**Stay “Church Connected”**

The local church is a place where people connect – with God, with each other and in the community. People naturally turn to the church in times of a crisis seeking meaning, peace and healing. A church that is prepared can help mitigate the emotional and spiritual impact of a disaster and may be a place of hospitality and sanctuary in times of critical need. A plan can speed the immediate response and help lessen those feeling of confusion, loneliness and isolation that are so common after disasters. Here are some suggestions to stay “Church Connected”:

**Congregation Checks**. Prepare a method of checking on the congregation of the church when a disaster strikes. i.e. developing a “telephone tree” or utilizing “prayer chains” communications. Develop an “Outreach Committee”. Update and make church directories available.

**Check on shut-ins and most vulnerable church members first.** Call, visit, reach out to family members to make contact with church members. Notify the local rescue squad if there is a call for concern or evacuation, giving all pertinent details.

**Companions**. Arrange for people (volunteers) to serve as companions for vulnerable or disaster-affected people. Companions should be prepared to listen, run errands, make phone calls; anything to help church members feel more comfortable and ease the anxiety. If possible, arrange for persons with skills in signing for the hearing impaired, and translators for non-English speaking people.

**Make contingencies for providing services as soon as possible after the disaster**. Consider identifying an alternate location in case the church is damaged, perhaps including a reciprocal agreement with another church. Be open to alternate ways of holding service – video tape service, use website and online capabilities. Be prepared in the event that the pastor is affected by the disaster.

**Determine ways existing ministries can continue in the event the church is damaged**. Develop a plan in case in-church ministries, such as child care, bible study, AA meetings, etc need to be cancelled. Identify and plan for ministries your church will engage in during a disaster, such as feeding, donations distribution, information center, etc.