

CHURCH CRISIS RELIEF PLAN

Mobilizing Your Church in the First 24 Hours

In the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks, Americans pulled together in silent acts of heroism. With the American response, more conflict on the horizon, and the unpredictability of nature many now turn to God and the Church for practical assistance, comfort, and questions of eternal importance. Here is a resource to help your church mobilize its members. It is a wonderful starting point outlining suggestions for a ten-step plan of action that will guide them in assisting local emergency personnel, victims, and their families within the first week of a crisis.

This resource was first provided by the Church Development and Education ministry of the Northern California and Nevada District of the Assemblies of God on October 4, 2001 and updated by Chaplain Services International in March, 2005.

To better equip its churches, the Church Development and Education team of the Northern California and Nevada District of the Assemblies of God, partnering with hundreds of ministers around the nation put together this resource to educate local congregations on how to mobilize their members to assist in crisis relief efforts. This resource is a launching pad, outlining suggestions for a ten-step plan of action that will guide you in assisting local emergency personnel, victims, and their families within the first week of the crisis.

After extending a national invitation for help through an e-mail conference, hundreds of crisis workers, pastors, and chaplains responded with helpful and practical suggestions for this resource. We faced the challenge of planning a one-day training seminar with authoritative resources in a matter of a week. We regret that in our attempt to meet critical deadlines, along with the flood of phone calls, e-mails, and letters, we were unable to compile a complete list of all the contributors to this project. We wish events had enabled more time to thank those who have helped us by providing this vital information for our churches. Theirs will be an eternal reward! For additional questions, submissions, or suggestions for improvement, please contact Chaplain Services International.

This resource consists of the following ten-step plan of action:

- [Inform The Church](#)
- [Call To Prayer](#)
- [Call An Emergency Board Meeting](#)
- [Contact Local Relief Agencies Regarding The Need For Assistance](#)
- [Resource And Mobilize Your Lay Ministries](#)
- [Involve Your Members In A Blood Drive](#)
- [Gather Practical Response Items](#)
- [Minister To Primary And Secondary Victims Located Closest To You](#)
- [Support United Efforts With Other Organizations](#)
- [Listen To Those Around You](#)

▲ Inform The Church

Communicate the facts clearly and simply. Do not believe every story you hear. It usually takes time for the press to verify facts and sort through the information. For example, minutes after the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center towers, FOX news reported that a small twin-engine aircraft with engine trouble crashed into the building. Other misinformation has been reported in the initial aftermath of the tsunami in Indonesia and the hurricanes in the gulf states in 2005.

A. Initial Contact: Phone tree to inform members of a situation and the prayer meetings that have been scheduled in response. Do this in an organized manner, one calling five others. Tell them that the church board is in the process of determining how the church will respond.

B. The Plan: Inform the church of the action plan that the church board has adopted and explain how they can be a part in making it happen.

C. Updates: Keep your church updated about the board's progress with their action plan and how the members are needed to fulfill it.

Call To Prayer

Ask each church family to begin to pray for the situation. Use your phone tree to continue providing updates and new needs for prayer.

Hearing about another random act of violence, the first response is usually to pray away the pain or pray that this will never happen again. But how can prayer be made, beyond the fear and shock and beyond the most obvious needs, for the issues of the kingdom? Here is a starting point to use for your scheduled prayer meetings.

A. Praise:

Though it is difficult, start with praise. Focus on God's character. Praise God that He is sovereign; that He has ultimate control over all, and that nothing takes Him by surprise. (Isaiah 45:5-7).

B. Petition and Intercession:

1. Ask God to use this situation to bring unprecedented spiritual openness to the people affected by the tragedy, and ask Him to reveal His love to them.
2. Ask God to guide and bless the ministry that will be thrust upon the church or community affected by the tragedy.
3. Ask God to empower the helpers with a powerful witness when they are called upon to speak about or reflect on the situation.
4. Ask God to stand against the enemy's attempts to make families experience unresolved anger or guilt over the loss of loved ones.
5. Ask God to focus the minds of public officials on the need for prayer and to provide people who will continue to pray for the situation.
6. Ask God to equip leaders who will be called upon to mentor and minister to people in the aftermath of tragedy. (Hebrews 13:20,21).
7. Ask God—for yourself and others—for a passion and love for Christ that drives out fear (1 John 4:18).
8. Ask God to give you—and others—specific acts of kindness, compassion, and friendship to incorporate into your life in response to the act of violence.

C. Thanksgiving:

1. Thank God that the enemy has made a tactical error, since martyrdom and persecution have always strengthened the Church, and that God will use for good what Satan has intended for harm (Genesis 50:20,21).
2. Thank God for the people who will be drawn to seek God because the overwhelming nature of the tragedy leaves them nowhere else to turn (John 2:1-9).

3. Thank God for a vivid reminder of your own mortality and vulnerability, asking Him to prepare your heart and spirit for a faithful response when you are faced with tragedy.

▲ Call An Emergency Board Meeting

Call an official emergency meeting of the church board as soon as possible. Use your board members to help coordinate a church-wide response and assist with relief agencies.

A. Brainstorming: Determine practical ways your church can respond. Give each member the opportunity to add ideas to a chalkboard. Then determine which ones are most feasible and beneficial for your community. Here are some suggestions that may help you guide the brainstorming process.

1. Have your group list a variety of problems connected with the situation. Come to a consensus (by vote) as to the most needful problem on the list.
2. List possible solutions; form a consensus on the most feasible solution.
3. List possible ways to implement the solution; form a consensus on an implementation plan.
4. List team leaders and specific duties they will perform to help the team implement the plan.
5. Enlist people to assist the team leaders.
6. Create an "Action Plan Status Board" so you can check off items as they are completed and be aware of items that need extra attention.
7. Set a time schedule for completing the project.
8. Set periodic meetings to assess progress and make needful adjustments to the plan.
9. Have a final evaluation meeting to determine the success of the plan.
10. Determine whether the operation was successful or is a project that should be continued. If the project is completed, go back to step 1.

B. Donations: Appoint a small team of board members to spend one or two days researching worthy and credible donor recipients. Research and contact relief agencies regarding financial donations. Contact local agencies and the agencies referenced below. Americans have always been willing to open their hearts—and their wallets—in response to disasters. In your haste to give, however, beware of proliferating charity scams. Unsolicited bulk e-mail and online postings asking for money in the name of victims or the American Red Cross are common. So are door-to-door or telephone solicitations. Make this information available to your church people so they can contribute through the church if they desire. Here are some tips to help steer your task force.

1. Beware of excessive pressure for on-the-spot donations.
2. Do not give cash. Give a check or money order to the charity.
3. Ask how much of your donation will be used for relief and how much will go toward other programs or administration.
4. Access reports on national charities at www.give.org

5. Don't give out your credit card number.
6. Ask for written information that describes the charity's programs and finances.
7. Check to see if the organization you chose is listed on www.guidestar.org, the search engine that powers www.helping.org and www.justgive.org. Guidestar lists over 700,000 charities that have 501-C3 status — that means that these organizations have charitable status from the IRS. Donations to these organizations are also tax-deductible.

C. Budgeting: Ask your board to provide finances for educational materials and resources to help respond the need.

▲ **Contact Local Relief Agencies Regarding The Need For Assistance**

A. Partnering Organizations: Contact local, state, and national relief agencies to determine the most urgent needs. You may be able to partner with these organizations to provide volunteers, physical needs, shelter, clothing, or food. These agencies include:

1. **The Salvation Army:** The Salvation Army, an international movement, is an evangelical part of the universal Christian Church. Its message is based on the Bible. Its ministry is motivated by the love of God. Its mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in His name without discrimination. Commissioned Officers are ordained ministers, trained at the Army's own schools. USA National Headquarters, Post office Box 269, Alexandria, Virginia 22313, United States (off) 703-684-5500 (fax) 703-684-3478 (web) <http://www.salvationarmyusa.org>
2. **The American Red Cross Disaster Services:** Each year, the American Red Cross responds immediately to more than 67,000 disasters, including house or apartment fires (the majority of disaster responses), hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, hazardous materials spills, transportation accidents, explosions, and other natural and man-made disasters. Red Cross disaster relief focuses on meeting people's immediate emergency disaster-caused needs. When a disaster threatens or strikes, the Red Cross provides shelter, food, and physical and mental health services to address basic human needs. In addition to these services, the core of Red Cross disaster relief is the assistance given to individuals and families affected by disaster to enable them to resume their normal daily activities independently. The Red Cross also feeds emergency workers, handles inquiries from concerned family members outside the disaster area, provides blood and blood products to disaster victims, and helps those affected by disaster to access other available resources. <http://www.redcross.org>
3. **American Blood Centers:** Founded in 1962, America's Blood Centers (ABC) is the national network of nonprofit, independent community blood centers. ABC members are licensed and regulated by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration. ABC members are located in 45 states, serving more than 125 million people at 450 blood donations sites. ABC members provide blood products and services to more than 3,100 hospitals nationwide. Please call 1-888-BLOOD- 88 or visit www.americasblood.org to learn the location of the nearest center and to schedule an appointment.
4. **Chaplain Programs:** Chaplain Ron Richardson is licensed in crisis relief and has formed a Critical Incident Response Team of chaplains in the Central California area called FAITH (Faith-based Assistance, Intervention, and Trauma Help). They have several chaplains who have Basic CISM training, who can help you develop a regional team. You can reach Ron via e-mail through Chaplain Services International.
5. **Many Large Law Enforcement Agencies:** Many large metropolitan areas, such as the Bay Area, Sacramento, Fresno PD, San Jose, Ventura, Bakersfield, Los Angeles, Orange County, and San Diego and other large metropolitan areas around the U.S. have highly trained teams that can offer training and assistance. Contact your local emergency services organization (police, fire, emergency medical) to find out how you can become trained and prepared.

Keep in mind that most rural areas either have no services for themselves or others or they may be poorly or improperly trained. In the event of an emergency, these agencies will be busy fulfilling their duties so it is important that you become trained to be an extra resource.

B. Denominational Agencies: Contact your denominational offices to see if they have mobilized a network to work through the local area. Some of these would include:

1. **Assemblies of God Disaster Relief:** The Benevolences ministry of Disaster Relief helps rebuild Assemblies of God churches damaged or destroyed by tornadoes, floods, hurricanes, and other catastrophes. Because concerned friends have supported this vital ministry throughout the year, funds can be made available almost immediately to churches in need. They can begin rebuilding and ministering to a community who needs them more than ever before. Information can be obtained from their web site at http://ag.org/benevolences/disasterrelief/index_disaster.cfm

2. **Convoy of Hope:** This is an Assemblies of God ministry with headquarters in Springfield, Missouri, that can serve as a resource or as consultants in your relief training. Convoy of Hope's intensive disaster relief involvement throughout our movement and our ongoing relief efforts all over the world have created a platform for ministry and training that our local churches benefit from. Randy Rich, from the Northern California and Nevada's, heads up this Disaster Response. Randy's insight, experience, and training are a tremendous asset to the local church. His expertise is available to you as the need arises within the district. He can be reached at Convoy of Hope, www.convoyofhope.org (ph) 417- 823-8998.

Resource and Mobilize Your Lay Ministries

Resource and mobilize your lay ministries and leaders with appropriate ministry tools to widen your ministry platform.

A. Resource your lay ministries and leaders:

Since new information comes out each day, the best thing to do is appoint a person in each area to spend an hour or so each night searching the Internet for helpful resources. Here are some resources to get you started.

1. **U.S. Department of Education:** The department has excellent articles on how to explain tragedy and crisis to children from the vantage point of parents, educators, and counselors. They can be obtained from their web site at <http://www.ed.gov>

2. The **National Incident Management System (NIMS)** is a department of the **Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA)** and has free online training available. If you wish to be an emergency or disaster response volunteer you must complete the IS100 and IS700 courses. Go to <http://www.nimsonline.com/>. From the menu select ICS Training, then select IS100 or IS700 and follow the instructions.

3. **General Council of The Assemblies of God.** The General Council has excellent resources available from Christian educators. One is entitled "Comforting Children in Times of Crisis" by Sharon Ellard. Six suggestions are provided for responding to young children who are trying to understand this recent tragedy. It can be obtained from their web site at www.ag.org.

4. **Other religious organizations.** Many other religious organizations have emergency and disaster response programs and suggestions. Please contact your organization to find out what they have available.

5. **The American Red Cross:** The American Red Cross provides brochures in several different languages to help victims and their families cope with tragedy and crisis. In addition to the online brochures, printable versions are available that may be distributed to others in your community. The following brochures are available online at <http://www.redcross.org>

- "How Do I Deal With My Feelings?" Disasters create an abrupt change in reality. Following the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, for thousands and thousands of people, reality now includes the loss of loved ones—spouses, significant others, children, other relatives, friends, and neighbors.
- "Helping Young Children Cope with Trauma" Disasters are upsetting to everyone involved. A child's view of the world as a safe and predictable place is temporarily lost. Children become afraid that the event will happen again and that they or their family will be injured or killed.
- When Bad Things Happen: The recent terrorist attacks may have caused you to question a number of things you have always believed about your own safety, and the safety of your family and friends.
- "Why Do I Feel Like This?" There are two types of disaster: natural disasters like the damage that results from a hurricane, a tornado, floods, forest fires, volcanoes erupting and earthquakes, and disasters that result from an intentional act of a human. When a disaster is the result of a human's action, our reactions are more severe and become much more complicated and difficult to overcome.

6. International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF): ICISF is a non-profit, open membership foundation dedicated to the prevention of disabling stress through the provision of education, training, and support for those serving in a disaster response team. The organization is located at 3290 Pine Orchard Lane, Suite 106, Ellicott City, MD 21042. (Ph) 410-750-9600 (Fax) 410-750-9601. Their web site provides a hot line, several emergency and disaster service links, and many interesting articles on crisis intervention at <http://www.icisf.org>.

7. The American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress (AAETS). AAETS is a multidisciplinary network of professionals who are committed to the advancement of intervention for survivors of trauma. The organization provides a periodical, certified training in forensic traumatology, emergency crisis response, motor vehicle trauma, disability trauma, and a school of crisis response. They are located at: 368 Veteran Memorial Highway, Commack, New York 11725 (ph) 631-543-2217 (fax) 631-543-6977 or via their web site at <http://www.aaets.org>

B. Mobilize your ministries:

1. Bible studies and small groups: Take a short departure from your regularly scheduled topics and provide Bible studies for all ages that focus on a biblical response to crisis, tragedy, mourning, and anger. Enlist the best people possible to lead the Bible studies. Also enlist teams to function as caregivers to those attending the study and others to promote the Bible series to the public. Schedule the Bible studies at various times and locations to accommodate as many schedules as possible.

2. Organize your church's talent pool: List your congregation's abilities and talents and group them under various headings such as:

- Food preparation and service
- Building trades – Carpentry, roofers, plumbers, etc.
- Mechanical trades – Auto / truck repair (engine, drive train, transmission, body work, etc.)
- Care Givers – Doctors, nurses, elder care, childcare, etc.
- Administrators – Business people who know how to organize people and projects
- General services – misc.

3. Partner with other churches and Christian organizations: Organize a Care Team ministry in your community by networking with other churches, businesses, service organizations, and schools that are willing to organize their resources as explained in the previous section, and work on cooperative community efforts.

4. Make your facility available: An intact roof or food pantry at a church is a starting place for a temporary shelter for displaced persons/residents/patients. Local citizens need a point of focus to channel relief through at a tightly secured disaster area. With some advanced but basic training your church facility can be designated a Red Cross Emergency Center. If a church has this designation and an individual is designated as the Center Manager, then the church is free to not only meet the immediate physical needs of those who come but they are also free to help people with their spiritual needs as well, something that Red Cross does not address. It is also important to note that during

a disaster, the number of Red Cross volunteers may be limited. If you are authorized to manage your own Red Cross site it will help eliminate overburdening of volunteers.

5. Become part of the big picture: Volunteer your services to help your community draft a disaster/crisis response plan. Find out if your community has a Citizen Corp program and get involved. Citizen Corps facilitates Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training to equip you as a volunteer emergency responder. To find a Citizen Corps program near you, go to CitizenCorps.gov and use the zip code search.

- Emergency medical needs.
- Emergency housing / shelter
- Emergency food and clothing aid
- Other logistics needs, such as security, traffic control, and networking with regional agencies for crisis response.
- Critical Incident Intervention Counseling services—a list of teams and professionals available in your area.

Involve Your Members In A Blood Drive

To host a blood drive, contact your local blood agency to determine the best way to donate blood, determine agency locations and times for blood donations.

A. Partner with a local agency: Call 1-888-blood-88 or visit www.americasblood.org to find the nearest donation center.

B. Meet specific needs: It is important to listen for the types of blood the centers are accepting at the time you want to give blood. During the recent New York City terrorist attack, many centers were asking for only donors of O negative. It is important for people to know their blood type.

C. Follow up with needs: It is also important to remember to continue to give blood in the weeks or months following a tragedy.

Gather Practical Response Items

After contacting the appropriate agencies to determine what is needed:

A. Coordinate collection: Coordinate the collection of materials and resources to meet existing physical needs. This could include things, such as:

1. Clothing
2. Blankets
3. Food
4. First aid supplies
5. Coats
6. Shoes
7. Baby items
8. Toys

B. Centralize the reception location: Have families bring supplies to church so all can be taken to a relief agency at one time. A single church is limited to the resources of its people. Networking with other churches and with the community greatly improves the ability to respond to needs that may be beyond the ability of one group.

Minister To Primary And Secondary Victims Located Closest To You

A. Primary victims:

1. **United States Justice Department:** The Justice Department's Office of Victims of Crime has set up a phone line to provide information to families about victims and about services for survivors and their rights. They can be reached by phone at 1-800-331-0075
2. **Crisis Counseling:** Provide emergency counseling for people who have been traumatized. You can do this by partnering with organizations that have trained counselors and allowing them to use your facilities. You can even have people call and schedule appointments at your office during the scheduled counseling hours.

NOTE: Only trained and certified counselors should do Crisis Intervention Counseling for traumatized persons. Although some clergy may have many years of ministry experience, professional training is necessary to enable the counselor to evaluate the various stages of trauma a person may be experiencing – whether the person may have Post-Traumatic Stress or may be gravitating to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Persons certified in Critical Incident Stress Management are trained to assess emotional, physical, behavioral, and cognitive symptoms and the severity of their condition which, if not properly diagnosed and treated, can lead to PTSD. Furthermore, certified CISM counselors are trained to know their counseling limitations and the proper time to make referrals for professional help.

3. **Victim Information:** Publish a list of other organizations that people can call for victim information requests. Your local hospitals may also have received victims and need ministry as well.

B. Family members of victims:

1. **Expressions of love and sympathy:** Send cards, letters, and drawings to victim's families. These can include work done by your children and youth. The purpose for this is to share sympathy with the families of the victims. This should be coordinated with agencies that have contact with the families.
2. **Follow-up care:** If you have a good, ongoing relationship with the victims, place them on your calendar for regular follow-up. Persons who experience traumatic events re-experience stress at regular intervals (e.g., three months, six months, one year, eighteen months, annually). Typically, the body (which does not know the difference between physical and emotional stress) begins, subconsciously, to experience stress about two weeks before the "anniversary" date (anniversary intervals as listed previously). Persons who have lost a spouse often experience adverse physical symptoms, such as high blood pressure, out-of-control blood sugar, irritability, or other symptoms years after the event (e.g., his/her birthday, anniversary, date of death or funeral). Giving concerned attention and information concerning this stress cycle helps the victim deal with the event with less anxiety.

C. Emergency personnel:

1. **Expressions of appreciation:** You can also send cards, letters, and drawings to military, rescue and relief workers involved with the aftermath of the situation and to their families. The purpose is to encourage the workers and let the families know you are joining with them in prayer for their family member.
2. **Secondary personnel:** Simple acts of kindness can be expressed in many ways. In New York one young girl made chocolate chips cookies and passed them out to the workers as a way to say thank you. It is important to remember that the people who are cleaning up after a crisis have families of their own, are concerned and affected by the situation, and appreciate a friendly face and a warm smile.

Support United Efforts With Other Organizations

Assist in any local meetings or gatherings to show support. This demonstrates a combined effort by the entire community, city hall, business, civic groups, and churches.

A. Build Relationships! During the New York City terrorist attack many local pastors were not allowed at ground zero, while more experienced and connected teams from the outside were allowed in. These teams had built relationships with those in command. If your church can begin to build relationships with the emergency service professionals in your own community BEFORE a crisis happens, your group will be some of the first ones called upon to help. Pastors and churches have to get out of their buildings and bridge relationships for the future. The police and fire departments are wonderful places to start.

B. Personal heroism: Encourage your people to take personal responsibility to bring hope to your community.

1. Put out some kind of visual reminder on the kitchen table, fireplace, or outside porch, reminding your family and friends to pray without ceasing.

2. Schedule a special time of family prayer in which your family spends ten minutes praying for God's help and hope for your friends and family and country.

3. Make yourself available to talk with your children. Give your younger children the assurances they need and your older children the opportunity to ask the tough questions that may be on their minds.

4. Invite your coworkers to join you in church.

5. Give your coworkers cassette tapes of sermons that address the issue from a perspective of hope and faith.

6. Coordinate a neighborhood show of support by mobilizing your neighbors to light a candle in their windows at the same time each night.

Listen To Those Around You

Listen to the people around you. Your community might or might not be located within the emergency area. Secondary victims occur everywhere. Watch and listen to the people around you. Be ready to assist them and serve them in whatever way necessary.

A. Understand that different types of stress, trauma, fatigue, and victims will be present.

1. **Four types of stress:**

- Eustress – the good kind of stress that keeps us challenged
- Occupational Stress—recognize your limits. Rest; take breaks, or a sabbatical.
- Cumulative Stress—a series of small crises that can accumulate and bring about an overload condition.
- Critical Incident Stress—Our natural response to an abnormal situation that evokes a strong emotional, behavioral, physical or cognitive response. Crisis Intervention Counseling is strongly recommended.

2. **Secondary Trauma**—Trauma experienced by caregivers (police, fire, EMT, chaplains, pastors, or other personnel) when dealing with a traumatized person either at the scene or away from the scene.

3. **Compassion Fatigue**—The cumulative stress experienced by caregivers who give aid to victims in several situations in a short period of time.

4. **Vicarious Victimization** — The trauma we experience as we watch, hear, or read the news of a terrible event (e.g., too much attention to the news concerning the terrorist attack and/or anticipation of our country going to war or anticipation of some other traumatic event).

NOTE: We must be careful how much of this tragic news we allow our children to view.

5. Secondary Victims

- Witnesses of traumatic events
- Friends of victims
- Children who witness Domestic Violence

B. Use good trauma and crisis listening skills:

1. **Assumptions:** Do not assume you know what a person needs before you take the time to listen to the person's story.

2. **Questions:** Here are a few simple questions you can use to help a person tell you his or her story.

- Where were you when this event happened?
- How have you been feeling since the event occurred?
- What can we do to move on from here?

3. **Listening Skills:** Here are a few skills you can develop in order to become a better listener.

- Don't assume you know how the person is feeling, or what he or she is thinking.
- Listen with your full attention. Do not begin to think of your response to the person while he or she is talking to you. If your mind is not focused on hearing the person, you probably are not.
- Repeat or restate the person's comments to him or her make sure you have heard the person correctly.
- Do not feel you must give an answer to everything a person says. Many people just need to talk. They are not looking for specific answers to many of their questions. They simply need an opportunity to release the pent-up emotions, thoughts, and pain they are experiencing.

You may contact Chaplain Services International more information on crisis preparation, intervention, and response.