

CHECKLIST FOR A CHURCH EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN

INTRODUCTION

A house of worship, at one time, was considered one of the safest places to be. The times in which we live today, however, seem to have brought the world, with its crime and uncertainty, right into the place we deem most sacred. The newspapers and television often report robbery, theft, homicide and etc. occurring in places of worship. Houses of worship are also subjected to the force of nature, such as hurricane, tornado and earthquake.

This checklist was developed as a guide for the leadership of a church or temple to evaluate its readiness to respond to an emergency. The questions will call attention to situations that may confront a congregation. Some of these questions will apply to all congregations, regardless of their size. A large congregation may find that all questions apply, a small one only several. No attempt is made to give answers to questions or to give an emergency response plan. Each congregation must ascertain which questions apply and then develop a response plan that meets the needs of the group.

Insurance companies, local emergency response officials, the American Red Cross, the local office of FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency), and denominational disaster response offices will have resources to use in developing the plan.

Once the plan has been developed and in place, the challenge is to train all interested parties initially and those that will join the group in the future (new pastors, ushers, etc.). Remember, the plan is no better than the actions of those trained to respond. And all plans, now matter how carefully thought-out they may be, must be evaluated periodically to determine if the needs of the congregation are being met and new situations have been included.

Checklist for a Church Emergency Management Plan

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I. CRISIS/EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT TEAM

- A. Does the church have a “Crisis Management Team,” (comprised of church leaders, emergency services personnel, members of the congregation, local doctor, local pediatrician, EMT, etc.) which has helped the church to identify appropriate emergency policies and procedures?
- B. How are members of this team identified and what are their specific responsibilities to the church and to the “Crisis Management Team?”
- C. Is there a church emergency management plan?
- D. What is the chain of command?
- E. Is the church emergency management plan reviewed annually?
- F. Are new staff trained in the implementation of the plan?

II. FIRE (OR OTHER EMERGENCY THAT REQUIRES EVACUATION)

- A. What is the procedure for orderly evacuation of the congregation in the event of a fire or other such emergency (loss of utilities, fire, tornado, earthquake, chemical release from highway or railroad, bomb threat)?
- B. Who is responsible for implementing the plan?
- C. Are the ushers and pastor thoroughly familiar with the plan?
- D. Are posters showing the evacuation route(s) posted in prominent places in the church?
- E. Is there a sign near the elevators indicating that they are not to be used in the event of a fire?
- F. How will all occupants in the building be quickly notified in an emergency?
- G. In an evacuation of the church, is there a procedure to account for all occupants (worshippers and staff)?
- H. Do all doors leading outside have lighted exit signs and are they working?
- I. Is there an emergency lighting system that will automatically activate if electric service is lost?
- J. What relationship has been established with local emergency services personnel?
- K. Is there an identified common meeting place when the building is evacuated, so that families are re-united?
- L. Does the church have the proper number and type of fire extinguishers and are they located as recommended by the fire marshal and/or the insurance company?
Are they inspected and serviced annually by a professional fire suppression service person?
- M. Is training provided to pastor/ushers in (a) type of fires, (b) fire extinguisher use?
- N. Are there smoke detectors and a fire alarm system installed throughout the building? Are they regularly maintained?
- O. Where is the closest emergency medical facility? Phone number?
- P. Where is the safest place in the church in the event of a tornado?
- Q. Is the church in an area vulnerable to earthquakes?
- R. Are there measurers that can be taken to protect worshipers in the event of a tornado or earthquake?

III. HEALTH

- A. What are the procedures for handling a disruption during a worship service, such as: (a) participant injury, (b) participant illness, or (c) intruder on church property?
- B. Are the ushers and pastor practiced in implementing these procedures?
- C. If so, what types of training have been provided and by whom? How is documentation of this training maintained?
- D. Where is the first aid-kit located? Is there more than one available? Who knows its location? Who is responsible for maintaining the supplies in the kit?
- E. Which members of the congregation are trained in CPR and First Aid? How are these members identified and who is responsible for verifying their certification?
- F. Is someone trained in CPR and First Aid available at all services? Who is responsible for verifying that someone trained in CPR and First Aid is present at all services?

IV. INSURANCE

- A. Does the church have adequate property (building and contents) and liability insurance coverage?
- B. Does the church leadership know what is covered by insurance, including the medical component of the general liability policy?
- C. When was the church and parsonage insurance coverage last reviewed?
- D. Does the pastor or church carry insurance on the items of the pastoral family in the parsonage and personal liability?
- E. What records and documentation will the insurance company want to see?
- F. If the church is located in a flood plain, and if so, is there flood insurance?
- G. If the church is subject to flooding, can permanent flood-proofing measures be taken?
- H. Is the church located in an area that is vulnerable to earthquakes?

V. NOTIFICATION

- A. Does the church have in place a procedure for quickly notifying the congregation in the event of a cancellation of service or an emergency? Who decides when to cancel a church related service or meeting?
- B. Who is to be notified in the event of an emergency?
 - 1. Fire and rescue – 911
 - 2. Pastor, if not already involved
 - 3. District Office
 - 4. Church Board Chair
 - 5. Chair of Property Committee
 - 6. Insurance agent
- C. Has the church designated one person (i.e., media contact) to talk to the media in the event of an emergency on church property or to church leadership?
- D. How will the media contact obtain accurate information regarding the situation?
- E. How are ushers or other church leaders trained to direct media to the “media contact”?
- F. Is there a phone readily available for emergency use during all functions?
- G. Is a fully charged cellular phone provided for use during all events held away from the church?
- H. Are appropriate notification/emergency numbers posted next to all phones?
- I. Are there procedures in place to ensure that the proper parents/guardians pickup a child from functions held at the church?

VI. RECORD KEEPING AND STORAGE

- A. What types of records and papers are considered important by the church?
- B. Where are important records and papers kept?
- C. Are these records and papers secure in the event of a fire, flood, or high wind event?
- D. Which persons know where such records are kept and have access to them?
- E. Is there a copy of all crucial corporate papers and computer files stored at an off-site location?
- F. Is there an up-to-date inventory and/or video tape of all moveable contents, such as office and sound equipment, TV/VCRs and ceremonial pieces such as gold or silver candlesticks and other easily stolen items? Who is responsible for maintaining the inventory? Is the inventory and/or video tape stored at a location away from the church building? Who is responsible for keeping the most recent version?
- G. In the event of destruction or damage to church property, was damage photographed or videotaped?
- H. Was a record made of all decisions relating to damage to church property?

VII. SAFETY AND BUILDINGS

- A. Who is responsible for snow and ice removal from church property?
- B. Who is responsible for the maintenance of all church property?
- C. Are the facilities routinely monitored for potential hazards?
- D. Are the cutoffs for all utilities clearly marked so that electricity, gas and water can be shut off quickly? Are they kept free of any storage items which would prevent quick access in an emergency?
- E. Who knows the location of the well and septic system?
- F. Is there a policy in place that states that hazardous materials should not be stored in the church?
- G. Has the maximum number of occupants been calculated for all rooms in the church and is this number posted in a prominent place in each room?
- H. Is the building protected by protection systems (sprinklers, alarms, water level monitoring equipment)?
- I. Do all electrical outlets near sinks have Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) receptacles? Do all children's rooms have electrical outlet protectors?
- J. Is the church handicapped accessible?
- K. Who is responsible for controlling the temperature in the church, especially the sanctuary?
- L. Is there more than one person trained in the operation of the church's heating and cooling system?
- M. Have structural measurers been taken on the church buildings to mitigate (reduce) the effects of wind damage from a hurricane or tornado (reinforcements of the frame at the foundation and in the rafters, extra nails, etc)?

VIII. SEXUAL ABUSE

- A. Do all workers in the children's and youth departments know that state law requires notification of appropriate agencies in the event of suspected physical and/or sexual abuse?
- B. Is training in "responding to allegations of child abuse" provided to the pastor, all youth department teachers, and other church leaders?
- C. Does the church have a procedure for addressing allegations of child abuse which

1. are disclosed on church property
 2. are alleged to have occurred on church property
 3. are alleged to have occurred during an off-site church sponsored event
 4. are alleged to have involved church leadership?
- D. Are background checks required and conducted for persons who have significant programmatic responsibility for children and youth? Where is documentation of these background checks filed?

IX. TRANSPORTATION

- A. If the church has a van(s) or bus used to transport members of the congregation, are there procedures in place for use of the vehicles?
- B. Do the procedures require the use of a “travel log” which documents all travel (i.e., person driving, miles driven, destination, problems/concerns with vehicle, driver’s signature)?
- C. Do the procedures prohibit the transportation of anyone under the age of 16 in a vehicle that does not have seats attached and that is not designed for transporting people? (State Law)
- D. Do the procedures specify that only qualified drivers are allowed to operate the vehicles? Do they possess a valid driver’s license? Have their driving records been checked to verify that they do not have driving- related offenses, which might suggest that they should not be transporting church passengers?
- E. Is a fully charged cellular phone provided for use during transportation?
- F. Do the procedures require that all church-owned vehicles being used to transport people carry a stocked first aid kit, reflectors, and a fire extinguisher?
- G. Do the procedures outline the steps that should be taken in the event of a medical emergency during transportation? How are drivers training in these procedures?
- H. Do the procedures require that two adults be present at all times when children are riding in the vehicles?
- I. Do the procedures require a quarterly inspection of the mechanical soundness of the vehicles in addition to the required annual state inspection?
- J. Is there a church member responsible for the routine maintenance of church-owned vehicles?
- K. Do the procedures require that all drivers be thoroughly trained in the operation of the vehicle being driven and have demonstrated their proficiency?
- L. Do the procedures require all passengers to buckle seat belts?
- M. How are drivers trained to address situations in which passengers refuse to buckle their seat belts?
- N. Do the procedures require that the number of passengers not exceed the number specified in the vehicle owner’s manual?
- O. Do the procedures outline steps to be taken in the event of an accident involving a church-owned vehicle while transporting passengers?
- P. Is there a policy regarding the proper loading of a trailer being towed behind a church-owned vehicle?
- Q. For churches with 15-passenger vans- has the church addressed recent concerns by the insurance industry that 15-passenger vans have the potential to flip over when the rear seat is full with passengers, luggage, etc.?

X. FINANCIAL SECURITY

- A. INTERNAL
 - 1. Are the ushers and treasurer bonded?
 - 2. Is there an annual audit conducted of the church's financial records?
 - 3. Is there a unified church budget that facilitates controlled spending by departments within the church? Is there a purchase order system in place for all purchases charged to church accounts?
- B. EXTERNAL
 - 1. Are there adequate procedures in place to prevent theft of the offering as it is being counted or transported to the bank?
 - 2. Are there procedures in place to prevent theft of or from purses of choir members during choir practice or worship service?
 - 3. Are all buildings kept locked unless in use by members of the congregation or other authorized persons/groups?
 - 4. Who has keys to church buildings?
 - 5. Are there procedures for documenting the distribution and use of church keys?

XI. DISASTER RESPONSE

- A. When there is a disaster in the community, do the local emergency management or other organizations have expectations of a service the congregation will provide? Who coordinates/liasons such activities? Who has oversight of the facilities under such conditions?
 - 1. Existing agreements such as sheltering, mass feeding, housing of donated goods?
 - 2. Trained volunteers for certain jobs?
 - 3. Do your facilities include special features that are valuable during such times?
- B. Is there a safety inquiry system for your membership and immediate neighbors? Your neighborhood?
- C. Who are the persons with disabilities (temporary or permanent) in your congregation or neighborhood who may need extra help or attention at this time?
- D. Can the church facilities be used as a temporary shelter for evacuees or disaster survivors?
- E. Can the church facilities be used on a long-term basis for disaster volunteer housing? If so, is your District Disaster Response Coordinator aware of this?
- F. How can the church assist in a community emergency?
- G. Is a telephone tree or system in place to check on elderly, ill or home-bound church members' needs during an evacuation order or after a disaster strikes? If telephones are out of order?

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