



# Identifying and Reducing Risk



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Episcopal Diocese of Utah  
Episcopal Diocese of Oregon  
Episcopal Diocese of New Jersey  
Episcopal Diocese of Ohio  
Episcopal Diocese of Maryland  
Episcopal Diocese of Michigan  
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Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota



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### OBJECTIVES:

- Identify and discuss hazards that participants face
- Understand vulnerability and how disaster preparedness contributes to overall risk reduction
- Assess the likelihood of different hazards
- Break down disaster preparedness planning into manageable steps
- Empower congregations and individuals to improve their personal and community safety

**TIME:** 100 - 115 minutes

### MATERIALS:

- Flip chart and markers
- Worksheets #1 - 4
- Pens



## Introduction

This workshop was based on Mason Whitney's materials and developed in the wake of the 2015 Charleston church shooting. It is designed to create a space for participants to share stories about their fears and to discuss hazards within their community. Participants will then evaluate and develop strategies for reducing risk, leading to a safer, more resilient community.

### WHO SHOULD ATTEND THE SESSIONS?

Anyone interested in discussing church safety should be invited to participate. It is particularly helpful for people with diverse backgrounds and life experiences to attend the workshop. Lived experiences influence both our vulnerability and perception of hazards. For example, women may have particular concerns about gender-based violence that others may overlook. Similarly, a firefighter may bring unique insight about preparedness activities that may benefit the group.

More diversity among participants often results in a fuller picture of your community's hazard profile.

It is also helpful to invite individuals who work in public safety, law enforcement and education. Many of these individuals are required to do emergency planning as a part of their professional lives, and they may also have strong insights on the hazards within your community.

### HOW CAN EPISCOPAL RELIEF & DEVELOPMENT HELP?

The role of Episcopal Relief & Development's US Disaster Program is to inspire, connect and equip leaders of the US Episcopal Church to prepare for hazards that might affect their communities, as well as mitigate the impact of those disasters and help vulnerable people make a full and sustained recovery. Our staff works closely with bishop-appointed Diocesan Disaster Coordinators to improve diocesan and regional resilience.

The Resource Library on Episcopal Relief & Development's website, [www.episcopalrelief.org/resourcelibrary](http://www.episcopalrelief.org/resourcelibrary), contains free, downloadable disaster training curricula as well as case studies of best practices in disaster preparedness and response.

For more information on this or other resources please contact your **Diocesan Disaster Coordinator** or email [usdisaster@episcopalrelief.org](mailto:usdisaster@episcopalrelief.org). We welcome your questions as well as your suggestions for resources that will support your work in disaster preparedness.

Check who your Disaster Preparedness Coordinator is on [this list](#) or at [www.episcopalrelief.org/usdisaster](http://www.episcopalrelief.org/usdisaster).



## I. Understanding Risk

**TIME:** 10 MINUTES

**Facilitator:** Use these or similar words to introduce this module. Feel free to adapt the language as appropriate. Ask the below questions in plenary and record the answers on the flip chart.

Faced with disasters, it is easy to feel powerless. However, when you break down all of the factors that contribute to how you experience a hazard, you can begin to see how we can control and reduce the risk.

For the purposes of this exercise, we have adapted The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction definitions. **Distribute Handout #1.**

$$\text{Risk} = \frac{\text{Hazard} \times \text{Vulnerability}}{\text{Capacity}}$$

**HAZARD** is the bad thing that could happen

**VULNERABILITY** is how acutely you feel the bad thing that could happen

**CAPACITY** is the ability to respond to the bad thing has happened

**RISK** is overall impact of the bad thing

Don't worry if the distinction between categories is confusing! Let's try out an example as a group:

**How do you reduce the hazard of a fire in our church?**

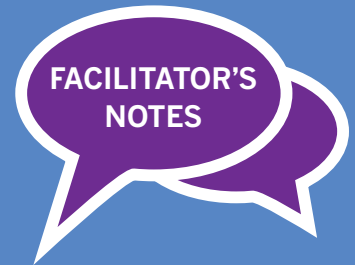
- Possible answers include: using electric candles during worship, making sure the building meets fire code regulations and having a firefighter supervise the lighting of the Paschal flame.

**What actions or characteristics reduce vulnerability to a fire in our church?**

- Possible answers include: keeping some money saved for emergencies and having good relationships with other local churches so that you can share worship space.

**What actions or characteristics improve capacity to respond to a fire in our church?**

- Possible answers include: having up-to-date building insurance, keeping fire extinguishers around the property and holding routine fire drills throughout the year.



Note to Facilitator: Occasionally participants will focus too heavily on correctly identifying each intervention with a variable. If this gets confusing, gently remind them that the goal of this activity is to think about the many ways to reduce overall risk. As long as participants think of ways to reduce risk, they are successfully completing the activity.

It is easy to feel overwhelmed when we think about how to reduce your risk for a major hazard. Often it is difficult (if not impossible) to stop the occurrence of particular hazards, but with this equation, you can see that any actions that we take to change the vulnerability, hazard or capacity variables will influence our overall risk. This means we have the power to reduce risk by in several ways regardless of the potential hazards that we may face.

For instance, it may not be possible to stop a hurricane from forming, but you can board your windows and make sure you have fresh batteries in your flashlight before the storm arrives. Both the boarded windows (vulnerability) and the batteries (capacity) will reduce overall risk for hurricane.

Let's try to reduce risk for a common hazard: the flu.

**Ask the following questions in plenary and record answers on the flip chart:**

**How do you reduce the hazard of the flu?**

- Possible answers include: getting annual flu shots, washing hands and having paid sick leave policies to help limit exposure to sick people.

**What actions or characteristics reduce vulnerability to the flu?**

- Possible answers include: being young and fit, having a strong and an uncompromised immune system and limiting exposure to germs.

**What actions or characteristics improve capacity to respond to the flu?**

- Possible answers include: having a network of loved ones who are willing to take care of you, taking antiviral medications prescribed by your doctor, having access to quality healthcare, eating chicken soup and possessing knowledge of basic home health care.





## II. What to Focus On: Hazard and Vulnerability Assessment

**TIME:** 25-40 MINUTES

### **Distribute Handout #2.**

Now it's time to begin thinking about the hazards that we face. On the top of Handout #2, take a couple minutes and list the hazards that you are concerned about in your church and community. You don't have to limit yourself to natural disasters. Feel free to include hazards such as a medical emergency, cyber attack, pandemic and vandalism.

**Ask participants to report back some of the hazards that they are concerned about. Record their responses on the flip chart. (5-20 minutes)**

Let's take a look at the second part of Handout #2. This grid is a helpful tool for prioritizing the preparedness work that we undertake. The vertical axis tracks the severity of a potential hazard and the horizontal axis for probability an event will occur.

**For the purposes of this activity, let's use the following definitions:**

- **A catastrophic event** is one with national impacts like September 11<sup>th</sup> or Hurricane Katrina.
- **A minor event** is something localized like a medical emergency during church, a fire in an apartment building or a severe car accident.

**Talk through an example as a group.** Please feel free to use this example or one that makes more sense for your context. *Participants' answers may vary.*

- How severe are the consequences of a fire to our church building?
- How likely is it that a fire is going to occur?

**Have the participants work in pairs to fill out the chart on Handout #2 with the hazards they have identified. (15 min)**

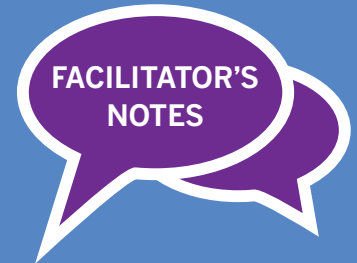
**Ask the group:**

- Did you identify a hazard in that was catastrophic and occur frequently?

*Facilitator's note: It is unlikely that participants will have examples for this type of hazard.*

- One that is serious and occurs frequently?

*Participants' answers may vary. When there is a difference of responses, share the following reflection:*



Note to Facilitator: If there are participants dealing with trauma or anxiety, allow them to share their stories, even if they seem far-fetched or unlikely to occur. This will help validate their concerns. The next step of the activity will help prioritize concerns.

Everyone has different perceptions of risk. This is related to vulnerability and personal history. For example, someone with a weak immune system may express more concern about disease, and a firefighter might express concerns about fire safety. This is helpful to keep in mind if a disaster occurs in your community. Many or even the majority of people may be fine, but some people may need additional assistance to recover.

It can be tempting to focus on catastrophic events because they are so frightening. News media often has extended coverage of these type of events, but statistically speaking, they are unlikely to occur. This process allows us to prioritize our work and focus on the hazards that occur more frequently.

*If there is time in your session, ask the participants to reflect on and then share what factors may influence their understanding of risk. This prompt can yield important discussions about race, gender, age and ability. Taking these concerns seriously can make for a more inclusive and equitable disaster plan.*

## Fast Risk Facts



- 20 million “cloud-to-ground [lightning] flashes” occur every year in the United States (Good Steward, May 2016)
- The US averages 1,253 tornadoes annually. ([National Centers for Environmental Information](#). NOAA.)
- 35.6% of women and 28.5% of men in the United States have experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime. ([The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey](#), CDC Division of Violence prevention, 2010)
- 2.8 million older adults visit the Emergency Room due to fall-related injuries. (CDC, [National Center for Injury Prevention and Control](#). [Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System](#) (WISQARS))
- In 2012, there were no 7+ magnitude earthquakes in the United States, but there were 27 5-5.9 magnitude quakes. ([Earthquake Statistics](#), Earthquake Hazards Program, USGS)



### III. Reducing Overall Risk

**TIME:** 40 MINUTES

Next, we are going to apply the risk reduction formula to these hazards. With your partner, turn to Handout #3 and brainstorm activities that would boost capacity, decrease vulnerability and reduce the occurrence of the hazard. Select a hazard that you both thought might occur. When you finish one hazard move on to another hazard. Towards the end, we will discuss our final hazard, violence in your church. (25 minutes)

**Have each pair report back one risk-reducing action to the group using the following form: “We can reduce the risk for [HAZARD] by [ACTION].”**

- e.g. “We can reduce the risk for fire by making sure that everyone in the congregation knows where the fire extinguishers are located.” (5 minutes)

**Let's turn to the final hazard, violence in our church.**

How do you reduce the hazard of violence?

- Possible answers include: Advocating for comprehensive mental healthcare, supporting anti-violence initiatives in the community and referring individuals to mediation services as appropriate.

What actions or characteristics reduce vulnerability to the violence?

- Possible answers include: Key control, knowing our neighbors and having formal policies for childcare pick up,

What actions or characteristics improve capacity to respond to violence?

- Possible answers include: Having an evacuation drill for congregants, clearly posting emergency telephone numbers and the church address near the phones and training church leaders in first aid and de-escalation.

**Invite participants to share their thoughts and reactions.** (10 minutes)



## IV. Next Step Planning and Conclusion

**TIME:** 25 MINUTES

Individually, look back through Handout #3 and circle any risk-reducing activities that occur more than once. Many actions that reduce the risk for specific hazards will improve overall resilience to hazards. The goal now is to identify the steps that we can take so that we get the most benefit for our work.

**Ask participants to share if they identified activities that reduced the risk for more than one hazard. (5 minutes)**

*Distribute Handout #4. Invite participants to work with people from their congregation to fill out the next steps planning worksheet. At the end of this section, ask participants to share one action that they will take to help reduce risk for their congregation. (15 minutes)*

**Take a minute and summarize these points:**

- **We can reduce overall risk by:**
  1. *Reducing the hazard*
  2. *Increasing our capacity to respond*
  3. *Reducing our vulnerability*
- **Every person has different perceptions of risk.**
- **Small action items can reduce the overall risk for many hazards.**

**Ask for any final questions or comments.**

**Thank the group for their hard work. Point out that disaster preparedness is an ongoing and incremental process. Assure them that their efforts will help boost the resilience of their church community.**

### Additional Resources



[Tips and Lessons: Individual and Family Preparedness](#)

[Comprehensive Guide to Preparedness Planning Guide for Congregations](#)

[A Season of Resilience: Emergency Preparedness Kits](#)

[Disaster Timeline Facilitator's Guide](#)

[How To: Build a Church Preparedness Team](#)

[Thomas, Deborah S.K., Brenda D. Phillips, William E. Lovekamp, and Alice Fothergill. Eds. \*Social Vulnerability and Disasters\*. Second Edition. Boca Raton, FL: The Taylor & Francis Group, LLC, 2013.](#)

## Handout 1

$$\text{Risk} = \frac{\text{Hazard} \times \text{Vulnerability}}{\text{Capacity}}$$

**RISK:** Overall impact of the bad thing

- The overall effect of a negative event

**HAZARD:** A bad thing that could happen

- Any harmful event, either natural or human-made, that can threaten health, property, livelihood or cause environmental damage.<sup>1</sup>

**VULNERABILITY:** How acutely you feel the bad thing that could happen

- Qualities that increase susceptibility to a hazard, including but not limited to age, race, class, ability, citizenship, access to public information, safe buildings, etc.<sup>2</sup>

**CAPACITY:** The ability to minimize impact once the bad thing has happened

- Capability to address an event, including but not limited to: coping skills, knowledge, relationships and leadership.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hazard. The United Nations Office For Disaster Risk Reduction. August 30, 2007. <https://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/terminology>

<sup>2</sup> Vulnerability. The United Nations Office For Disaster Risk Reduction. August 30, 2007. <https://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/terminology>

<sup>3</sup> Capacity. The United Nations Office For Disaster Risk Reduction. January 23, 2009. <https://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/terminology>

## Handout 2

List possible hazards:

Now place those hazards in the grid below based on their probability and impact:

### SCENARIO PROBABILITY

C O N S E Q U E N C E		Frequent	Likely	Occasional	Seldom	Unlikely
	Catastrophic					
	Extensive					
	Serious					
	Minor					

## Handout 3

$$\text{Risk} = \frac{\text{Hazard} \times \text{Vulnerability}}{\text{Capacity}}$$

Event: \_\_\_\_\_

↓ Hazard?

↓ Vulnerability?

↑ Capacity?

Event: \_\_\_\_\_

↓ Hazard?

↓ Vulnerability?

↑ Capacity?

$$\text{Risk} = \frac{\text{Hazard} \times \text{Vulnerability}}{\text{Capacity}}$$

Event: \_\_\_\_\_

↓ Hazard?

↓ Vulnerability?

↑ Capacity?

Event: Violence in our church

↓ Hazard?

↓ Vulnerability?

↑ Capacity?

## Handout 4

### NEXT STEP PLANNING AND CONCLUSION

Look over your last two worksheets. You should have a long list of possible strategies that you could implement to decrease the likelihood of these hazards impacting your church, decrease your vulnerabilities to these hazards and increase your capacity to respond.

*What can you actually take on in the next six months? What actions might reduce the risk for more than one hazard? Circle what you'd like to do on the previous sheets. What is feasible?*

Goal	Activity	Person(s) Responsible	Date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have ushers walk people from their cars to the door on icy days</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Train ushers</li> <li>Schedule 1 extra usher during winter months</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mike (Usher Captain)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scheduled by Sep 1 to happen by Oct 15</li> </ul>