

## What should faith communities do in a time of crisis?

Faith communities are on the front lines when a disaster strikes. People turn to religious leaders for comfort, support and direction. But what are the best ways to help?

- 1. Build Relationships.** One of the most important things your congregation and faith leaders can do is to build relationships with emergency management leaders in your community long before a crisis occurs. Get to know the local first responders, meet with chaplains at your hospitals, reach out to other faith community leaders of all faith traditions. Work with these partners to make a disaster response plan, or find out how your congregation can fit into existing plans.
- 2. Assess.** Assess the resources you have. Do you have space to house people? A big kitchen and the ability to provide meals? Child care facilities. Medically trained members who can volunteer to provide care? A phone tree for alerting people to danger or changes in the situation? Do a thorough assessment and share this information with disaster response leaders in your neighborhood and religious organization.
- 3. Stay put.** When confronted with an emergency, our first impulse may be to rush toward the scene to try to help. First responders tell us that the best thing that we can do is to stay put, attend to the needs right where we are and listen for further instructions or requests for help. This is where those relationships, assessments and plans that you have already made come in handy. If you know your first responders, they will be aware of the practical assistance you can provide and will contact you if they need your help.
- 4. Practice your faith.** Open your doors for prayer. Provide a space for people to gather. Plan a special service. Offer pastoral care to your members and neighbors. Activate your phone tree to keep people informed.

It's hard to imagine that we will ever be affected by disasters. But planning ahead of time makes us more nimble, creative and confident if we are ever faced with these situations.

Wishing you joy and good health,  
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