

Disaster Response Plan

Shenandoah Presbytery

I. Introduction

A. Background

This plan defines roles and responsibilities across the Presbytery for response to disasters. It recognizes our relationships with local and national disaster assistance organizations and develops an organization structure and communication paths within the Presbytery. These response protocols will facilitate the flow of information to bring appropriate resources to those most in need. This plan is tailored around several unique characteristics of our Presbytery, but also is based on training and materials provided by Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA), a ministry of the PC(USA), supported primarily by One Great Hour of Sharing.

This plan serves as a beginning of an evolutionary and expanding system of connecting members of our Presbytery to resources and needs both inside and outside of our boundaries. It is hoped that future iterations of this plan can serve as a model for congregations to develop their own specific disaster plans.

There are many volunteers in the Presbytery who have experience with disaster response efforts in Florida, the Gulf Coast, and in more local emergencies. This plan is designed to focus this experience in an organized manner to prepare and respond to future disasters both within the Presbytery and reaching out to other parts of the nation and the world. It recognizes that all disasters are local. Therefore, pastors play a key leadership role in disaster situations and often require an extra measure of emotional and spiritual support.

B. Rational

Shenandoah Presbytery, as a collection of church families, characterizes itself as a *community of Christ for worship, nurture, and mission*. As such, it is important to us to be a part of the healing love of Christ by caring for communities adversely affected by crises and catastrophic events – both natural and human-caused. From PDA's perspective presbyteries are gateways for an organized response to disaster. To be effective in this ministry, we recognize the need for careful preparation, communication, and mobilization plans that reach across our many churches and can be activated in a timely manner.

Presbyteries and congregations need to have good communication plans in place in the event of a disaster. Often without reporting from the local community, the Presbytery (and Synod) is dependent on news accounts rather than first-hand information, which could lead to an uneven or inadequate response.

C. Scope

Disaster response addressed by this plan moves in two directions. It reaches inward to churches and communities experiencing disaster events within the boundaries of Shenandoah Presbytery. It also includes reaching out to areas in need beyond our Presbytery. It will become part of a larger Presbytery Disaster Plan that also addresses

protection and recovery of the Presbytery office facility, a training plan and model disaster plan for congregations, and a list of disaster response resources.

The nature of disasters covered by this plan is purposely left unspecified. This plan is not tied to a specific class of disasters. Disasters are events that cause human suffering or create human needs that survivors cannot alleviate without spiritual, monetary, material, and/or physical assistance.

Disaster planning covers three distinct phases: preparation, immediate response, and recovery. Our response philosophy includes offering a ministry of presence, assessing need, and coordinating a response. An adequate response meets physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. Special attention must be paid to care of pastors who often bear a tremendous leadership role in local disasters. We will do this by:

- Identifying experienced individuals and congregational resources within the Presbytery that can respond to a disaster,
- Developing a response organization and communication protocols that can be activated as needed,
- Managing donated material and financial resources,
- Training individuals and building resources for response, and
- Linking our resources among:
 - Presbytery churches
 - Community-based and ecumenical response organizations
 - National and international relief agencies.

We remain especially attentive to responding to those of our communities with limited personal options and resources to overcome the chaos often delivered by disasters.

Although this plan focuses primarily on responding to disasters within the Presbytery, a protocol for responding to national situations is included. We recommend using the resources and connections provided by PDA for response to national and international disasters.

II. Disaster Response Organization

A. Presbytery Disaster Response Team

A Disaster Response Team (DRT) will be formed at the Presbytery level. The functions of this team are to:

- Assist Mission Communities (MCs) with creating DRTs
- Coordinate a rapid response to local and national disasters
- Form and activate communication protocols as needed
- Ensure that pastors affected by disasters receive pastoral care
- Disseminate assessment and response information to affected churches and responding churches, PDA, and other organizations including local inter-faith networks and Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD)

- Provide information for the news media
- Develop and maintain a comprehensive Disaster Plan
- Plan training for DRT members and field volunteers
- Liaison with inter-faith and civic disaster response agencies, and provide representatives as requested
- Develop and maintain master phone lists of MC DRT members and field volunteers
- Recommend creation of financial accounts to receive and disburse relief funds
- Review and revise this plan as needed.

The Disaster Response Team will be organized as a sub-committee of Presbytery Council, reporting directly to the Council. It will include the following members:

- Director
- Co-director
- Mission Community (MC) representatives (minimum one from each MC)
- General Presbyter
- Presbytery Communications Coordinator.

Non-staff DRT members will normally serve a three-year term that can be renewed.

The responsibilities of the Director can often be shared or delegated. The Co-Director provides back-up availability and general assistance to the Director. As a leadership team their responsibilities include:

- Convene and chair quarterly meetings of the DRT
- Coordinate recruiting of members of the DRT
- Maintain routine contact with and support for MC DRTs
- Coordinate training of DRT members across the Presbytery
- During times of disaster, activate the DRT and coordinate information flow to/from the appropriate MC DRTs; communicate directly with the General Presbyter, Communications Coordinator, other members of the DRT, and members of MC DRTs
- Coordinate a Presbytery response to any disaster brought to the attention of the DRT including ministry of presence visits, assessments of need, delivering spiritual care, and coordinating volunteer response
- Coordinate communication with other inter-faith and civil disaster response agencies; recommend requests to PDA
- Report training accomplished, disaster response actions, and lessons learned to the Presbytery Council.

B. Mission Community Disaster Response Teams

The ministry of disaster response fits well within the vision and structure of our Mission Communities. Each Mission Community is expected to form at least one DRT. These teams are a critical part of disaster response because these are the people who can lead and coordinate a local response. Some MCs that include different geographic areas may want to form more than one DRT.

The functions of this team are to:

- Facilitate communication among churches and ensure information is passed to the Presbytery DRT
- Form response teams to help assess the need for an expanded response
- Coordinate response from incoming teams (outside the MC)
- Assign a Disaster Coordinator in the case of a local disaster
- Provide support for pastors of affected churches
- Coordinate disaster response with local agencies.

Each MC DRT will include the following members:

- Director
- Co-Director
- Field workers.

MC DRT members will normally serve a three-year term that can be renewed.

The responsibilities of the Director can often be shared or delegated. The Co-Director provides back-up availability and general assistance to the Director. As a leadership team, their responsibilities include:

- Convene and chair quarterly meetings of the MC DRT
- Coordinate recruiting of members of the MC DRT
- Establish an emergency communication plan within the MC (e.g., calling tree)
- Assign a representative to the Presbytery DRT
- Coordinate training of volunteers across the MC
- During times of disaster, activate the MC DRT and coordinate information flow to/from the appropriate congregations; communicate directly with the Presbytery DRT
- Coordinate a MC response to any disaster brought to the attention of the MC DRT including ministry of presence visits, assessments of need, delivering spiritual care, and coordinating volunteer response
- Coordinate communication with other inter-faith and civil disaster response agencies; recommend requests for PDA assistance to the Presbytery DRT
- Report training accomplished, disaster response actions, and lessons learned to the Presbytery DRT.

III. Response and Communication Protocols

The principle methods of communication during disaster situations will be direct phone/cell phone contact among Pastors and DRT Directors. Information can be passed throughout the Presbytery via the Key Church Communicators (KCC).

Guidelines for communication and response are provided by PDA. The following protocol is recommended for responding to disasters within Shenandoah Presbytery and is based on a PDA model.

A. Pastor

1. Remain sheltered until danger passes.
2. Assess your own damage and attend to loved ones and yourself first.
3. When it is safe, assess the general situation and physical needs of your neighbors, congregation, and community.
4. Respond to the immediate needs of survivors in cooperation with local emergency response agencies.
5. Report your status and immediate needs to the Presbytery DRT.
6. Undergird all efforts with spiritual support to the survivors in cooperation with other spiritual leaders of the community. (No secular agency is equipped to perform this unique and vital role.)
7. Coordinate efforts of the congregation, relying as much as possible on church members to lead work teams – focusing on those in the community with the most need.

B. Presbytery DRT

1. Remain sheltered until danger passes.
2. Assess your own damage and attend to loved ones and yourself first.
3. Communicate with DRT members via phone and decide if/when to activate the DRT.
4. When it is safe, move to the Presbytery office if necessary to initiate and receive communications.
5. Activate a MC DRT if necessary. Contact pastors in affected areas to begin an assessment of the local situation.
6. Send a communication to all KCCs with initial information about the disaster and the areas affected.
7. Together make a “ministry of presence” visit to all affected areas. Report initial findings to PDA, Synod executive, and neighboring presbyteries.
8. Request PDA support as appropriate.
9. Assist MC DRTs in coordinating response from the MC and other incoming resources.
10. Where appropriate, arrange for long-term recovery partnerships among Presbytery churches and other inter-faith and civic long-term recovery organizations.
11. Create financial accounts and authority to receive and disperse relief donations.

C. Presbytery Disaster Response Team Director, Co-Director

1. In addition to the above DRT items, assemble information to send an update communication to all churches via the KCCs about the current status of areas affected and any expected needs.
2. Direct a complete assessment of damaged churches and community needs.
3. Communicate needs to MC DRTs and assist them with coordinating volunteer responses when it is safe to send in field workers.
4. Establish a regular meeting schedule for the Presbytery DRT as long as the situation warrants support from the Presbytery and national organizations including PDA.
5. If necessary, take the initiative to convene an Inter-faith Disaster Response Network. This may include representatives from VOAD, PDA, Red Cross, Salvation Army, FEMA, UMCOR, and other inter-faith response groups.
6. As FEMA and insurance companies respond, begin a list of “unmet needs” that can serve as an assignment guide for volunteer work teams. Enlist the aid of local church members in this survey, paying special attention to the poor, minorities, disabled, elderly, and uninsured. Coordinate this effort through the Inter-faith Disaster Response Network.
7. Assess and respond to spiritual care needs, especially support for pastors of affected churches.
8. Seek profession advice as needed from a panel of advisors (see Long-Term Recovery section below).

D. Mission Community Disaster Response Director, Co-Director

1. Remain sheltered until danger passes.
2. Assess your own damage and attend to loved ones and yourself first.
3. Communicate via phone to Presbytery DRT if in an affected area, or remain accessible to receive phone calls from the DRT if unaffected.
4. Assist as needed with the Presbytery DRT functions above.
5. Assemble and deploy teams of field workers as requested by the Presbytery DRT.
6. Collect assessment information from work teams and report to the Presbytery DRT. Needs assessment may include contacting pastors and community leaders.
7. Coordinate requests for supplies with the Presbytery DRT and the Inter-faith Disaster Response Network, if applicable.
8. Maintain frequent communication with work team leaders to keep information current.
9. If necessary, appoint a MC Disaster Director to coordinate multiple work teams over an expected long period of disaster assistance.

VI. Long-Term Recovery

While immediate disaster response periods can be counted in terms of days and weeks, long-term recovery efforts may stretch into several months and even years. If these efforts continue for extended periods, it is very important to enlist help from long-term recovery organizations. In this situation the Presbytery DRT may recommend creation of an Administrative

Commission. During this extended period, pastors and relief workers will need pastoral care for themselves and their families. Disasters always put great stress on persons and families involved in response and recovery, especially those in leadership positions. Shenandoah Presbytery will make a special effort to minister to the special needs of these persons during times of crisis.

Another valuable resource during a long-term recovery situation is an Advisory Panel. The Presbytery DRT will foster relationships with specialists who can provide professional advice to guide the Presbytery in decision-making and recovery planning. Generally such advice will pertain to:

- Protection and safety of survivors and workers
- Possibilities for advocacy, relationships, and creative responses
- Propriety issues around norms and issue ownership
- Community re-development issues

Advisors will be available in many areas including medicine, law, finance, banking, insurance, engineering, community organization, psychiatry, agriculture, human rights, religion, ecumenical and inter-faith relationships, governmental agencies, private enterprise, the environment, etc.

V. Responding to National and International Disasters

Responding to persons in need is a very natural way of showing Christ's love and putting faith and concern into action. An increasing number of Presbytery congregations seek to respond to those in need by:

- Organizing and sending volunteer work teams to disaster sites
- Collecting and donating money
- Building or donating various disaster recovery kits for survivors (e.g., shelter, hope-in-a-box, medical, school, HAZMAT).

Shenandoah Presbytery will use the resources of PDA to communicate need and coordinate management of work teams, monetary donations, and disaster kits. PDA maintains a list of disaster sites across the country in need of volunteer teams and can provide helpful information on forming teams and planning a mission trip. Information about current national and international disaster response needs are contained on the PDA web site and are communicated via e-mail on the PDA Rapid Information Network. Monetary donations for disaster response may be given through One Great Hour of Sharing. During the year when an appeal is made or if there are significant recovery needs, the PDA office will assign a designated account number for giving to a specific disaster response. Even if there is no specific appeal issued for a disaster, gifts may still be sent to Presbyterian Disaster Assistance for general disaster response.

Congregations are encouraged to coordinate relief efforts through their Mission Communities. Mission Communities are encouraged to maintain lists of parishioners who have disaster response work trip experience and who can be mobilized in case of a disaster within the Presbytery or an urgent national appeal for assistance.