



MISSION PRESBYTERY
BETTER TOGETHER

Presbytery Disaster Response Protocol

Preparedness Action Phases

As members of the church fill out the **Congregation Information Survey**, and the session and Disaster Team complete the **Church Preparedness Checklist** (both are in Phase 1), the data and information needed to prepare for and respond to a disaster will start to come together. This is a very comprehensive document and at first glance can seem imposing, but if worked on one section at a time it will be manageable. The better prepared the church and the individual members are for a crisis, the better the chance of survival and the easier it will be to aid in the rescue phase and ease your recovery. This process is only as good as the data that is entered. The more data that is entered by each member the easier it will be to help them during their time of need and allow the Presbytery to contact those with special skills and equipment to come together to help one another. **We are Better Together.**

Congregation Information Survey

The objective is for every member/friend of the church, over the age of 12, to complete this form.

This information form has several areas, the first is general information, the second is for emergencies and disasters so that in a time of crisis we can help you and others. There are also parts of this form that will help you prepare for a disaster. These questions are not only informational, but should prompt discussion within your family and church to come up with best practices in case of a disaster. This is not a family form, it is for each individual of the household over 12 years of age (do not exclude your youth, they have skill sets that could be valuable).

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1jKP3Dr_-WiNf9hETz6pYPcaQHAYry_be_w8ozGAvaBU/edit

Church Security

We have to realize that times are changing and security for churches is a real need for all faith communities. Security breaches can result in a unique disaster that at one time was not even a consideration for a church. They can range from a simple break-in to a violent encounter within your place of worship. Pre-planning is critical to ensuring the safety and security of your church and your members.

A violent attack on your church is unlikely but being prepared for the worst-case scenario is critical. **Most violent encounters are by people known to the community.**

You do not need to run background checks on all of your members, however, both **employees and any members who work with children are required to be screened in accordance with PCUSA**



policies. Contact Mission Presbytery for assistance in background checks. Anyone without a valid, up to date background check may not work in any capacity with children in the church.

Preparing your People

The balance between keeping your congregation safe and security and being a welcoming and loving community of faith will be vigorously debated within your church. Each congregation will make decisions best suited for it. And, congregations should revisit their plans annually to determine if they need to be changed in response to local events.

- **Contact your local police, fire departments,** and insurance agent and ask them to meet with your team to evaluate security for your church and how it can be incorporated. They can help you evaluate your facility and programming and make recommendations on how your church can respond to a crisis. They will evaluate all the factors that may have a bearing on the situation in your area and help develop a training program to educate the congregation on proper responses. Do not try to make this evaluation without their input as it is important that your plan is developed in conjunction with the overall plan on how law enforcement will respond.
- **Develop a training program** based on the recommendations from the police evaluation. To ensure effectiveness, this training program should be repeated annually to maintain awareness and ensure that newly assigned staff, officers and members are well versed on procedures.
- **Conduct background checks** and follow up on references when hiring new employees.
- **Churches that have a day care program or preschool** must comply with the PCUSA policy and state laws which require background checks.

Active Shooter

Call 911 as soon as it is safe to do so.

- Provide as much of the following information as possible:
- Number of shooters
- Location of shooters
- Physical description of shooters
- Number of victims and potential victims
- Types of weapons held by shooters

Run – Hide – Fight

1. Evacuate the Area – If you can safely leave the area, do so.
 - Have an escape route and plan in mind.
 - Leave your belongings behind.
 - Keep your hands visible.
2. Hide – If you are unable to leave the area safely, hide
 - Hide in an area out of the shooter's view. Give critical priority to areas you can best secure.
 - Block entry to your hiding place.



- Lock the doors, if possible.
 - Move objects in front of doors, if possible.
 - Silence cell phones.
 - Remain in place until released by law enforcement officer.
3. Take Action – If unable to leave the area or hide, take action only as a last resort.
- Attempt to incapacitate the shooter.
 - Act with physical aggression.
 - Look for items to throw at the shooter or to use in an attack.

As part of your Active Shooter response plan, it is recommended to first review Take Action – Fight Back measures with local law enforcement.

When law enforcement arrives, their first priority will be containing the shooter, not helping victims. Do not stop officers to ask for help or direction when evacuating. Evacuate the premises as quickly as it is safe to do so.

- Remain calm and quiet.
- Follow instructions.
- Keep your hands visible at all times

Resources

Armed Intruder Best Practices Video: Church Mutual Insurance partnered with Alice Training Institute, experts in active shooter civilian response, to create a Best Practices Video and Armed Intruder Resources Kit.

<https://www.churchmutual.com/6421/Armed-Intruder>

DHS Webpage: Active Shooter: How to Respond. Provides fact sheets for private citizens, HR professionals, Active Shooter Workshop participants and First Responders. Also provides links to videos on Active Shooter planning.

<https://www.dhs.gov/active-shooter-preparedness>

Preparing your Property

- **Contact the local police department** and ask them to conduct a detailed security evaluation of the church property. This evaluation will have specific recommendations on what you should do to protect your church property.
- **Develop a plan** that incorporates the recommendations of the police department evaluation. The plan should address both normal hours and after-hours protection of property.

Procedures for Ushers/Greeters

Listed below are instructions for assisting when un-expected circumstances arise. Your assistance helps the pastor/elders maintain a sense of order in the church, as well as maintaining the safety of those present.

Medical Emergencies



Ushers should scan the congregation as people arrive – know who has medical training (physicians, nurses/CPR) and note their location. Should a medical emergency come to your attention, first assess the situation to see if the ill person is in danger to themselves or anyone else. If available, summon a Health Care Provider from the attending congregation to begin medical care. Know the location of the First Aid Kit and Automated External Defibrillator (if available).

If further assistance is necessary, **call 911** using a cell phone. Station one usher outside the church to direct paramedics to the patient's location

Hidden Illness

- If a person has a seizure, do not attempt to restrain them or put anything in their mouth. Move objects away to prevent injury. Loosen clothing, especially around the neck. Make the person feel comfortable after the seizure, perhaps by helping them to a comfortable place to rest and by offering assurance. Immediately summon a Health Care Provider from the attending congregation (if available) and **call 911** using a cell phone.
- In the event of a sudden attack (a seizure, a stroke, or a reaction to medication), immediately find a Health Care Provider from the attending congregation (if available) and **call 911** using a cell phone.
- Check for any medical alert tag the person may be wearing (necklace, anklet, bracelet, etc.).

Disturbances and Distraught Individuals

1. On occasion, an unknown/conspicuous person may enter the church seeking assistance. First, welcome them and offer to find them a seat. If not interested, usher them to the entryway (vestibule) of the church and inquire what assistance they might need. Should the person be in need of money, food, or clothing, assist as you have been instructed by the pastor or session.
2. People with mental illness or certain addictions, could be disruptive and/or present a risk of injury to themselves or others.
 - Behavioral clues include rocking, rolling eyes, irrational movements, constant mumbling, talking to one's self, staggering, pacing or wandering.
 - Such people may be unstable, and ushers should intervene immediately.
 - Find one or two ushers, Health Care Providers, or members of the congregation who are willing to approach the person quietly and ask them to accompany you to a quiet area in the church. Do your best to be respectful and make the person feel comfortable.
 - Walk away from the person if there is any indication of violence and call 911.
3. In the event that someone becomes unruly and begins to cause a disturbance
 - Again, ushers should immediately intervene in a reasonable manner.
 - If safely able, escort the person outside to discuss their intentions.
 - If the unruly person becomes aggressive, call 911 immediately for police assistance.



4. Once the person is ushered outside, unless concerned for safety and 911 has been called, do not lock the doors as this could restrict emergency exiting. If necessary, station ushers at every door to prevent the person from re-entering the church.
5. Ushers should never act alone when dealing with disturbances or distraught individuals. Always ask other ushers to assist you.
6. Ushers should take the initiative to step in when a disturbance occurs. Follow policies and procedures set by your session and pastor.

Weapons

Any usher who is aware of a weapon brought into the church should:

- **Call 911 immediately**, if reasonably suspected and follow their instructions.
- If able to still maintain calm with those attending, notify the pastor/elder, informing them of the suspected person who brought the weapon, where it is located, whether the suspect has threatened anyone, and give any other details that might prevent the suspect from hurting someone or themselves.

Fires

- Ushers need to be familiar with exit routes and their assigned area if evacuation is required.
- **Call 911 and notify the fire department of the emergency.**
- Fires in the church will require evacuation.
- The pastor/elder will give instructions from the microphone that evacuation is necessary.
- Evacuation will require strong direction with calmness and authority.
- All ushers shall stand by the exits.
- People should leave by their nearest exit.
- Assure disabled persons in your area are assisted, as needed.
- Once the church has been evacuated, ushers should clear people away from the building (until an “all clear” can be called).
- One or two assigned ushers should report to the presiding priest for further instructions after the church is cleared.
- Ushers should know the locations of the fire extinguishers in their worship site and how to use them. They are to be used for minor fires only.

Tornadoes/Severe Weather

Tornadoes are usually seasonal and may give us warning. If a tornado siren is heard, the pastor/elder will direct people in an orderly and calm manner to the pre-planned shelter area. Assist disabled persons in your area, as needed.

Safer areas of refuge are:

- Interior hallways and stairways.
- Basements and areas away from windows and glass.



Training

Training Plan

Promote preparedness of church members, employees, and those who have volunteer to help execute this plan.

1. Obtain local Disaster Preparedness information and distribute it to your members. This information is available from local governments, radio/TV stations, Salvation Army etc.
2. Host a disaster preparedness workshop yearly at your church.
3. Provide your church members with a list of local workshops that they can attend. Your local Emergency Operations Center can provide you with a list of workshops and training courses.
4. Annually, provide training to group leaders. This training should provide all of the requirements that will make this group leader effective in their neighborhood during an emergency. This training should include:
 - How to organize your group.
 - How to communicate with your group.
 - What is expected from the group leader?
 - When and to whom do they report?
5. Host a course in basic First Aid and Stop the Bleed for the preparedness of church members.
6. Annually, provide training to church staff and any organization using your facility. This training should include:
 - First Aid and Stop the Bleed
 - Defibrillators
 - Evacuation and safe room procedures.
 - Notification procedures
 - Preparing church property for an emergency
 - Backing up and protection of church files
7. Annually, provide specialized training as necessary for those who will be in charge of various portions of this plan. (Such training should include periodic drills or other attempts to test the plan as realistically as possible, without causing undue stress.)

Church Facilities Evacuation Plan

The evacuation plan should be in a presentation format and placed on the walls in strategic locations (preferably by every door) so members and visitors will know where to go in an emergency. This Plan should also designate a safe room where a large group of people could weather a storm if necessary and a location to gather outside of the building that would be clear of emergency vehicles.

1. Make a floor plan of each level of your church and buildings. Mark the exit doors to the outside, location of any fire alarm pulls and any fire extinguishers. Post the plan throughout the building, marking “you are here” at the appropriate location. Show how to get to the nearest two exits. At services, twice a year talk about



what everyone should do in case of an emergency. Discuss both evacuation and maintaining a safe area. If your church already has evacuation plans posted check them for updates.

2. Keep examples of your evacuation plan in hard copy and digital files.