

US DISASTER PROGRAM

Caring for Emergency Responders



Emergency Response Building Resiliency and Community

THE MINERVA FIRE

When a wildfire broke out near the rural town of Quincy, CA, Christ the King Episcopal Church made caring for the emergency responders their goal. In turn, they helped forge a sense of community under the threat of fire.

Quincy, California is a small town of 5,000 located in the heart of the Plumas National Forest in the Northern Sierra Nevada Mountain Range. In July 2017, a suspected arsonist started several fires in the hills just outside of town.

The Minerva Fire, as it became known, was a complex challenge for firefighters. While the fire was burning through forested hills, the flames also threatened schools, homes, and the downtown area. This “wildland urban interface” event called upon fire units experienced in both wildfires and structural protection. Quincy soon swelled as fire crews from across the state were called in to help protect the community.

Aggressive tactics and air support strengthened the early containment lines established to protect the town. And while residents were asked to prepare for a potential evacuation, the fire was largely kept at bay.

The Rev. Warren quickly realized that as long as evacuations were not ordered, the parish was called to care for those who were protecting the community. As it happens, Christ the King shares a back parking lot with the local Firehouse.

USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR OUTREACH

The Rev. Warren approached the Fire Chief by Facebook, “I didn’t want to distract personnel with a call—a message allowed the fire department to respond when they had the time,” Warren shared.

As it turned out, the Fire Department was quick to reply to his inquiry on how to care for firefighters. As the fire camp was still to be established, many firefighters just wanted a decent cup of coffee. An anonymous resident gave the local coffee and bakery \$50 to create a “tab” to pay for anything a firefighter wanted. That tab had wound down to less than \$10 by mid-morning. The Rev. Warren quickly realized that the church could extend the tab.

“It was the end of July and the firefighters were battling flames in 100+ weather. I wanted to make sure the firefighters had more than just coffee to enjoy on their break,” Warren recalled. “I called the owner of the new Ice Cream Shop in town and made a matching donation to start a tab there, as well.”



BIOGRAPHY

The Rev. Matt Warren serves two parishes in the rural mountains of the Sierra Nevada: Christ the King Episcopal Church in Quincy, CA and Holy Spirit Episcopal Church in Lake Almanor. He also is the Disaster Coordinator for his deanery and works closely with parish and diocesan leaders to prepare and respond to emergencies.

“The first few hours were incredible!” The Rev. Warren had shared news of the firefighter accounts at the coffee and ice cream shops in town on Facebook. “My phone kept buzzing! Shares, likes, everything, it just took off. By the end of the day, the post had been seen nearly 16,000 times—remarkable for a town of only 5,000!”

CREATING A SENSE OF AGENCY

The Rev. Warren is convinced that creating a sense of agency in caring for firefighters helped build resiliency. “We went from passively watching the flames to actively caring for firefighters. It gave us a sense of hope during an anxious time.”

The community spirit was infectious. There were scores of signs thanking firefighters along Main Street. The Rev. Warren made rounds near the end of every shift to let firefighters know about the tabs...but after a day or two, word had spread through camp!

In the end, the parish’s original \$200 gift grew to over \$5000. “It was truly incredible to see our community respond in such a giving way!”

3 TAKEWAYS

Agency: By engaging the community in caring for firefighters, Christ the King participated in their own recovery. This helped raised confidence that they can play a deeper, more meaningful role in the well being of the neighborhood.

Community: Caring for firefighters raised a sense of community during anxious times. While caring for first responders, the community worked together and built stronger relationships with one another through fundraising, spreading the word and joining in to provide coffee or ice cream at their store.

Thanks: Always recognize others efforts, even something as simple as “liking” a post helps! This adds a personal touch to your campaign will drive engagement with your posts.

The Resource Library on Episcopal Relief & Development’s website, www.episcopalrelief.org/resourcelibrary, contains free, downloadable disaster training curricula as well as case studies of best practices in disaster preparedness and response.

For more information on this or other resources please contact your Diocesan Disaster Coordinator or email usdisaster@episcopalrelief.org. We welcome your questions as well as your suggestions for resources that will support your work in disaster preparedness.



EMAIL TEMPLATES MAKE SENDING UPDATES AND TIPS TO PARISHIONERS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS EASIER

During the Minerva Fire, The Rev. Warren was active on social media and email providing updates to parishioners and community members. “The first email was the easiest! I just hit send on my emergency template.” By creating an email template with information on what to do in an emergency, tips on evacuation packing, and a checklist of what to pack, the email was ready to send in an instant. “Unfortunately, many of us don’t plan for an emergency before we face that situation. The best tip I gave over email encouraged people to take pictures of every wall in their home as a ‘quick and dirty’ inventory for insurance. We have to remember, Noah built the ark before the rains started!”