

CuttingEdge

**After a disaster:
Is your church prepared?**

**HARRISTOWN
DISASTER RELIEF FUND**

The HARRISTOWN CHRISTIAN CHURCH has established a Disaster fund to be used for the victims of the April 19th Tornado. This fund will be used to help families with emergency needs such as Food, Clothes, Medicine, etc.

All Donations will be greatly appreciated.
If you can help please contact:

MARYLYNN BAER
(CHURCH SECRETARY)



MICHAEL ODUM
(BOARD CHAIRMAN)

Editor's Note: I have felt awkward about all of the terrorist attack references in articles seemingly unrelated to the events of last September. At the same time, however, we cannot ignore that these events have sharpened our sensitivity to our surroundings. The following article appealed to me because churches are now wrestling with a broad spectrum of "security and preparedness" issues and I found the suggestions here to be useful. RDH

How your church can prepare and respond to threats and emergencies

By Jeff Hanna

Security and safety have always been important matters for churches. However, not all churches take this issue as seriously as they should.

Some churches have put a well-thought-out plan in place; others leave these matters to chance. Most congregations say they care about protecting people and property; yet, without a plan in place, the response to a tragic event can be the wrong one. In the end, that can often compound the severity of the problem.

In light of the recent terrorist attacks, however, more churches are beginning to ask some of the questions they should have been asking all along. They have come to realize that they are not as prepared to deal with a problem or an emergency as well as they could. To help move churches toward a complete emergency preparation and response policy, a complete plan for each of the following areas should be in place at every church:

- Severe weather
- Fire

- Automobile accidents
- Injury on church property
- Sudden fatality of a member or staff
- Suspicious persons
- Theft, robbery, or assault
- Domestic violence
- Suspicious package or letter
- Threats against people or property

Though there have been only a handful of actual threats against congregations, the last two topics are what many congregations are concerned about right now. However, a plan that addresses all of the above issues will help secure the general safety of a church.

The best approach is to make sure that each of the above potential threats has been considered and that responses have been planned for each. To assist in this, it may be best to consider what needs to happen before and after an event occurs.

Pre-emergency planning

As churches prepare for a potentially hazardous or traumatic event, it is important to ensure the information

gathered is easily accessible. A great plan that is sitting on a shelf out of reach of the people who need it is useless. The complete emergency preparedness and response policy plan should be duplicated and given to the people who will most likely need to implement it. This list should include secretaries, key staff members, trustee members, custodians. And the safety and security team director.

Every plan should include the following:

Emergency phone numbers should be complete, current, and visible. Phone numbers for the police, fire station, and hospital are vital. Also, the contact information for staff members, key leaders, insurance agents, legal assistance, and key contractors that may need to be summoned should also be included.

A posted evacuation plan should be placed throughout the building. It should be clear and easy to follow. The location of emergency medical equipment and in-house medical personnel also should be quickly accessible.

A specific threat or events checklist is a key tool needed to ensure that nothing is forgotten. Knowing what to do when a suspected or actual threat is made or a suspicious letter or package arrives is not something most of us are used to dealing with on a daily basis. Checklists that give clear responses for steps to follow during such an event can help keep people protected.

An inspection policy should be a part of every plan. Routine inspections that look for hazards that emerge, poor storage of flammables,



A scene captured at Falmouth Christian Church, Falmouth, Ky., after floodwaters damaged the church and the town in 1997.

faulty equipment, and unsafe practices can significantly reduce the likelihood that an unexpected event will occur. Daily lock-up security and safety inspections can detect hazards and suspicious packages or people in and around the church facilities.

Making sure there are **proper response supplies** available is important. Mobile telephones, flashlights, radios, water, blankets, first-aid equipment, and other necessary response items should be easily located.

It can be important to have **clear shutoff procedures for gas, electric and water access**. This may need to be done to prevent further problems, but should only be facilitated by a trained person in order to prevent additional danger.

To ensure that key information is not lost should a major event such as a fire or destruction of the building occur the **location of legal and insurance papers** should be known. An off-site location for these and important computer programs and electronic documents can save the church much time and grief later, if the building is destroyed.

Though most churches do not designate one, the **naming of church spokesperson** ahead of time can be critical on how the church is viewed in the media and in the eyes of the public. A person knowledgeable in media relations can put the church in a good light even in the midst of tragedy.

Finally, the key to any pre-planning is to have **thorough training and practice procedures**. Staff members and key personnel (including ushers, greeters, teachers, and volunteers) should be trained in how to respond in the event of a threat, emergency, or tragedy. First and foremost, the most vital aspect is protecting people, and second is protecting property. The congregation also should be trained on evacuating the



A photograph on a church wall serves both as a reminder of denominational roots and floodwater level inside the building.

building in case of fire, explosion, or bomb threat and on the location of shelters in the event of weather or national emergencies.

Responses during and after the event

Regardless of how well a church plans, the day may come when a tragedy occurs. Make no mistake, the event will likely be highly charged with emotion. How the church responds to the event may determine the future of its ministry.

In the case of potentially imminent danger, the immediate response should always be to protect life and then property. Buildings and resources can be replaced; while human beings cannot. Sometimes it is best to evacuate the building immediately. Other times it is necessary to seek safe shelter inside the building. This may also mean locking the building down so a potential threat from outside cannot get in. Remember, how well a church has planned and rehearsed usually determines how calm people remain during a crisis situation.

Once the initial event passes, key people should then be summoned to

assist. After calling any needed emergency help, pastors, staff members, legal counsel, and insurance company should be contacted. Begin assembling the necessary people needed to help the church move through the emergency and continue ministry as soon as possible. A measured and faithful response by the church spokesperson, should the event warrant media attention, can have a positive impact on the community and the congregation.

When all is said and done

Though no church community would choose to experience a horrific event or to be involved in some other threat or incident, there are two things all church safety teams should be able to say after reading this article and taking steps to respond: when all is said and done, the church had a plan and the plan worked.

Churches must become more proactive in protecting the people and property God entrusted to their care. Doing so is simply good stewardship of God's resources.

Jeff Hanna is the Executive Director of the Church Division of the GuideOne Center for Risk Management. Contact him at the center by calling 1-877-448-4331, ext. 5118, or by visiting www.guideonecenter.com Reprinted with permission from NACBA Ledger Winter, 2001. www.nacba.net

“Churches must become more proactive in protecting the people and property God entrusted to their care. Doing so is simply good stewardship of God’s resources.”

Churches Starting Churches

By Rick Morse

In the very beginning, Churches started Churches. Soon after the resurrection, one of the earliest congregations in Antioch sent a man named Paul out into the world to start congregations.

The Disciples developed the same method of starting congregations, too. If we look at congregations started along the frontier trails of the 19th century there is lots of evidence that when church members relocated they

started new congregations. We also see a lot of evidence of congregations that sent pastors to start new congregations on the frontier. It is highly likely that your congregation was started by another church!

In those days congregations did not wait for a centralized office to act. Congregations saw the growing edge of their community as a mission field, and knew that people would benefit from being a Christian community together.

When we restructured, we put the responsibility of starting new congregations on Regions.

Regions are an important piece of the new church strategy. But let's face it 35 Regions can only do so much. Just think of what happens to

the new church effort when we get 3,800 congregations working on the solution. A little math shows we increase our efforts 100 times!

The 2020 Vision challenges the Christian Church to start 1,000 new congregations by the year 2020. If churches will once again take on this historic and biblical ministry, we will start many more than 1,000 congregations by that time. Remember 65% of the U.S. population is no

longer living near a Disciples congregation.

Sometimes we believe that starting new congregations is more complicated than it really is. It is hard work to be sure, but it is also a joy to see these communities of faith spring up. They bring such new life, new vision, new energy to the whole church. And your congregation will be deeply rewarded by engaging in this ministry.

Perhaps some day in the future, our children will read about this critical time when congregations once again recognized their ministry and started new congregations.

Rick Morse is director of New Church Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).



New Church Ministry

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"The motion passes to form a committee, to select a task force, to see why we can never get anything done in our board meetings."

Ed Says—An on-going conversation between Ed Taylor, the Editor and You:

Ed says:

Once a congregation can imagine faithful ministry without money*, it is liberated for vital ministry with money*.

*substitute "a minister" or "facilities" for "money"

Ryan says:

Funding, facilities and clergy are all gifts for the mission of the church. However, we know they are not, in themselves, the mission. It may be a matter of liberating these gifts for their ordained purpose.

You say:

Share your insights. Write to us at cuttingedge@churchextension.org. See the responses at www.churchextension.org/about/cutting-edge.htm

Upcoming Topics

An upcoming issue of *Cutting Edge* will deal with Family Life Centers. Does your church have one? What's worked and what hasn't? What piece of information would you like to know or share with a colleague on the subject? Are there other topics that you would like to see addressed in future issues? E-mail your ideas to rhazen@churchextension.org or drop a note to the address on the back of this issue.

CHURCHES ON THE CUTTING EDGE

Louisville, Kentucky Hill Street Christian Church

Hill Street Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky has tackled its building accessibility issues head on. According to Clifford Willis, Pastor, "A number of our members are vision impaired and are having to constantly



Church Extension's Ellen Mitchell, Vice President for Development, and Jim Powell (right), President, congratulate Pastor Clifford Willis on the congregation's advancements in building accessibility.

battle stairs leading to the worship area or fellowship hall. We serve the community in many ways so it is important to our entire congregation to make the building accessible for all." For the congregation, addressing accessibility issues is the latest in a series of challenges.

A fire in 1994 completely destroyed the church facility forcing the congregation to purchase a different building. Hill Street is the first congregation to receive low-interest loan funds from the Accessibility Loan Fund through Church Extension. Donors have



Hill Street Christian Church, Louisville, Ky., received the first loan made from the Accessibility Loan Fund.

contributed to the fund and loans from the fund are now available to congregations with qualifying projects. The project at Hill Street will provide for the installation of an elevator lift with access to all levels of the building.

Lee's Summit, Missouri Longview Chapel Christian Church

When noted Disciple and lumberman R.A. Long built a chapel for his workers on his sprawling farm in 1915, little did he know that the time would come when it would be in a rapidly growing area of Lee's Summit, Missouri, now a south suburb of Kansas City. Today Longview Chapel Christian Church finds itself in just such a position. In 1994, just 12 families attended the Chapel. Today, more than 120 families call the Longview Chapel their church home. With the explosive growth came the need to expand and renovate their facility, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. New classrooms and the R.A. Long Fellowship Hall addition are now complete. The architectural firm of Susan Richards Johnson & Associates was awarded the 2001 Preservation Award by the Historic Kansas City Foundation for their design of the project. In addition to Church Extension financing, capital fund

campaigns and fund raisers such as a benefit auction, the congregation members have contributed

enormous amounts of "sweat equity" to the project. Jan Keeler is the minister of the congregation.



As construction progresses, the new addition prepares to meet the historic 1915 chapel.

The new addition houses a fellowship hall, kitchen and classrooms.



Welcoming people with disabilities— A first-hand account

By Lee Mehrlich



An Introduction—

For over twenty years Lee Mehrlich has attended Zionsville Christian Church.

No one person has impacted our life together any more than he has. He communicates using Blissymbols (a communication system using line pictures), has limited use of his hands and uses a wheelchair.

Lee loves the Lord and communicates that love to others. He has written stories, a sermon and Elder prayers, and participates in Bible study.

Lee is committed to sharing the Bible with others who cannot read printed words. He has defined this to be his ministry and serves on an international committee to develop theological Blissymbols.

Lee loves children and often interacts with them. He has been a big part of our vacation Bible school, sharing Blissymbols and stories with children. (Once a father—not a church member—brought his children to VBS the first day wondering if this was a church where he wanted his children to be. When he saw two men in wheelchairs, the father knew this WAS exactly the kind of place he wanted his children to be!)

Lee inspires others by his presence and persistence. More than one person has said, “When I got up this morning, I didn’t feel like coming to church. But then I thought, ‘Lee will get there.’ So I got ready and came.”

Lee has helped all of us to be more comfortable around a wheelchair. He is so much a part of the life of the church that having someone in a wheelchair seems natural.

—Bill McGraw, Pastor
Zionsville (Indiana) Christian Church



The church says everyone is welcome and wants all people to come. The church is not accessible and then I feel like

the church does not want the handicapped to come with them. They do not think and see what we do. That is why they think we cannot understand what is going on so we would not want to go to church. People with handicaps have brains too.

We often feel like we are left out. Jesus wants the handicapped included in communion. Jesus says, “Come, poor, and weak, come, poor and those with handicaps.” All physically and mentally handicapped people are his people too.

When I was a child, my mother went to church. People did not know how to help us. When I was six my family put me in school in Kentucky in the Wendell Foster Center. They taught me Christian values. They made a chapel outside of the school. Mother and I went to church. That is why the Wendell Foster Center made a chapel for people with disabilities. The Wendell Foster Center is still there today. For school, it is open for handicapped. When I turned 21, the schools had to allow the handicapped to attend. I did not have schooling in a public school. Although schools are required to open their doors to the handicapped,

churches are excluded from this law due to the separation of church and state.

The church should welcome people with disabilities because we want to be there. We often feel like the poor if we cannot come in. We feel like the church is saying, “We do not want you” which makes me feel like the poor. When the church has stairs they are saying “stay out.” But, God says “they are my children and they can come to my table, too.”

The problem is that while a few handicapped persons have entered and been part of our churches, there are still many people outside regardless of the wheelchair ramps and signing interpreters employed especially for the handicapped. They have either not been invited to come in or even worse, have been disinvited. Also, the handicapped often do not realize church is for them, too. In the midst of disability and ability, illness, and health, strength and weakness, we can all come together in one body.



Lee Mehrlich and other vacation Bible school teachers of Zionsville Christian Church.

Property Committee Corner

How safe is your building?



The church should welcome people with disabilities because they have things to teach others. When people with disabilities cannot come in to worship, it diminishes the liturgy. The whole, complete circle is not there when they are not seen or heard. The presence of human faces, how people gesture to one another, and touch one another shapes us far more profoundly than the words we speak. We can get all persons of different colors and the poor and the rich in a church and we can learn from each other. We can learn that among our differences, we can still come together as one regardless of race, class, ethnicity, and disability. Liturgy is a school to teach ourselves compassion for one another. It becomes like a family under God.

People with disabilities need to have the kind of churches that are willing to risk learning and discovering about people with disabilities in a religious setting even in a culture that shuns limitations and glorifies the "perfect human body."

"Liturgy is a school to teach ourselves compassion for one another. It becomes like a family under God."

One more committee is something that most churches do not need! However, if the committee can help the congregation be a better steward of the physical facilities or their resources, it may be warranted. A safety committee may be a stand alone committee that would report to the board or a sub group of the property committee or trustees. But, however it is structured, having a designated group (2-4) of people to be vigilant about safety issues around the church can at the least give peace of mind and at most, can save lives.

The task of a Safety Team would be to meet at least quarterly to give the building and property the "once over." A thorough walk through of every inch of the building with an eye to safety issues will produce issues—some that may be fixed on the spot, others that will require a work day and still others that will require board action and an outlay of capital funds. Some examples

of things the Safety Team should look for include:

- floor surfaces that are clear and dry (interior and exterior)
- clear path to designated exit ways
- functional smoke/carbon monoxide detectors
- adequate lighting to walkways and steps
- child care areas free of hazards including cords, outlets, etc.
- policy in place for child care pick up authorization
- two adults always present in child care areas
- staff members trained in CPR
- storage area for cleaners locked
- wiring/breakers up to code and inspected regularly

While accidents are bound to happen, they should not happen through negligence on the part of the congregation. The diligence that is given to safety issues will help the trivial from turning catastrophic.

SPOTLIGHT on Church Extension Services

ACCESSIBILITY LOAN FUND

Started in 1997, the Accessibility Loan Fund represents gifts received by Church Extension for the purpose of providing low-interest loans for capital projects involving the removal of physical barriers. In August, 2001, Ellen L. Mitchell, Church Extension's Vice President for Development, announced that the \$500,000 goal for the accessibility loan fund had been surpassed and churches could begin making application for the low-interest loans. Qualifying projects for the accessibility loans include: ramps and accessible building entrances,

elevators and accessible restrooms.

Although the initial goal of \$500,000 has been reached, Church Extension continues to make the Accessibility Loan Fund a priority. The maximum loan from the fund is currently \$25,000. The loan interest is set at 3% for a five year period. For more information on how to make an annual, memorial, named fund or extender's fund gift to the Accessibility Loan Fund, contact Ellen Mitchell at 1-800-274-1883 or e-mail emitchell@churchextension.org.

More information on loans from the fund can be received from any Church Extension consultant.

Notes from the Editor



Perhaps the scariest moment of my ministry came when I was an Associate Minister responsible for child care and education areas of the church.

A woman came into our church and “claimed” a child from the nursery. The child many times was picked up by different people including parents, grandparents and childcare providers so a new face was not out of the ordinary. The setting was a small town and “nothing like that ever happens here.” Fortunately, the child care givers in our nursery immediately became suspicious and the woman and child did not get past the front door of the church—but they were on their way out. Since then, stricter guidelines are in place

regarding safety issues.

It only took one such experience to teach me that the unexpected can happen in the blink of an eye. Some things cannot be avoided but other things can be averted with some attention and forethought. Both the lead article in this issue and the Property Committee Corner highlight that we are better able to respond to any emergency if we have a plan in place before it happens.

I am also appreciative to Lee Mehrlich for his ministry. I hope you, too, will appreciate his insight. The article here was actually written for a Liberation Theology class at Christian Theological Seminary. Lee is a licensed minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

As always, I welcome your comments and am grateful for your ministry!

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P.O. Box 7030
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1-800-274-1883
Editor: Ryan D. Hazen
e-mail:
rhazen@churchextension.org
Designer: Debbie Williams
Web site:
www.churchextension.org

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