

Broad Topics

Small Churches do most of their work through informal structures- however:

- Family Churches (usually under 75 members) – if they have a pastor, pastor is a resource or a consultant to the Families who run the church.
- Pastoral Churches (usually under 125 members) – Pastor is the quarterback of the team – he is on the field and is often the most important player.
- Programmatic Churches (usually under 200 members) - Pastor is the coach of the team the programs and their leaders run the church – this is very normal in large churches it does happen in some small churches.

Disaster Assistance:

- Relief – the day of the storm/event and the week that follows.
- Recovery – the week after the event and maybe up to a year.
- Rebuild – usually after the first 30 days and into the next 1-4 years.

Before the “event”:

In my context we normally have 3 to 7 days to know a storm is coming – not so with fires, tornados, earthquakes, and etc.

- Contact the vulnerable – “what are your plans?” “How can we help?”
- Contact the Session – same two questions – but also perhaps can I/we have some authority to act. Big churches will have a policy – small churches tend to act informally.

After the Event:

I write primarily from a Pastoral perspective –

- Have you taken care of your family – home? In my case I get things stabilized yet rarely finished.
- Take stock of your congregation – can you call? Can you visit? Word of mouth? What is the extent of damage? Usually first 24 hrs. there is limited phones, limited knowledge. How are the facilities?
- What are next steps (capability and capacity):
 - Who are you skilled members? What are their skills? Are they available? Usually local members are either, recovering themselves, helping others, or heading back to work within 48 hrs of the event. We don’t have many who are either available or extremely handy. Talk about what 1% looks like...
 - Will you take an active role (doing relief work) or a more passive role (supporting relief work)? In other words, what is your capability to help and what is your capacity to help?
 - I like to think very specifically about how deep do we want to get and how do we get out?

A timeline (this will vary dramatically based on location, the event itself, and the congregation):

I believe a relief pantry is the easiest way to help I plan it carefully in terms of exit strategy (I have run one for several weeks and I have run them as large as two warehouses making trips over 3 states for 4 months). A small church cannot sustain this work very long.

Decision point: who will take the lead? Pastor or layperson. Next a word on clothing and etc is very labor intensive, slow moving, you have to make a decision early on if you want to get involved with this, clothes often become a long term problem to get rid of for relief workers.

Relief:

ADULT XL
First 72 hours – bottled water, electrolytes, MRE's canned food, shelf stable food, tarps, nails, hammers, diapers (all ages), diapers are priority during this time but most of these supplies are not desirable after 72 hours. Heavy duty bags. Fuel and oil for saws and generators will continue to be a need for at least a week.

Chainsaw crews, tarp crews, very hard to move teams around at this point. Cellphones may not work.

Day 3 through 7 – electrolytes, diapers all ages, cleaning supplies, (no clothes), some water but not much, no more MREs these are undesirable and go to waste every storm, shovels, bags, wheelbarrows, chainsaws. Fuel, oil etc. Storage bins. In rural areas stuff is hard to get so food, drinks might continue into this period.

Day 8 – 14 – electrolytes (we go through pallets of these every storm), cleaning supplies, muck out supplies, tarps winding down, small air conditioners, no clothes, no water, no blankets etc. Small appliances – and storage items etc... **DOG FOOD**

Day 15-21 – relief supply wind down. Fuel needs should be winding down as well. I am always thinking of exit strategy. A church is not a relief agency – a small church cannot maintain its function as a worshipping community and be a relief agency it does not have the capacity to do this – trust me.

Recovery:

Decision point – are you going to work on direct recovery? You may not have the skills or the people it is ok to hand this to local groups like Samaritan's Purse. Leader cannot run pantry and recovery efforts must have at least 5 volunteers at this point. Can you house volunteers or support those who do? Your best mission may be to cook meals, help clean up someone else's facilities.

First 72 hours – emergency work – tarps up, trees cut, yards cleared. Might begin clearing homes if possible (the sooner the better in a water event).

Days 3-30: save items in homes that are at risk of mold etc. storage locations, including the church.

Decision point: Who is running the recovery efforts? Pastor will need help by now – they cannot maintain the work of shepherding and running recovery efforts.

Rebuild:

A small church needs to be very modest in this approach. 3-5 projects at most. If you have a coordinator and financial support you can consider more.

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Return to normalcy must occur

