

After the Fall: A Story of One Congregation's Entry into Disaster Preparedness

One Sunday afternoon, members of St. Gabriel the Archangel Episcopal Church in Cherry Hills Village, Colorado, gathered outside for our annual church picnic. It was a beautiful day, and everyone enjoyed 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 of our congregation were able to call for prompt medical attention.

But it left the congregation questioning our 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 developing a plan.

St. Gabriel the Archangel began the visioning process for our church preparedness plan by imagining what situations would be most likely to occur in their congregation. These included an ice storm, fire, security incident and medical emergencies. We established clear response protocols and identified skills that members would require to respond to those situations.

A major asset of our congregation was our team of ushers, who already felt called to serve our faith community. They were familiar with members of our congregation and with the church grounds, so they were likely to have situational awareness of an event as it unfolded. We invited the ushers to participate in our preparedness training sessions and accept responsibility for taking or directing actions in an emergency. We invited other members of the congregation to participate in these preparedness trainings as well. We offered coffee and donuts during the training, and members saw the training as a fellowship event where they all learned together. Once members completed the training, they became part of our Church Safety Ministry. Participants said they shared what they learned with their families and workplaces.

As we have developed this ministry, we have come to see that just as we are all part of the body of Christ, we can all contribute to this ministry.

For instance, although some of our members have limited mobility and cannot perform techniques like CPR, they can assist others who are more physically able. We want our members to know that we are all capable of doing something to contribute to the safety of our congregation. [Read more](#) about our training and preparedness.

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, utilize its many strengths and expand its capacity to serve God's people and the community.

Mason Whitney, the Church Safety Warden at St. Gabriel the Archangel in Cherry Hills Village Colorado, reflects on the journey his congregation took from a frightening picnic incident to establishing a church safety ministry in their parish. Read the full story of St. Gabriel the Archangel Episcopal Church [here](#).