



Episcopal
Relief & Development

Healing a hurting world

US Disaster Program



Preparedness Planning Tools: Congregational Preparedness

How To: Build a Church Preparedness Team

Members of St. Gabriel the Archangel Episcopal Church in Cherry Hills Village, Colorado, gathered outside for the church's annual picnic one beautiful Sunday afternoon a few years ago. The day took a frightening turn when a member with heart issues suddenly felt light headed and then collapsed. Church members immediately called for 911 for medical attention which arrived promptly.

This incident forced the congregation to answer a critical question: How are they prepared for emergencies? The rector and church members realized the importance of emergency preparedness and decided to develop a plan.

Mason Whitney, Church Safety Warden at St. Gabriel the Archangel, shares the process of how he worked with his congregation to respond to emergencies and how they established a comprehensive preparedness plan and a church safety ministry.

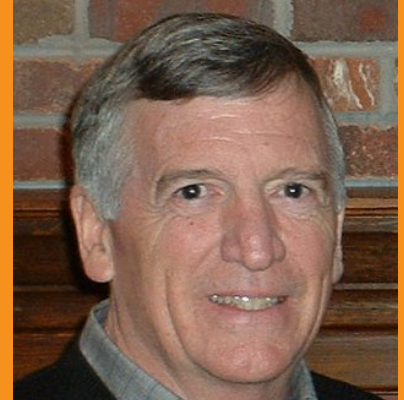
CREATING A CULTURE OF PREPAREDNESS

Our church disaster preparedness plan began with members communicating their thoughts about what situations would most likely occur in our congregation or local community and what skills would be required for our members to respond in a timely and effective manner. It's impossible to imagine every scenario, but we learned that many situations have similar response protocols.

We focused on developing procedures for emergencies that are more likely to happen in our region, such as ice storms, fires, security incidents and medical emergencies. The goal of our emergency preparedness plan is to equip our members with information and skills to help prevent, protect against, respond to and recover from potential hazards while balancing the risks involved with available resources and anticipating needs.

A team of trained volunteers ready and willing to respond to emergencies is the foundation of our disaster preparedness plan. Our ushers are an asset to the overall strategy. They actively participate in training sessions and have accepted responsibility for taking or directing actions in the event of an emergency. They know our members, church grounds and community more so than most.

St. Gabriel the Archangel Episcopal Church has benefitted by having strong leadership invested in disaster preparedness. Our rector regularly mentions the importance preparedness during sermons, and he and the senior warden are active members of our preparedness committee and well as advocates for the training programs. Clear communication about the benefits of preparedness for our congregation has been critical to our success.



Biography



Mason Whitney is the Church Safety Warden at St. Gabriel the Archangel Episcopal Church and a Regional Disaster Warden in The Episcopal Church in Colorado



Fast Facts

CONGREGATION:

St. Gabriel the Archangel Episcopal Church

LOCATION:

Cherry Hills Village, Colorado

POPULATION:

6,585

DISASTER RELIEF:

Developing a congregational disaster preparedness plan



OUR DISASTER PREPAREDNESS PROGRAM INCLUDES:

- Inviting the congregation to participate in disaster preparedness training.
- Offering two levels of training: a basic one for all members and an advanced level training.
- Holding Preparedness Awareness Training, our basic training, once a year between 8 a.m. and 10:15 a.m. services.
- Scheduling Specific Response Level Training, our advanced level training, which is led by Red Cross leaders, local first responders and certified instructors, on a Saturday morning. Participants practice CPR, AED (defibrillator) operations, basic first aid and fire suppression. They receive a detailed walkthrough of the church, including training on how to shut off utilities and locate emergency equipment.
- A slideshow presented by our safety warden that includes an overview of preparedness plans and emergency procedures, locations of fire extinguishers, emergency exits and our shelter-in-place procedures.

During our trainings, we offer refreshments and this helps our members see it as a fellowship event where we are all learning together. Once members have completed the training, they become part of our Church Safety Ministry. Participants have shared what they've learned with their families and workplaces which will hopefully raise awareness about disaster preparedness in our community.

We've worked to integrate preparedness practices in other ways, too. Early in our preparedness planning, we held a fire drill during a Sunday service. For several weeks beforehand, we held Q&A sessions to let members know what was happening, where to go and what the evacuation plan would be. Then, we practiced the drill during a Sunday service, and we were able to get everyone out of the sanctuary quickly and safely. Our members felt comfortable with the plan, so they felt more equipped to act when the situation arose.

The more we talk about emergency preparedness together, the more it becomes part of St. Gabriel's identity. Our members now see emergency preparedness as a collective ministry, and we have successfully cultivated a culture of preparedness in our congregation.

Much like we are all part of the body of Christ, we can all contribute in some way to a church safety ministry. As an example, some of our members have limited mobility and are not able to perform CPR, but they may be able to assist in other ways. We want our members to know that all of us are capable of contributing to the safety of our congregation.

By fostering a culture of preparedness in our church, we've equipped our church members to respond to emergencies. This has allowed St. Gabriel's to better fulfill its mission, to utilize its many strengths and to expand its capacity to serve God's people and the community.

Starting Your Preparedness Process:



- **Prioritize:** What disasters and emergencies are most likely to affect your church?
- **Communicate:** Be sure to include a diversity of voices, including those with special needs, into the planning stages for a well rounded perspective.
- **Support:** Strong support from congregational leadership is key to gaining support from the congregation. The rector or senior warden can be very helpful in framing disaster preparedness as a form of stewardship and as a ministry.

Additional Resources



For more information on disaster preparedness, please see the following online resources:

- [St. Gabriel Episcopal Church Preparedness Plan](#)
- [Comprehensive Preparedness Plan for Congregations](#)
- [Facilitator's Guide to the Comprehensive Preparedness Plan](#)
- [Identifying and Reducing Risk](#)

For more disaster preparedness ideas and resources, visit episcopalrelief.org/preparedness.