

Parish Disaster Plan

UPDATED OCT. 3, 2024:

It seems like none of us spends a great deal of time or energy worrying about hurricanes until there is the possibility of a landfall here in Florida. Then we all turn our attention to the weather and spaghetti models.

It has been 18 years since the 2004 hurricane season when we were visited by Hurricanes Charley, Francis and Jean, and only a few years since Hurricanes Matthew, Maria and Irma. Since our diocese is spread from the Gulf of Mexico to the Atlantic, a Florida landfall very well might affect one or more of our churches.

As "Diocesan Disaster Relief Coordinator" for the Diocese of Central Florida, I stand ready to help you assess needs, connect churches to resources to gain assistance and coordinate volunteers, supplies and financial support as circumstances require. We will also help determine the ways we can help your church support and serve affected communities and neighborhoods.

Here is my contact information:

The Ven. John Motis
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Please allow me the opportunity to serve your church as a resource in the event that you are affected. Our diocese stands ready to support each other and our neighbors.

In Christ,
Deacon John Motis

Helpful Links

- FloridaDisaster.org
- [FEMA App](#)
- Weather.com
- [Episcopal Relief and Development](#)

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Diocese of Central Florida Parish Disaster Plan

PREFACE

This plan is to serve as a broad guide for preparations for and responses to disasters. In an attempt to simplify the implementation of this plan as much as possible, we have broken it down into different parts. In doing so, we realize not all parishes have the same facilities; therefore, some of the suggestions herein will not be applicable to all parishes. As the program is implemented, it is expected the plan will be given more details and changes will be made as needed. The inventories will need to be regularly updated and the Vestry will need to review the insurance coverage to ensure it is adequate to the needs of the church; however, you should consider your local community disaster programs as well.

I. GENERAL ORGANIZATIONAL OPERATION

The Vestry of the church should appoint a disaster director who shall be responsible for the following:

- A. Assembling and updating a detailed disaster plan; detailing specific responsibilities for the plan's execution; and coordinating the plan with governing bodies and office staff.
- B. Coordinating and directing the execution of disaster preparation and post disaster response and assigning alternates for responsibility as needed.
- C. Once per year (April or May) notifying the congregation of evacuation routes, shelter locations, personal preparation, requests for listing of persons who require special Need Registry, and other information.
- D. Once per year, (June) make a digital and a hard copy list of parishioner's names, addresses, phone numbers (including cell phone telephones), and their likely evacuation address with particular emphasis on the at risk members, i.e. elderly, single mothers, and the disabled. A copy should be kept on site and a copy should be stored off site.
- E. A Communication Plan to quickly contact all parishioners before and after a disaster strikes, i.e. telephone tree.
- F. A List of members with talents who would be willing and able to assist in a disaster, i.e. doctors, nurses, carpenters, electricians, etc.
- G. Reviewing and updating plan once per year to account for changes.
- H. Advising the Diocesan Office, as soon as practicable, of the situation and any injury or damage to persons or property. If it is impossible to contact the Diocesan Office directly, use indirect calls to other parishes, if possible, asking them to relay the information on to the Diocesan Office.

II. POTENTIAL CLAIM PRESERVATION

The first matter which should be addressed is the preservation of the documents, pictures of the entire inventory of the parish, and extensive pictures of the inside and outside of all parish

buildings. This will be in conjunction with the documentation necessary for the filing of any insurance claims if any type loss should occur.

A. To assist in the compilation and storage of these documents, the Diocese of Central Florida has arranged with the Church Insurance Company of Vermont to provide each parish the necessary computer software, instruction, and continued assistance to assure every step has been taken to be able to document any loss in the parish. The Church Insurance Company of Vermont will make available its computer program, Riskeepers, to assist in the compilation, retention, and storage of the parish documents. These documents will be located in several locations by Riskeepers to assure their safety in the event of a disaster in more than one area. When documents are stored on location, usually a disaster that hits the parish destroys the documents subsequently needed to be filed to support a claim for the loss.

B. Refer to the information and instructions from Riskeepers. If you do not have access readily available, contact us in the office at the Diocese of Central Florida and we will assist in anyway possible.

C. It is important to realize that this Riskeepers service is offered at no charge to either the parish or the Diocese of Central Florida. It is a service from the insurance company to assist in subsequently documenting any potential claim with the company. After a loss it is often impossible to recreate what an item looked like or what was actually present before the loss. Hopefully, this will be a great benefit.

D. The retrieval of these documents for any potential claim is critical to the success of collecting on any loss on the parish.

III. CHURCH OFFICER'S CHECKLIST

A. Vestry choose an alternate location for worship and office (have prior agreement with other community churches).

B. Appoint a disaster director.

C. Establish Clergy Support Team to minister to needs of congregation after the disaster.

D. Determine if church should have a disaster fund to cover financial assistance for the members. Yes____ No____.

E. Establish the fund if above answer is yes.

F. Assign specific responsibility for facilities preparation.

G. Prepare a damage assessment preplan.

H. Determine if church should have a disaster fund to cover unexpected facility needs.

Yes____ No____.

I. Establish the disaster fund if above answer is yes.

J. Necessary materials are purchased and stored.

K. Perform post disaster damage assessment and estimates following disaster.

IV. DISASTER DIRECTOR'S CHECKLIST

A. A disaster director is appointed.

B. A disaster plan is completed.

C. The disaster plan approved by the Vestry.

- D. Responsible individuals are notified and agree to tasks.
- E. The congregation is informed of pertinent disaster information (annual occurrence).
- F. The plan has received an annual review and update.
- G. Church video (and photos) are completed and stored in a safe.
- H. Outreach commitments for the church are forwarded to local disaster response agencies.
- I. Disaster preparation materials are purchased and in place.
- J. Have a "Church in a Box" readily available.

V. DISASTER COMMITTEE

- A. Determine any transportation needs for the elderly or shut-ins.
- B. Assure transportation for those listed above.
- C. Recommend listing with Special Needs Registry through County Emergency Operations Center.

VI. INSURANCE INFORMATION

In considering the information requested below, please refer to Section II above.

- A. Policy is with:_____.
- B. Home Offices:_____.
- C. Policy Number is:_____.
- D. Local agent is:_____.
- E. Phone:_____.
- F. Policy is a Replacement Value type with total value of_____.
- G. Policy covers hurricane, fire, burglary, and breakage.
- H. Policy does___ or does not___ cover sexual misconduct or personal possessions of staff or congregation or groups using the buildings or grounds.
- I. Policy does___ or does not___ cover flood and the church does, or does not, have separate flood insurance. The policy is reviewed annually by the Finance Committee of the Vestry.
- J. A copy of the policy is kept in the church vault and a duplicate copy is kept off site under the supervision of church secretary.
- K. The policy has some coverage for personal possessions that are regularly used for church business. Yes___No___.

VII. IMPLEMENTATION

The following steps to initiate execution of the disaster plan are based on a hurricane for which there is a period of warning time. The steps for other disasters such as tornadoes, explosions, fires, terrorists, etc. shall be initiated after the fact.

- A. The disaster director shall contact the clergy and senior warden of the vestry 48 hours prior to potential evacuation and together they shall set specific times to execute emergency preparation.
- B. Emergency preparation shall be completed 24 hours prior to expected hurricane arrival.

C. The checklists provided in this plan shall be checked off as items of preparation are completed.

D. Post disaster checklists and other assessment material shall be readied and disaster impact assessment responsibility shall be verified.

E. Implementation of outreach commitments by the church staff coordinated with the clergy, senior and junior wardens of the Vestry and liaison/contact person for any necessary local agency.

VIII. CHURCH FACILITIES

A. The main purpose of facility preparations is to protect critical equipment, important documents and other cherished church items. This plan does not include window protection or attempts to seal the buildings from flooding or wind damage. The expense and effort would probably exceed the benefits derived, given the design of the buildings and the large expanses of glass. The church may want to consider protection or modification of the church buildings at a later date. The technique used for hurricane preparation includes a general set of instructions, rough drawing floor plans and checklists for various areas. There is also a list of protective materials, quantities, location of storage, and drawings showing the method of application. A framed box could be made for protection of the stained glass panels from the worship area.

B. Priorities for action in preparation are listed in descending order:

1. Worship Area, Fellowship Hall, Sacristy, and Choir Room.
2. Church Office.
3. Clergy's Office.
4. Library.
5. Work Rooms (C.E. Building).
6. Christian Education Area.
7. All Others.

IX. INSTRUCTIONS FOR GENERAL HURRICANE PREPARATIONS

A. Materials stored in storeroom of Worship Area:

1. 1 roll of 4-mil plastic.
2. 2-3 rolls duct tape.
3. Wooden box frame for storage of any stained glass panels, padding.

B. Materials stored in Christian Education building:

1. 1 roll of 4-mil plastic.
2. 3-4 rolls duct tape.

C. Use the materials as follows:

1. Place plastic on desks, pianos, file cabinets, etc.
2. Cover everything with sheet plastic, run plastic to floor and make plastic snug to item.
3. Tape all seams with duct tape.
4. Cover bookshelves.
5. Slope plastic sheeting to wall above bookshelves and staple or seal with duct tape (will take paint off wall when removed).
6. Tape plastic sheeting to floor and tape to seal (plastic to plastic where possible).
7. Smaller items:
 - a. Make a bag of plastic sheeting or use trash bags when available
 - b. Close with tape or tie.
 - c. Place off floor in cabinets where possible.

X. SANCTUARY, WORSHIP AREA, CHAPEL

- A. Disconnect organ and bag connectors.
- B. Cover organ with plastic.
- C. Bag microphones at lectern and place in sound room.
- D. Cover keyboard with plastic, move to safer area.
- E. Cover piano with plastic. .
- F. Unplug lights.
- G. Cover Missal, Hymnals, Bible with plastic, move to safer area.
- H. Ask owners of portable music equipment to take them elsewhere.
- I. Bag cross, candleholders, Alms Basins, move to safer area.
- J. Cover projection equipment move to safer area.
- K. Pad any stained glass panels and place in wooden frame in storage room.
- L. Call sound control people about protection for sound equipment.
- M. Cover sound control room console with a plastic bag.
- N. Cover, move any other critical equipment.

XI. KITCHEN, FELLOWSHIP AREA

- A. Move loose items into cabinets as time permits.
- B. Set freezer, refrigerator to coldest setting.
- C. No other actions are expected.

XII. CHOIR ROOM

- A. Tape plastic over the piano.
- B. Move small items into cabinets.
- C. Use as storage area for items from the sanctuary.

XIII. SACRISTY

- A. Alert Altar Guild to move vestments, vessels, and other liturgical items.
- B. Remove items from shelves in front of windows.
- C. Move Altar bread and wine to a safer place.

XIV. CHURCH OFFICE AND RECEPTION AREA

- A. Run backup disk and place in safe with other disks.
- B. See if a duplicate disk can be stored off-site with a responsible person.
- C. Disconnect cables to all computer equipment and bag them.
- D. Cover all computer equipment.
- E. Tape or staple plastic over secretaries' bookshelves.
- F. Tape plastic over secretaries' desk.
- G. Place critical records in a safe (confirmation, baptism, membership).
- H. Place other small items in desk or cabinets, if there is time.
- I. Cover typewriter or computer with plastic.
- J. Cover file cabinets with plastic.

XV. CLERGY OFFICES

- A. Run backup disk and give to rector.
- B. Cover computer with plastic and move to a safer place.
- C. Staple or tape plastic over bookshelves.
- D. Alert rector to remove any personal items of value.
- E. Tape plastic over desk or file cabinets.

XVI. LIBRARY

- A. Remove valuable books to a safer area.
- B. Run backup disk and place in a safe or off-site location.
- C. Cover computer equipment with plastic, disconnect cables, plugs.
- D. Place other sensitive or small items in cabinets.

XVII. WORKROOM AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION OFFICE

- A. Cover copiers with plastic, unplug.
- B. Cover file cabinet with plastic.
- C. Unplug dehumidifier, other electrical items.
- D. Place small items inside cabinets.
- E. Cover VCRs and monitor with plastic.

XVIII. OTHER AREAS OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION BUILDING

- A. Cover all electronics such as TVs, VCRs, boom boxes, with plastic.
- B. Move small items into cabinets, if there is time.
- C. Do visual check of outside area for loose items; store them.

XIX. TOOL SHED OR OTHER STORAGE BUILDINGS

Check that doors are shut and locked.

XX. OUTSIDE WORSHIP AREA

Do visual check for loose items to move indoors, like trash cans.

XXI. FIRE PLAN

- A. All smoke detectors should be checked and should meet existing building and fire codes.
- B. The fire system should be inspected annually by the local fire department.
- C. We have a total of ____ fire extinguishers in each building.
- D. We have ____ manual pull-alarms; in Worship Area ____ and ____ in Christian Education Building.
- E. The locations of alarms and extinguishers are detailed on the floor plan in this report.
- F. The Worship Area, Parish Hall and Christian Education/Church Office Buildings do ____, do not ____, have an emergency lighting system, which is maintained by the Buildings and Grounds committee of the Vestry.
- G. The system is inspected regularly to ensure that all components are in good operating condition.
- H. There are exit signs at all main exits from all buildings.
- I. Chairpersons of Groups and organizations, which meet in the church buildings, should be informed of the location and use of the fire alarms and extinguishers in the areas of their activities.
- J. They should also be encouraged to report any concerns to the church office.
- K. The clergy and office staff should be aware of the location and methods of use of fire equipment in the buildings.
- L. Ushers should be informed of the location of manual alarms and how to use the fire extinguishers as well as evacuation plans.

XXII. ACTIVATION OF THE FIRE ALARM SYSTEM

In the Worship Area, the Vestry should determine what action is to be taken when an alarm is activated, for example, should the rector, Senior Warden, or Junior Warden be called before the fire department unless there is an obvious fire on the premises.

XXIII. EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS TASK FORCE SUPPLEMENTAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Much of the following is covered in Section II, above.

- A. Take a photo and video tape inventory of the church buildings and grounds and their contents. Update it on a regular basis. Take written inventories as well.
- B. The Buildings and Grounds Committee should make up a Fire Information sheet to be included in the information given to all groups using any of the church buildings.
- C. Permanent Vestry records should be kept in the church office or library.
- D. The Plan should include an established procedure to help organize transportation for those who need to evacuate but have no way of getting to a shelter.
- E. A Disaster Director needs to be appointed by the Vestry and should be present whenever

insurance coverage is reviewed and updated.

F. Arrange for backup copies of vital church records to be stored off-site in a safe deposit box or other secure setting.

G. Adopt a policy that all organizations using your buildings are informed that once an Evacuation Order is issued by any authority, all activities in our buildings will be automatically canceled.

H. Regularly inform in writing all those who have expensive or valuable items at the church that these items are not covered by our insurance policy and they will be responsible for guaranteeing the Safety or relocation of their own possessions.

I. Look into whether the church needs to purchase flood insurance.

J. A program for checking on the safety of church members and friends should be set up to care for those in need. This includes safety both before and after a general disaster affecting more than just the church buildings.

K. If smoke detectors are wired in, have some form of battery backup in case a fire should occur while there is an electrical power outage.

L. Explore participation in Interfaith Networking in Disaster programs.

M. Designate someone to attend Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster.

XXIV. TERRORIST RELATED OR BOMB THREATS

CONTACT THE POLICE IMMEDIATELY. If a threat is received by phone, try to get as much information as possible without upsetting the caller, i.e. who, what, why, where, when etc. A specific plan should be developed for the parish as to who is contacted and how.

XXV. CRISIS DURING SERVICES OR OTHER GATHERINGS

THE FIRST RESPONSE, IF POSSIBLE, SHOULD BE TO CONTACT THE AUTHORITIES. REMAINING CALM IS CRITICAL TO A RESOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM AND MAY PREVENT A PANIC SITUATION.

A. If there are injured persons, with care, all assistance should be given to assist their immediate needs. As first responders arrive, it is usually beneficial to their efforts if others enable the first responders to perform their duties without interference.

B. If there is a disruption, or attempted disruption, in the Services or gathering the Vestry should have planned ahead to enable the continuation of the services, remembering, the rector is the leader of the parish and parishioners will look to see his/her reaction to the incident and how to handle it. Designate ushers or others to take care of emergencies and call appropriate emergency assistance. (During a service the priest should not be expected to stop the worship unless the emergency is extreme. The same goes for a parish program and the program leader. Others need to be at hand for responding).

XXVI. OUTREACH

Each Vestry should consider and implement a Plan to handle disaster situations. The Plan should be as extensive as is reasonable considering the size of the Parish, Vestry, and

congregation. In any event, it is essential that consideration be given to what should be done, if anything, in the event of a disaster. The outreach to consider might be:

A. OWN PARISH

Of course, the first priority will be to check upon the clergy and parishioners of your own Parish. Every effort should be made to have some system of checking to verify the safety and needs of the parishioners. Ahead of time, some pairing of parishioners for telephone or physical checks should be arranged to facilitate this process in the time of the emergency. Consideration should be given to being prepared to take food/water/medical supplies etc. to the elderly or handicapped.

B. NEIGHBORING PARISH

The Vestry should plan and determine the extent it can assist those outside its own Parish. If there is a neighboring Parish needing assistance, it might be expeditious to offer assistance directly from one Parish to another Parish. This is especially true if there is a close proximity of the two Parishes. Also, lack of telephonic communications may prohibit the direct contact in person. It is the Vestry's responsibility to assure it is comfortable with its efforts to go directly to other parishes.

C. REMOTE AREAS

Many times the disaster will be in an area that is not close to your Parish. In that event, the local Parish should feel free to go directly to the impacted area if they have a contact person, such as a former parishioner or former priest. If there is no contact, it is suggested the Parish come through the Bishop's Office and we will focus upon the most seriously impacted area of the disaster and assist in making any appropriate contacts.

D. COORDINATION

To the extent necessary, the Bishop's Office will assist in coordinating the assistance offered from the Diocese of Central Florida and the area needing assistance. Let us know how we can be of support to you.

XXVII. SCOPE

Of utmost importance in any disaster is the care and protection of the people followed by the care and protection of the facilities. The buildings, records, and musical instruments need special protection.

This is a suggested parish Disaster Plan for Congregations. It should be reviewed by each Vestry with the Vestry approving and implementing their own disaster plan. On July 1 of each year, the Junior Warden should confirm to the Bishop's Office that the Disaster Plan has been updated and is workable for the parish.

As Christians, we must prepare to protect our fellow humans and our property to the utmost of our ability. Prior planning and prayer are the only ways to reach that objective. As we “do unto others” let us not fail to remember many will need assistance both before and after any disaster. Due to circumstances, some might need assistance in boarding up windows, removing items from yards, transportation to shelters and being checked upon after the disaster to see if they have all necessities.

Remember our objective: We are here to help and assist God’s people.