

Guidance for Dealing with Catastrophes

Wisdom from ministers who have served in response to catastrophes

What must I do?

1. Contact the media office
2. If your church has agreed a disaster plan, draw upon it
3. Inform the person with pastoral oversight of your role that you are responding to a catastrophe
4. Make sure the response is shared
5. Consider the well-being of yourself and others
6. Consult resources

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Contact the media office

The Communications Team are a great support, use them well.

With a major news story, it's worth contacting the Communications Team first to agree a way forward. If you don't have anyone locally who can field media calls, they can do this for you. You may want someone from the Team with you on the ground (they attended and supported with the Grenfell Tower fire and in the days after the murder of the MP David Amess). They will be able to draft media statements for you and put them out as required, and work with you on messages for media interviews.

The constant pressure from local and national journalists can take up a lot of time, so involving the Communications Team early on will take away some of the pressure enabling you to concentrate on other tasks.

Social Media

Be aware that your community, and potentially journalists, will look to your social media for advice, guidance and emotional support.

Be mindful to ensure that what you share is accurate and refer to official agencies, such as the police and local authorities.

Do not speculate on causes, motives, victims (including numbers) or any offenders.

Once again, the Communications Team can give advice on messaging for social media and offer support with drafting posts if you need it.

**Communications Team on-call number (24 hours):
07799 902580**

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If your church has agreed a disaster plan, draw upon it

3

Inform the person with pastoral oversight of your role that you are responding to a catastrophe

Try to be clear with the person in pastoral oversight what support you and the team need and from whom.

Ask that person to contact others in the church. For example:

- You might ask the person in pastoral oversight to keep others informed of what support they can offer as and when the situation changes.
- You will not want your inbox to be inundated with good wishes, so it may be helpful for them to field messages of support.

4

Make sure the response is shared

- Bring together a team to respond for mutual support.
- Allocate roles. Roles might include: spokesperson, spiritual support/prayer spaces, chaplaincy/community care, managing donations of money or items, ecumenical liaison, liaising with other agencies, care for the congregation.
- End each day with a team debrief.
- Identify someone outside of the situation to be available for the team to debrief to and let off steam.
- If you are in the context on your own, be very clear about what you can and cannot offer.
- Be as attentive as you can to the well-being of yourself and the team in the short, mid and long term. Try to make decisions at the start that will serve you well mid and long term.
- Get connected to chaplaincy rapid response projects that might already be on the ground.
- Which multi-faith and ecumenical partners are involved? How can you join with them?

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Consider the well-being of yourself and others

Your well-being

- A lot will happen fast. Have your initial response and create some space for yourself in the near future, because you do not know how long this this situation will last.
- All ministers dealing with catastrophes are entitled to CMCS counselling
- All ministers can have a discussion with the Well-being Team about any additional support or funding for support.

Questions to ask

- Who can pray with and for me?
- What can you do to not get drawn in a saviour complex and think it is your responsibly to fix or save everyone?
- Who can you talk to (outside of the situation) who can hear you vent?
- What can you most usefully take to Reflective Supervision? Remember that you can request an additional session.
- Did you complete a Support Plan (Appendix 2 of the Ministers' Handbook), if so, can you draw on this wisdom is this situation?
- Will you be acting as pastor to a congregation and the wider community? If so, is this sustainable for your well-being?
- Echoes of other situations can occur – situations in wider society or echoes from past trauma, including your own. Be attentive and make use of counselling.
- Collective grief and voyeurism can be confused. Be attentive to identify the differences at play and recognise which you are experiencing. What can your response most usefully be?

Well-being of others

Families/victims

- In times of catastrophe, families and victims can feel as though decisions are 'done to' them and not made themselves – even by well-meaning church representatives. Be alert not to take decisions away from families/victims, eg dictate memorials etc.
- Consider how you can best act as an advocate for families/victims.
- Consider any therapeutic or specialist support that can be provided or applied for and who can source this? Contact the Well-being Team to discuss ideas: wellbeing@methodistchurch.org.uk

Congregation

- Be attentive to how to bring the congregation along with the response team, especially if the crisis lasts a long time (for example, if the church want their building back to how it was before etc).
- Be attentive to members of the congregation who are victims of the catastrophe.
- Be attentive to secondary PTSD that congregation members might be experiencing.
- What small things can the congregation offer that do not overwhelm them or traumatise them?
- Is there any specialist support deliverable on a group basis, and who can source and fund this? Contact the Well-being Team to discuss ideas: wellbeing@methodistchurch.org.uk

Wider community

- Will part of your building be made available to meet the spiritual needs of the public?
- Will you offer prayer space? What will it be?

- Will you have people available when the space is available?
- Will you offer gathered worship? If so, in the church building or in a public space?
- Will you offer spiritual care online? If so, what content? Which platforms?

Wider well-being issues

- Echoes of other situations can occur – situations in the wider society or echoes from individual's past trauma.
- Collective anger can take hold. Be attentive to what a helpful Christian response could be.
- People often want to blame, but contexts are very complicated. What is a helpful Christian response to this?



Consult resources

- A helpful summary of some of Ann Morrisy's phrases jonnybaker.blogs.com
- Understanding collective grief [cruse.org.uk/understanding grief](https://cruse.org.uk/understanding-grief)
- Understating voyeurism theconversation.com
- A Methodist response to inter faith relationships methodist.org.uk