

In Case of Disaster . . .

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Think you couldn't possibly be faced with the sudden loss of your church building?

What if a tornado removed the roof?

What if the city revoked your certificate of occupancy?

What if floodwaters shorted out the entire electrical system?

What if a schismatic faction locked you out? (Trust me, it can happen.)

In the face of devastating loss, what are some of the key things a church community needs to do? It's essential that your congregation have a disaster recovery plan – covering both occasions when your building is empty as well as occasions when it's full of people. If your church already has a disaster plan, you've probably thought about many of these key elements. But if not

Safety First – Make sure you are physically safe. And then make sure your colleagues are physically safe. As the flight attendants remind us, put on your own oxygen mask first. And as the EMTs remind one another, you can't rescue anyone if you're dead.

Take Roll – Touch base with every single one of your families. Whether there's a community-wide disaster, or the "disaster" is limited to your congregation or your building, they may need help and support. They may have resources to share. They may know of others who need help or have resources. And they need reassurance. Leaders reach out to leaders who reach out, in turn, to others until you've reached them all.

Assess Your Resources – Way beyond money and materials, your people and your relationships – with one another and with the larger community – are the most valuable. Out of those resources and your congregation's imagination will come the life-giving, Christ-centered response to whatever you're facing.

Hold On To (or Recover) the Data – Lists are vitally important. Have readily available lists of your people, an inventory of church property, and contact information for your people and other key support (your insurance agent; your lawyer; every staff member; the judicatory leadership/offices; civic leaders; media outlets; skilled trades support, like plumbers and electricians and roofers). "In the cloud" back-ups of the data on your office computers can be a huge help.

Gather Your Leaders – In any crisis, rapid response and healthy recovery are the collaborative work of many minds and hearts. If at all possible, gather together in the same room. There's energy and security and inspiration when the leaders gather. And

sharing in creative proposals and communal deliberation can expedite broad-based decision-making and swift action.

Communicate – Just like taking roll, communication is the lifeblood of nimble response. Communicate frequently and repeatedly, both inside your congregation and outside, as appropriate. Get your story out, or others will tell it for you – probably not the way you'd like.

Some key things to remember as your team works together to recover:

- Chaos is the raw material of creation. You probably won't lack for it – but don't fear it. It's the starting point for creativity.
- If you can't be a "non-anxious presence," be a "less anxious presence." Reactivity is your enemy.
- Prayer changes things – starting with our own hearts.
- Listen – to your colleagues, your community, and your own heart, as well as to the still small voice of God.