

# Developing a Family Disaster Plan

The family is the domestic church and is integral to the life of the parish. As such, families should be as prepared as the parish to face a disaster. Parish staff live in two worlds, one with their employer (the parish) and the other with their families at home. If a disaster was to strike and the parish staff and parishioners' families were not prepared, the parish community would be unable to adequately respond to the broader community.

Attached is a disaster preparedness guide that can be distributed to families. This is a family readiness guide produced by Catholic Charities USA that will prompt families to begin thinking about preparing themselves for disaster.

**We encourage parish staff to distribute these materials to all families within the parish.** The parish disaster committee could then host informal meetings with parishioners to review elements of a family disaster plan. The more involved and knowledgeable parishioners are in the preparation for a disaster, the better their ability to respond to such a disaster will be, resulting in less loss of life and property damage.

## Basic Steps to Disaster Preparedness



### Preparing your Family for a Disaster

Unfortunately, disasters are familiar to many Floridians. In the past few years, the Southeast region has been impacted by the worst flooding in recent history, experienced damaging hail storms and tornadoes, seen space shuttle debris rain down across the state, undergone massive fires in factories and plants, and become aware of the threat of terrorism to the community as it grieved with a nation on September 11, 2001.

Having experienced these disasters, we have learned that we can take some simple steps to protect our families and ensure the safety of our children, while at the same time making it easier to recover if and when we have to go through a future disaster. This family readiness guide is designed to help you and your family be prepared for future disasters.

## 1 Find Out What Can Happen To Your Family

From experience, we all know that the Southeast region is susceptible to natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes, and tornadoes. Depending on where you live, however, could put you at an even greater risk for a disaster. Parishioners whose houses are located in floodplains are more concerned with flooding than those who live safely outside the floodplain. Take these steps to find out what could happen to your family:

- ❑ Contact your Local Emergency Management Office or your local American Red Cross Chapter to find out which disasters could affect you specifically.
- ❑ Determine what types of disasters are likely to happen near you and how to prepare for each.
- ❑ Identify what your community's warning sirens sound like and what to do if you hear them.

## **2 Create a Family Emergency Plan**

### **Hold a family meeting: Keep it simple and work as a team!**

It is important to warn children - without overly alarming them - about potential disasters. Use the following guidelines to teach children about disaster and to make them feel as if they are helping in disaster planning.

- ❑ Tell children that a disaster is something that could hurt people or cause damage. Explain that “sometimes nature provides too much of a good thing”, like fire, rain, and wind.
- ❑ Explain how important it is to make a Family Disaster Plan.
- ❑ Tell children there are many people who can help them in a disaster.
- ❑ Have a common plan in case family members are separated:
  - ❑ Choose a place to go outside of your neighborhood in case you cannot go home.
  - ❑ Choose someone out-of-town to be your family contact.
- ❑ Fill out the local emergency phone numbers and child identification cards.
- ❑ Keep emergency phone numbers by each phone.
- ❑ Teach children:
  - ❑ How to call for help (emergency numbers).
  - ❑ When to call each emergency number.
  - ❑ How to dial long distance.
  - ❑ How to memorize the names and numbers of local and out-of-state emergency contacts.
- ❑ Show everyone how and when to turn off the utilities.
  - ❑ Locate the main electric fuse box, water service main, and natural gas main.
  - ❑ Keep a wrench near gas and water shut-off valves.
- ❑ Remember: if you turn off the gas, you will need a professional to turn it back on again.
- ❑ Do a home hazard hunt for items that can move, fall, break, or cause a fire.
- ❑ Plan home escape routes – two from each room.
- ❑ Find safe places in your home for each type of disaster.
- ❑ Designate “rally points” where you and your family can meet if a disaster happens when you are all away from home.
- ❑ Have all adults take a Red Cross First Aid and CPR Class.

### **If you have to evacuate...**

If you are told to evacuate, please take the following steps:

- ❑ In Florida, you may be asked to evacuate through a mandatory evacuation order issued by the local emergency management office. If the emergency management office recommends evacuating, take their advice and do so immediately. It could save your life.
- ❑ Listen to the radio, TV, or a NOAA weather radio for instructions from local officials. They will provide instructions on evacuation routes and shelter openings.
- ❑ Shut off water, gas, and electricity if told to do so.
- ❑ Leave a note telling when you left and where you are going.
- ❑ Call your family contact to tell them where you are going.
- ❑ Make sure you have all of your disaster supplies (see checklist)
- ❑ Secure doors and garage doors from the inside.
- ❑ Fill up your car with gasoline.
- ❑ Use evacuation routes recommended by officials.

## Hurricanes and Evacuation

You will have more time to prepare for evacuation in the event of a hurricane than during a hazardous materials spill. However, it will take more time to prepare your home and your family for this type of evacuation. Here are some steps to take before evacuating.

- ✓ If you live in a mobile home, **LEAVE**.
- ✓ If it is recommended you evacuate, take the advice and **LEAVE**.
- ✓ Cover windows, skylights, and sliding doors with shutters/boards.
- ✓ Wrap up irreplaceable items (family photos, videos, etc.) in plastic and pack them so you can take them if you evacuate.
- ✓ Take your family records and documents. If your home is damaged in a disaster, you will have to prove home ownership to the American Red Cross and FEMA.
- ✓ Move furniture away from windows and cover with plastic.
- ✓ Move lawn furniture inside with other loose outdoor items.
- ✓ Remove TV and cable antennas and turbines from the roof.
- ✓ Secure dumpsters and land-docked boats by filling them with water.
- ✓ Leave as early as possible – being stuck on an evacuation route as a hurricane strikes is not only scary but also dangerous.
- ✓ Remember any special dietary needs of your family.
- ✓ For the elderly or disabled, take all walkers, wheelchairs, extra oxygen or other special health care needs.
- ✓ Arrange for pets' safety. **DO NOT** leave pets tied up outside.
- ✓ Take bedding and essential clothing.
- ✓ Bring enough food/water/medicine to last for 3 days.

### **If you stay at home...**

If you decide to stay at home during a disaster, do the following:

- ❑ Only stay at home if you have **NOT** been ordered to leave.
- ❑ Prepare your home as if you were evacuating (see Hurricanes and Evacuation Checklist).
- ❑ Stay in a large center room with few or no windows.
- ❑ If flooding occurs, move to higher floors.
- ❑ Keep all windows and doors closed tightly.
- ❑ Monitor radio for news and weather reports continuously.
- ❑ Turn off any propane tanks. Unplug all unnecessary appliances.
- ❑ Fill bathtub and large containers with water for sanitary purposes.
- ❑ Use flashlights instead of candles. Cook with canned heat; **DO NOT USE** charcoal or pressurized gas inside!
- ❑ Turn refrigerator to maximum cold and open only when necessary.
- ❑ Turn off utilities if told to do so by authorities.
- ❑ If you are in a multiple-story building and away from the water, go to the first or second floor and take refuge in the halls or interior rooms.
- ❑ Stay inside until “all clear” is announced. If seeking shelter during a hurricane, do not leave your home when the eye of the storm passes – eye wall winds, the strongest of the storm, can start back up with very little notice.
- ❑ Be alert for and ready to seek shelter from tornadoes, which can happen during a hurricane or a severe thunderstorm.

## **3 Create a Disaster Supply Kit**

### **Use kit if evacuating or staying put in a disaster!**

When preparing for a disaster, use the “15 minute rule”. This rule states that any essential things you need to evacuate or prepare for a disaster should take you 15 minutes or less to get together. To make sure that items are readily accessible: (a) assemble the supplies in easy-to-carry containers like backpacks and duffle bags, (b) have important papers already packed in waterproof containers, and (c) have plastic sheeting easily available if needed.

Use this checklist to prepare your family disaster supplies kit (a copy of this list also is found in the forms section (Form 2-O) at the end of this manual).

#### **Household Items**

- Battery-powered radio
- Battery-powered flashlights
- Extra batteries
- Cash or travelers checks and change
- Map to follow evacuation routes/ find shelters
- Minimum 3-day supply of nonperishable, packaged or canned food (e.g. canned or dried juice mixes, powdered or canned milk, peanut butter, jelly, crackers, unsalted nuts, trail mixes, cereals, rice, cookies, hard candies, instant coffee, tea bags)
- Basic food seasoning (salt/pepper)
- Manual can opener
- Paper plates
- Cups
- Minimum 3-day supply of bottled drinking water – one gallon of water per person per day. Don't forget water for pets. Store water in sealed unbreakable containers. Replace every 6 months.
- First aid kit
- Fire extinguisher (small ABC type)
- Duct tape
- Waterproof matches
- Sewing kit
- Plastic storage containers
- Paper, pencils and pens
- Aluminum foil
- Plastic sheeting/tarps
- Basic tool kit (adjustable wrench, screwdrivers, hammer, etc.)

### **Family Documents (stored in a water proof container):**

- Birth certificates
- Marriage certificates
- Death certificates
- Ownership documents
- Insurance policies
- Passports/ visas
- Social Security cards
- Bond/stock issues
- Wills/ living trusts
- Medical records/ children's vaccination histories
- Photocopies of all cards carried in wallet
- Backup disks of computer information
- Irreplaceable photographs/videotapes/family heirlooms
- Inventory of personal property for filing insurance claims. List everything and include receipts of big ticket items.
- Videotape or photos of home(s)' contents to supplement your written inventory of your home.

### **Personal Needs**

- Clothing and bedding (for each family member)
- Sturdy shoes or work boots
- Rain gear
- Blankets and sleeping bags
- Hat and work gloves
- Thermal underwear
- Sunglasses
- Insect repellent and sun screen

### **Sanitation Supplies**

- Toilet paper, towelettes
- Soap, liquid detergent
- Feminine supplies
- Personal hygiene items
- Plastic garbage bags with ties
- Plastic bucket with tight lid
- Disinfectant
- Unscented household bleach

### **Baby Needs**

- Disposable diapers
- Formula
- Bottles
- Powdered milk
- Medications
- Changes of clothing

### **Adult/Elderly Needs**

- ❑ Extra months' supply of prescription medicine refills (Store in easily accessible bag in medicine cabinet, rotate pills as prescription is refilled).
- ❑ Walkers/ wheelchairs/canes
- ❑ Denture needs
- ❑ Extra set of prescription glasses/ contacts.
- ❑ Don't forget these odds and ends...
- ❑ Entertainment – Books, Toys, and Games
- ❑ Extra set of car keys.

### **Storing your Kit**

Choose a cool, dark location in which to store your kit (i.e. a closet or “safety corner” in the garage). If you live in an apartment or have limited space, be innovative. Other possible storage locations include under stairways or in a large box or plastic tub that can be covered with a tablecloth and used as an end table.

### **Layer and Monitor Your Supplies**

Layer supplies and keep them together in a container such as a plastic garbage can with wheels. Check the items every 6 months for expiration dates, changes in your children's clothing sizes and weather requirements. A good way to remember to inspect your kit is to do it when you set your clocks back and change your smoke detector batteries.

### **Use What You Already Have**

Use what you already have and prepare as if you are going camping for 3 days in the mountains with no facilities. If you are a camper, you have a head start: camping supplies, tent, camp stove, and water jugs can double as emergency supplies.

### **Tips for Storing and Using Water**

Purify water by boiling it for 5 –10 minutes or by adding drops of unscented household bleach containing 5.25% hypochlorite. FEMA recommends using 16 drops of bleach per one (1) gallon of water. Purification tablets or a filter system designed for backpackers also work well. Store water in plastic three-liter soda bottles instead of plastic milk-type jugs. Milk jugs will break down over time, while soda bottles last considerably longer. Consider freezing water so it will last until needed. Frozen water also can be used for non-emergency situations like camping, fishing, hunting, etc. However, don't forget to replace the water jugs when you get home.

## **4 Practice and Maintain Your Plan**

Without practice and maintenance, your family risks forgetting its disaster plan, and your disaster supplies will expire or be ruined. Use this schedule to remember to practice and maintain your plan.

### **Every Month**

Test your smoke alarms.

### **Every 6 Months**

Go over family disaster plan and do escape drills. Quiz children. Replace stored food and water. Make sure to rotate clothing according to the season.

### **Every Year**

Wash blanket/clothing supplies. Replace batteries in smoke alarms.