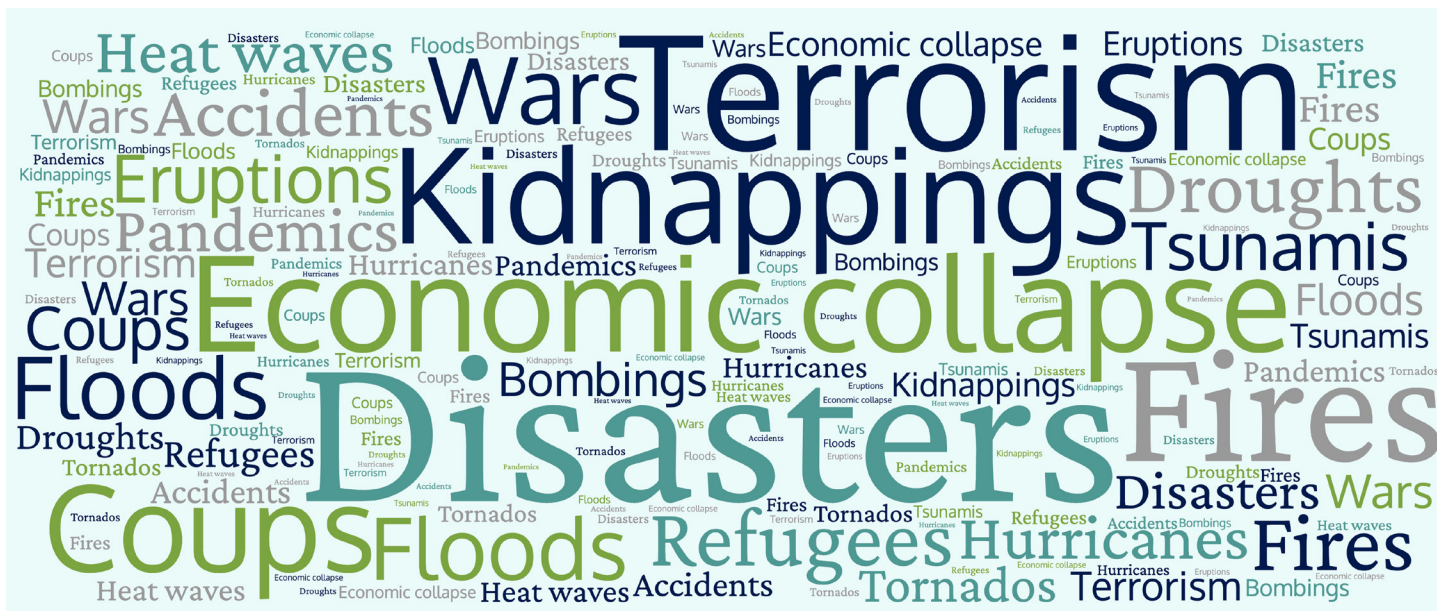


articles for missions mobilizers



One Crisis after Another

Responding wisely to the endless waves of emergency needs

How does Jesus want us to demonstrate His compassion in the face of all this suffering?

As individual believers, our hearts break. If we have a role in determining how our church will respond to this torrent of tragic stories, our responsibility substantially increases. Emails and church hallway conversations will raise urgent questions: “People are suffering! What will our church do? How can we help?”

How *should* our local body respond? Often missions dollars are already designated, and special appeals must be limited or compassion fatigue sets in quickly.

There are no easy answers. And certainly no one answer is right for every congregation. This issue of *Postings* presents some principles to consider and some questions to ask as you determine how to prayerfully define your church's responsibility in a world of ongoing turmoil and frequent disasters.

SEVEN PRINCIPLES FOR RESPONDING TO CRISES

1. Remember that your church is not responsible to address every emergency.

Help your missions team and congregation to understand that a crisis is not automatically a call for your church to respond. Often individuals will passionately champion a particular need, urging an immediate response to an emergency they care about. You will want to kindly but firmly make it clear that church leaders will prayerfully determine when God is calling your body to address a particular crisis, keeping in mind their responsibility to meet prior commitments.

If your leaders decide to collect a crisis-related offering, it may be appropriate to remind the congregation not to neglect their support of your church's regular ministry by redirecting their usual giving to the special offering. Extra generosity, even sacrificial giving, is a biblical response to need, especially the need of brothers and sisters in Christ in keeping with Gal. 6:10: "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

2. Proactively make prayer the core of your response. God is always at work, even in the most dire of emergencies. Remind your people that physical aid is important, but prayer is the greatest contribution in any crisis. Provide a short list of specific prayer requests. Wherever possible, focus prayer on specific people/ministries and how they are serving

on the front lines of the situation. Explaining how believers are offering on-site aid can help replace a sense of hopelessness with a confidence that God is bringing good out of even the darkest circumstances. In pastoral prayers, intercede not just in the first days of an emergency but also later on when you can include thanksgiving for how God is working.

3. Establish an emergency fund as a part of your annual missions budget. With a budgeted missions emergency fund, monies can be disbursed to address a sudden need without launching a fundraising project. Creating a line item for emergencies will mean that before crises arise, you can objectively consider the percentage of your church's budget you believe should be designated for emergency response.

4. Develop a list of reputable agencies through which individuals could contribute funds or volunteer hours.

In situations where your church determines not to contribute budgeted funds or launch a special project, you can encourage individuals to invest through another worthy organization if they feel so led. Providing a list of organizations you find trustworthy will help to channel funding to ministries you believe are capable of using resources most strategically and in the name of Jesus. See criteria below.

5. Designate funding to an aspect of crisis response that is of particular interest to your congregation. Most emergencies create multiple needs of huge proportions. The amount of loss and desperation feels overwhelming. Targeting

"Targeting one specific area of the need can help your church see where and how they are making a difference."

one specific area of the need can help your church see where and how they are making a difference. Whenever possible, designate funds, time, and/or other resources toward an aspect of relief that is of particular interest to your congregation or for which your people have gifting and experience. For example, if your church is particularly concerned about vulnerable children, steer your crisis-response funds to a relief organization providing emergency family housing or rebuilding schools. Or if your congregation is committed to church planting, contribute to relief that will be distributed through local churches, thereby strengthening the testimony of the believers in their communities. Offer on-the-ground service if you have qualified volunteers.

"Prayer is the greatest contribution in any crisis."

6. Focus on what is neglected when a crisis draws funding elsewhere. The sad reality is that funding for other projects drops when a crisis occurs because donors redirect their giving to the latest urgent need. Challenge your church to consider the bigger picture when a crisis hits. One church leader phrased it this way, "When a major emergency draws attention and funding in one direction, we intentionally focus elsewhere and fund out-of-the-spotlight strategic needs that will likely be neglected."

7. Make sure to report stories of specific ministry impact. "Did our giving make any difference?" your people will wonder. Make sure that you report back, if possible on multiple occasions and through multiple means. Even a couple of short mentions in pastoral prayers, in PowerPoint slides prior to/during your worship service, in emailed updates, etc., will encourage your congregation by letting them know how their gifts made an impact.

PRAYERFULLY ESTABLISH A CRISIS-RESPONSE PROTOCOL

In addition to the principles above, consider these questions:

1. Are there specific reasons why our church should respond to this particular crisis? For example, does it impact a global area or ministry to which we are already committed? Has it struck nearby in what we might consider our Jerusalem/Judea region?

2. Is this crisis likely to generate great amounts of generosity from other sources? If the crisis has received a lot of publicity, aid organizations may receive more resources than they can mobilize, at least in the short term.

3. How long is this crisis likely to last? Rarely is an emergency resolved by the time the media coverage has disappeared and attention has moved on to something new. Would it be wise to wait and review the situation in a few weeks or months? By then, relief organizations may be better able to assess the situation on the ground, and our help could be even more desperately needed.

In the weeks following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, churches and individual Christians contributed millions of dollars to support refugee care and aid distribution. Ministries distributed large sums to pastors and churches who were able to serve needs in the name of Christ. But 18+ months later, giving has reduced to a trickle while in many parts of Ukraine the needs have increased. Will churches in the West forget?

4. Have members of our congregation been stirred to respond to this crisis?

Emotional reactions should not be the sole criterion for our response, but they should be one factor in our decision.

5. Will responding to this crisis jeopardize our ability to meet the funding and volunteer commitments we have already made?

In other words, will our members just move their giving of time and money from one “bucket” to another, or will they give over and above to an appeal addressing this crisis?

6. Most important: As we pray about our response, how has God confirmed His leading?

Discerning His voice will help us avoid being motivated solely by our emotions. Sometimes God calls His people to make exceptions and compassionately respond to an emergency outside or beyond their usual guidelines. At other times, we need to be assured that God is not dependent on our church to meet every need and not feel guilty because we cannot help address this particular crisis.

- Will this organization provide aid in the name of Jesus, and if feasible, distribute it through local churches? While emergency aid should never be used to coerce people to a faith decision, it is important that, as much as possible, services are rendered in ways that strengthen the testimony of local churches and communicate that love for Jesus is the motivation of the donors.
- Does this organization have a track record of being conscientious about informing donors of the impact of their giving?

Global crises will doubtless continue to devastate multiple parts of our world and fill our screens with heart-wrenching pictures of suffering people. As we live out our faith in unstable times, godly compassion should overflow in wise stewardship of the resources entrusted to us. Joyful generosity can mark our churches as we seek to fulfill Jesus’ Great Commission (Acts 1:8) and Great Command (Mark 12:30-31) in these turbulent days.

SET UP CRITERIA FOR WHERE TO CHANNEL EMERGENCY GIFTS

Make sure your missions team has criteria for emergency relief agencies.

- Could our aid flow through a trusted individual missionary or ministry working in this area, ideally one with whom we are already engaged?
- Does this organization have boots on the ground in this geographic region and do they have expertise in addressing these specific types of needs? Sadly, some organizations take advantage of a crisis to raise funds for needs they are not well equipped to address; in some cases, funds are diverted to cover administrative costs or other expenses.

"As much as possible, render services in ways that strengthen the testimony of local churches."

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