Congregational Disaster Readiness Program

The *Willing & Able* program exists to help congregations prepare for disaster and coordinate their response with other congregations in their community.

**Why Should Congregations Get Ready?**

- **Readiness is Biblical**
  As proverbs says, “a wise person plans ahead.”

- **Readiness is Essential**
  Disaster response agencies cannot do it all. Often, the “hole” in disaster response is simply people caring for their neighbors – the very thing God’s people are called to do.

- **Readiness is Transformational**
  Disaster response ministry opens doors to loving our neighbors like no other way and can powerfully transform both receivers and givers, congregations, and entire communities.

**How Can Your Congregations Get Ready?**

It is simple and easy to get started.

- **Step 1: Willing to Respond to Disaster**
  Affirm that your congregation is willing to respond when disaster strikes. Register for readiness at [www.WillingToRespond.org](http://www.WillingToRespond.org).

- **Step 2: Able to be in Regular Communication**
  Identify a point of contact, or Disaster Response Coordinator (DRC). This enables your congregation to be in communication with the coalition and other congregations. Communication is the most critical element of disaster response. *(A DRC is not required to register.)*

- **Step 3: Ready to Serve When Disaster Strikes**
  Consider how your congregation will serve when disaster strikes. The coalition can help you get ready.
What is a Disaster Response Coordinator?

A Disaster Response Coordinator (DRC) serves as a liaison for disaster readiness and response between your congregation and the local disaster response coalition.

Communication

The DRC is the central point of contact between the coalition and your congregation and helps ensure effective communication by:

- Following and responding to communication from the coalition
- Sharing relevant coalition information with your congregation
- Connecting with the disaster response coalition coordinator, as needed
- Participating in periodic calls or meetings with other DRCs

Coordination

The DRC coordinates the participation of the congregation and its members in disaster response by:

- Facilitating your congregation identifying how you will respond to disaster
- Offering training for volunteers as needed (*provided by Houston Responds*)
- Arranging a process for volunteers to serve when opportunities arise
- Forming a disaster response team, if needed
Is Your Congregation Willing & Able?
Three Steps to Help Your Congregation Get Ready

**Step 1: Willing to Respond to Disaster**

Affirm that your congregation is willing to respond when disaster strikes, and to take steps to get ready. Register for Readiness at www.WillingToRespond.org.

**Step 2: Able to be in Regular Communication**

Identify a point of contact, or Disaster Response Coordinator (DRC). This enables your congregation to be in communication, the most critical element of disaster response.

**Step 3: Ready to Serve When Disaster Strikes**

Consider how your congregation will serve when disaster strikes. The disaster response coalition can help you get ready.

**Invite Other Congregations**

The more congregations that are ready to respond the better prepared our community will be.
Step 1: Willing to Respond to Disaster

Affirm

Make it known that your congregation is Willing & Able to respond to disaster, and to potentially work with other congregations in your area. To locate the disaster response coalition of congregations in your area go to www.houstonresponds.org/coalitions.

Connect

Getting connected is essential. Identifying your congregation as Willing & Able means connecting with the local disaster response coalition and being in communication about ways to prepare and serve.

Register

To affirm you are Willing & Able and to begin receiving communication, register online at www.WillingToRespond.org. Your congregation name, location, and contact person are all that is needed. Once your congregation is registered, someone from the local coalition will reach out to your contact person about next steps.
Step 2: Able to be in Communication

Identify a point of contact or Disaster Response Coordinator (DRC). This enables your congregation to be in communication, the most critical element of disaster response.

Role

The Disaster Response Coordinator (DRC) directs your congregation’s response and serves as the liaison between the congregation and the local disaster response coalition. Anyone Willing & Able can serve. There are two primary roles:

**Communication**
DRCs provide the point of contact between the coalition and congregation by:
- Receiving and responding to communication from the coalition
- Sharing relevant information with their leadership and congregation
- Participating in periodic coalition calls or meetings with other DRCs

**Coordination**
DRCs ensure the congregation’s participation in disaster response by:
- Arranging for training of volunteers (provided by the local coalition)
- Coordinating a process for the congregation’s volunteers to serve
- Forming a congregation disaster response team if needed

Scope

Beyond the regular coalition meetings, the scope of the DRC role depends primarily on how the congregation decides to serve and the DRC’s specific leadership style. Whether the DRC is more doer or delegator will largely shape the role, as well as the time and talent required.

Once your DRC is identified, the local coalition will reach out to the DRC about next steps.
Step 3: Ready to Respond When Disaster Strikes

Consider how your congregation will serve when disaster strikes. Your local disaster response coalition can help you get ready.

Who
By your “congregation,” we mean individuals or teams of people from your congregation that volunteer in one or more ways in disaster response.

What
The way you serve is up to each congregation. Some considerations may include a congregation’s previous experience, sense of calling, available resources, volunteer skills, as well as anticipated needs in the community and how other congregations are serving. Your local disaster response coalition helps to assess and communicate these needs and resources collectively.

Where
Willing & Able congregations serve wherever they are led. Congregations typically respond first in their local community, then their county, then the Greater Houston area. Houston Responds and the network of disaster response coalitions help to facilitate collaborative efforts.

When
Some congregations and volunteers intend to be generally ready to respond when disaster strikes, as needed and able. Other congregations identify a specific way to serve prior to a disaster to be better prepared. The local coalition can help with either approach.

How
Congregations typically identify how they will serve as they would with any other ministry. It may be helpful to do so in conversation with other congregations and coalition participants to avoid duplication and develop a coordinated effort. The local disaster response coalition can provide guidance and training as needed.
Inviting Other Congregations to Participate

The more congregations that participate, the better coordinated and comprehensive the disaster response will be. Congregations often participate in response to an invitation from a friend, colleague, or organization.

What ways can you help?

Invitation

Here are a few ways you can invite other congregations and their volunteers to participate:

- Invite your friends and colleagues in other congregations.
- Share the opportunity with your congregation’s denomination or association.
- If you lead a denomination or association, invite your participating congregations.
- If you are part of a ministerial association, invite participating congregational leaders.

Information

For potential participants who would like more information about disaster response or your local coalition, here are some ways to share:

- Share a story about how your congregation has served in disaster response.
- Share how God used disaster response to transform both givers and receivers.
- Share the Willing & Able: Three-Step Overview.
- Share the coalition’s website or webpage. Coalition webpages can be found at www.houstonresponds/coalitions.
- Invite a potential participant to the next coalition call or meeting.
- Invite a potential participant to serve with you in your current disaster response.
Common Disaster-Related Needs & Ways to Serve

How your congregation serves depends on several factors, such as anticipated needs and available resources, including the interests and skills of volunteers, existing local disaster agencies, and potential partners in the community. The local coalition helps to assess and communicate these needs and resources collectively.

COVID-19 Response

Common ways congregations are currently responding:
- Food Distribution
- Mask Distribution
- Financial Support
- Planning for Safe Congregational Reopening

Hurricane Readiness

Some common ways congregations are preparing to serve:
- Compassionate Care
- Volunteer Coordination
- Sheltering
- Clean-Up
- Mucking & Gutting
- Supply Distribution
- Laundry Services
- Transportation
- Non-Emergency Medical Support

Local Disaster Agencies, Nonprofits & Potential Partners

Rather than duplicate efforts, the coalition seeks to maximize the support from others and fill gaps when and where needed. Some examples of potential partners:
- County Long-Term Recovery Committee
- County Office of Emergency Management
- Food Bank
WHAT IS A DISASTER RESPONSE COORDINATOR?

The disaster response coordinator (DRC) serves as the liaison for disaster readiness and response between your congregation and your disaster response coalition to help facilitate effective **COMMUNICATION** and **COORDINATION**.

**COMMUNICATION**

The DRC acts as the key contact between your coalition and your congregation by...

- Following communication from your coalition
- Connecting with your coalition’s leadership
- Sharing information with your congregation
- Participating in periodic DRC meetings

**COORDINATION**

The DRC coordinates your congregation’s participation in disaster response by...

- Helping identify how you will respond
- Arranging for volunteers to serve
- Offering training for volunteers
- Forming a disaster response team