

Congregational Preparedness Planning

Task 6: Identify Partners, Agreements and Resources

“When disaster threatens or strikes, there is an immediate need for action. The more relationships that are forged and information that is gathered ahead of time, the more efficiently a community can prevent or minimize damage and suffering and bring order out of chaos.” (CDPG 27)

After a disaster strikes, the word “chaos” just doesn’t quite do justice to the state of a community. In those moments where most normal forms of communication do not work, roads are out, power lines are down, and you have only one bar left on your cell phone — how do you get the help you need?

Build Community Relationships

Over the years I have had the benefit of working with several communities affected by different types of disasters. The communities that had established relationships and direct communication abilities — like the pastor’s cell phone — were able to respond more efficiently than communities that did not. Ministerial associations are a great resource here.

Other communities have more intensive communication networks, such as a Community Organization Active in Disaster (COAD). These meetings consist of every leader of organizations in the area, and the agenda in non-disaster times is to simply build relationships. The benefit of this organized gathering is that there are clear points of contact and a wider knowledge base of resources available. Experience has proven that when a disaster strikes, the communities with partnerships, agreements,

and resources already identified were able to respond to helping those in need more efficiently than communities that did not.

In creating your preparedness plan, identify who your points of contact are in your congregation. Also, challenge those leaders in your area — other pastors, mayor, superintendent, funeral home director, etc. — to create an active list of direct contact information. Then I want to challenge you to take it a step further and meet with the leaders periodically to keep numbers up to date and work on building your partnerships to serve your community. Who knows, maybe new ministry opportunities may come out of such a meeting! Remember, disasters are any type of event that abruptly changes what is normal.

Connect with disaster response partner organizations

In addition to our local relationships, one of the best partnerships that we have is Lutheran Disaster Response. Admittedly I’m a bit biased here, but on a national level this branch of the ELCA’s ministry is able to leverage the resources of thousands of congregations and millions of Lutherans to respond to disasters. You can learn more about this partnership that you already have at www.ldr.org.

The three Iowa synods form our Iowa state’s expression, LDR-Iowa, where all three synods pool their resources to respond to disasters in our state. At the Northeastern Iowa Synod level we refer to our LDR expression as the Disaster Response Network. You can learn more about our synod’s partnerships at www.neiasynod.org/disaster-response.



I would like to highlight one of the several partnerships of our Disaster Network, the Iowa Disaster Human Resource Council. The IDHRC primarily involves regular meetings with state and national agencies who are active in disaster, such as LDR and other religious disaster groups, Red Cross, Homeland Security, FEMA, etc. The benefit the IDHRC brings is that when a disaster strikes, the council already has established partnerships, agreements, and resources to be a strong resource and advocate for the local agencies and congregations responding to a disaster area.

It is important to note that for disaster ministry to be the most effective, the national organizations like LDR, FEMA, Red Cross, etc. need the local partnerships to be effective. Even state groups like the IDHRC and the Northeastern Iowa Synod’s Disaster Network require the local partnerships to be effective. This is because you know your people the best.

For example, it takes time to identify a chainsaw team and get them mobilized to a disaster site. But you know the five guys in your congregation who own chainsaws and can get them to clear a driveway in a matter of hours, if not minutes. Responding to a disaster effectively requires relationships from all levels: from the relationships you have at a local level, the Disaster Network on a Synod level, the IDHRC on a state level, and the resources of LDR on a national level. Together we are God’s Church responding to those in need.

— Pastor Ron Mathews
Disaster Response Network