such as relocation of parish operations if necessary. Voice Mail will be less vulnerable to failure than desktop answering machines.

Parish websites and email addresses will generally remain active when hosted in out-of-town servers, and they can be viewed from anywhere. Keep the information current. Place a notice in the website immediately before the storm and as soon afterward as possible.

Consider how to harden and improve your wireless communications with the parish.

## COUNT-DOWN TO WEATHER-RELATED DISASTERS

Establish a count-down sequence to make timely decisions and complete work not later than the following schedule of deadlines. Where the logic of “Plan the Work, Work the Plan” delivers benefits is in not needing to make additional decisions, procure additional supplies, or figure out how to do things. Planned operational movements should proceed directly from scheduled decisions to designated actions.

- 72 hours:      Declare and Activate the Plan  
                    Notify Committee Members of activation  
                    Start the countdown and track the clock time against the activities accomplished  
                    Communicate to the whole parish that preparations are underway
- 48 hours:      Back-up all computers with several copies  
                    Send a copy by express mail to a safe off-site location out of the area  
                    Place copies to travel off-site with the Rector and Wardens.  
                    Bring all possible outside equipment into buildings
- 24 hours:      Rector or designated alternate makes the firm decision to evacuate or remain  
                    Communicate the evacuation decision to the Diocesan Office  
                    Notify leaders of event cancellations; communicate cancellations to media  
                    Set thermostats on refrigerators and freezers as cold as possible  
                    Put up shutters and wrap all vulnerable equipment in plastic  
                    Place special notices on the telephone voicemail and website home page  
                    If evacuating, pack essential and valuable items in designated mount-out containers  
                    If evacuating, remove reserve sacrament materials
- 18 hours:      Disconnect all utilities and thoroughly shut down buildings
- 12 hours:      If evacuating, leave not later than the 12 hour point  
                    All readiness plans should be complete

## **RECOVERY PRIORITIES FOLLOWING THE DISASTER**

- Reestablish communications access and availability for parishioner reporting in as a first priority.
- Walk through the property to assess damage and immediate needs for security.
- Contact the Diocesan Office directly; if necessary key staff members by cellphone.
- Begin contacting parishioners to assess short-term and long-term needs.
- Contact the insurance carrier, utility providers, and government agencies as needed.
- Reestablish the parish routine and schedule.
- Begin cleaning up to reestablish minimal operations.

## **UNEXPECTED DISASTERS**

### **Terrorist Activity or Bomb Threats**

If a telephone threat is received, remain calm and gather as much specific information as the caller will give (what, when where, why), write it down for accuracy, and call the Police at once.

### **Emergencies during Church Services or Parish Events**

Remain calm, gather information, and call the Police, Fire Department, and Ambulance Squad as appropriate. Render first aid if you can or locate somebody who can do so. The Priest should not normally be expected to stop worship services unless there is a clear and present danger to those attending. As Leader of the Parish, the Priest's own reaction sets the level of calmness and good sense for all present, so other ushers and leaders do well to know they can and should resolve the emergency to the best of their ability while the Priest continues to lead worship or education. The Priest will make the decision about when to end activity and respond personally to the emergency.

## **PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCIES**

While continuing to operate the congregational program activities and scheduled worship services, publish guidance for parishioners concerning the presence at the church campus and other public gatherings, steps they can take to prevent spread of infectious disease, and other public health and safety guidance that may come from public officials and our Bishop. Provide ample supplies of hand sanitary cleaners and ensure their use by all who serve at the Altar.

If the Bishop issues directives that relate to public health and safety in the churches, publish that information for parishioners and observe it. The immediate notification to the parish can be accomplished through email, website, electronic newsletter, or the telephone answering message.

### **Continuing Parish Operations during a Community Health Crisis**

While continuing to operate the congregational program activities and scheduled worship services, the Diocese publishes this guidance for parishes and parishioners concerning the presence at the church campus and other public gatherings, steps they can take to prevent spread of infectious disease, and other public health and safety guidance that may come from public officials and our Bishop.

Planning for continued worship and program activities involves a concern that visits to the church campus not become a venue for spreading of disease.

This planning document anticipates action in four areas of parish life: worship, personnel absence, pastoral care, and parish buildings. If the Bishop issues directives that relate to public health and safety in the churches beyond this document, he would publish that information for parishes by electronic means and observe it throughout the Diocese.

### **Conduct of Public Worship**

There is much disagreement in statements by notable parties concerning the issue of the spread of disease through the administration and reception of the Holy Eucharist.

All entrances to the parish buildings should be equipped with the means to dispense hand sanitizer for everybody who enters and again when they leave the Church.

Unless directed otherwise at a later date, the Bishop's policy will remain for the administration of the Eucharistic elements in both kinds and with a common cup.

The passing of the Peace is another opportunity for the spreading of infectious disease. The Diocese calls for clean hands and minimized body contact. The Peace can be passed merely by exchanging the phrases published in the Prayer Book.

The key to minimizing the impact of public gathering in the Church is the use of hand sanitizer products with their easy availability and instruction to parishioners to use them.

### **Clergy Staff Absences**

Individuals who may be sick with infectious diseases are called upon to be absent when sick – especially to include persons who lead worship. The clergy and lay Eucharistic ministers are as vulnerable to infectious illness as anybody; yet, the intention is to keep parish worship and program schedules operating as much as possible.

**The practice of leading the service without a priest would be used only in the extreme situation where there is no other way to keep the Church open on a Sunday. If worship is conducted in this fashion, it should be conducted in a very simple way and explained as a single-time exception to normal practice for the extremity of the current situation.**

All parishes should prepare and keep the minimum of one whole week of consecrated Eucharistic elements on hand for such occasions.

### **Off-Site Pastoral Care**

Clergy and licensed individuals bringing the Holy Eucharist to shut-ins and members under nursing or hospital care should follow the use of hand sanitizers both before arrive and at departure.

If the staff on location is wearing face masks, follow the onsite procedure.

The communion kit will require a thorough cleaning after every visit.

### **On-Site Parish Activities in Parish Buildings**

Parish hall buildings, classrooms, and offices are other venues where a wide variety of people pass through and can bring or contract infectious disease. Hand sanitizer dispensers at all entrances and their use both arriving and departing can minimize the risks for passing disease. All persons will need to be instructed to use them.

Sanitation in all food service areas is more important than ever. Rest rooms need careful cleaning. Outside groups meeting in parish facilities need to be informed and trained.

### **Congregational Safety and Monitoring**

- Parish membership and participant rosters need to be kept current and accurate.
- A simple reporting system needs to be created for members to report their condition, location, and safety if an infectious outbreak occurs.

- A separate roster of members with specialized talents and skills needs to be created. – to include individuals with health care skills.

### **Supply Availability**

- The most commonly needed supply during an infectious disease outbreak will be hand sanitizer products, and it is wise to prepare by stocking an adequate supply for three months of use by everybody using the church facilities. Such hand sanitizer products could become scarce in the stores during an outbreak.

### **Plant and Property**

- Study current traffic patterns in the parish buildings and plan for locations and dispensers of hand sanitizers at all entrances with a plentiful supply at the busiest entrances. Among important locations are kitchens, the Sacristy, and the Altar.

## **GENERAL PLANNING BEST PRACTICES**

Prepare a photographic and videotape inventory of all parish grounds, buildings, and equipment; keep at least one copy at an off-site location and ideally out of the area.

Back-up copies of vital church records should be kept off-site at a secure location such as a safety deposit box in a bank vault.

The Disaster Response Committee should become and remain an ongoing activity in the life of the Parish. Procedures should be reviewed annually, training should be conducted, and the disaster plan should be practiced on a drill basis.

Anticipate following all evacuation orders issued by your County Office of Emergency Management.

Keep parish rosters up to date and give copies to all members of the parish leadership.

Prepare and keep ready the minimum necessities for moving the worship site and offices to a temporary location away from the parish.

Work cooperatively with other worshipping communities in the immediate area to arrange for temporary use of their facilities if needed and make your parish facilities available to them if they suffer disaster. Discuss other ways to support each others' operations if disaster strikes any ecumenical neighbor.

Become sufficiently prepared for eventualities that action can be taken quickly according to plans and with a minimum of decision making or invention.

**APPENDIX 1: Diocesan Staff Cellular Telephone Numbers:**

Bishop Dabney Smith  
 Canon Michael Durning  
 Archdeacon Dennis McManis  
 Jim De La, Communications Officer  
 Diocesan website:                      www.episcopalswfl.org

**APPENDIX 2: County ESF-15 Coordinators (Volunteers & Donations) and County Emergency Operations Centers:**

| <b>County</b>       | <b>ESF-15 Coordinator</b>    | <b>ESF-15 Telephone</b> | <b>EOC Telephone</b> |
|---------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Charlotte</b>    | Dr. Henry Agabedis           |                         |                      |
| <b>Collier</b>      | Judy Scribner                |                         |                      |
| <b>DeSoto</b>       | (to be assigned)             |                         |                      |
| <b>Hernando</b>     | Jean Rags                    |                         |                      |
| <b>Hillsborough</b> | Betty Tribble, Sherry Tailor |                         |                      |
| <b>Lee</b>          | Josh Roberts                 |                         |                      |
| <b>Manatee</b>      | Dick Haynes                  |                         |                      |
| <b>Pasco</b>        |                              |                         |                      |
| <b>Pinellas</b>     | Bertha Battle, Alan Goetz    |                         |                      |
| <b>Sarasota</b>     | Jamie Mahadeo                |                         |                      |

**APPENDIX 3: Scanner Radio Monitoring Frequencies:** (Monitor whichever is strongest)

National Weather Service Broadcast Frequencies and Callsigns

|             |         |       |
|-------------|---------|-------|
| Belle Glade | 162.400 | WXM58 |
| Ft. Myers   | 162.475 | WXK83 |
| Inverness   | 162.400 | WWF38 |
| Largo       | 162.450 | KEC38 |
| Naples      | 162.525 | WWG92 |
| Sarasota    | 162.400 | WWG59 |
| Tampa Bay   | 162.550 | KHB32 |

National Weather Service SkyWarn Weather Net (same activity on all frequencies)

Net Control Station at National Weather Service, Ruskin, is WX4TOR

|      |         |         |         |         |         |
|------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| VHF: | 145.290 | 145.430 |         |         |         |
| UHF: | 442.950 | 442.825 | 442.450 | 443.450 | 442.650 |

National Hurricane Center, Miami Net Control Station is WX4NHC

HF: 14.325 Upper Sideband

**APPENDIX 4: Parishioner Evacuation Plans (sample document)**

(sample) Parishioner Evacuation Intentions Form

For any parishioners intending to leave the area in the event of a hurricane,  
Please provide the following information for the Parish Office for your alternate point of contact.

After the storm has passed, please do telephone the Parish Office with your location, your situation, and any needs you may have so that we can assist.

Please keep this top portion of the form with you if you must evacuate.

- (parish name)
- (parish location)
- (parish telephone number)
- (parish email address)
- (parish website address) http://

If the Parish Office is unable to reopen promptly, please report in by telephone to the following number:  
(alternate location's name and telephone number)

-----

For the Parish Office at \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parish Family of \_\_\_\_\_

Our plans if evacuation becomes necessary are to do the following:

Our cellular telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Our email address: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 5: PROPERTY PROTECTION CHECKLISTS**

### **Church Sanctuary**

- \_\_\_ Remove all unattached sanctuary equipment and store it in enclosed rooms.
- \_\_\_ Disconnect electronic organs; bag connectors in protective bubble wrap.
- \_\_\_ Cover the Organ Console in plastic wrap.
- \_\_\_ Cover the Altar in plastic wrap.
- \_\_\_ Wrap audio equipment and control room equipment in plastic wrap.
- \_\_\_ Wrap projection equipment in plastic and stow equipment that is not tied down.
- \_\_\_ Remove sacramental reserve elements.

### **Kitchens and Parish Halls**

- \_\_\_ Set refrigerators and freezers at coldest settings; turn them off if evacuating.
- \_\_\_ Move all loose items into cabinets or drawers.

### **Sacristy**

- \_\_\_ Altar Guild moves all vestments and loose items into closed cabinets or closets.
- \_\_\_ Altar Guild locks up particularly valuable sanctuary equipment.
- \_\_\_ In case of evacuation, Altar Guild packs valuable sanctuary equipment for transportation.
- \_\_\_ Altar Guild prepares a transportable kit of minimum equipment and vestments to support potential temporary relocation of worship to another site.
- \_\_\_ Stow or pack for transport the Church Services register book.

### **Church Office**

- \_\_\_ Prepare back-up media for transport off-site and send a copy to a responsible party outside of the area for additional safety.
- \_\_\_ Disconnect all computer equipment; bag all connectors in protective bubble wrap.
- \_\_\_ Disconnect all electronic equipment; wrap in protective plastic wrap.

- \_\_\_ Place all critical parish records in the safe unless they are being packed to evacuate.
- \_\_\_ Stow all loose items in cabinets or drawers.
- \_\_\_ Wrap the Secretary's desk, other work desks, copier, and printer in protective plastic.
- \_\_\_ Change recorded telephone message to give instructions to members that they should contact the Parish after the storm or emergency passes and how to do so with an alternate method in case the Office cannot reopen.
- \_\_\_ Place a message on the Website with emergency contact instructions and how to reach the Office after the storm and an alternate method in case the Office cannot reopen.
- \_\_\_ Cover bookshelves in plastic.

#### **Appendix 6: INVENTORY FOR THE RAPID DEPLOYMENT MOUNT-OUT BOX**

- Administrative office relocation kit, prepackaged
- Copies of all computer back-up media
- Parish record books and service attendance records, all volumes
- Church Roster
- The most essential parish files
- Vestry and Annual Meeting minutes for recent years
- Financial records, contracts, leases, monthly bills and assessment statements, discretionary fund checkbook, church credit cards, most recent bank statements.
- Archival materials about the church: incorporation papers, consecration certificate
- Stewardship files and pledge cards
- Communion set of equipment
- Home Communion kit
- Minimal vestments for the current and upcoming liturgical season
- The most essential of the Rector's library books
- Complete set of keys