

# LOCAL CHURCH DISASTER PREPAREDNESS GUIDE

Sometimes it is hard to think about a disaster when we are not in the “season.” Being prepared for a disaster of any form and any magnitude is crucial for your church, its members and the community. The key to being prepared is to make people aware of the plan, both church and community, and to practice and update your plan on a regular basis.

## Building Preparedness

There are many pieces to making sure your building is safe, but communicating your plan is just as important. Make sure you have clear maps with directions and signage, so those in the building know how to get out in an emergency. No one church disaster plan is the same; each will be different due to building age, layout, number of exits, etc., so it important to take some time and lay out your plan.

Additionally, keep multiple copies of your plan, in a folder or a binder, at one or multiple points in your building, depending on your size. You’ll need to easily be able to grab this plan during an emergency, so best practice is to have a copy in every building on every floor.

## Do you have a church evacuation and storm safety plan?

The plan should include things like:

**Evacuation plans for each type of possible emergency:** For us in the Midwest, consider things like tornado, flood, earthquake and active shooter. How do these procedures differ depending on what area of the building you’re in? Who is responsible for keeping it updated?

**Exit Routes:** Consider which doors are the best exits. Make sure every exit is free from debris and clutter.

**Identify Safe Area Inside Your Building:** Inside your building, where will people shelter during a storm? Does your church have an area that meets Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) criteria and provide near-absolute protection in extreme wind events, including tornadoes? Do you have that area mapped out and marked with visible signage? Does someone in the church regularly check the room for readiness/accessibility?

**Identify Safe Areas Outside Your Building:** Where will staff/members meet if evacuation is necessary? How will you communicate with folks in other safe areas?

If your church works with individuals under the age of 18, identify a meeting place and reunification policy in case of an evacuation. Remind parents that attempting to find their child instead of proceeding directly to the meeting place puts everyone in danger in an emergency.



## Discuss the Plan with Key Stakeholders and Assign Responsibilities

If your church has people in the building during the week – such as a staff, senior activities or a preschool – discuss the plan with those individuals. Conduct practice runs of the evacuation plans regularly.

Part of your plan is delegating responsibilities when disaster strikes. Consider the following:

**Who will shut off important utility valves?** If your building sustains damage, there may be water running, gas flowing, electrical lines hanging. Make sure someone in the church knows where all shut offs are and wait for properly trained people to shut them off.

**Who is responsible for keeping sensitive information backed-up off-site?** Are your church financial records backed up? Is that back up off site, cloud-based, etc.? Does your church have historical information archived? Is it back up anywhere?

**Who is responsible for checking on members after a disaster?** This is a great job for a congregational care team.

**Who is responsible for keeping the disaster plan up to date?** Someone should regularly evaluate the plan and make sure shelters and exits remain accessible.

## Make Your Community Aware of the Plan

- Is that plan posted around the church?
- Is there a map of the exits posted around the church?
- Is the safe area during a storm clearly marked?
- Do you have multiple copies of your disaster plan easily in reach throughout your property?

## Weather Preparedness

There are several ways to be alerted of bad weather that may be heading your way:

- Learn more about the various emergency alert systems and how you can make sure you're receiving alerts at [www.ready.gov/alerts](http://www.ready.gov/alerts)
- Know the differences between a watch and a warning, [www.weather.gov/sjt/WatchWarningAdvisoryExplained](http://www.weather.gov/sjt/WatchWarningAdvisoryExplained)

## First Aid

- Does anyone in your church have first aid training, know CPR or are medical professionals?
- Anyone can get trained with the Red Cross. See classes at [www.redcross.org/take-a-class/first-aid/first-aid-training/first-aid-classes](http://www.redcross.org/take-a-class/first-aid/first-aid-training/first-aid-classes)
- Do you have a First Aid kit? The ULINE brand Trauma Kit is a recommended choice.
- Do you have an AED? Where is it located and do folks know the location?