



Tips & Lessons — Disaster Response

The Sunday After a Disaster

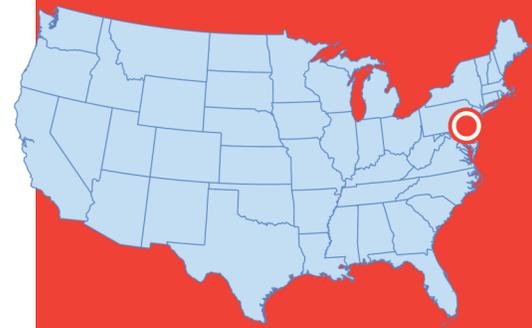
A devastating hurricane hit communities all along the US East Coast this week, following previous devastation in Haiti, Jamaica, and Cuba. All of us in the Episcopal Church mourn the losses of life, homes, and businesses following Hurricane Sandy.

CREATE COMMUNITY AS A CONGREGATION

Congregations on the East Coast must minister to parishioners who experience frustration, anger, grief, and pain as they face power outages, delays and difficulties in reaching work places and loved ones, disruption of “life as usual,” and even loss of entire communities. Even churchgoers not touched personally by the storm – seeing only images of devastation on television - will bring to church this Sunday their sadness, their frustrations, their anger at God, and maybe even their doubts and struggles with faith.

As we respond as the hands and feet of Christ this Sunday, we have the opportunity to minister to those in our congregations at a time when we are most needed. Our ministry of presence at times of disaster is crucial. Our skills of listening compassionately and serving as companions to those affected by disaster – both directly and indirectly – are ways in which we can best respond to this disaster.

Providing a safe space where our church families and our communities may bring in their sorrow, their fears, their frustrations, and even their struggles with faith is the best pastoral care we might offer in times of crisis. People need to talk. People need to tell their stories.



Fast Facts



Read - Updates On How to Help
<http://www.facebook.com/EpiscopalRelief>

Print - Bulletin Inserts for Hurricane Sandy Relief Fund:
<http://www.episcopalrelief.org/church-in-action/worship-resources/bulletin-inserts>

Donate - Hurricane Sandy Relief Fund:
<http://www.episcopalrelief.org/Donate>

Tips for Working with Children:



- LISTEN. If a child wants to talk about experiences or something he or she has seen on television, take time to listen to the story the child wants to tell or emotions or thoughts the child needs to express.
- Take prayer requests. Ask children who or what they would like to pray about. Take their prayer requests seriously, even if prayers are for cats and dogs affected by the disaster.

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By sharing stories and by expressing emotions of grief, suffering, fear, and sorrow, those affected by disaster can begin to heal.

Rather than preparing a “presentation” for adult forums and other church gatherings this coming Sunday, those on church staffs might simply ask people what they experienced this week and what they are thinking and feeling about the effects of the superstorm. What do they think the church might be called to do? Who do they think church might be called to serve? Who are they praying for?

We might also offer what the church does best at times like these: a sense of belonging, a sense of community and safety, a place where we can bring our whole selves – grief, anger, faith struggles and all. That might take many forms, from extended coffee hours to potlucks to community meals, but all focus on fellowship and community.

We might also introduce tools of spiritual growth we ourselves may find helpful – even crucial – to our own faith and sense of the presence of God. We might introduce *lectio divina*, silence, and meditation. We might point to books of devotionals we have found helpful in times of distress.

We might ask for prayer requests from our parishioners, listening and honoring their most passionate concerns.

Many of those who have ministered to others after a disaster report that their faith, eventually, grew. Times such as these are points where all of us might seriously wrestle with our doubts, our fears, our anger, and our frustrations... and, ultimately, come out of the experience spiritually stronger than ever before.

Times like these are also opportunities for all of us to minister to those in need, healing a hurting world in our neighborhood, in the United States, in the Caribbean, and in the world. We invite you to partner with us in ministering to those in need after Hurricane Sandy. We invite you to share in our ministry of healing.

Tips for Working with Children continued:



- Acknowledge all emotions. Assure children they are safe and that you will get through any crisis together. Don't try to “fix” children's emotions. Don't try to sugarcoat the situation.
- Encourage children to draw or write as a means of expressing themselves.
- Children often feel empowered and more confident if they can “do” something. Consider making cards of encouragement for those affected by disaster or for first responders and relief workers. Youth groups or older children might organize a fundraiser for those in need.
- Limit exposure to media reports of the disaster.
- Provide a quiet and calm place for children to play. Teach self-soothing techniques such as taking deep breaths and spending time in silence.

Additional Resources



For more information on helping flood victims, please see the following online resources:

[“Ministering to Children After a Disaster”](#)

To learn more about what Episcopal Relief & Development is doing following Superstorm Sandy, see our [Hurricane Sandy Response page](#).