

## Creating Empowered Faith Communities to Act in the Event of a Disaster

### A Church-Eye View of Disaster Relief & Response

It's Monday morning.

Your community experienced a massive, sudden flood yesterday evening when a dam burst after heavy rains.

Media reports indicate that many homes and businesses were severely damaged. There have been some deaths and many injuries. People are still being evacuated. Many people are suddenly homeless.

Your church is on relatively high ground. The rector lives next door. Electricity is out, and water isn't running. Surrounding roads are impassable.

Your disaster team members have cell phone service and are ready to respond.

Are you?

The faith communities most effective in responding after a disaster are those that have a firm sense of their mission in the community, have taken stock of their human and physical assets and have a sense of how to mobilize them to address the changing constellation of needs that occur in disaster recovery.

Episcopal Relief & Development offers a free resource to help you do that. It's called "The Disaster Timeline: A Church-Eye View." This simulation exercise introduces church members to the various ways a disaster can impact a community and the role a congregation can play in helping people recover. It walks you from the onset of a disaster to the development of a new normal for your community. The entire program can be found [here](#).

It features two sessions that can be done separately or back-to-back, with a variety of church-based groups, such as vestries, youth groups, outreach committees and faith formation programs:

1. **Creating a Disaster Preparedness Plan (60-90 minutes):** This exercise invites small groups to create a mini-parish disaster plan that inventories their congregation's particular human and physical assets and considers how they might be mobilized in the immediate aftermath of a disaster.
2. **The Disaster Timeline (3 hours):** This exercise introduces the various phases of disaster recovery and invites participants to use their work from the first exercise to examine how their congregation can respond on the road to recovery. It also introduces the **Emotional Life Cycle of a Disaster**, which we explain below. It can be found [here](#).

**Localize This:** If a flood scenario is unlikely in your community, feel free to adapt this exercise with a disaster that is more likely to occur. However, avoid using the most recent disaster your community may have experienced. Too often, disaster planning rehearses the last disaster but fails to prepare for other potential crises, such as weather events, fires, shootings and political uprisings.