

Preparing the church: Are you ready for the next disaster?

By Hubert Yates

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Severe Weather Awareness Week is February 11-17, 2024 in Mississippi. This annual call to awareness serves as a reminder to those of us who reside in Mississippi, because of our geographic location, that we have the potential to experience the effects of natural disasters year-round.

This has been demonstrated over the past few years as a significant number of severe weather events have occurred outside of the traditional spring and fall cycles. Whether it be tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, high winds, or snow and ice, Mississippi is no stranger to severe weather and the “disasters” that are generated from the effects.

The call to awareness is purposeful as it focuses attention on the need to plan and prepare before the disaster strikes so that purposeful and meaningful action can be taken in a timely manner. This concept is echoed in Proverbs 22:3 says “The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it.” (ESV) While the call is to the individual, the same call extends to the local church and association.

For most congregations, a disaster response is rooted in a reactive compassionate response to the needs that we see presented. Whether from personal connections, social media pleas for help, or the media messaging of damage and need, our hearts are moved to “do something.”

The response has to be initiated, needs/methods identified, resources collected, people mobilized, and connections made. This often results in delays to the assistance being rendered, the provision of inappropriate or unneeded resources, and an

inefficiency to the entire process. Moved by compassion, we did something, but whether our something was of benefit to the affected community and/or individuals might be questioned.

Look again at Proverbs 22:3. After seeing the danger – an awareness of the threat, the wise man took action. An action of planning, “to hide himself.” This represents a proactive response anchored in awareness rather than a reactive response to the event. Still motivated by the heart that desires to help the wise man sees the potential and takes steps to prepare.

Now the steps are guided by a plan prepared not in the crisis of the event but in thought before the event occurs. Resources are readied and people are prepared. Now when the disaster occurs, the congregation/association is able to respond in a timely manner with appropriate resources and effectively minister those affected.

This is the process by which Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief provides the Disaster Ready Church/Disaster Ready Association program to assist churches and associations in preparing for likely disaster events by 1) identifying the risk and hazards that the church/association faces; 2) Planning for the church/association’s response to the varied disasters; 3) developing resources and training volunteers to be prepared to respond and provide needed assistance to church members and the community following a disaster; and 4) networking into the local, state, and national disaster response work with Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief.

For information on the Disaster Ready Church/Disaster Ready Association or to schedule an event for a congregation or association, contact Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief State Director Hubert Yates at hyates@mbcb.org or (601)292-3334.

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