

How to Use Your House of Worship in a Disaster

Your facility may be needed as a shelter, service center, warehouse, or volunteer staging area during a response and recovery operation. Adapting your facility in a way that is consistent with your capabilities, and aligns with your mission and other programs, takes advance planning and close coordination with emergency management, human service networks and public health officials.

TIP SHEET

05

MITIGATION & PREPAREDNESS

Mitigation - The action of preventing or reducing the severity of a disaster's impact on your facility and community

- **Plan** for existing and expanded human services. If your disaster plan calls for maintaining ongoing programs, ensure you account for the human, material and facility resources you may need to support them.
(See **NYDIS Disaster Tip Sheet “Continuity of Operations Planning: Ritual and Human Services Post-Disaster.”**)
- **Take inventory of your facilities and special equipment:**
 - Electrical and plumbing configurations – generators, lighting, outlets, pipes, shut-off valve, wiring, etc.
 - All assets including those outside your community (Local assets may not be usable or ideal location for certain operations, such as staging areas and warehouses.)
 - Physical stability or other limitations of your building(s)
 - Type of space and square footage of areas you could offer
 - Building codes and occupancy limits including handicap access
 - Commercial kitchens with non-perishable and perishable **food items and storage**
 - Adequate water, heat and cooling ability for your physical plant
 - Accessible bathroom and shower capacity
- **Coordinate** with:
 - Your **CERT Teams, Citizen Corps, Medical Reserve Corps and VOAD**. Identify what their facility needs will be during disasters and recovery operations.
 - **Houses of worship and other organizations in your neighborhood**. Consider planning to combine programs/religious services in order to make space available for a recovery operations and essential human services
 - Specific **disaster response and recovery organizations** (see below)
 - Local **disaster interfaith or national disaster recovery office**. Identify what their facility needs will be during disasters and recovery operations; identify what volunteer capacity you can offer their operations.
- **Consider which vulnerable populations you are uniquely positioned to serve** (i.e. those with a particular type of disability or medical issue, or those from a specific culture, or age group)
- **Secure written agreements** and memoranda of understanding (MOU's). Clarify each party's human services and recovery responsibilities, address liability issues, etc.
- **Ensure physical access** and other **accommodations for the disabled and the elderly**

RESPONSE & RECOVERY

- **Consider the extent to which your house of worship has been affected** by the disaster and evaluate your ability to go safely forward with your plans. Think about:
 - **Impact on people** - yourself and family, key leadership, support personnel.
 - **Damage to facilities and equipment**, availability of back-up sites, etc.
- **Activation & Needs Assessment** (Note: Your plans should detail exactly how the use of your resources will be triggered):
 - **Confirm the need** for deployment of your resources with the appropriate organization.
 - If your resources have not been requested, **thoroughly assess post-disaster conditions** to ensure that resources you wish to share are indeed needed.
- **Coordinate** both with your neighborhood and local government agencies or volunteers networks (VOAD).
- **Consider “radical hospitality.”** A compelling need that does not fit into your existing plan may present itself. Consider it. Sometimes the right thing to do is not necessarily comfortable or well-suited to your facility or mission.
- **Be flexible and adapt to changing needs.** Consider both how needs for physical resources will change through the recovery process, and how your congregation's needs will change.

WAYS TO USE YOUR FACILITY DURING DISASTER RESPONSE & RECOVERY

Please note that comments regarding “considerations” are general in nature. Basic elements such as appropriate number of restrooms should be considered for all uses. Always coordinate with your VOAD as well as the specific organizations listed.

Disaster Uses for Your Building	General Considerations	Coordination Organization
Headquarters for your faith community's disaster recovery programs	Requirements will vary depending on size of operation.	Your denomination or faith community's national recovery office director
Safe space; area for prayer/meditation, emotional and spiritual care	Many types of spaces will work; ensure adequate private space.	Neighboring houses of worship; disaster interfaiths or chaplaincy networks
Disaster-related funerals: It is possible that one or two houses of worship could have the largest percentage of disaster-related funerals.	Consider how to create a welcoming physical space for those that may not be of your denomination/faith tradition.	Other houses of worship, hospitals and medical examiners office. Medical Reserve Corps or Health Department
Disaster Assistance Service Center (DASC)	Large spaces with capability of supporting many computers, etc.	Office of Emergency Management (OEM)
Respite Center for workers	Large spaces; consider access to food, space for private sessions.	OEM; American Red Cross Chapter, or your local volunteer center
Space for liturgical services & special events	Many types of space will work.	Neighborhood houses of worship, and events of other community organizations
Volunteer staging and training area	Assess proximity to work areas.	Volunteer centers
Reception Centers - Temporary spaces for displaced victims to receive basic services, refreshments, re-assurance, information, use of restrooms, etc.	Requires relatively large space; tables & chairs; restrooms.	American Red Cross Chapters, OEM or disaster interfaith - Emergency Rest Centers are used during large scale evacuations and events
Cooling Center (during heat emergencies)	Requires large space with air conditioning that could be open to the public.	OEM or your Health Department
Fixed Feeding Station/or places where organizations can produce meals	Requires large kitchen and possibly dining area.	American Red Cross Chapters, The Salvation Army, VOAD
Housing for work and service groups from other congregations	Requires sleeping accommodations.	Your denomination or faith community's national recovery office director
Meeting space for various human services functions	Many types of space will work.	VOAD, OEM, human services network
Community Information Meetings, where organizations can present what assistance is available and how to get it	Requires large open area.	American Red Cross chapters, OEM or your local human service network
Sheltering (See NDIN Tip Sheet “Faith Communities & Disaster Sheltering”)	Requires sleeping accommodations with adequate bathroom and feeding facilities.	American Red Cross chapters and their national partners

RESOURCES: Contact Information for Organizations Listed Above

- **American Red Cross — Preparing to Get Training:** www.redcross.org
- **Church World Service — Community Arise Curriculum:** www.communityarise.com
- **ERD — Preparedness Planning Guide for Congregations & Parishes:** www.e-rd.org/resourcelibrary
- **National Disaster Interfaiths Network — Training & Tip Sheets for U.S. Religious Leaders :** www.n-din.org
- **National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD):** www.nvoad.org
- **New York Disaster Interfaith Services (NYDIS):** www.nydis.org
- **Guide — Church World Service: Guide to Disaster Ministry in Your Congregation**
- **Toolkit — Bloomington Public Health: Ready, Set, Go! Faith Community Emergency Preparedness Toolkit**