

Faith-based organizations have always played a pivotal role following disasters, mobilizing their people to help those most in need. Ready Congregations serves all Bainbridge Island and North Kitsap faith-based helping them prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. Our goal faith communities be ready to both care for their own congregations in disaster and to be leaders in caring for the entire community.



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If you are interested in increasing the resilience of your house of worship or organizing your congregation to help others, please contact us at [readycongregations-leads@bainbridgeprepares.org](mailto:readycongregations-leads@bainbridgeprepares.org).

## Prepare Your Congregation for Disasters: 8 Ideas to Get You Started

From the Bainbridge Prepares Ready Congregations Team

You don't need to be an expert to help your house of worship become better prepared for natural disasters. All you need is to get started, and this pamphlet provides eight ideas for how. Pick one of these ideas that seems both important and achievable for your congregation now. The Bainbridge Prepares [Ready Congregations Team](#) is here to help.

### Idea 1: Organize a team to work on disaster preparedness.

Your congregation is most likely to make progress on disaster preparedness when one or more people take ownership of this work. A group is best since it shares the load and allows people with different talents to work together, but one dedicated advocate can make a huge difference, too.

- Identify one or more people to work on disaster preparedness issues.
- Seek authority for your work from your congregation's leadership.
- Define what you want to achieve and get started.

### Idea 2: Conduct fire and earthquake drills.

Earthquake and evacuation drills are easy to organize and make a big difference in safety if a disaster strikes while your congregation is gathered together. Drills are especially important in congregations with very old, very young, and mobility-challenged members.

- Conduct an [earthquake drill](#) during services.
- Conduct a fire/evacuation drill during services.
- Consider conducting drills annually.

### Idea 3: Encourage members of your congregation to prepare at home.

Help the members of your congregation to stay safe by assisting them to make their homes prepared for disasters.

- Include preparedness tips in newsletters or other regular communications.
- Encourage every household to store [emergency supplies](#) that meet all of their needs for two weeks.
- Encourage households to make [family reunification plans](#).

### Idea 4: Participate in training programs.

Police, Fire Departments, and others offer a range of training programs in emergency preparedness skills. These range from first aid to basic fire safety to becoming a member of a [Community Emergency Response Team](#).

- Invite trainers to conduct programs directly at your house of worship.
- Inform members of your congregation about training programs being offered at other venues.

### **Idea 5: Be ready to communicate with congregation members in an emergency.**

Communication is critical in a disaster, and can be challenging if phones, internet and other infrastructure are not working.

- Ensure that you keep contact information for congregation members up-to-date and in a variety of formats and locations.
- Plan when and how to contact people during an emergency and what to say.
- Identify and plan for members of your congregation who might need particular help after a disaster, such as those with mobility and health issues.

### **Idea 6: Take steps to make your facilities safer.**

No one can stop natural hazards from occurring, but you can do a lot to reduce the amount of damage they cause. For example:

- For earthquake, [secure heavy furniture](#) and other items that could fall and injure people.
- For wildfires, [manage vegetation](#) to reduce risk to your buildings.
- If you know your buildings or land have major vulnerabilities to disasters, launch a multi-year program to decide how to address and finance retrofit and remediation work.

### **Idea 7: Get involved in community preparedness efforts.**

Houses of worship can participate in ongoing community programs to prepare for disasters in a range of ways, including these:

- Encourage congregation members to participate in the popular [Map Your Neighborhood](#) program, in which neighbors help neighbors.
- Encourage members to join one of the [Bainbridge Prepares teams](#) based on interests and skills. Are they medical professional, boat owners, interested in helping domestic animals, or ham radio operators? Our volunteer teams need all of these skills and more.
- Some houses of worship have committed to serving as official [Hubs](#) for the City of Bainbridge, temporarily loaning their building space to help the community in the hours and days immediately following a disaster.

### **Idea 8: Create a comprehensive emergency plan for your congregation.**

A comprehensive emergency plan defines what to do before, during, and after all of the possible natural hazards your house of worship could experience. Preparing a comprehensive plan takes time, but it ensures that your congregation will be as prepared as possible for whatever may occur.

- Reach out to the Bainbridge Prepares [Ready Congregations team](#) for guidance and a template plan that you can adapt.
- Identify members of your congregation with special skills or equipment that could be needed after a disaster, such as those with medical training or portable generators.