

Emergency Planning and the Churches

Background

The Civil Contingencies Act (2004) requires local authorities to provide a co-ordinated response to disasters and emergencies, acting under the overall authority of the Emergency Services (now called 'Category 1 Responders'), who are to produce their own Joint Plan. Local authorities are obliged to include voluntary and community groups in their planning. The guidance to accompany the Act refers to the role of the voluntary sector in chapter 14 and the churches and faith communities in sections 5:51-5.53. The guidance states that the faith needs 'should be borne in mind' and that it is 'important to integrate their requirements into general contingency planning as far as possible'.

Many ecumenical county bodies used older Anglican diocesan based Clergy Plans and adapted them to make them more ecumenical and some have included other faiths in their plans. This is now essential.

Points and questions to consider when making a new county faith community plan

- 1 The Plan will need to be integrated into the overall contingency plans in the area.
- 2 What is the area the faith community plan will cover? County, unitary authority area, a combination of these? Ask the police headquarters for their 'Contingency Planning Manager' who will know the boundaries for the Emergency Services.
- 3 All local authorities (Counties and Unitary Authorities) have Emergency Planning Officers (EPOs) who devise and co-ordinate local emergency plans to fit in with the Joint Plans of the Emergency Services. Make contact with the EPOs for the area to seek their support and to say that the faith communities are there to assist them in responding to emergencies.
- 4 EPOs are obliged to set up 'Resilience Forums' to plan and co-ordinate responses to emergencies. There is a Resilience Forum for the voluntary and community sector. Faith communities should have a place on this forum. The Salvation Army can claim a separate place on this because of their distinct practical role with their mobile canteens.
- 5 Each hospital has an emergency plan, so it would be helpful to consult with the chaplains.
- 6 Each airport will have an emergency plan too and their chaplains should have been involved in planning and/or exercises, so will be useful in overall planning.
- 7 Most plans consist of a 'telephone tree' to inform local teams of clergy. How will your plan be triggered? Joint emergency planners will be happy to telephone a designate at the top of your telephone tree. In the older Anglican diocesan plans these were usually Archdeacons, but one suggestion is that it may be better to choose a place which is open 24 hrs, such as a YMCA hostel or a religious community.
- 8 Who is going on site? The new Act restricts who can go on site. These will need to be people with identification. In most large scale emergencies casualties are quickly moved away from the site so there will be a greater need for pastoral support away from the immediate area.

- 9 Other faith communities should be involved and included in the teams. There are national guidelines for the requirements of the major world faiths regarding giving food, medical treatment and the treatment of bodies.
- 10 Churches may wish to offer church halls as rest centres, but if so, then the authority for what happens there is taken by the Local Authority, or someone designated by them to take charge there.
- 11 For people who are going on site, there are training implications. Who is going to provide this? Can it be delivered locally? Will it be ongoing? Easingwold Police College hold two-day courses suitable for clergy.

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