

Emergency Preparedness for Church Organizations

Balancing Hospitality and Safety



“I am sending you out as sheep among wolves; so be as wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”

Overview

Have seen how we live in such a broken world;

Mass shootings in Buffalo, Uvalde, Highland Park

Shooting at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Alabama

Many have been asking: what steps can we take for our own safety?

Balancing Safety and Welcoming

Sad reality: cannot be assured of safety in this world.

And: We also need to acknowledge ways in which privilege impacts these discussions

>White supremacist shooting at Emmanuel AME Church in 2015

>Attack on Tree of Life Jewish Center in 2018

Anti-Defamation League has charted an increase in anti-Semitic incidents every year for the past five years.

Also be mindful of pastoral nature of these conversations.

Can be anxiety producing and uncomfortable to talk about and imagine violence in our churches.

Ways in which these discussions can be triggering for persons with PTSD or who have experienced trauma

Yet like talking about death, or systemic racism, do our best to be engage difficult conversations; trust in God and the Holy Spirit to be with us.

A Culture of Preparedness

“Keep awake, therefore, because you do not know the day nor the hour.”

Matthew 25:13

“This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: ‘I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.’”

John 18:9

Framing this discussion around

Being Prepared

Developing a Culture of Planning and Safety

This is not:

About preventing disaster

Another Sad Fact of This World:

We cannot prevent everything.

Cannot control the weather.

Cannot predict random acts of violence.

But: **we can be prepared**

And: **We can take steps not to make bad situations even worse**

Emergency Preparedness

Church organizations much more likely to deal with other kinds of emergencies than an active shooter.

Different kinds of emergencies:

>Weather Emergency: Severe thunderstorm, Tornado, Blizzard, Flash Flood

>In Central New York, do not need to deal with earthquakes and rarely hurricanes. A plus to not living on either coast!

>Medical emergencies / overdoses

>Fires and/or gas leaks

>Disruptive or dangerous person

>Active Shooter

Are there others that come to mind from your own experiences?

Developing a Plan

Know your
context:

One Size does
not fit all.

In addition to presentation, we are circulating a template for developing an emergency preparedness plan

Keep in mind: One size does not fit all
 Adapt template to your context

Location:
 Urban vs Rural
 Larger vs. smaller

Human Resources:
 Organizations with clergy and/or staff
 Organizations run solely by volunteers w/out
 Clergy or staff

Physical layout:
 One building or several?
 Multiple points of entry or just one?

Just to name some of the difference in context and settings.

Developing a Plan

Gather a team with representatives from key constituencies including but not limited to:

- Staff
- Ushers
- Musicians/Choir
- Sunday School / Christian Education
- Outreach ministries (including outside groups which use building, like AA, feeding programs, etc.)

>Walk through the template with the group

- Look at each different situation

- Determine how to best to respond given your context, asking questions like:

Who will call police/fire/9-1-1?

How will building be evacuated?

How to make sure everyone is out?

>Review Active Shooter Best Practices

Know Where Your Stuff and People Are At

If a disaster does strike, important to know where key documents and resources are

>Make a map of your physical plant marking exits, fire extinguishers, fire alarms, first aid kits [and defibrillators if you have them]

>Collect your insurance policies' information and marriage & baptismal records: Store them in fireproof, waterproof storage; with an OFFSITE BACKUP. (Scanned and stored online/ backup physical copy stored at diocesan offices)

>Make a list of important contacts using the Episcopal Relief & Development Checklist

>Identify people in your congregation with particular experience, training, and resources who can be resource persons for emergencies.

>Contact local fire department to schedule a fire drill

>Contact Community Resource Officer from Police Department to do a walk-through.

Develop a Culture of Preparedness

A plan is only as good as its implementation.

Establish a Emergency Preparedness Committee, either as a subcommittee of Vestry or similar governing body, or as a stand-alone committee.

Review your Emergency Plan at least annually, and revise in light of experience, or of new developments and resources

Regularly train staff, Vestry, and relevant volunteers in your Emergency Plan

Like with Safe Church training: the more people who are involved, trained, and attentive, the greater capacity for the organization as a whole to be prepared.

Additional Resources

Episcopal Relief and Development Preparedness Planning Guide:

<https://www.episcopalrelief.org/resource/bronze-level-preparedness-planning-guide-basic-level/>

Checklist on important documents to have, information for important local and diocesan contact persons

US Red Cross Emergency Preparedness Resources:

<https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/make-a-plan.html>

Department of Homeland Security / FEMA

<https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/individuals-communities/faith>

General DHS / FEMA Preparedness Site:

<https://www.ready.gov/>

Additional Resources

<https://www.sba.gov/business-guide/manage-your-business/prepare-emergencies>

<https://www.cisa.gov/faith-based-organizations-houses-worship>

<https://www.cisa.gov/employee-vigilance-power-hello>

[Mitigating Attacks on Houses of Worship Security Guide](#)

“But when the Spirit of truth comes, the Spirit will guide you into all things.”

“I am with you always, to the end of the ages.”



While we live in a world where terrible things can happen, we also know that God has promised never to abandon us, and to walk with us in our fears, our struggles, and our challenges.