

Stay Prepared: Five Easy Steps for Running Drills

Most leaders of Episcopal institutions understand the importance of disaster preparation—for natural disasters and extreme weather events, violence and criminal activity, illness breakout, and more. And, many leaders have acted by creating written plans for responding to catastrophic events.

Don't let those written plans sit on a shelf and gather dust! To make sure your disaster preparedness plans actually work, run drills. This will help you identify and correct any flaws in your plans, and it also raises awareness in the congregation about what to do in case of disaster.

STEP ONE: Get People Involved

Recruit a group of volunteers to participate in the drills. They can be employees, volunteers on other projects, or community members who are looking for simple ways to become more involved. Make sure the small group accurately represents the demographics of your population. You will not truly know if your plan is effective if only young and active people practice the drills, but there is a large elderly community, for example.

Appoint a few people who will act as leaders during the drill. These people can step up if there is ever a need to follow the plan during a real-life emergency.

STEP TWO: Follow Your Written Plan

Whether you need to evacuate the building or shelter in place for the particular drill you run, follow your written plan to the letter. If something goes wrong, don't deviate or improvise. Instead, take notes as you go, so you will have a record of exactly what parts of the plan you will need to change.

It's important to do this because the written plan will always be available, whereas the same people may not always be present to provide direction.

STEP THREE: Welcome Feedback

Encourage everyone to share their thoughts and feelings about the drill's efficacy—both what went wrong and what went right.

Weigh this feedback and take any concerns seriously. For example, if you have disabled congregants, make sure your disaster plan takes their needs into account. Adjust the written plan to reflect the requested changes.

STEP FOUR: Run the Drill Again

Follow the new written plan carefully. Did the adjustments you made improve the effectiveness of the drill? Again, solicit feedback from those participating, and edit the plan as necessary.

Be diplomatic about feedback and try different ideas if the group seriously diverges in their opinions about what will work. But maintain strong leadership throughout this process so trial-and-error doesn't turn into chaos.

STEP FIVE: Repeat Until It Works

Keep repeating the process of running the drill, eliciting feedback, and changing the plan until it works well. The whole process can usually be completed within a couple of hours in a single afternoon.

Then, make sure everyone in the congregation is aware of emergency procedures. One easy way to accomplish that awareness is to announce and run a community-wide drill after services are concluded.

Disaster planning requires periodic updating. Repeat the process on an annual basis to ensure that your plans and the particular needs of your institution complement each other.