

# **The Presbytery of Eastern Virginia (PCUSA) Disaster Preparedness and Response Plan**

## **Introduction**

The Presbytery of Eastern Virginia (PEVA) has created a PEVA-Presbyterian Disaster Assistance Task Force to assist churches/partners in witnessing to the healing love of Jesus Christ through caring for communities when crisis occurs.

The Presbytery of Eastern Virginia is called to service and mission, and its members are committed to fulfilling God's plan. Therefore, in times of disaster PEVA will respond as God calls to help affected individuals and congregations, and to restore homes and businesses.

PEVA pledges to be prepared to respond in the event of a disaster, and to be actively involved on both short-term and long-term recovery efforts. Because the capacity to respond effectively in times of disaster is tied to the establishment and acceptance of a well-orchestrated plan, PEVA will develop and adopt a disaster plan that ensures that members are informed and equipped to carry out their roles.

The Presbytery of Eastern Virginia will partner with Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) and Church World Service (CWS) during disasters in order to be as effective as possible in its response to disaster.

## **I Steps to Prepare for Disaster**

### **A. General Preparation**

Establish a PEVA PDA Disaster Response Team; Register with and notify the Red Cross VOAD, and FEMA that PEVA has a Presbytery Disaster Plan, as well as a Response Team in place in case of natural disaster.

Check in with Civil Coordinators in case of disaster (see Area Coordinator below).

The PEVA PDA Team will be staffed by members elected and serving in classes for three-year terms on a rotating basis, to respond to large or small disasters.

The team will be organized as follows:

The Team will prepare and execute a Disaster Preparedness Checklist with detailed contact information that will be accessible and in possession of each congregation in PEVA.

- ❖ Director—Overall leadership and coordination of the presbytery disaster preparedness and response plan.
- ❖ Alternate Director—in the absence of a Director who is in place, the Alternate Director will be responsible for the overall leadership and coordination of the presbytery disaster preparedness and response plan.
- ❖ Field Workers—Trained to move directly into locations where a disaster has occurred to counsel survivors, assess needs, monitor, report damage in their areas, and provide immediate relief if needed. Fieldworkers should not only be able to assess material needs but also how to comfort those distressed by loss of family and friends or at least how to begin to contact, or safely refer such persons to spiritual leaders.
- ❖ Advisors—People with a variety of knowledge, skills, and abilities, who can assist the presbytery in executing the disaster preparedness and response plan. This team will include a panel and a committee who will be able to provide information and assistance to congregations within PEVA.

**The Team will be charged with:**

- ❖ Consulting with GA PDA personnel within the bounds of PEVA .
- ❖ Becoming trained to respond effectively in situations of disaster. Training should be compiled from a variety of resources including

Church World Services (CWS), Red Cross, United Nations, PDA, FEMA and other emergency organizations. The team will develop resources (printed, video, DVD, CD, or human) to be available to PEVA for additional study and consultation.

- ❖ Developing and maintaining an up-to-date directory of pastors and churches that includes all necessary communication information such as: home and office telephone numbers of pastors, clerks of session, and cell phone and/or pager numbers for any of the above. The Director and the Team will activate the calling tree in case of disaster. During a disaster many telephone and electric lines are knocked out; therefore, an alternative communications network consisting of pagers, cell phones, satellite phones, and amateur radios may be needed.
- ❖ Establishing a communication contact or “telephone calling tree” to include each active pastor or interim and each clerk of session. One person, the presbytery executive or a person designated by him/her, is responsible for activating the system when a disaster is imminent, or when an unexpected disaster has occurred.

#### **B. Action when an anticipated disaster is imminent**

- ❖ The Director will activate the calling tree; the Team will warn pastors and churches of the imminent disaster and suggest preparation steps to take in order to minimize damage.
- ❖ Instruct each pastor and clerk to respond immediately after the disaster with a preliminary estimate of damage to their homes, churches, and neighborhood. Distribute cell phone and pager numbers, or amateur radio contact for the DRT director and PEVA office for alternative ways of reporting.
- ❖ PEVA will share the plan and names of key people with ecumenical and community organizations (i.e., interfaith disaster response networks, and Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster-VOAD) who are partners in disaster relief. PEVA will take leadership role in forming such organizations when they do not exist.

- ❖ Prepare each leader and him/herself, each family, each church, and each home to weather the disaster in the best way possible.
- ❖ Encourage the DRT director to establish an emergency communications center, possibly at the presbytery office, that will be ready to receive calls and serve as team headquarters as soon as the disaster has passed. (Off site center in case of regional disaster, such as Makemie Woods or another presbytery office)

If disaster strikes unexpectedly the DRT will initiate appropriate steps in combination with those listed in Section II below.

## **II Guidance for PEVA Leaders and Helpers Once a Disaster Has Occurred**

- ❖ Contact and notify local authorities, the local interfaith disaster and emergency response network and local organizations such as PDA, about DRT's plans to respond to the imminent disaster.
- ❖ PEVA will notify PDA through the Team Director so that a central data bank may be maintained of churches, pastors and individuals of PEVA that have been affected and publicized throughout the denomination. PEVA will also publicize the information throughout its bounds.
- ❖ If the disaster strikes unexpectedly such as the Oklahoma City bombing, initiate the appropriate above steps, combining them with the steps in III below.
- ❖ Contact the PDA office in Louisville for any last minute instructions and plans for assistance after the disaster strikes.

### **PASTOR(S)**

- ❖ **Pastors will stay where they are until danger passes.**
- ❖ Pastors will Assess their own damage, attend to family, and loved ones **first!**

- ❖ When it is safe, pastors will assess the general situation and the physical needs of the people in their congregation and community.
- ❖ Pastors will respond to the needs of survivors, in cooperation with local emergency response agencies/police, fire department, American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, local interfaith response teams, etc.
- ❖ Pastors will report their findings to the General Presbyter and Associate Presbyter, as well as to the Director of the Disaster Response Team as soon as possible.
- ❖ Pastors will undergird all efforts with spiritual support to the survivors of the disaster. No secular agency is equipped to do this task. Pastors will perform this unique and important role in cooperation with other pastors, priests, rabbis, and spiritual leaders of the community.
- ❖ Pastors will assist the presbytery response by working closely with the DRT director and assigned Field Worker.
- ❖ When the relief phase of the disaster response begins, pastors will coordinate efforts of the congregation on the local level, working in cooperation with other pastors, interfaith response groups, FEMA, civil and governmental authorities, etc.

## **GENERAL PRESBYTER & ASSOCIATE PRESBYTER**

- ❖ **The GP and AP will stay where they are until danger passes!**
- ❖ The GP and AP will assess their own damage, attend family, loved ones and themselves **first!**
- ❖ When it is safe, the GP and AP will move immediately to the disaster response office and be available to receive messages.
- ❖ The GP and AP will monitor news reports from the Director, as well as reports of damage. They will contact pastors or churches who have not reported.

- ❖ If not already accomplished, the GP and AP will activate the Disaster Response Team with the Director.
- ❖ The Director will arrange for temporary staffing of the emergency communication network until the Disaster Response Team becomes operational.
- ❖ Together, the GP and AP, along with the Director, will make a “ministry of presence” visit to all affected areas. Report findings to the PDA associate for disaster response, Synod executive, and to neighboring presbyteries. Request the services of the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance Team as appropriate.
- ❖ After immediate disaster response needs are met and the recovery phase begins, the Director will make arrangements for room and board for volunteer work teams. Volunteer management should be coordinated with the interfaith network and /or VOAD.
- ❖ Where appropriate, the GP and AP, in coordination with the Director, will begin to arrange for long-range recovery partnerships between damaged churches, or congregations whose member’s homes have suffered damage, and other churches in the PEVA. These partnerships of mutual aid have potentials for long-term reconciliation and spiritual development for all concerned.
- ❖ After a disaster, presbyteries will receive donations from individuals and churches who want to give directly to those managing recovery efforts. They will expect PEVA to direct these funds in the most immediately helpful ways. PEVA is encouraged to appoint a small committee with authority to disburse these monies promptly to families with immediate unmet needs, in collaboration with other agencies. However, care must be taken not to jeopardize eligibility for funds from the American Red Cross, insurance settlements, and FEMA.

## **DIRECTOR OF DISASTER RESPONSE TEAM**

- ❖ **The Director will stay where she/he is until danger passes!**

- ❖ The Director will assess her/his own damage, tend to family, loved ones, and self **first!**
- ❖ In addition to the above, the Director will begin to give necessary disaster response information to all pastors and churches in cooperation with the GP and AP.
- ❖ The Director will begin to keep an updated list of damages to each congregation and community, surveying each affected pastor, church or campsite in cooperation with the GP and AP.
- ❖ If necessary, the Director will set up an emergency communications network, and work with the GP and AP to arrange for temporary staffing.
- ❖ The Director will convene the team for decision making, evaluating those situations that need the most immediate attention.
- ❖ The Director will, when it is safe, deploy Field Workers to the most critical places to deliver immediate emergency assistance and provide for temporary shelter.
- ❖ As FEMA and insurance companies respond, begin a list of “unmet needs” which can serve as an assignment guide for work teams who come to assist in recovery. Pay careful attention to the needs of the poor, minorities, handicapped, elderly, the uninsured, and others who might “fall through the cracks” when aid is disbursed. Ask each affected church to carefully survey its community to bring these unmet needs to light. Check these needs through VOAD or the Interfaith Disaster Response Network.
- ❖ The Director will assess spiritual as well as physical needs. The Director will also make plans to meet these needs, using as a resource the list of “Resources for Presbyteries.”

## **FIELD WORKERS**

- ❖ The field workers will stay where they are until the danger passes. They will be available to send and receive messages.

- ❖ Field workers will assess their own damage first.
- ❖ Field workers will monitor damage in their area via news reports.
- ❖ Field workers will report damage in their area to the Director and come to the initial meeting of the Disaster Team. Field workers will determine the most immediate needs.
- ❖ When it is safe, field workers will enter the affected area with emergency relief supplies.
- ❖ Field workers will continue to meet with the Director and the DRT, making contact with assigned pastors, churches, and community leaders.
- ❖ Field workers will compile a list of needs for their assigned area and convey this information to the Director.
- ❖ Field workers will report daily to the Director about changing needs.
- ❖ Field workers will minister to pastors and key leaders. Field workers will be particularly sensitive to the needs of pastors, key leaders, and all who are affected.

### **ADVISORY PANEL OR COMMITTEE**

- ❖ These individuals are responsible for providing specialized professional advice. Such advice will generally have to do with Protection and Safety (of survivors, workers and the Presbytery), Possibilities (for advocacy, contact, creative response), and Propriety (what norms, whose turf may be involved). Advisors will be available in many areas: medicine, law, finance, banking, insurance, engineering, community organization, religion, psychiatry, agriculture, human rights, ecumenical and inter-faith relationships, governmental agencies, private enterprise, the environment, etc.

### **III Long-Term Response and Recovery Issues**

- ❖ It is important to remember that while immediate disaster response time can be counted in terms of days and weeks, long range recovery

workers will need pastoral care for themselves and their families, in order that these workers may continue to be effective leaders. Disaster always puts great stress on persons and families involved in the response and recovery. Presbyteries will need to plan for ways to minister to the special needs of these persons during times of crisis.

#### **IV. Resource and Bibliography for Presbyteries**

- ❖ Papers and publications of the “Cities at Risk” 1996 Internet conference of the United Nations Secretariat of the International Decade of Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR), found at <http://www.quipu.net>
- ❖ “National Earthquake Probabilistic Hazard Program: Lessons for Knowledge Transfer” (WP92, 1996, 84pp.), order from Publications Clerk, Natural Hazards Research and Applications Information Center, Campus Box 482, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO 80309-0482 (\$4.00 shipping and handling).
- ❖ “The Extension Agent’s Handbook for Emergency Preparation and Response,” produces by the Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center of Texas A&M University. Fourth edition is available through FEMA’s World Wide Site (<http://www.fema.gov>)
- ❖ For Presbyteries along our coastlines or in mountainous areas where there are many tourists, there is a new monograph: “Disaster Evacuation Behavior: Tourists and Other Transients:” (Monograph #58, 1996 375 p. p., \$20). May be ordered from National Hazards Research Center above.
- ❖ Papers and session summaries of the 1996 Annual Hazards Research and Applications Workshop, especially R96-14, “Rural Areas and Disaster Planning” and PP96-7, “Disaster Resistant Communities Program.” Order from National Hazards Research center above.
- ❖ A subscription to “National Hazards Observer,” a bimonthly magazine published by the National Hazards Center at Boulder, address above. Cost \$15/year. The magazine contains articles on hazard prevention and mitigation, as well as a review in each issue of helpful Internet sites.

- ❖ A manual entitled: “How to Set Up and Run a Community Disaster Recovery Organization,” by Drew Cathell. Edited and distributed by: Charitable Outreach Society (COS), 505 North Polar Street, Charlotte, NC 28202. (Not for sale, free distribution. Excellent. Order from North Carolina Council of Churches, Interfaith Disaster Response Committee, 1307 Glenwood Avenue, Suite 162, Raleigh, NC 27605-3258).
- ❖ “When Disaster Strikes,” a publication of FEMA giving the steps in requesting and receiving Federal disaster assistance. Order by calling the FEMA Office of Congressional Affairs, 202-645-4500.
- ❖ “Responding in Disaster: Work Group Opportunities in Disaster Response,” a pamphlet available from PDA, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202-1396. An update on current work group opportunities for local churches and presbytery work teams.
- ❖ “A Guide to Federal Aid in Disaster,” FEMA publication 3262, April 1995, available along with other FEMA publications from FEMA Headquarters, 500 C Street SW, Washington, DC 20472, 202-646-2500, or regional and area offices of FEMA in major cities.
- ❖ “Missouri Interfaith Disaster Response Network Manual,” Revised January 1995. Available from PDA at above address.
- ❖ “Disaster Counseling Manual for Churches,” by Virginia L. Soberg and Pastor Robert A. Bremer, March, 1992. North Carolina Council of Churches, Methodist Building, 1307 Glenwood Avenue, Suite 162, Raleigh, NC 27605-3258, 919-828-6501. Contains very helpful information about dealing with the emotional and spiritual needs of people affected by disasters. For presbytery committees, local churches and pastors.
- ❖ “Volunteer Considerations,” a three-part manual from the Lutheran Disaster Preparedness and Response Committee, 143 Oakdale Drive, Morganton, NC 28655, 704-433-8142, fax: 704-433-1287. Deals with all that you need to know about developing volunteer work groups, including sample forms and planning worksheets of various kinds.

- ❖ “Leading aWorkcamp,” by Bruno D. Schroeder, United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, Division of the American Missionary Association, Voluntary Service Program, September 1987. Available from PDA. Covers some of the same areas as above, but in a different way with additional information. Well done.
- ❖ “Together We Triumph: Youth Response to Disaster,” PDS#74340-95-019, Free. A booklet for youth leaders to prepare young people for ministry in disaster situations. Order from Presbyterian Distribution Center, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202-1396, 800-524-2612.
- ❖ “Prepare to Care: Church Response to Disaster,” a publication of Church World Service, Emergency Response Office, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115, 212-870-3151.
- ❖ “Handbook for Emergencies”, a publication of the United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva Second Edition, June 2000

#### Important 24-Hour Numbers

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