

COMMUNICATION

“Say the right thing *according to the need of the moment* so that you will *help others by what you say.*” Eph 4:29b

CONSIDERATIONS: The importance of how and what we communicate.

- ✚ In disasters and hazardous incidents adequate and accurate **communication is a recurring challenge.**
 - ❖ While the above scripture may not specifically apply to incident response it does state a **principle that should guide communicators**, especially in churches and the faith communities, as they plan and prepare for this vital area of response.

- ✚ Rumors are often rampant in hazardous events.
 - ❖ Because of **the trust factor** churches and pastors have with their congregants, in particular, and the community, in general,
 - the more clear and accurate the information a church is able to disseminate the more the church and pastor will “help others by what you say.”

- ✚ Experience has shown that in any incident, whether small or large, there tends to be **three groups with whom the church/faith community communicates:**
 - ❖ The congregants/members of that specific church/faith community.
 - ❖ The general public, including members of other churches/faith communities.
 - ❖ Responders and volunteers (depending on the scope of the event).

- ✚ Unlike much of the communication usually received from “official channels;” (news reports, official statements, etc.) which generally flows one way (from the official channel to the public), **the style of communication in which churches/faith communities engage is**
 - ❖ Almost always **two-way**,
 - ❖ Frequently, **personal**, and,
 - ❖ Often **individual/one-on-one** (or one to a small group such as a family).

- ✚ While the information received via the official channels is important, **the dynamics of the two-way communication** which the church/faith community is most often engaged **adds a dimension** not often seen in “official” settings.
 - ❖ Churches, pastors and faith community leaders often find themselves **communicating face-to-face and hands-on** with worried, stressed and/or scared people looking for answers regarding
 - Location and condition of loved ones.
 - Condition of personal and church property.
 - When they can come home?
 - What they are going to do next?
 - Can anyone help?
 - “What are we/am I going to do now?”
 - Etc.

- ✚ This type of **communication often necessitates time** that is not taken in many communiqués in incident settings.
 - ❖ If pastors and faith community leaders do not take the time necessary, we exacerbate the traumatic effect and the stress people experience in hazardous events.

- ✚ The need in incident preparation, planning and response is for churches/faith communities to be **accessible and communicate accurately** “so that it will give grace to those who hear.” (NAS)
- ✚ In stressful incidents some individuals’ senses are heightened while those of others are dulled. If churches/faith communities are to “give grace to those who hear” then **as important as the information given and the time taken to give it is how the information is communicated.** A few of those “how” factors are:
 - ❖ Tone of voice,
 - ❖ Facial expression,
 - ❖ Simplicity and clarity of instructions or advice,
 - ❖ Body language,
 - ❖ Actions or movements,
 - ❖ Eye contact and focus,
 - ❖ Behavior.
- ✚ All of the above, and more, communicate to those with whom the pastor or faith community leader speaks. Sometimes **these factors, along with the time taken, speak louder and have more impact than the information given.**
- ✚ In incidents, **lack of knowledge** (information, direction, instruction) **can be as emotionally and spiritually destructive as the incident has been physically destructive.**
 - ❖ **People will want and need communication from trusted leaders.**
 - ❖ **To not prepare to communicate is to fail our duty to serve.**
 - ❖ We, the church and other faith communities must prepare.

COMMUNICATION PREPARATIONS

- ✚ Preparing for good communication in a disaster, hazardous incident or other events begins by
 - ❖ **identifying** knowable barriers that frequently exist in such instances,
 - ❖ **planning** ways to overcome those barriers and, as much as is humanly possible,
 - ❖ **helping** ensure continued communication *from* official sources and channels *to* church members and the general public.
- ✚ Some **knowable barriers** are:
 - ❖ Loss of power,
 - ❖ Damage to communication equipment and/or communication infrastructure,
 - ❖ Overload of traditional communication infrastructure,
 - ❖ Lack of or inability to access alternative sources of communication,
 - ❖ Inability to access official channels or sources of information,
 - ❖ Lack of communication with other responding faith groups and communities,
 - ❖ Lack of familiarity with or knowledge of one’s own denomination or church association’s policies and protocols,
 - ❖ Lack of familiarity with or knowledge of response groups and organizations,
 - ❖ Failure to encourage and teach congregants and members to plan ahead.
- ✚ These, as well as almost every other barrier to communication, fall into one of two general categories:

- ❖ Technical barriers; and/or,
- ❖ Human barriers.

✚ And many can be prevented or overcome by pre-planning and preparation.

✚ **Human caused barriers**, generally, *can be eliminated or minimized by developing relationships* with:

- ❖ Officials on the city and parish/county levels.
 - Sheriff, fire & police chiefs, EOC information director, etc
 - Before an event occurs, can a member of the faith community be approved to attend briefings as a liaison to the faith community?
- ❖ Other churches and faith communities.
 - Coordinate and facilitate meetings between the faith community and city and/or parish/county leaders in your area to build relationships and develop plans.
 - Prepare congregants as to what to do should an event occur.
 - Learn the events or incidents to which your area may be specifically vulnerable, such as an accidental chemical release from an area plant.
 - Become familiar with events that may not be specific to your area but could impact an entire state or region, such as a pandemic health event; i.e., pandemic-flu.
- ❖ Ham radio operators and other such groups in your area.
- ❖ Managers or safety officers at plants and facilities in your area.

✚ **Technical barriers** – The nature and scope of some technical barriers defies the average faith community's ability to eliminate the barrier; i.e., you can't do anything about the power lines being downed by falling trees. But, *with forethought and planning the impact can be minimized.*

- ❖ Technical barriers tend fall into **two categories**:
 - Equipment and/or infrastructure failure.
 - ◇ To minimize these barriers requires considering questions such as, "How will we contact our congregants if (electricity, cell towers, etc) fails?"
 - Lack of knowledge re. new technology that is available to aid in consistent communication.
 - ◇ These can be minimized by making the conscious effort to stay abreast with technological developments in this area...(or by talking to a 12 year old ☺).

✚ **Overcoming Barriers** – In considering ways and methods to overcome predictable communication barriers we will assess how these methods will assist the church and faith community leaders to remain in contact with each of the three groups with which it normally communicates during incidents.

NOTE: While many of the methods and tools can be used for each group some cannot and should be considered separately.

❖ Members, Congregants and Leadership Team

➤ Obstacles and Barriers

- ◇ In the case of evacuations, not knowing to what location members have evacuated.
- ◇ Members unable to reach/communicate with the pastor or leaders, and, vice versa.
- ◇ Lack of communicated pre-event plan for communicating.

➤ Potential solutions

- ◇ **Internet** – *NOTE:* It is an incorrect concept to think that “the internet went down” in the last hazardous incident. The simple fact is, the internet is too large and interconnected to “go down.” While it may become taxed due to traffic volume, your connection may not work or you may lose power...**the internet simply does not go down.** Therefore,
 - Establish a **blog** by which the pastor can “journal” to the members and the members can post questions.
 - Establish a **website**.
 - A blog can be linked to the church’s website and vice versa.
 - Static, non-live, announcements can be posted for the church.
 - There will typically be a cost associated with establishing and maintaining a website.
 - For those members and congregants still able to do so, establish an **on line giving** protocol to allow continued tithes and offerings to flow to the church.
 - **Free, Secure Social Networking Sites** – Such as, Facebook, Twitter, SKYPE.
 - Facebook, in particular, allows you to control who can see your postings because only those whom you “confirm as friends” can see what is on your “wall”; AND, if you want to send a private message, you can do so and only those from your “friends list” whom you designate to receive the message can see it.
 - Twitter – is another social networking site that can send a 140 character text message from your computer to the cell phones of those you choose in your address book.
 - SKYPE – allows those with a camera and microphone enabled computer to see and speak to one another via the internet.

- **Streaming video and/or audio**

- **Live streaming** will incur additional cost for this service.
- **Static or archive stream** can be placed on a church’s website.
 - Check with your web server to determine if this ability is included in your hosting agreement.

- **Both** would allow pastors to post sermons/teachings that members and congregants could access from wherever they are, as long as they have internet access.
- **Webinars**
 - Think of webinars as **web-based conference calls**
 - These may be a good method for **communicating with leadership team and planning** when the team is in different locations and traditional phone communication is limited or overloaded
- **Internet based phone systems**
 - As with any system there are limitations, however, getting phone calls through when traditional landline systems are overloaded *can* be easier.
 - As with any phone system and service, there are costs involved and the system should be in place before an incident. So, a church or faith community may want to consider changing to an internet based system for their regular service.
- ◇ **Cell & Smart Phone Technology**
 - Learn to **SMS/Text** – In hazardous events landline phone systems, and voice cell phone systems frequently become overloaded so that voice calls will not go through.
 - Because SMS/Text systems require smaller data streams and are based on a combined cell tower-satellite systems, they get through when voice calls will not.
 - Also, **emails** can be sent and received via cell phone/smart phones if you have the data package with your contract.
 - With both SMS/Text and Email/internet via cell phones additional charges may apply if you don't have this in your contract.
- ◇ **Satellite Phones**
 - These systems are an option but can be cost prohibitive and can have signal difficulties.
- ◇ **Radios**
 - There are several radio types (ham, shortwave, amateur, fm, CBs, high frequency), each of which has proven useful in events where traditional communications are disrupted.
 - **LIMITATIONS**
 - Only persons with a radio tuned to the same frequency or bandwidth can send or receive signals.
 - Cost vary greatly
 - Range varies and, in some cases, is very limited.
 - **SUGGESTION** – Familiarize yourself and become acquainted with any ham radio clubs or operators in your area.
 - They have often proven invaluable in relaying brief messages and information to loved ones, especially in those hours between the interruption of normal communication services and the implementation of alternate services.
- ◇ **Old fashion “phone trees” and robo-calling systems**
 - Sometimes forgotten in our modern communication culture is the simple old fashion **phone tree** in which, a pastor or leader initiates a call to 5 preselected contacts with a message or information.

Those 5 then contact 5 additional, preselected contacts with the message or information.

- Within 5 “generations” over 3,100 homes can be reached and notified. For example:

- × $1 \times 5 = 5$ homes;

- × $5 \times 5 = 25$ homes;

- × $5 \times 25 = 125$ homes;

- × $5 \times 125 = 625$ homes;

- × $5 \times 625 = 3,125$ homes

- Obviously, a “phone tree” will only be useful during those incidents in which both the landline and cell phone systems have not been significantly damaged or disrupted.

- **Robo-calling** is the system used by such groups as telemarketers and politicians in which a brief, prerecorded message is placed via a computer.

- One advantage of this system is that it is not labor intensive.
- There are varying costs involved.
- If a service-provider were chosen, it is suggested that one outside of a potential impact area be used so they would not be susceptible to any power failures, etc that occur in the church’s area.

- NOTE: many of the above can be adapted to communicate with the general public and responders/volunteers.

❖ Responders and Volunteers

- Communication *with/to* responders and volunteers

- ◇ Consider establishing a **dedicated page on your web site** for announcements and links pertaining to volunteers.

- Include such information as how to volunteer, the types of volunteers needed (skilled craftsmen, medical, etc), paperwork needed, etc.; OR,

- ◇ Provide links to partner groups where people can volunteer and then those volunteers be assigned where needed.

- This option may be easiest as it will not require each individual church to “re-invent the wheel.”
- Most denominations, associations and groups will have links available that can be placed on your website.

- Communication *from* responders and volunteers.

- ◇ Much of the equipment and many of the methods already mentioned can be adapted to communicating with both volunteers and responders.

- However, there are some and, one in particular, pieces of electronic equipment which will facilitate a faster response from the church and faith community, that leaders may want to consider.

- **Radio scanner** (also known as a police scanner)

- An electronic scanner that, once set, can scan across the frequencies used by law enforcement and fire departments, search and rescue teams, EMT/ambulance units, etc.

- By monitoring these frequencies, church and faith community leaders would be better able to inform their congregations and members with accurate information when an event occurs, AND
 - Would be able to respond more quickly in time critical situations.
 - **IMPORTANT NOTE: In most, if not all, jurisdictions permission must be received to own and operate such devices. In some locales they are illegal. Check with your local Sherriff's office, Chief of Police, and Fire Department. Explain the purpose of your request and ask how, if possible, you may receive permission to purchase a scanner and the protocol for its operation.**
- ◇ Building **pre-incident relationships with officials** can also increase the possibility of church or faith community leaders being invited into briefings, planning sessions, etc.
- By being present (or having a liaison present) at such briefings the church and faith community is better informed and can more clearly and accurately inform its members and the public.
 - These relationships should extend to officials not normally considered in the past, such as, state/regional health officials, hazardous-material response units, factory management, etc.
 - In many cases each of these entities has a **community liaison** who is tasked to meet with groups to inform and educate.
 - **Consider scheduling a meeting or workshop** between several of these liaisons/communication officials and the churches for the purpose of better preparation and training to respond.
- ◇ **PRINCIPLE IN FACT:** The earlier you (pastor/faith community leader) build a relationship with these officials...the earlier you make the effort to “get into their boat” (Lk 5:1-3)...the more readily they will allow you to help them and the more prepared you become to respond should the need arise.
- In most cases they are waiting for someone to take the first step and reach out. They may be somewhat reluctant at first, or even guarded, but if you will serve them (Mk 9:35), the Lord will take you places you never “asked or thought.”

❖ COMMUNICATION WITH AND FROM THE PUBLIC

- In many instances the general public, if they have not accessed any of the communication portals above, will simply not know how to receive communication from or communicate with the church or faith community.
 - ◇ Many will simply show up at the door of the local church looking for help, information and answers.
 - ◇ For those who do not show up or have not accessed the communication portals discussed, **we will have to go to them.**
 - The methods for this that tend to work the best are quite simply some very old, tested and proven techniques such as,
 - **Knocking on doors** to check on neighbors.

- Making and placing **signs along travel corridors** that inform people where help is located.
- If **broadcast radio and/or TV is available, PSAs** (Public Service Announcements). NOTE: Be sure to keep PSAs current and updated with the radio/TV station. Also, don't be surprised if, in the middle of an incident, you (leader) are contacted and interviewed.
- Some cable television providers will also place written **PSAs on a scroll on the public access channel.**
- **Flyers** that are distributed in areas to inform the public where help is located.
- Recommendations re. distributing flyers, knocking on doors, etc.
 - ◇ Send workers, church members, etc. out in two person teams, minimum. **NO ONE GOES ALONE.**
 - ◇ Give a brief training/orientation to those going out as to how to conduct themselves, because some will be confronted with very scared and highly stressed or angry people.
 - ◇ Place some kind of recognizable "identification" on your teams; i.e., t-shirts, name badges, etc.

✚ **Communicating with and through the media**

- ❖ PRC Compassion ***strongly recommends and encourages*** all pastors and faith community leaders to **adopt the following policy:** *Only designated individuals speak with the media (reporters) and/or make official statements on behalf of the church, faith community or organization.*
 - Experience has shown that well-meaning individuals (volunteers, workers, members, staff, etc) can unintentionally send the wrong or inaccurate message which will be reported as an "official statement" from the church.
 - ◇ This usually results because the individual was not in a position to have the entire picture. AND,
 - ◇ Requires the church or organization spend time correcting the miss-communication.
 - PRC Compassion's policy is to ask everyone to refer any reporter or media personnel to the communication director or spokesperson.
 - ◇ A simply reply of, "I'm really not the person to answer that question. You need to speak with _____." OR
 - ◇ "I really don't have time to speak with you right now" (or "to comment on that.") "You should speak with _____."