



For the safety of the parish community, parish leaders should seriously consider taking time to develop a Parish Emergency Preparation and Response Ministry.

Inside this edition:

Incident Reporting.....3

Basic Safety Rules for Everyone3

The Benefits of Stretching.....4

Preparing a Parish Emergency Plan

Overview

If a phone call came into the parish office that the pastor had just suffered a heart attack, would the person answering the phone know what steps to take? If five people became violently ill after eating the potato salad served at the potluck dinner, would anyone know what to do? If the tornado sirens started blaring during one of the worship services, would the staff and leadership know their responsibilities? If the police came to the parish and arrested your youth pastor for sexual misconduct, would you know the best way to proceed?

We all hope and pray nothing bad ever happens to our parish or anyone associated with it. We would like to think that if anything were to happen, everyone would know exactly what to do. But sadly, many parishes have no plan to respond to an emergency at the parish or to a member of the staff or parish community. As a result of not having a plan, the response is often inadequate or will even compound the original problem, making the situation worse.

For the safety of the parish community, parish leaders should seriously consider taking time to develop a Parish Emergency Preparation and Response Ministry. Here are some very simple steps to assist in the development of such a plan.

Team Development

Every parish should have a Safety and Security Ministry. Their job is to evaluate every aspect of programming, facilities and resources to determine if they are safe and secure. They will be responsible for everything from prevention and inspections to training and oversight.

As a part of that larger ministry, an Emergency Preparation and Response Ministry should be formed. Depending on the size of the parish, you may either choose to make the emergency group a part of or the same as the Safety and Security Ministry. The important piece is to bring together a group of people that can spend the time to educate themselves, organize and develop a plan and carry out the functions needed in the event of an emergency.

You do not need a team of hundreds; however, the following positions should be considered (some may be combined) depending on the size of your parish:

- Team Coordinator and Assistant Team Coordinator
- Board/Leadership Representative, Staff Representative, Membership Representative, Youth Representative, Children’s Area Representative, Senior Services Representative, Volunteer Representative
- Facility Management
- Medical Representative

Preparing a Parish Emergency Plan

Continued from page 1

- Prayer Coordinator
- Spiritual Support Coordinator

Select team members who can give the time it will take to make this ministry grow and thrive.

Education and Identifying the Issues

After your team is formed, you will want to help them understand issues that could negatively impact your ministries. Be prepared, this may take some time. However, by relying on such organizations as the Red Cross, FEMA, and web sites such as www.ready.gov, you will be able to quickly identify not only the wide variety of issues that might happen, but also those more prevalent in your geographical area.

The Three Areas You Will Want to Consider Are:

1. **Internal Events.** Those events that happen either at your parish or to your people (staff, members, volunteers, children, etc.). They may include such events as death, injury, threat, robbery, abuse or severe weather conditions.
2. **Community/Regional Events.** These events happen within your vicinity, but may not impact you directly. They would include such occurrences as a civil disturbance, flood, mass destruction, severe weather within another area of your town or a chemical spill.
3. **National Events.** A terrorist attack, elevated Homeland Security Advisory, or having your members travel to offer aid and assistance are some of the events that could be considered national emergencies. Your team will want to brainstorm and identify all incidents and emergencies that they can think of.



Plan Your Responses

Once identified, your team will want to discuss the best response for each incident. Many will be similar. The responses often will be a page or less. Others may be more detailed. You will want to identify people within your parish community that could make up a response team. You will also want to identify those people and organizations outside of your parish community that will be valuable during an incident (e.g. attorney, denominational officials, other care providers, etc.). Consider the needs of all age groups and those in your parish community with special needs.

Put It in Writing

Once you have assembled this information, put it in writing. This is the most time-consuming part of the plan, but the most important. What you put in writing becomes your plan; it will act as a foundation and invaluable resource for responding to an incident. It is best to view the plan as a series of principles and practices. Never develop a plan and place it on a shelf somewhere; it will not help you there. Review it regularly and revise as needed.

Communication

Share the plan with members of the staff, parish leadership, volunteers and parish community. Let them know you have developed it out of a sense of care

for their well-being as well as the entire parish community. Help them understand that by developing this ministry your parish community will be better able to respond to a more catastrophic event. Use small group settings and other creative ideas to communicate the plan.

Practice/Implementation

You will never know how good your plan is unless you practice it. Conducting periodic emergency drills will help you see holes in the plan or areas that need to be modified.

Evaluation

Finally, after you do a mock drill or event, evaluate and revise. Discuss who did what and how they did it, solicit feedback and address concerns. Keep the plan flexible. If you do have an actual event that you respond to, always conduct a debriefing to evaluate how the response went and what revisions need to be made.

Conclusion

You may be fortunate enough to never suffer a life-changing event in your parish. However, you want to be prepared to react if something does occur. Also, you never know when your parish may be called upon to assist and provide care and resources in the event of an emergency across town or across the country. Wouldn't it be great to have the confidence to know that your parish would be ready to respond almost instantly?

Incident Reporting

Accidents can occur even in the safest work environments. When an incident occurs, it is imperative that an accident investigation be done to prevent future occurrences. The goal of the investigation is to correct the problem, *not* to place blame. The incident report plays a critical role in identifying the underlying cause(s) of the incident and what corrective actions need to be taken to prevent repeat incidents.

The key component of an accident investigation is the incident report. This report is what others will rely on to obtain information about the incident. A well-written incident report paints a clear picture of the incident for the reader and does not leave anything up to the reader's imagination. Keep the following guidelines in mind when completing an incident report:

DO:

- Answer all questions when asked.
- Complete the report as soon as possible after the incident to capture information that is fresh and clear in everyone's mind.
- State facts observed and obtained from interviews. Be objective. Would others who saw or heard the incident agree with your account?
- Give specific and clear information. We need to know exactly how the event happened.
- Stay calm as the purpose is to make sure the situation is fixed going into the future.
- Re-read your report to ensure it is an accurate depiction of what took place and does not contain statements that are ambiguous.
- Test your recommendations before submitting your report. Will your recommendations prevent repeat incidents?



DON'T:

- Avoid Yes/No questions or those that imply fault.
- Wait to complete the report. The accuracy and detail of the information you provide will only diminish as time from the incident lapses.
- Give your opinion or the opinion of witnesses. If you are unsure of a fact, don't include it in the report. Accuracy is very important.
- Give vague descriptions. Your account is what others will rely on to obtain facts and correct the problem.
- Comment on fault or liability. You are a reporter not a judge.
- Submit your report without reviewing it first. You want to make sure your language remains objective and that you have covered all the key points.
- Assume that your recommendations solve the problem. Be sure you follow up that the right fixes have been completed.

Basic Safety Rules for Everyone

Always:

- Report all accidents to your supervisor even though they may seem minor at the time.
- Look for the cause of all accidents or near-misses to prevent them in the future.
- Practice good housekeeping to prevent slips and falls—your own and anyone else's. Clean up spills and keep all areas free of clutter.
- Know which types of fire extinguishers may be used safely for each class of fire.
- Use good body mechanics when lifting and moving objects.
- Get help when you need it and let your legs, not your back, do the work.
- Use the personal protective equipment (PPE) you've been assigned—every time!
- Take precautions before using electrical equipment. Make sure it is in good condition.
- Share your own safe attitudes and habits with your coworkers.

Never:

- Never ignore or neglect safety rules.
- Never get complacent about your work.
- Never assume accidents only happen to others or "just happen."
- Never drive or operate machinery under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Never take chances with the life and health of yourself or your coworkers.



The Benefits of Stretching

Proper stretching increases flexibility, thereby minimizing the chances of pulling or tearing a muscle. Increased flexibility benefits your agility and balance, and has been proven to reduce related MSDs. The following is a list of stretching exercises. Hold each stretch for 10 seconds, and be sure not to bounce.

Neck Rotation

Turn your head to the side, stretching your chin toward your shoulder. Turn your head back to the center and repeat on the other side.

Shoulder Stretch

Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. Raise one arm overhead and stretch as far as you can without bending your torso. Repeat with the opposite arm.

Forearm Stretch

Extend your right arm straight out in front of you, palm downward. With the left hand, grasp the fingers of the right hand and pull back gently, stretching the wrist and forearm. Repeat with the left arm.

Triceps Stretch

Raise one arm straight up in the air. Bend at the elbow and let your hand fall to the back of your neck. With the other arm, reach behind your head and place your hand on top of the bent elbow. Gently pull down and back on the elbow. Repeat with the other arm.

Torso Twist

Stand at arm's-length from the wall, with the wall at your side. Reach one arm out and place your hand on the wall. Reach the other arm around the body, stretching the hand to the wall. Repeat on the opposite side.

Back Stretch

Lie on your back and bring one knee to your chest. Hold the knee with both



hands and gently pull in. Alternate knees and repeat.

Lower Back Reach

Sit on the floor with your legs straight out in front of you. Reach forward toward your toes, keeping your chin up and lower back slightly arched. Try not to round the back or tuck the chin in—this decreases the effectiveness.

Hamstring Stretch

Stand with your legs shoulder-width apart and the left leg slightly in front of the right. Shift your weight to the back leg (the right) and bend the knee, turning the knee and toes to the right. Extend the left leg and place the heel on the floor, toes in the air. Keep the back straight and bend forward at the hips until you feel the stretch in the hamstring of the left leg. Repeat with the opposite leg.

Standing Calf Stretch

Stand with your feet together. Extend one leg in front of you and place the heel on the floor, toes in the air. Keeping the back straight, bend forward at the hips until you feel the stretch in the calf. Repeat with the opposite leg.

Standing Quad Stretch

Front a standing position, reach back and grasp your right ankle with your right hand. Pull your foot toward your buttocks. Place your other hand on a wall or chair if you need balance support. Repeat with the left leg.



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