

Sample Hurricane Preparedness Plan

The purpose of this hurricane plan is to prepare the staff members, Session members and others in the congregation in disaster management both before and after a hurricane. This plan will enable all persons associated with the church to be better prepared for a hurricane, to know what to do during the hurricane and, finally, what processes to follow after a hurricane in order to speed up the return to normalcy for the church and others.

Background

What happens in a Hurricane? – The Rescue Phase

The Rescue Phase begins with the hurricane and continues for at least the first 48 hours. Those affected seek emergency relief and assistance, which is often provided by first responders such as police and fire fighters, the America Red Cross, the Salvation Army and local congregations. Your church can serve as a vital force in rescue as you bear Christian witness to the community.

What happens after a Hurricane? – The Relief Phase

The Relief Phase usually begins 12-72 hours after a hurricane. During this difficult time people often find themselves in the most acute stage of personal shock. Debris removal and cleanup, damage assessments, temporary repairs, and applications for assistance characterize this phase. Community needs assessment and decisions and organization for recovery are other critical steps. During this phase networking with other congregations, ecumenical groups and community and governmental groups is important. A coordinated effort is essential so as not to duplicate efforts and to meet the needs present.

What happens in the Long-Term? – The Recovery Phase

The Recovery Phase begins three to five days after a hurricane and may last from several months to several years. This phase is characterized by permanent repairs and rebuilding leading to full reconstruction and rehabilitation. It also involves planning for clothing, furniture and equipment replacement. The role of congregations is critical to this phase. Long after other agencies are gone, the church remains present. The bigger the disaster, the longer the Recovery Phase will last. *(Taken from the Lutheran Disaster Response, partners in southeastern Pennsylvania, congregational disaster response guide.)*

Hurricanes

Hurricanes fall into five categories on the Saffir-Simpson scale. These categories provide an estimate of the potential property damage and flooding expected along the coast from a hurricane landfall.

Category 1: 74-95 mile per hour sustained winds. Damage is estimated primarily to involve trees and unanchored mobile homes and may include coastal flooding.

Category 2: 96-110 mile per hour sustained winds. Damage is estimated to involve roofs, doors, windows, trees and shrubs with flooding damage to coastal piers.

Category 3: 111-130 mile per hour sustained winds. Damage will be incurred in the structural areas of architectural buildings, large trees may be blown down with flooding on the shoreline and potentially even inland in low lying areas. Mobile homes are destroyed by Category 3 hurricanes. City officials will announce some mandatory evacuation.

Category 4: 131-155 mile per hour sustained winds. Extensive damage will occur to doors and windows; major damage to lower floors near shorelines with terrain floods well inland. City officials will announce mandatory evacuation in all areas near landfall.

Category 5: More than 155 mile per hour sustained winds. Expect complete roof failure and some building failures; with massive mandatory evacuation. Flooding will cause major damage to lower floors of all shoreline buildings and lower areas inland.

Hurricane season starts June 1 and ends October 31. During this time period, the church staff should monitor all storm warnings and begin preparations if and when a storm threatens your area. Hurricanes are extremely unpredictable; therefore, please treat all storms predicted to hit our area the same regardless of the category.

SAMPLE PLAN

WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW!

- Call a meeting of the pastor, staff and facilities chairperson to discuss hurricane planning and your particular problems and needs.
- Consider purchasing a generator.
- Consider, if storage is available, preparing a Congregational Hurricane Emergency Kit, consisting of first aid supplies, fuel for your generator, water, canned foods batteries, sand and sand-bags.
- Prepare an Emergency Church Directory, including the cell phone numbers and emergency contact numbers for everyone in the Congregation. Make at least three copies, and keep them in a safe and secure place.
- Consider purchasing a church emergency cell phone. Publish the number for members.
- Develop a plan to back up all your computer records and to store the back up information in a safe and secure place. Storage may be best at the Presbytery office or another out-of town location.
- Consider appointing a standing emergency administrative commission to be empowered if needed in a disaster situation to make decisions for the church.
- Plan for Sunday Worship to begin as soon as possible after a disaster strikes.

On or Before June 1 of Each Year

- Facilities Chairperson, Administrator and Solo/Senior Pastor review the Hurricane Plan, update if necessary and share with staff and Session.
- If you have a Generator, Staff should check and insure it comes on-line.
- Facility Chairperson and Pastor or Administrator will prepare video of all interior and exterior areas of the church facility and make three copies. One copy will be kept in the Church Safe, one will be kept at the home of the Facility Chairperson and one at the home of the Administrator.

72 Hours Prior to Hurricane Making Landfall

- Moderator will have a called meeting of the Session.
- Facility Chair and/or Custodial staff will ensure that all gas cans have been filled and church vehicles are gassed up.
- Staff will prepare new directories, including cell phone numbers, for all Session members and staff.
- Elders will be asked to contact the members for whom they have responsibility and ask for the following information:
 - Are you leaving or staying for the hurricane?
 - Location and phone numbers where they can be reached during and after the storm.
 - When do you plan to return?
 - Will someone be checking your home after the hurricane or do you need a church member to check on it for you?
 - If member is staying, ask that they come to the church Sanctuary at 5:00 p.m., 24 hours after the hurricane.
- If an elder will be leaving for the storm, they will be asked to either
 - take the directory with them and make calls to their members, or,
 - request another elder to take their call list.

48 Hours Prior to Hurricane Making Landfall

Staff will make sure they have all directories, contact names and numbers of all utility and service providers, and that the Administrator or Senior Pastor are aware of everyone's hurricane plans.

In addition, staff (and volunteers) will:

- Prepare sand bags using bags in the hurricane kit and using sand from storage or the playground. (Sand will be returned to playground once the storm has passed).
- Order or purchase extra of water and store in a secure place.
- Insure there is additional petty cash on hand to meet benevolent needs after the storm.
- If necessary, notify parents that the church/school will be closed following the storm until it has been affirmed to be safe and all utilities are operational.
- Request that all members watch local media and listen to radio stations for further information.

Just Prior to Leaving the Church Before Storm Makes Landfall

- Staff members will insure the building is as prepared as much as possible by taking care of the following as necessary:
- Place sand bags at the top of stairwells leading to the basement floors and in front of entry doors if necessary. (If at all possible, use tube bags.)
- Make sure drain covers are clear of debris and/or sump pump is operating correctly.
- Fill freezers with ice if possible.
- Remove all toys from the outside playground and store securely indoors
- Remove all parking signs and stack inside building.
- Bring in all trashcans.
- Pick up any loose debris on the grounds.
- Close all windows and blinds and shut all interior doors.
- Ensure all church information systems have been backed up and back up copies are safe.
- Ensure all computers are unplugged and off the floor.
- Gather up all church coolers and place in convenient location for use after the storm.
- Cover piano and organ in the sanctuary with tarps.
- Round up all flip charts and marking pens for designating needs after the storm and place in a central secure closet, off the floor.

12 Hours After the Storm

- Staff members will report to work if at all possible. Those unable to report to work should make every effort to contact another member of the staff to let them know their status.
- Staff members who have needs at home requiring immediate attention will be excused to take care of those needs but asked to maintain phone contact with either the Administrator or the Senior Pastor.

- Staff members and Facilities Chairperson will assess immediate needs of the church structure and whether or not the building is secure. (This will include all power and air conditioning up and running.) DO NOT plan to resume use of the building for regular church activity until the Facilities Chairperson, the Administrator and the Senior Pastor have affirmed the building is safe and all utilities are functioning. All windows, doors, roofs, and ceilings must be checked.
- Contact local television and radio stations as appropriate to notify the public of Church Services and social services available.
- If the power is out, ensure the generator power is up and running as soon as possible.
- If the power is out, the telephones at the church can be powered by the emergency generator power as appropriate to your system.
- Staff will use their personal cell phones if necessary to handle church matters during this time.
- Staff will take pictures of any damage sustained to the interior or exterior of the building for insurance purposes. A camera should be kept in your Hurricane Kit.
- Empty sand bags, returning sand to the playground or storage and bags to the Hurricane Kit if they are re-useable.
- Outside toys can be returned to the playground.
- If power is on, turn all thermostats throughout both buildings back on and to a comfortable temperature.

24 Hours After the Storm

- All members who are able are invited to come to the Church Sanctuary at 5:00 p.m. This information should be general knowledge in the congregation and have been communicated to every member when elders and staff made their initial contact with the assigned members.
- The Narthex, Social Hall or other suitable central place should be utilized as a post-disaster command center. A member should be designated as the Service Team Coordinator to match needs and volunteers and ensure that all needs are assessed and taken care of if possible.
- Elders and staff will use cell phones and church phones to contact members who have not yet been contacted since the storm to ascertain their needs.

- Flip Charts can be set up identifying:
 - those with needs and what tools will be required to take care of the problem.
 - volunteers who can meet individual needs, skill levels and tools.
 - immediate needs of the church structure/grounds matched with volunteers who can assist.

- A current church directory will be placed on the information desk in the command center. Elders, members, and staff are asked to sign the directory when they come in and indicate: I/we are (1) okay; and/or (2) need help. If help is needed, members are asked to indicate their help request on the appropriate flip chart.

48 Hours After the Storm

- Everyone who is able will meet at the church at 9:00 a.m. to break into teams and be assigned a task by the designated Service Team Coordinator. All work teams are asked to come to the church prepared to clean/repair. Volunteers are asked to bring shovels, hammers, roofing nails, plastic sheeting, tarps, chainsaws, gasoline, extension ladders, step ladders, rope, wood strips to secure tarps, flashlights, rakes, gloves and wheelbarrows. Additionally, volunteers should bring water and/or Gatorade, sunscreen, a hat and a lunch.

- If we find some of your members or neighbors have become displaced and in need of emergency housing, every effort will be made to place them either in member's homes or at the church.

72 Hours After the Storm (Depending on Severity of the Storm)

- Volunteers will be recruited to provide meals for the neighborhood and/or community.

- Volunteers will be recruited to provide child care for church or neighborhood families.

- The church building will be available to provide space for initial community gatherings as needed.

- Those in need will be encouraged to gather in the sanctuary for prayers and spiritual care.

Sunday after the Storm

- Gather at 10:00 a.m (or other appropriate pre-set time) for services and fellowship regardless of the circumstances.

One Week after the Storm

- Pastors, elders and others will make door-to-door visits to church members.
- Pastor(s) and staff will assess current status of needs and also critique the hurricane plan and make necessary changes.

STORM RELATED INFORMATION SOURCES

Phone Numbers and Web Addresses of Local Governmental Agencies Needed:

National Hurricane Center: www.nhc.noaa.gov

Hurricane Information: www.hurricanealley.net

County or City Emergency Management Information Line

State Division of Emergency Management
<http://www.mema.state.md.us/MEMA/index.jsp>

American Red Cross
<http://www.redcross-cmd.org/>

Police/Sheriff's Office

Utilities Companies

Radio/TV Stations

Staff Contact Information/Emergency Contact numbers

Church Emergency Cell phone number

Guide to Disaster Ministry in Your Congregation, a resource from Church World Service and the PC(USA). Available from Presbyterian Distribution Service: pda@pcusa.org or 888-728-7228 ext: 5839. PDS#74340-00-02

Lutheran Disaster Preparation Guide: <http://www.libertylutheran.org/GUIDE12%209-29-05.pdf#search=%22congregational%20disaster%20kits%22>

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