

Is your family prepared for an emergency?

Tornado. Flood. Acts of Violence. Zika or Ebola virus. It seems like we are being affected by disasters of some kind more than ever before. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) urges citizens to follow key steps to prepare for future emergencies.

1. **Get a kit.** Start building your own disaster supply kit. Include basic items such as food and water, medications, first aid supplies, pet food, and important papers. Keep your kit in a safe location in your home and update it every now and then.
2. **Make a plan.** Families and workplaces should get involved in efforts to prepare a plan of action in the case of different emergencies. Where will you take shelter? How will you make sure everyone who needs to be there is out of harm's way? How will you contact each other?
3. **Know before you go.** Plan for how you will address the 5 P's in case you need to evacuate: People, Prescriptions, Papers, Personal Needs, Priceless Items.
4. **Be proactive!** Before an emergency occurs, learn about what can be helpful when different disasters hit. Do you need the same things for a flood as you would for a tornado? Know the signs of different disasters so in the event of an emergency, you are prepared to act quickly.
5. **Get involved.** Volunteer to support disaster relief efforts in your community, start a preparedness project, or donate money and goods to organizations that assist in these emergency relief efforts.
6. **Prepare Child ID kits.** Email digital photos of all family members to extended relatives and/or friends. Update photos of children every 6 months. Make copies of important documents (e.g. birth certificates) and mail them to a friend or relative, and give your children identification information to carry with them in case of an emergency. If your child has special health care needs, prepare an emergency information form that lists important meds, treatments and care guidelines that may be needed if evacuated or sheltered away from primary caregivers.

You can never fully prepare for everything that might happen, but taking some simple steps ahead of time can make a big difference in your ability to cope and bounce back if a disaster every happens.

Prayer: God, keep us safe and give us the wisdom and strength to prepare for emergencies that may affect our family and our community.

What should faith communities do in a time of crisis?

Faith communities are on the front lines when a disaster strikes. People turn to religious leaders for comfort, support and direction. But what are the best ways to help?

1. **Build Relationships.** One of the most important things your congregation and faith leaders can do is to build relationships with emergency management leaders in your community long before a crisis occurs. Get to know the local first responders, meet with chaplains at your hospitals, reach out to other faith community leaders of all faith traditions. Work with these partners to make a disaster response plan, or find out how your congregation can fit into existing plans.
2. **Assess.** Assess the resources you have. Do you have space to house people? A big kitchen and the ability to provide meals? Child care facilities. Medically trained members who can volunteer to provide care? A phone tree for alerting people to danger or changes in the situation? Do a thorough assessment and share this information with disaster response leaders in your neighborhood and religious organization.
3. **Stay put.** When confronted with an emergency, our first impulse may be to rush toward the scene to try to help. First responders tell us that the best thing that we can do is to stay put, attend to the needs right where we are and listen for further instructions or requests for help. This is where those relationships, assessments and plans that you have already made come in handy. If you know your first responders, they will be aware of the practical assistance you can provide and will contact you if they need your help.
4. **Practice your faith.** Open your doors for prayer. Provide a space for people to gather. Plan a special service. Offer pastoral care to your members and neighbors. Activate your phone tree to keep people informed.

It's hard to imagine that we will ever be affected by disasters. But planning ahead of time makes us more nimble, creative and confident if we are ever faced with these situations.