

## Manual for developing strategies for crises

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*BP photo by Kathleen Murray*

Bobby Welch, SBC president and pastor of FBC, Daytona Beach surveys damage in 2004.

*Goal: To assist churches to prepare for disaster by developing a strategy to minister to their communities during crisis through preparing their facilities, training their members, securing supplies, and developing protocols that will activate their disaster response plans.*

Even with all of the organization and all of the resources of Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, all the needs of our world cannot be met. Nor does the words of Jesus, “the poor will always be with you,” free us from the command, “to go do likewise.”

The greatest tools the Kingdom of God has in our world are Christians living in the local community sharing their faith day-in and day-out under the power of the Holy Spirit. The local church ministering in the community is still God’s beginning point for the sharing of the Gospel worldwide.

A disaster is defined as anything that causes human suffering or creates human needs the victims cannot alleviate themselves.

The greatest disasters in our world are not always the huge catastrophes that grab the headlines. There are more disasters that involve one person or one family than the headline grabbers. We cannot minister during the large disasters and ignore the needs of those suffering through

individual crises.



*BP photo by Kathleen Murphy*

In St. Augustine a tree is splintered by the force of hurricane Frances.

Churches must plan how they will respond to disasters, large and small, in their communities. These plans need to be well thought-out and discussed by the church leaders. The congregations need to discuss their plans and determine how they, as individuals, can become part of this ministry.

The unprepared church will miss valuable opportunities to minister while attempting to react to a disaster in their community. By planning before a disaster occurs and coordinating with the local government and local American Red Cross chapter, a church can be prepared to minister fully in a time of crisis.

By planning before a disaster strikes, the local government and the local American Red Cross will know a shelter can be set up in the church facilities and how many people it can accommodate. These plans should include the national and state organizations of Southern Baptist Disaster Relief. Often local American Red Cross, government, or Southern Baptist Disaster Relief officials do not know what is available to them through associations and churches because they are not informed of local church plans.

Church members will find opportunities to minister because of disasters in the lives of friends and fellow church members that occur almost weekly. When Christians are sensitive to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, they are provided opportunities for ministry.

In the complex world we live in today, with such great needs all around us, it's easy to throw up our hands and give up because we do not know where to start. We must realize individuals are

won to the saving grace of Jesus Christ one person at a time.

Churches must plan for and train their members to work with individuals caught in a crisis. They also must plan and prepare for the disasters that can affect their communities. As you become involved in Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, you will see how you can lead your church to become involved in planning and serving as well.

### **Churches and Disasters**

Local churches are in a unique position to respond to individual needs in ways no other organization or group can. Churches can demonstrate the love of Christ as they meet the needs of victims in the time of disaster. Even spontaneous reaction to a disaster in or near the church community can be helpful if it is coordinated with disaster relief agencies' response efforts.

The purpose of this section is to assist churches in making plans for a disaster ministry. The lists that follow can give guidance and help church planners develop other ways their facilities might be used.

If the church building is in or near the disaster area and useful in any way, the church has a variety of opportunities. It can offer the use of its facilities for a feeding center. This center could be a self-contained center utilizing the church kitchen, a Southern Baptist mobile feeding unit, for a sandwich preparation site or for a meal distribution site.

Additional opportunities for a church building to be used in a disaster are: as a distribution center for clothing or bulk food items; an information staging area for volunteers or work units; as a shelter, child-care center, a communication center, or an information center for other organizations.

Church members provide a ready pool of volunteers who may perform any of the above services, whether it's in the church's facilities or not. They also can provide transportation as well as assist with cleanup and repair. Church members can also provide counseling and assistance for special needs.

If the church is not within an affected area, their opportunities will be different. A church's facility could be a gathering point for food, supplies, building materials, and other items contributed by the community. It could be used as an orientation center for untrained people who have volunteered to help in the disaster area, a shelter for volunteers from out-of-the-area, a staging area for mobile units en route to the disaster site, a communications center, or a command center.

## Local church preparation



*Photo by Joni B. Hannigan*

FBC, Fort Ogden, met their community's needs for clothing, food, shelter and hope.

Local churches should work with churches and organizations cooperatively, not competitively. A church should make advance arrangements to offer facilities during the first few days of an emergency to victims and/or disaster agencies. Plan and work together with a disaster response organization of local churches to reduce omissions as well as duplications.

Local churches should coordinate church and local organizations' preparation with civic and American Red Cross efforts, while retaining church identity, purpose, and direction. Churches should seek advice and assistance from their state Baptist Disaster Relief director.

A Church Disaster Relief Committee should be elected by the church membership, headed by a church disaster relief director who will give general direction to mitigation, preparation, organization and training. Other recommended members are church men's organizations, and Woman's Missionary Union directors, a Missions Committee chairman, pastor, and other staff. The Disaster Relief Committee should perform the following functions:

- Conduct a survey of church members' skills, gifts, talents, and willingness to serve.
- Provide regular, up-to-date training.
- Lead the church to approve making facilities and equipment available for disaster relief ministries.
- Begin and maintain a crisis closet, food pantry, et cetera.
- Secure approval of the church to cooperate with other local churches, the association, state disaster relief director, American Red Cross, civic and government agencies.
- Contact government and American Red Cross authorities for the names of those will direct disaster operations.

- Be alert for local and nearby crises that present the church opportunities to witness and minister through disaster relief. These may be large-scale crises, such as tornadoes, floods, and winter storms. Short-term crises, such as fires in single family dwellings, accidents, vandalism, and acts of crime are also opportunities to minister. Churches should report any actions and register them with local authorities, the Baptist association, and the state disaster relief director.
- Identify and assign volunteers according to talent sheets.
- Conduct damage assessment in the community and notify local, associational and state disaster directors.

**Responsibilities of church disaster relief leaders:**

**Church Disaster Relief Director:**

- Chair the Disaster Relief Committee.
- Assemble a Church Disaster Response Team.
- Schedule planning and preparation meetings and activities.
- Schedule training.
- Enlist a church resources coordinator and help that person establish a plan of action and carry out duties listed below.
- Enlist a church volunteer coordinator and help that person to establish a plan of action and carry out the duties listed below.
- Relate to associational disaster response coordinator, local American Red Cross Chapter and government authorities.
- Serve on planning and coordinating groups before, during, and following any disasters.
- Alert coordinators and the Church Disaster Relief Committee.
- Prepare the team to respond.

**Church Resources Coordinator:**

- Conduct an inventory of building facilities, equipment, supplies, and vehicles that might be used during a disaster. Adapt forms provided in Involving Southern Baptist in Disaster Relief manual for that purpose.
- Determine, with the whole committee, what to recommend to the church regarding the use of facilities and equipment during a disaster.
- Enlist volunteers to assist with plans adopted by the church regarding the use of church facilities

and equipment.

**Church Volunteer Coordinator:**

- Conduct a skills and talent survey of the church membership. Adapt forms provided in Involving Southern Baptist in Disaster Relief manual.
- Develop a database of volunteers and skills.
- Arrange for orientation and training.
- Organize teams by skills; choose team leaders.
- Establish a telephone chain for notifying volunteers when a response is possible. Use non-disaster volunteers for calling.
- Activate the church disaster relief telephone chain.
- Gather volunteers at the church or other location for assignment to duties and work locations.

**Possible Church Opportunities and Action**



*Photo by Joni B. Hannigan*

Disaster relief workers delivered thousands of bags of ice in 2004 when a record four hurricanes hit Florida.

Churches can assist with mitigation, preparation, warning, rescue and evacuation. They can also provide facilities, volunteers and supplies to supplement or assist the American Red Cross with emergency feeding, shelter, childcare or other functions. Church facilities can be used as an information or advocacy center for victims.

Churches can also provide pastoral counseling or crisis intervention.

Other opportunities for churches to minister during a disaster is to:

- Finance a line of credit for authorized applicants to secure clean up or repair products and secure and disburse grants or loans for emergency needs.
- Identify volunteers (in the church or in the community) who can give legal or business advice regarding insurance, repair contracts, applications for loans or grants.
- Locate qualified people to care for children, as well as elderly, ill and disabled who need special facilities, diets, transportation and recreation.
- Identifying members who will provide temporary housing for victims, bilingual interpretation or assist with those who have language or literacy limitations.



*BP photo by Kathleen Murray*

SBC president Bobby Welch witnesses to a resident in Arcadia after hurricane Charley.

- Provide companionship to people who have been displaced and are unfamiliar with their new surroundings, community services and stores.
- Participate in ministries such as the receiving, sorting and distributing of clothing, bedding, bulk food, clean-up and household supplies.
- Provide food, housing, communication and other needs for out-of-town volunteers who come to help with the disaster response.
- Cooperate with other agencies in times of disaster, have a voice in rebuilding and relocating, and make sure victims are treated the same in regard to physical, social and spiritual recovery.
- Begin a transportation bank by developing a database of cars, vans, pickup and dump trucks,

boats, planes, and so forth that might be available for use during a disaster.

- Organize clean-up, salvage, security or repair crews, as well as help victims clean their homes and furniture, install temporary roofing, board up windows and doors, or remove household contents for safe storage.

### **Church Preparation**

Advance planning is the key to serving effectively in a disaster. The preparation may be of an emergency nature. As Christ's disciples, sometimes we must react to people's needs spontaneously. But even in a crisis, we fall back on what we have learned from experience and training. When disaster strikes, capable church leaders can still find time to quickly brainstorm how their facilities can best be used in the crisis and how to make their facilities available to relief efforts.

Long-range planning is the best answer. Churches will have time to investigate, learn, decide, plan, and develop a plan before disaster strikes. If no advance preparation has been made, opportunities will be limited. Consider the following suggestions as you organize your church in disaster relief:

- Pray! Pray before, during, and after each of the following steps. If God wants your church to get involved, the Holy Spirit will lead.
- Discuss the idea with the pastor.
- Complete the checklist for a Church's Potential for Disaster Response.
- Discuss the possibilities with the church men's organization director; if there is no men's organization in your church, establish one or talk to another group that might take the lead.
- Consider finances. How will the ministry be paid for?
- Be ready to recommend a leadership team—people willing to work and willing to enlist others to do so.
- Discuss ways the ministry might be used in the church's community, or how it will contribute to state and associational disaster relief.
- Contact the association's director of missions, associational men's organization director and the state disaster relief director for suggestions and guidance.
- Make a list of possible services. Try to find out what other churches have done and give examples.
- Contact the local American Red Cross and county emergency services agency for information on how the church can help them in case of a disaster.

- Use the checklist A Church’s Potential for Disaster Response to conduct a survey of what the church has that might be used in disaster response.

- Select one or more services to recommend to the church, or get input from other church members in deciding on a ministry.

A local church can be involved in one or more of the following ministries that use the church building or another location that may be available to the church:

- Feeding—church facilities, mobile unit
- Child care—church facilities, mobile unit
- Elder care-church or other facilities
- Info. center in the church building
- Service center for American Red Cross
- Clothing bank
- Crisis closets (clothing, food, etc.)
- Collection station for supplies
- Distribution center for goods, supplies
- Storage
- Communication center—church facilities or mobile unit
- Shelter

These things could require a mobile unit:

- Feeding team
- Child care
- Emergency medical unit
- Transportation (e.g. use of church van)
- Communications center unit

Before a local church builds a unit, the church must contact the state disaster relief director and receive his or her approval if the unit is to be a part of the state Baptist convention’s disaster relief program (see related story on page 7).

The following would require special training or experience for team members:

- Crisis counseling
- Emergency medical care
- Advocacy
- Cleanup and repair
- Mudout

The following requires acquisition, storage, and distribution of special equipment:

- Wheelchairs, crutches, walkers, etc.
- Cots, mattresses, bedding
- Oxygen tanks (if legal in the area)
- Chainsaw and tree removal equipment
- Cleaning and sanitation equipment

**Church approval** and **church follow-up** are also important in planning for disaster relief.

*For more information or to download the complete manual on disaster relief from which this is excerpted, go to the disaster relief section of the North American Mission Board Web site at: [www.namb.net](http://www.namb.net).*



*Photo by Joni B. Hannigan*

Members at FBC, Fort Ogden, gave of their time and resources to help rebuild their community.