

RECOMMENDATIONS



Action

5. Prepare for Environmental Emergencies

“Our churches are uniquely situated to provide quick and essential services during an emergency because we are already in the neighborhoods and communities where disasters happen. Because we have the opportunity to act as Jesus to help those in need, our parishes and mission churches can prepare themselves to offer respite for people who live near us and for aid workers to come in to assist in recovery. We live in an area where fire, heat, power outages, flooding, and earthquakes can happen. How quickly could you open your doors to provide protection, warmth, phone charging, a hot meal, or quiet space to pray and rest?”

– The Rev. Patty Baker, Vicar, St. Clare’s, Snoqualmie

Recommendation: Congregations commission a resource/action plan so they are ready when and if they are called upon in a natural disaster to be a place of hospitality or assembly point for congregations, community members, and helpers (medical, fire fighters, etc.), offering a place of shelter and emotional and spiritual support.

Background: Floods, fires, smoke, heat. These are regional issues deeply impacting the communities in which our parishes live.

“The Episcopal Church welcomes you” is taking on new meaning in our generation. Congregational buildings are prominent public spaces. They are typically centrally located. They have plumbing and electricity and often showers as well. During a public outage, the electrical power in some of our parishes is more likely to be operational than in many private homes. The people will come.

Taking Action:

- In the summer of 2021, on Vashon Island, local congregations were approached by the Medical Reserve Corps to see if their spaces could be available for respite from heat for people in need during the “heat dome,” when temperatures soared beyond historical record. Air conditioning is uncommon in Western Washington.
- As far back as 2007, St. Clare’s, Snoqualmie, found itself offering a new ministry. The Vicar, the Rev. Patty Baker, tells the story of how St. Clare’s opened its doors when the Snoqualmie Valley experienced a major flood:

“Part of our response was to open our doors to a local preschool for three weeks while the school was being repaired. We also responded to a request from PSE to act as a central location while their workers replaced approximately 600 gas meters that were flooded out. As a result, both organizations supported our local foodbank through donations to St. Clare’s. It was our chance to act as Jesus to help those in need.”

Here are some suggestions for getting started:

- **Network with your community.** How are local organizations, such as the Medical Reserve Corps and the Fire Department, planning for community disaster response? Are there other churches in your community who are asking similar questions about the role of faith communities?
- **Identify the scope of the role your church could play.** Consider your congregational building and its setting.
- **Prepare for disaster.** Identify individuals in your congregation who can mobilize and lead in times of disaster. Ponder the training experiences that might be planned and taken in advance.
- **Consider the Vestry and other leadership.** Identify issues like insurance, building safety, storage of water, space for camping, electrical generators—all will likely come into play.

Results: The congregation recognizes disaster preparation ministry as *a ministry needed in our time. The congregation begins to prepare now, BEFORE the natural disaster hits.* The congregation is seen as an integral part of the greater community by members and non-members alike.

Conclusion: In 2022, many more Episcopal congregations will find themselves being asked to play a new role in their communities, especially in smaller communities where there is less access to public spaces. As this task force looks ahead, we anticipate that this trend will only continue and accelerate. How are congregations equipped to respond? What are some of the resources the Diocese can offer to support them when these congregations review the decisions they may need to be making soon and regularly?

Resources: The Rev. Patty Baker is also the Partner in Response and Resilience at [Episcopal Relief and Development](#). She can provide multiple linkages with ERD.