

## 5 Small Ways (and 1 Big Thing) to Prepare for a Disaster

The very idea of having to prepare for a disaster can be overwhelming. But the good news is, you do not have to do it all at once!

We interviewed the Diocesan Disaster Coordinator for El Camino Real, William Brooks, to learn the small things you can do now to prepare for a big emergency.

### 5 Small Ways

#### 1. Identify which parishioners can help

Make an announcement during services or print a notice in your weekly bulletin that you are seeking go-to people in the event of an emergency, and identify the skilled church members who could be helpful should a disaster occur.

Bill Brooks suggests finding individuals, such as “Emergency Medical Technicians, Ham radio operators, first responders of any category, and retired military personnel,” whose background suggests they would be willing and able to help.

Make sure your congregational leaders (e.g., clergy, staff and Senior Warden) know who these skilled parishioners are, too. This not only builds redundancy into your preparedness planning, but if you are ever directly impacted by a disaster and out of town when the event occurs, there will be people who will still know what to do and whom to contact.

Bill also suggests training ushers and forming a disaster preparedness team. “It gives them a greater sense of responsibility,” he says. And if something unexpected happens during services, they can act immediately.

It is also helpful to reach out to ministry leaders and people who compile prayer lists. These people will be connected to individuals in your greater church family who may be more vulnerable and need additional support.

#### 2. Organize your contacts – and get texting

In case your computers go down, have a physical list of people to contact in case of an emergency and also program essential numbers into your mobile phone. As Bill says, time is of the essence when disaster strikes. If you do form a disaster preparedness team, enter them as a group so you can reach them with one quick text.

Bill points out that landlines and even mobile phone networks can get overburdened during times of disaster, but text messages take up less bandwidth and are therefore less likely to overload mobile carriers. More people involved in disaster response should be able to send and receive text messages on their mobile phones, he says.

### 3. Access training and increase your readiness

Low-cost preparedness training can increase your disaster readiness. Many first responders and local government agencies offer fire safety, security, and **Mental Health First Aid** trainings. Contact your local agencies to check out what educational opportunities are available in your area.

“One of the most important things that staff and parishioners can do is get CPR training,” says Bill. First Aid and CPR training can help in emergencies of any kind and scale.

The **Red Cross** has options, including on-site instruction and a “train-the-trainer” program, which prepares a few staff members or volunteers to hold training sessions within your organization.

### 4. Utilize your ministerial association

“If an earthquake hits, and the church building is not stable, where will you hold services?” Bill asks. Another church might allow you to hold services at their location if your building is unusable. That is why Bill says to nurture relationships with other churches through your local ministerial association. That way, you will be able to come to each other’s aid in times of need. These churches may also be strong ministry partners should there be a need to launch a shared disaster recovery program.

### 5. Do a walk-through

Bill is the disaster preparedness leader for his church, St. Andrew’s, in Saratoga, California. Because Saratoga lies on three fault lines, earthquake preparedness is very important. St. Andrew’s had an expert walk through their property and point out potential problem areas. For example, the inspector identified that hymnals stored in a high place would likely pile up on the ground during an earthquake. That would create trip hazards right in front of the main exit from the sanctuary. Silk cords woven by parishioners now secure the closet doors to prevent that from happening. The more you can prevent, the better off you will be if something were to occur.

## One Big Thing: Check out Episcopal Relief & Development’s resource library

Bill highly recommends Episcopal Relief & Development’s **resource library**. He particularly recommends the Comprehensive Plan and the **Facilitator’s Guide** for comprehensive disaster planning. And, you can **go here** for a longer list of preparedness activities.

September is **National Preparedness Month**. Make a commitment to begin to prepare your congregation for emergencies.