

Disaster Preparedness: Evacuation and Sheltering-in-Place

With the current hurricane season already proving treacherous, we'd like to remind you of a few best practices for disasters. While hurricane warnings may call for people to evacuate from their homes and organizations, other kinds of disasters, such as tornadoes and active shooter situations, can mean that it's best for you to stay put or to take shelter in your immediate surroundings.

Evacuation: Know Your Route, Know Your Destination

Nobody wants to think anything bad will happen, so many people avoid preparing for the worst, often to their detriment. Spending just a few minutes to do so, however, could save your life. When entering a new space, for instance, take a moment to become familiar with emergency exits and escape routes. And check in with vulnerable parishioners to see if they have planned their evacuation routes and destinations.

Church leaders need to plan for their own evacuations, too. Where will you go in an emergency? Because disasters are often unpredictable, it's a good idea to have more than one evacuation plan at the ready. Your anticipated route may be blocked, or you may be unable to book transportation out of the area.

What to Take, and How to Prepare

Pack a go-bag in advance. A go-bag contains the items you will need during an evacuation. This could include medications, a flashlight, and extra food and water, among other items.

If there is a possibility that you will need to evacuate and you'll be traveling by car, keep your gas tank topped off. Gas stations may lose power, and the demand for gas could be high, especially if you live in a densely populated area.

Don't Waste Time

When the order to evacuate comes, do not hesitate to follow your plan. Otherwise, you may be trapped by severe weather. Listen to evacuation instructions and do not deviate from them. Don't take shortcuts to avoid traffic; you may encounter hazards.

If authorities recommend it, turn off utilities, such as water and gas, before you go. You should also unplug electrical appliances. Wear sturdy, protective clothing for your journey and be sure to tell others where you are going, either by leaving a note or communicating to specific people when you have left and where you will be.

Shelter in Place

Know ahead of time which situations require sheltering in place versus seeking protection elsewhere. Be ready for the possibility that church members will need to hunker down in the church by preparing a fully-stocked **emergency kit** that meets the needs of all of your parishioners and staff. For example, in

addition to the ordinary emergency kit supplies, such as food and water and first aid, you might include hearing-aid batteries.

Depending on how long you will be sheltering in place, food rationing may be necessary. So conserve food to allow everyone at your location to eat and drink during the entirety of the time that you will need to remain on your property. Be careful that no one becomes dehydrated.

Give your parishioners peace of mind by letting them know that you have a plan for sheltering in place. Raise awareness by running a drill, perhaps after services. Practice moving toward the shelter area in an orderly fashion. Ask about any special needs that should be accommodated, or what you might want to add to your emergency kit.

Planning for a disaster can be daunting, but if you know how you will react in a variety of situations, you will be more prepared — and that could make all the difference.