

# US DISASTER PROGRAM

## Adapting Church Disaster Response During A Pandemic



### Adapting Disaster Response

## NEW METHOD, SAME CALL

Episcopal Relief & Development and its church partners tend to respond to natural disasters in a relational manner, often convening community meals, food pantries, shelters and the like. Many of the usual ways that we are accustomed to responding are not safe during a pandemic. Here are a few ideas of ways churches can respond safely to the needs of their vulnerable neighbors as natural disasters occur:

### PROVIDING ACCESS TO GOODS

- Buy gift cards to a local big box store (often you can do this online) and ask a few key local leaders to distribute individually, perhaps someone at the emergency operations center, a school counselor or a clergy person.
- Set-up an outdoor shed or temporary storage facility with emergency supplies (like diapers, formula, household goods, etc.) and a padlock. If people reach out to the church in need of such supplies, share the code with them. You can change the combination on some locks regularly to ensure inventory control if you'd like.
- Distribute small goods (like masks or small denominations of gift cards) via baggies on a fence, and allow people to request prayers or additional support via paper and a mailbox. Volunteers can then check the box regularly as well as resupply the bags on the fence.

### WORKING WITH LOCAL BUSINESSES

- Partner with a local restaurant to provide boxed meals for displaced residents to distribute to people in their vehicles and/or set-up a tab to allow people to call in and order themselves up to a certain amount and pick-up themselves.

### INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

- Work with local non-profits to create and/or distribute

## HAVE IDEAS TO ADD?

This list was compiled in part by Episcopal Relief & Development staff and Partners in Response and Resilience. We don't know it all! If you have any other response ideas, please let us know by emailing [usdisaster@episcopalrelief.org](mailto:usdisaster@episcopalrelief.org).

updated information (updated both post-pandemic and post-disaster) about how to access local services like feeding, clothing, financial assistance, mental health, substance abuse treatment, domestic violence shelters, etc. This information should be updated and distributed on a regular basis electronically as things will evolve quickly.

## DISASTER VOLUNTEERS

- Utilize local young adult volunteers who might be home from college to do debris removal in very small teams (like siblings). Emphasize the importance of safety because this is not a great time to need to access emergency medical services.

## PASTORAL CARE/MENTAL HEALTH

- Create virtual convenings/phone trees in the immediate aftermath of the storm to allow congregation members and their neighbors to debrief the experience and share information about available resources.

## SELF-CARE AND MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

It's especially important to take care of ourselves as leaders during these stressful times.

Here are a few resources describing the signs/symptoms of stress and a few simple practices to cope:

[Self-care for church leaders](#)

[Using online affinity groups to address isolation](#)

[Emotional Life Cycle of a Disaster](#)