

## **Why a Guidebook for Church Leaders?**

The origins of this guidebook started about 10 years ago. It was a Saturday morning and I was putting the finishing touches on my sermon for Sunday. I received a call from the organist who said she wasn't going to be in church tomorrow. So naturally I asked why. Her response was because I'm going to evacuate. The church we were serving is in New Orleans, LA. I had been so caught up during the week with pastoral duties as well as sermon preparation that I had no idea that Katrina was coming. My first thought was well good don't have to finish the sermon but secondly what am I gonna do now?

Scriptures remind us that we need to be prepared. There are many places in the Old and New Testament that talk about it but I can honestly say I was not.

That Saturday afternoon I did my best to contact 200+ members in the church to tell them that there was not going to be church on Sunday. Some argued with me and all I did say is "that you can come, but the doors will be locked."

What I have learned since Katrina about disasters, spirituality and preparation could fill a book. My hope is that church leaders will take the time to look through this guidebook to think about what must be done to prepare your church should something horrific happen. Many communities experience disasters on smaller scales. There are one or two every year in MA. It may not be a Katrina, but it is still emotionally traumatic for the pastor as well as the congregation. Churches need to be prepared to be the beacon on the hill, the place that provides hope in the midst of distress.

This Guidebook is a work in progress. The MACUCC Disaster Resource & Response Team has been working on it for over 2 years now. We will continue to update it and change the information to better meet the needs of churches as well as any house of worship.

Blessings,  
Rev. Fred Meade  
Former Co-Chair, MACUCC Disaster Resource & Response Team

For more information, contact [Estelle Margarones](#) or [Jim Tilbe](#), Co-Chairs, Disaster Resource & Response Team; or Assoc. Conference Minister [Don Remick](#).



# **Disaster Preparedness in the Local UCC Church Questions for the Church Leadership to Consider**

(Updated 9-6-2017)

This document has been prepared by the Disaster Resources Team of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ (MACUCC), and references to our website are mentioned throughout: <http://www.macucc.org/disasterresource>

See also the Disaster Planning Guidelines on the [national UCC website](#).

## **Table of Contents**

Church Moderator.....	3
Pastor.....	5
Deacons.....	7
Building and Grounds.....	8
Treasurer and Finance Committee.....	9
Christian Education or Faith Formation.....	10
Outreach or Mission.....	11
Church Members or Friends.....	12

### **Church Moderator:**

In your local church do you have a disaster resource team or coordinator (and backup)? Have you charged them with organizing disaster preparedness for the church? These are some suggestions for your church's planning.

A. **Seasonal Warnings:** It's important to encourage your congregation members to be prepared in the event that a seasonal disaster befalls your area. Every season has its issues, and you need to be aware of the dangers that may arise. Every year people die because they're not prepared for winter storms, spring tornados or flooding. MACUCC has a calendar for more [information here](#).

B. In the event of a local disaster that doesn't affect your building, **in what way is your church able to respond?** Can you provide medical personnel, supplies, canned goods (food pantry), clothing and household goods (thrift store), Sump pumps, generators, chain saws and people who know how to use them?

C. Every community has an **Emergency Manager (EM)**, often the fire chief or the police chief, in some cases under the mayor's office or selectmen. It's important that the church contact EM to learn the church's role in the event of an emergency. Is your house of worship in your town's emergency plan? Does your church have a protocol for a disaster response? [More here](#).

D. Do you have **a list of skilled tradespeople** (carpenters, electricians, plumbers) who could be called upon should their skills be needed? Do you have access to four-wheel drive vehicles to check on shut-ins in the event of snowstorms or boats in case of flooding?

E. You should be aware if your town has a **CERT (Community Emergency Response Training)** program. Who is the contact person? CERT volunteers respond in the event of a disaster, and you can also contact them for disaster preparedness help. [More here](#).

F. Do any of your congregation members have experience in **disaster response work?** Disaster response work is a specialized field in itself. Some may be able to share experiences with you so that as moderator you will have a deeper understanding. Some examples of these people may be medical professionals, first responders with critical incident training, chaplains, long-term recovery professionals (counselors, social workers), people experienced with mission trips. Does your minister have disaster ministry training? Examples are under Pastor. Speakers are available from your UCC Conference to come and talk to your church about these issues.

G. If someone was to act out in your church either during the week or during the Sunday service, and could become physically dangerous, is there a protocol in place to deal with this? Do you have **a disruptive person's policy** or a behavioral covenant?

H. Are you aware of how your Conference staff can support you in the event of a disaster in your church

or community? Or how the UCC national staff can support you in the event of a disaster in your church or community?

**Additional Links:**

[Disasters: Prepare and Respond – A resource manual developed by Province IV of the Episcopal Church](#)

[Developing and Maintaining Emergency Operations Plans – FEMA Preparedness Guide \(CPG\)101 V.2](#)

[Planning Your Church Mission, Role and Response in Case of Emergency or Disaster, from the Vermont Conference, UCC](#)

**Pastor:**

A. Have you had any disaster training in the past 5 years? (Information on emotional, physical and spiritual resources available and important to aid your congregation.) Many Conferences are encouraging, and provide training for pastors. Contact your Conference disaster coordinator for more information.

B. A good place to explore training, including online, is through [ICISF](#) (International Critical Incident Stress Foundation). Your state fire or police academy may offer [courses](#). FEMA also offers [online courses](#).

C. Are you aware of the concept of caregiver fatigue or compassion fatigue (also called secondary traumatization.) It's very important to understand the role of stress on a pastor in times of crises. If you're not taking care of yourself, you won't be able to take care of others. See compassion fatigue inventory [here](#).

D. Have you done anything to prepare your church for a disaster approaching or happening in your community? For some pastors, this is a new concept. Some church and community members will look to you for help and support. Be a healing force in the community. Part of that is being prepared. You can mitigate the impact on children and families through education. Minimize the impact on buildings by guiding people to preparedness tools and community resources, and by having some resources in place for you and your church. Your outreach into the community will increase the church's pastoral presence in the community, but don't try to do it alone.

E. How prepared are you and your church to respond to a disaster? This document can be used in a church council meeting, with your staff and your committees to spur your church to organize its disaster role in the community. If you have questions, please contact MAUCC Disaster Resource Team. In Massachusetts, the Disaster Resource Team has provided training at biannual Conference gatherings (Super Saturdays) and conducted inexpensive training workshops for pastors. If you would like more information please contact the MACUCC Disaster Team coordinators through our website at [macucc.org/disasterresource](http://macucc.org/disasterresource)

F. Do you have lists of physicians, clergy/chaplains, nurses, EMT's, psychologists, and other potential first responders (and their contact information) in your church who could be mobilized in the event of an emergency at your church?

G. Are you aware of liturgies, music, other worship aids for use at a time of disaster? When disasters happen, we need to be able to respond to spiritual needs right away. [Here's a link](#) to help you find resources of this sort.

H. Are you aware of the UCC national staff can support you in the event of a disaster in your church or community? [That information is available here](#).

I. Have you talked with your local clergy association about how you can work together should a disaster happen?

J. These are some links to help you:

[www.alban.org/archive/clergy-self-care-strategies-for-good-times-and-bad/](http://www.alban.org/archive/clergy-self-care-strategies-for-good-times-and-bad/)

[www.co.burlington.nj.us/DocumentCenter/Home/View/944](http://www.co.burlington.nj.us/DocumentCenter/Home/View/944)

[www.textweek.com/response/natural\\_disaster.htm](http://www.textweek.com/response/natural_disaster.htm)

[www.ucc.org/disaster\\_national-disaster-resources](http://www.ucc.org/disaster_national-disaster-resources)

**Deacons:**

A. Contacts -- In an emergency, it's important to reach out to your members to make sure they're okay. Do you have a telephone tree, or use a robo call service that can blast voicemail, so that you can rapidly contact all your church members if there is an emergency or a disaster in your local community? Are you set up to send a mass email or text to members and friends of your church? If there is no electricity in your community, how will you contact members? Have you considered using social media as a way to contact members?

B. Do you have emergency contact information for all of your congregants? It should include email, text, and telephone contacts, as well as emergency representative information. Do your church members carry a printed church wallet card asking for your church to be called in case that person is taken ill or injured?

C. Who are the most vulnerable people in your church community? If something were to happen, how would you reach out to them? Do you have a "buddy system" for people to check on those who might need help to evacuate? Do your lists include the folks who are not church members, but who still consider yours their "church home"? What about vulnerable people who are not members of any church, who are known to your church members?

D. Do you have lists of physicians, clergy/chaplains, nurses, EMT's, psychologists, and other potential first responders (and their contact information) in your church who could be mobilized in the event of an emergency at your church?

E. Do you, your ushers, and other church officers know who the physicians, nurses and EMT's are in your congregation, where they are seated during worship, and their location in the building during meetings?

**Buildings and Grounds Committee:**

A. Does your church have a generator?

B. Do ushers and church officers know where the fire blankets and extinguishers can be found – especially on Christmas Eve?

B. Is your church considered a warming station or a shelter? Have your church staff / members been trained in running a warming station or a shelter? If yes then, who are the trained leaders, and how can they be contacted?

C. Do you have a commercial kitchen, and could your kitchen be used to aid the community if called upon in a disaster?

D. Do you have showers? Could your church be used to house volunteers in the event of a local disaster?

E. [Here is a link to help you.](#)

### **Treasurer and Finance Committee:**

Churches have fires, floods, and hurricanes. [Watch this video.](#)

A. Are your financial records backed up in the cloud? Is your insurance up-to-date?

B. Are your church records and historical artifacts inventoried and catalogued? Copied? Insured? Are the originals kept safe?

[NOTE: If your church houses **colonial era records and/or records of a closed church**, please consider contacting the Congregational Library's Hidden Histories Project to have them documented and possibly removed to the Library for safe-keeping. Records prior to 1800 are often very valuable historical documents for historians, and should be protected from damage and loss. Further information on the Hidden Histories Project, in partnership with Yale University, can be found [here](#).

C. How are your valuables kept safe? Are any stored off-site? Are they adequately protected from fire, hurricanes/tornados and flooding? Who is in charge of retrieving and caring for these in case of a disaster?

D. After a disaster, is there an ethical/legal protocol to follow if your church starts receiving financial gifts to help rebuild or restore your church or community? How aware are you of this protocol?

E. When was the last time your committee checked your insurance policy and made sure the church and its contents are covered in the event of a flood, hurricane, tornado or fire?

**Christian Education/Formation Committee:**

A. Have you practiced fire drills in your church?

B. Have your church children and/or members helped others who have experienced disasters – in the community or in the world?

C. Have you talked with your church parents about how to help children understand weather disasters and damaging fires? [Here is a helpful video.](#)

D. Have you ever had your church children think about disasters in the news, and talk about how important it is to stay calm should you face a disaster and need to evacuate?

E. Could your children put together a “Go-Kit” and help their families plan for disasters? They are likely to be concerned about their pets, too, if they have them. Pets also will need their own [Go-Kits](#).

F. Are children in your congregation handed alternatives to lighted candles on Christmas Eve – e.g., glow sticks, LED candles?

**Outreach or Missions Committees:**

A. Has your church ever been involved in mission trips or “long term recovery groups”?

B. Are you interested in knowing how to do these in your local church?

C. Do you know what a “Go-Kit” is? Can you encourage your congregation members and friends to have them in their cars?

D. If for any reason people in your congregation had to evacuate the church or their homes, do you, their neighbors and other family members know where your individual members might go?

Pets are not always allowed in shelters. (Service animals are allowed in shelters.) If people have pets, what might they do with them? Don't forget to have emergency supplies packed for your pet as well.

**Church Members and Friends:**

A. Do you know what a “Go-Kit” is? Do you have them in your cars? A Go-Kit consists of food, water, extra clothing, medications, supplies and other necessities sufficient for three days for each person. [More information](#).

B. If for any reason if you had to evacuate, do you know where might you go? Do your neighbors and other family members know where you might go?

Pets are not always allowed in shelters. (Service animals are allowed in shelters.) If you have pets, what might you do with them? Don’t forget to have emergency supplies packed for your pet as well.

C. If you had to evacuate what kinds of things should you bring? How long would it take to get everything together?

D. Does your community have a designated shelter? Are there transportation resources to get people to the shelter if needed (rides, boats, 4-wheel drive vehicles)?

E. Every year people die because they're not prepared for winter storms, spring tornados or flooding. MACUCC has a [calendar for more information](#).

F. Emergency Preparedness Links:

<https://www.fema.gov/pdf/library/children.pdf>

[www.pbs.org/parents/rogers/special/scarynews.html](http://www.pbs.org/parents/rogers/special/scarynews.html)

<https://familylinks.icrc.org/en/Pages/home.aspx>

[www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/pet-disaster-preparedness#Pet-Emergency-Kit](http://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/pet-disaster-preparedness#Pet-Emergency-Kit)

[www.asPCA.org/pet-care/general-pet-care/disaster-preparedness](http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/general-pet-care/disaster-preparedness)

[www.ready.gov/food](http://www.ready.gov/food)