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PURPOSE OF THE MATTHEW 25 PLANNING AND ORGANIZATION GUIDE

Jesus set the example for us when He described His mission as one of service to others.

“The Son of Man has not come to be served but to serve.” (Mark 10:45)

Churches of all denominations have been responding to human suffering caused by natural disaster, both large and small, for centuries, historically serving those who would have otherwise fallen through the cracks of other helping systems.

By definition, Matthew 25 Disaster Preparedness and Response Ministry is the church parish disaster readiness and response program for the diocese. However, we must remember that it is first a ministry and an ultimate opportunity for evangelization of God’s people. The name of the ministry is taken from the Bible verses found in Matthew 25 Verses 31-40:

*“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’ And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, **whatever you did for one of these least brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me.**”*

The purpose of this Matthew 25 Disaster Preparedness and Response Planning Guide is to assist Diocesan staff, church parishes and the Catholic community to be well prepared for a disaster and to guide collaborative relief efforts in response to whatever calamity may occur. This guide also is intended to serve as a tool that church parishes, schools, institutions, and parishioners can use to assist in preparing, developing, implementing and monitoring Disaster Response Plans specific to each church parish’s needs.

Disaster planning is a collaborative effort and a continuous process of assessment, evaluation, and preparation. It is a process that requires research, analysis, decision making, teamwork, implementation, and updating. A disaster plan is not a single document and is never “finalized”; rather, it is a “living” document.

Unfortunately, the question, “Why is disaster planning so important?” has become easier to answer in the immediate aftermath of recent events. Anyone in the areas of the state who personally felt the effects of the hurricanes of 2005 could provide a list of “if only”; “If only we had”, “If only they had”, “If only the storm had”. Hindsight tells us proper planning **would have been helpful**.

The goals of this plan are to (a) reduce human suffering, (b) adequately protect Sacramental Records and church property, and (c) promote outreach efforts to assist our neighbors affected by disasters. It has been developed to allow the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux to more effectively meet the spiritual, emotional and human needs of the diocesan community should disaster strike. Being prepared can greatly lessen the traumatic effects experienced both during and after a disaster. Most importantly, proper planning can save lives.

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The Matthew 25 Disaster Preparedness and Response Planning Guide in no way seeks to duplicate the efforts of the American Red Cross or any government agencies active in emergency assistance. The Diocese will work collaboratively with these agencies when preparing for a disaster and in bringing assistance to victims.

Particularly throughout coastal Louisiana, we know it is not a matter of *if* disaster strikes, but *when* it will strike. We also know that living inland from the coast does not provide safeguards from disaster. Christ calls us to vigilance. We cannot afford to be unprepared.

DEFINITION OF DISASTER

A disaster is defined as:

A hurricane, storm surge, drought, pestilence, fire, explosion, building collapse, transportation accident, or other situation that causes human suffering or creates human needs that the victims cannot alleviate without assistance.

The types of disasters are: (1) Family Emergency (2) Local Disaster (3) State Disaster (4) Major Disaster

EXPECTATIONS OF THE DIOCESE

The Bishop of the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux established the Matthew 25 Disaster Preparedness and Response Ministry (Matthew 25). The purpose of this Ministry is to:

- Assess the disaster potential to the Diocese and analyze the resources available to provide services to victims, including procedures to obtain resources from outside the diocese.
- Outline procedures and responsibilities for the delivery of disaster recovery services.
- Articulate the needs, priorities, objectives, and responsibilities of Catholic Charities as the lead Catholic disaster response agency for the Diocese.
- Provide a Disaster Preparedness and Planning Guide for parish/institution use.
- Provide for a method to review and update the plan as needed.

The Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux cannot address every disaster such as individual disasters, international natural disasters or out-of-state events. However, this plan does provide family education materials to help prevent household disasters and discusses responses to international disasters. **The scope of this plan is focused on domestic disasters of a large scale within the diocesan community.**

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ROLES OF THE DIOCESE, CATHOLIC CHARITIES, PARISHES AND INSTITUTIONS

A. Diocese

- Provides initial leadership and subsequent direction in establishing Diocesan, Parish and Institution preparedness and response plans.
- Promotes active clergy and religious participation in disaster planning and response.
- Establishes a Diocesan Disaster Planning Committee.
- Implements Diocesan Disaster Plan.
- Encourages parishes/schools/institutions to develop parish disaster plans.
- Provides leadership and general direction to relief activities.
- Receives information about the state of Diocesan personnel and property.
- Mobilizes resources and funds.

B. Catholic Charities

- Serves on the Diocesan Disaster Planning Committee and as a member of the Diocesan Disaster Team.
- Serves as the lead diocesan agency in disaster relief.
- Coordinates Matthew 25 Program.
- Networks with other organizations and faith communities to develop working relationships and plan disaster relief activities.
- Works with Bishop to secure additional emergency funding as needed.
- Provides case management services to affected victims.
- Maintains records of all disaster-related activities (i.e., client intake, daily logs, reporting, financial, and other necessary forms).
- Thanks donors.
- Produces a summary report of all activities including funds received and expended at the conclusion of the disaster recovery period.

C. Parish/Institution

- Each June 1 makes a tape back-up of all sacramental records and other irreplaceable information and sends the tape to the diocesan Archivist.
- Creates a Disaster Planning Committee at the parish/school/institution level which has the following responsibilities:
 - Networks with other parishes/schools/institutions (and other local faith communities) to share information, ideas, concerns, and resources.
 - Develop a relationship (alliance) with neighbor parishes within their deanery for mutual support if desired.
 - Encourages parishioners/staff to develop their own family disaster plan.
 - Disseminates disaster-related material/information to parishioners/staff.
 - Surveys parishioners/staff to determine:
 - Who would need assistance in evacuating. (Matthew 25 Needs Form)
 - Which individuals/families would be willing to assist others after a disaster. (Matthew 25 Volunteer Membership Form and Matthew 25 Volunteer Area / Roles Sign-up Form)
 - Determines if parish/school/institution facility should be offered as a relief site. (shelter, relief supply distribution center, warehouse).

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- Develops a team of volunteers willing to serve the community following a disaster through the Matthew 25 Program.
- Attends to the spiritual needs of the faith community before, during and after a disaster.
- Identifies where emergency worship services could be held.
- Determines how to protect Sacramental Records.
- Communicates promptly to the Diocese when impacted by disaster.

Cooperation and collaboration is the key to the development and implementation of any disaster response plan. The Church's ability to communicate quickly with key parish/school/institution personnel; facilitate the continuation of regular religious services and activities; and to begin relief activity as soon as possible is vitally important to the well being of the community as a whole.

SEQUENCE OF ACTIONS IN THE EVENT OF DISASTER

In the event of a disaster in a community, **the primary responsibility** for providing people's basic needs (i.e. food, shelter, medical help, and clothing) and other essentials (i.e. electricity, police protection and emergency communication) **rests with civil authorities** (i.e. the American Red Cross, parish government emergency management, police and fire departments, etc.).

The Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux collaborates with these agencies in providing maximum disaster response and ensuring that even the most marginalized persons receive the assistance they need.

FOLLOWING A DISASTER

1. Any damage to parish property is reported by the pastor immediately to the Chancellor or Diocesan Risk Manager so that a Disaster Assessment and Recovery Team can visit the property.
2. Any damage to sacramental records is reported to the Diocesan Archivist.
3. The pastor and Parish Disaster Coordinators assess the needs and resources of the Parish and the community and develop a plan of appropriate response to the disaster with the help of Catholic Charities if requested.
4. The recovery plan is implemented in consultation with the Disaster Team of the Diocese.
5. Catholic Charities may also provide financial assistance for victims. Catholic Charities has developed a case management program to assist victims directly or assist parishes in their supportive efforts. Assistance requests should be directed to Catholic Charities. The CCHT Director and Chancellor will work with the Bishop to secure additional funds as needed.
6. The Diocesan Disaster Team coordinates with FEMA, the civil emergency management offices and appropriate community and interfaith groups to develop a program of short and long-term recovery for individuals and families.

COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE

The parish and the diocese both have an obligation to communicate with each other. During times of disaster, however, communications modes may or may not exist. Be creative. Make phone calls or send faxes, send email messages, or make in-person visits to stay in touch and keep each other informed.