
Indicators of Risk for Traumatic Stress and Compassion Fatigue When a Church Facility is Damaged

This is a hand out. This document is intended for use by deployed PDA teams who have responded to a church damage event whether the church damage is isolated or part of a broader community event. The intended audience of this document is pastors, executive presbyters and the leadership of churches. The purpose of the document is to provide introductory awareness and guidance as well as to assist in identifying the need for additional support and resources to those affected by the event. This document will also provide guidance in assessing the level of traumatic stress and compassion fatigue within the congregation. After the presentation of this document, the deployed Team will discuss the document, assist in assessing the level of risk with the affected parties, and provide guidance and information on additional resources and support.

Cause of Damage

- Fire
- Vandalism
- Misconduct
- Negligence
- Accident
- Disaster/storm

Motive

- Was the damage part of a deeper motive that is anti-clerical or anti-church?
- Is it a crime scene?
- What impact does that have for accessibility to facility?

Timing of incident

- Near church holiday
- Certain events/celebrations escalate emotions

Repeated incident

- Subsequent to a similar recent damage (within 3 to 6 months)

Displacement of:

- Congregation from sanctuary
- Ancillary daily programs coordinated by church
 - Pre-K School

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- Adult Day Care
 - Other
 - Programs coordinated by volunteer/nonprofits that use church space
 - Food pantry
 - AA meetings
 - Scouts
 - Other
 - Renters/programs that provide financial remuneration
 - School
 - Office space
 - Other

Impact upon Congregation

- Smaller congregations and larger congregations that rely heavily on the pastor for decision making are more vulnerable.
- Were members directly involved in church damage incident?
- Are members or their families directly impacted by related community involvement?
- Are members displaced?

Impact upon Staff

- Was the staff directly involved in the church damage incident?
- Is the staff or their families directly impacted by the related community involvement?
- Is the staff displaced?
- Is a manse affected?
- Is anyone providing pastoral care to the pastor?
- Is the ratio of staff to congregation and program sufficient to deal with the added responsibility of leading the recovery effort?

Damage

- What was damaged?
 - Sanctuary
 - CE
 - Manse
 - Offices
 - Basement
 - Outside facility
 - Other

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- Is there extensive damage or pervasive reminders of damage?
 - Smoke
 - Water marks
 - Other
 - Beyond facility, what records, files, artifacts were compromised and how can they be secured and/or restored?
 - Are worship materials damaged?
 - Can new/borrowed materials be acquired quickly?
 - Is there an environmental risk?
 - Is the residue from the damage toxic or require special handling?

Security and stabilization

- Have the damaged areas been secured and stabilized?
 - Who is making these arrangements and when will it happen?
 - Who has access and how is that managed?

Historical nature of the site

- Is the church considered an historic site in the community?
- Were there objects or mementos that were destroyed or damaged?
- Was there a recent restoration, addition or change to the facility?

Community context

- Is the community environment within which this takes place one that might predict or anticipate this kind of damage.
- Is there a pattern occurring in the neighborhood?
- Is the church well grounded in the community and likely to receive support from the community in its recovery effort?
- Has the community or area been affected by the same incident and to what extent?
- How connected to the community is the church?

Perception of preparation

- Was there a crisis or relocation plan in place?
- Is anyone trained in disaster response?
- Are there connections already in place to the community response and/or emergency management?
- Is insurance adequate?

Response of Leadership

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- Is there a stable leadership in the church?
 - Have elders, deacons, a subcommittee and/or pastor met with others to assess the situation and determine next steps?
 - Have they communicated effectively with the congregation?
 - Does the church have a working relationship with its presbytery and presbytery executive?

Temporary location(s) for worship and programming

- Proximity and perception of location site
- Accessibility
- Parking
- Secure storage
- Dates/times/availability

Likely timeline of rebuilding or having access to facilities

- A long delay (more than 1 liturgical year) may stress social and programming systems.
- How long will it be before the congregation is able to
 - Worship in their own sanctuary
 - Have access to office space
 - Use education and fellowship facilities

Previous exposure to traumatic stress

- Has there been exposure in the congregation or among the staff in the last 2 years?
 - Natural disasters
 - Personal trauma
 - Accidents

Previous serious conflicts in the congregation

- Was the conflict resolved or suppressed?
- Are there people in the church who still bear resentments about how the conflict was handled?

Communications

- Are communications affected?
- Are alternate means in place?
- Consider use of website, social media (Facebook, Twitter), landlines, cell phones/text, flyers, signage and media (radio, television, newspapers)

Financial Concerns

- Is the church financially stable or are there underlying issues?
 - Does the congregation know these issues?
 - Does the damage exacerbate the issues?
- Is there a need for financial assistance?
- Is there a mechanism in place to track, acknowledge and account for donations?

Availability of assistance

- Are contractors and recovery services readily available?
- Would the church consider using volunteers?
 - Is there a volunteer coordinator or mechanism in place?

Availability of insurance

- Is insurance adequate?
 - Is there a shortfall?
 - How much is the deductible?
- Is the insurance inadequate?
 - Are there plans to obtain additional funds?