

## Preparedness Planning Tools

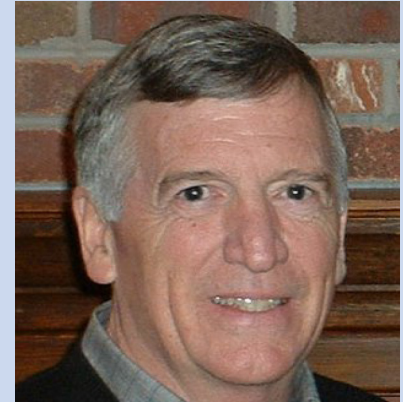
One Sunday afternoon, members of St. Gabriel the Archangel Episcopal Church in Cherry Hills Village, Colorado, gathered outside for the annual church picnic. It was a beautiful day and everyone was enjoying the warmth, sunshine and fellowship. The afternoon took a frightening turn when a member with heart trouble felt lightheaded and then passed out. Fortunately, other members from the congregation were able to call for prompt medical attention. But it left the congregation questioning their capacity to respond to similar emergencies in the future. The Rector and members realized the importance of equipping the congregation to respond to an emergency and began the process of developing a plan. Mason Whitney, the Church Safety Warden at St. Gabriel the Archangel, reflects on the process of equipping the congregation to respond and establishing a church safety ministry.

## INVITING YOUR CHURCH MEMBERS INTO DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

We began our visioning process for our church preparedness plan by imagining what situations would be the most likely to occur in our congregation and what skills our members would require to respond to those situations. We also realized that it would not be possible to imagine every possible scenario, but that many situations could have similar response protocols. We decided to focus on thinking through emergencies that are more likely to happen in our context, such as an ice storm, fire, security incident or medical emergency, and to establish clear response protocols. The goal of our emergency preparedness plan is to equip our members to prevent, protect against, respond to and recover from hazards while balancing risks with resources and needs.

A key components of our preparedness plan is a team of trained volunteers ready and willing to respond to emergencies.

**A major asset of our congregation is our team of ushers. They are familiar with members of our congregation and the church grounds, they are likely to have situational awareness of an event as it unfolds and they feel called to serve their church community.**



### BIOGRAPHY

Mason Whitney is the Church Safety Warden at St. Gabriel the Archangel Episcopal Church and a Regional Disaster Warden in The Episcopal Church in Colorado

### FAST FACTS

**CONGREGATION:**

St. Gabriel the Archangel Episcopal Church

**LOCATION:**

Cherry Hills Village, Colorado

**POPULATION:**

6,585

**DISASTER RELIEF:**

Developing a congregational disaster preparedness plan

We asked our ushers to participate in our preparedness training sessions and to accept responsibility for taking or directing actions in the event of an emergency.

We invite other members of the congregation to participate in these preparedness trainings, as well. We offer two levels of training: one for all members and another for those interested in increasing their response capacity. Preparedness Awareness Training, our basic training, is held annually between the 8 AM and 10:15 AM services. Our Safety Warden gives a slideshow presentation which includes an overview of the preparedness plan and information regarding emergency procedures, such as the locations fire extinguishers, emergency exits and our shelter-in-place procedures.

Specific Response Related Training is our advanced level training. We hold the training on a Saturday morning, and leaders from the Red Cross, local first responders and other certified instructors lead the training. Participants practice CPR, AED (defibrillator) operations, basic first aid and fire suppression. Participants receive a detailed walkthrough of the church, including training on how to shut off the utilities and locate emergency equipment. We offer coffee and donuts during the training, and members see it as a fellowship event where they are all learning together. Once members have completed the training, they become part of our Church Safety Ministry. Participants say that they can share what they've learned with their families and workplaces.

Through these activities, our members now see emergency preparedness as a collective ministry, and we have had success in cultivating a culture of preparedness in our congregation.

Clear communication about why preparedness is important for the welfare of all who attend church or use the facilities at St. Gabriel's has been critical to our success.

The more we talk about emergency preparedness together, the more it becomes part of our church's identity.

We've also benefitted from strong, invested leadership. Our Rector regularly mentions preparedness during sermons, and the Rector and Senior Warden are active members of our preparedness committee and advocates for the training programs.

One of our earliest successes was holding a fire drill during a Sunday morning service. We first held several Q&A sessions in the weeks beforehand to let members know what was happening and what the plan would be. Then, we practiced the drill during a Sunday service, and we were able to get everyone out of the sanctuary quickly and safely. Our members felt comfortable with the evacuation plan, so they felt more equipped to act when the situation arose.

## STARTING YOUR PREPAREDNESS PROCESS:

- Think through what disasters and emergencies are most likely to affect your church. For instance, it's more likely that a fire will occur than a zombie apocalypse!
- Having several different voices in the room is helpful during the planning stage. In particular, members with special needs may have a unique perspective to offer the group.
- Having strong support from congregational leadership is important in obtaining support from the rest of the congregation. The Rector or Senior Warden can be very helpful in framing the disaster preparedness as a form of stewardship and as a ministry.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information on disaster preparedness, please see the following online resources:

- St. Gabriel Episcopal Church Preparedness Plan
- Comprehensive Preparedness Plan for Congregations
- Facilitator's Guide to the Comprehensive Preparedness Plan
- Identifying and Reducing Risk

For more disaster preparedness ideas and resources, visit [episcopalrelief.org/preparedness](http://episcopalrelief.org/preparedness).

Much like we are all part of the body of Christ, so we can contribute to this ministry. For instance, although some of our members have limited mobility and aren't able to perform techniques like CPR, they are able to assist others who are more physically able. We want our members to know that while they can't do everything, we are all capable of doing something to contribute to the safety of our congregation.

By fostering a culture of preparedness, we have made our goal of having a church ready for any hazard more achievable. This has allowed St. Gabriel's to better fulfill its mission, to utilize its many strengths and to expand its capacity to serve God's people and the community.