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Local Christian Churches and Disaster Preparedness: Are They Prepared?

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LOCAL CHRISTIAN CHURCHES AND DISASTER PREPAREDNESS:
ARE THEY PREPARED?

By

ANDREW J. SMITH

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate College of
Arkansas Tech University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
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Permission

Title: Local Christian Churches and Disaster Preparedness: Are They Prepared?

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Abstract

Many religious institutions respond to global crises. These faith-based organizations may be small, independent institutions or belong to a larger corporate body. Local mainline Christian churches from mainline denominations including Lutheran, Presbyterian, Catholic, and United Methodist follow the latter model. As members of the larger corporate faith organization, these local churches have access to well-organized and established disaster response functional units. At the corporate level, these religious institutions have come together as collaborative partners in disaster response and recovery as members of the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (NVOAD). While disaster planning, preparedness, response and recovery activities may be well established and coordinated at the national level, similar activity at the local level has not been examined closely. This study explores the level of internal disaster preparedness activity and coordination with formal emergency management organizations to which local churches within a NVOAD participating denomination have engaged. Using qualitative interviews and survey techniques, this research establishes the planning activities, preparedness levels, and coordination with local emergency management of three local churches in Northeast Arkansas representing different denominations. Current levels of preparedness activity is then compared to accepted standards for disaster plans and recommendations for practice and future study are suggested.

Keywords: disaster preparedness; planning; faith-based organizations; VOAD

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Introduction

One of the core values of the Christian churches has always been loving one's neighbor. This is found in Mark 12:31 of The Holy Bible, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (New Revised Standard Version Anglicized Catholic Edition). Christians strive to show compassion and care to those who need it. These faith-based organizations may be single institutions, or may be part of a larger Christian body. The United Methodist, Southern Baptist, and Assemblies of God churches are organized into a corporate body. On a corporate scale, these churches work together in a collaborative capacity to respond to a disaster as members of the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD). While they may have created a collaborative well planned effort on a national and international level, activity at the local level has not been examined closely. This study examines what local churches are doing internally for disaster preparedness. Using qualitative interviews, this study establishes disaster planning activities and preparedness levels of six local churches in Arkansas representing three different denominations. Current preparedness levels are then compared to accepted standards to establish recommendations for practice and the need for future research into these faith-based organizations.

The Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Disasters

Faith-Based organizations (FBO) are organizations based on religion, or faith. In Christianity, FBOs are any church body, whether they be local, or a larger corporate body. For example, the United Methodist Church has local churches, state-wide conferences and a global general conference that is comprised of all United Methodist

Churches on earth. During disasters, these faith-based organizations respond, either locally or through their VOAD. These VOADs respond to all disasters, whether natural or manmade. Ager (2014) stated, “Our experience of the work of local faith communities in providing humanitarian assistance...suggests some very practical actions for humanitarian agencies to partner with religious groups” (p. 18). These VOADs are organized under the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster.

Organization and relationship between local and national church. The National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD) is a national collaborative organization comprised of non-governmental organizations that respond to disasters. The United Methodist, Southern Baptist and Assemblies of God each have non-governmental organizations that are members of the National VOAD. These non-governmental organizations are respectively the United Methodist Committee on Relief, the North American Mission Board, and Convoy of Hope. Each local church is connected with their respective VOAD through the corporate body.

Coordination and collaboration through VOAD and NVOAD structures. These VOAD organizations coordinate through the NVOAD. The NVOAD is a collaborative effort between multiple non-profit, and faith-based organizations who work together to respond to disasters. It “is led by Member organization volunteers and staff” (“Who We Are,” 2014, para. 4). Some of the volunteers and staff are from the Christian VOADs that are members of the NVOAD. Christian VOADs are very well organized and respond throughout the world. Many churches may not know what is entailed in disaster preparedness. If local churches do not have a plan on what to do if they are affected by a disaster, then these local churches may have to rely heavily on outside

entities to help the local church recover from a disaster. This will cause a delay in their response and recovery efforts, which could impact the church by limiting and delaying essential functions to these churches' congregations and the community they serve.

Background and Need

According to the Arkansas Secretary of State, a study in 1990 was conducted that approximately 1.4 million people, which is over 60% of the population, were members of a Christian Church. ("How We Believe," n.d.) Many rely on the church for religious fulfillment, social interaction, spiritual growth, and assistance in their daily lives.

Without the church's ability to function, many of these members of the congregation and community may be negatively impacted, such as loss of food supply, transportation assistance, and connections with others in the community. Members of the affected church may feel lost and afraid with no one to turn to in the event of a disaster. It is for this reason that preparation for a disaster is so important for these Christian churches. If the churches were to have a disaster plan in place, the church could recover sooner, and respond quicker to any disaster that strikes the church.

Connection Between Preparedness and Disaster Role Fulfillment

If the churches were to have a disaster plan in place, the church could recover sooner, and respond quicker to any disaster that strikes the church. "FBOs are also significant sources of social capital for their members and communities; thus, there is potential to utilize them for promoting and sustaining disaster preparedness and resiliency in their communities" (Muller, Burke, Berg, Lin, & Upperman, 2014, p. 132). This social capital is a resource that local emergency managers could utilize, and often do, in a response effort. "FBOs recognize that the community and congregation members will

likely look to them for resources in the event of disaster and are willing to be such a resource” (Muller et al., 2014, p. 132). In order to ensure preparedness, FBOs must determine their level of preparedness compared to current preparedness standards.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine what Arkansas local Christian churches are doing to prepare for a disaster. The findings provide an overview of local churches’ disaster preparedness. The results of this research provide local churches with a starting point for enhancing local church preparedness.

Significance to the Field

Christian Churches play a key role in disasters. For example, St. James UMC in Little Rock, Ark. organized a group of youth and adult volunteers that traveled to Biloxi, Miss, after Hurricane Katrina, to help those affected. The volunteers stayed at a United Methodist Church in Biloxi, Miss. This church was functioning as a shelter for displaced members of the community and volunteers that traveled in to help. The Biloxi UMC had constructed a cafeteria, showers, beds, and bathrooms for everyone to use. Signs were posted that told those passing by that the church was a place of shelter for any who needed it. While there, the volunteers from St. James UMC participated in group discussions with those affected by Katrina, aided in the cleanup of Biloxi, and provided spiritual outreach by leading worship services for the church. The St. James UMC’s mission outreach to Biloxi, Miss. was a clear example of how churches help victims of disasters. Churches are a logical point of focus for disaster response and recovery operations because of the resources they possess, such as congregation members who can

provide manpower, mission outreach funding for needed financial resources, as well as large spaces that can be used for shelter.

In the field of emergency management, a prepared church could assemble volunteers quickly to help local emergency managers in their response and recovery operations. Research into how well local Christian churches are prepared for a disaster will help illuminate imperfections in their emergency preparedness and provide a better picture as to how well prepared local churches are for a disaster.

Definitions

For clarity, the following descriptions are provided. A Voluntary Organization Active in Disaster, VOAD for short, is an organization that volunteer's assistance to government agencies in their disaster response efforts. The National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster is a national collaboration of VOADs. Public agencies are governmental agencies that respond to disasters. For example, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, also known as FEMA, is a public agency. Private agencies are any privately-owned business; this can include non-profit agencies.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were: *What are Arkansas local Christian churches doing to prepare for a disaster? Do they have a disaster plan in place?*

Summary

Local churches, their VOADs, and the NVOAD that they collaborate with, all respond to disasters. As previously stated by Muller et al. (2014), there is potential in local churches as a resource for disaster preparedness. The local church resources could

be used by emergency managers to aide in their preparedness activities and response efforts. This study researched how well prepared local Arkansas Christian churches are for a disaster by interviewing local Christian churches and reviewing literature on faith-based organizations and disaster preparedness.

Chapter II: Literature Review

A limited amount of information on disasters in relation to faith-based organizations was found when utilizing the key terms “faith-based organizations”, “United Methodist Committee on Relief,” “North American Mission Board,” “Convoy of Hope,” “Business Continuity,” and “Disaster Preparedness” in a search of the following digital databases: Proquest, EBSCOHost, ijmed.org, and Project MUSE. Additionally, the Arkansas Tech University library databases were searched as well as Arkansas.gov and nvoad.org. Most articles reviewed were non-peer-reviewed sources and only one research study (Muller et al., 2014) pertaining to faith-based organizations and disaster preparedness was found. There appears to be a significant gap in the literature regarding faith-based organizations’ disaster preparedness and response.

Faith-based organizations (FBOs) play a vital role during disasters and these FBOs may even be put in charge of certain relief efforts. In Tobin-Gurley and Peek’s article, “Displaced single mothers in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina: Resource needs and resource acquisition,” Tobin-Gurley and Peek (2010) stated that “... the city transferred the responsibility to local faith-based charities...” (p. 180) for the care of displaced single mothers following Hurricane Katrina. As well, these community organizations continued to find housing and provide services for Hurricane Katrina evacuees residing in Colorado.

At the local level, Christian churches can provide emergency managers with volunteers, supplies, and facilities that can be used in their response and recovery efforts. If the church is not prepared, however, then the church will not be able to assist emergency managers in their response and recovery efforts. Additionally, without a

disaster plan local churches often are not able to continue their essential functions to help their members and their community in the midst of a disaster.

To better understand what Christian churches are doing regarding disaster preparedness, response and recovery operations, reviewing current literature about Christian churches in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery operations may provide insight into how well prepared local churches are for a disaster. This literature review will examine what United Methodists, Southern Baptists, and Assemblies of God denominations are doing to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters.

Disaster Preparedness

What is it? Disaster preparedness, simply put, is preparing for disasters. There are many levels of disaster preparedness. These levels include individual, household, organization or business, city, county, state, national and international preparedness. The disaster “preparedness process begins with hazard and vulnerability analysis that attempt to anticipate what problems are likely to occur and proceeds with the development of ways to address those problems effectively” (Tierney & Perry, 2001, p. 27). Mitigation activities for addressing potential problems that might arise during a disaster include gathering supplies, training, conducting exercises, learning about disaster preparedness, and developing a disaster preparedness plan.

What is a disaster preparedness plan? A disaster preparedness plan is a developed, written, tested, and maintained plan on what to do if a disaster strikes. “The plan states aspirations, principles of action, and often specific courses of action” (Berke, Cooper, Salvesen, Spurlock, & Rausch, 2010, p. 370). For faith-based organizations, disaster preparedness plans are a written policy on what to do to ensure the continuation

of service to the community, including its membership, should a disaster affect the organization. “An emergency preparedness and response plan offers guidance immediately before and after a disaster with the ultimate goal of rapid restoration of normal routines” (Berke et al., 2010, p. 372). These disaster plans help the church quickly respond to a disaster and resume normal functions of their church in order to assist their community.

Faith Based Organizations and Disaster Preparedness

Local Christian churches are faith based organizations that help organize the community, gather resources, and provide emotional stability. Churches also provide faith and spiritual support for the citizens they serve. Often these churches can gather a large amount of financial resources as well as personnel to help in the event of a disaster. For this reason, churches are essential in the local response effort and a valuable resource for local emergency managers during response efforts. For example, most churches already have largely vacant buildings as well as facilities, kitchens, supplies, and personnel that can be used in the response and recovery efforts. According to Muller et al. (2014), “FBOs represent a source of stability and have an established presence in a community. They frequently serve their community following disasters by providing shelter, food, and prayer; giving financial contributions; and rebuilding structures” (p. 128).

Muller et al. (2014) also note that “FBOs are generally active in preparedness, response, and recovery phases...” (p. 128). This shows promising support that Christian churches are familiar with disaster preparedness, and may be prepared, to an extent, for a disaster. Muller et al. (2014) state that “Faith-based organizations have the potential to

be an important resource for disaster preparedness and resiliency for the community, but the barriers they face hinder their ability to best serve their community in the event of a disaster” (p. 132).

According to Muller et al. (2014), their research was limited and covered only churches in a specific community in California. Their findings did not include what other denominations were doing within their community, state, and nation. For this reason, it can be assumed that the differences between the California churches and Christian churches in Arkansas in reference to disaster preparedness is due to the regional variation of churches in these 2 states.

Similarly, in regards to local church response to disasters, Mwaura and Martinon (2010) provide a perspective on how the local churches within Kenya reacted to the post-election violence of 2007. The violence resulted from the 2007 election results that many doubted as accurate because “The whole process was less than transparent, casting doubt on the credibility of the electoral outcome, especially the presidential election” (Mwaura & Martinon, 2010, p. 39). This led to a division amongst the citizens of Kenya based on religious and political grounds, and ultimately a civil conflict. During this crisis, the local churches addressed the social concerns within the country, and provided efforts to try to mitigate the violence within the country. Churches tried to quell the differences between differing denominations that influenced different political views amongst the citizens of Kenya.

The local churches also established humanitarian efforts to provide supplies, shelter, food, water, medical treatment, and other essentials during the conflict in Kenya. According to Mwaura and Martinon (2010), the church communities also worked to

develop child protection initiatives. “The council also developed child protection initiatives in collaboration with UNICEF to provide safe spaces for displaced children...” (Mwaura & Martinon, 2010, p. 44). These child protection initiatives were developed in collaboration with United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund, also known as UNICEF, so that children victims could be well cared for in Kenya.

Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster

Each of the three denominations chosen for this thesis study have Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster. These faith-based organizations provide food, supplies, financial support, and personnel in disaster response and recovery efforts. “National VOAD, an association of organizations that mitigate and alleviate the impact of disasters, provides a forum promoting cooperation, communication, coordination and collaboration; and fosters more effective delivery of services to communities affected by disaster” (“Who We Are,” 2014, para. 1). These voluntary organizations, or VOADs, have plans and agreements in place, with other private and public organizations, that clearly provide their roles and responsibilities in how they respond to disasters.

The United Methodist Church and The United Methodist Committee on Relief

The United Methodist Church is one of the few global church organizations left in the world. They have a voluntary organization active in disaster called the United Methodist Committee on Relief or UMCOR. This organization provides disaster relief both within the United States and abroad. Interestingly, they are one of the few agencies who use 100 percent of donations towards disaster relief and mission efforts, none of the donation monies collected are utilized for administration of the organization or the relief efforts. While UMCOR’s main office is staffed by elders of the United Methodist

Church, they have representatives within each state that help coordinate local efforts within their state.

UMCOR and disaster preparedness. UMCOR, in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, began an effort to boost preparedness for local churches. “Connecting Neighbors” is an program that UMCOR used to develop plans for local churches and their communities. UMCOR also provided disaster response, recovery, emotional and spiritual care training for conferences of the United Methodist Church (Kim, 2016).

UMCOR and disaster relief. In the article, *Faith, relief and development: the UMCOR-Muslim Aid model seven years on*, authors Saleem and Hovey (2014) discuss UMCOR’s joint efforts with a United Kingdom Islamic Non-Governmental Organization in Sri Lanka in 2007. Together, UMCOR and Muslim Aid worked to help provide relief, bring development, and inspire peace and reconciliation within the country of Sri Lanka (Clarke, 2010; Saleem & Hovey, 2014). Saleem and Hovey (2014) describe the difficulties the two faith based organizations faced during their formation of their partnership.

During their partnership’s development phase, UMCOR and Muslim Aid confronted issues related to personnel. “The concern that the Sri Lankan experience owed more to personal friendships proved to be justified...key staff at the field offices in Sri Lanka had left or been replaced” (Saleem & Hoavey, 2014, p. 34). According to the article, other people in main leadership positions were also replaced during the process. This led to coordination problems, especially within the Sri Lanka area. Support for the program was hard to keep afloat. After a while, the partnership of UMCOR and Muslim Aid lost support in Sri Lanka, which slowed their efforts. According to Saleem and

Hovey (2014), much of the problem arose because of a lack of understanding of how organizations like UMCOR and the Muslim Aid of the UK Islamic Non-Governmental Organization work. This article identifies a gap in knowledge regarding disaster preparedness and VOAD structure.

UMCOR traditionally has been a stalwart NVOAD member and has sought to relieve human suffering. The Christian Century published an article in 2005 noting that UMCOR received a grant from FEMA to provide counseling after Hurricane Katrina; identifying UMCOR intended to hire approximately 600 case managers to work with relief centers and volunteers across the USA. (“FEMA Grants \$66 Million,” 2005). This article provides further empirical evidence of a faith based VOAD providing aid in coordination with a government agency.

During the relief effort of Hurricane Sandy, UMCOR provided relief to those affected “Through local United Methodist churches and trained disaster response workers, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) provides immediate relief, assistance with cleanup and rebuilding, pastoral counseling and support for children and youth who have been through trauma” (“United Methodist Committee,” 2012, para. 1). According to PR Newswire, UMCOR stated “...early response teams from many states have been put on alert...” (“United Methodist Committee,” 2012, para. 4). Similar to other VOADs, UMCOR responded to Hurricane Sandy and provided quick relief to those affected.

The Southern Baptist Convention and The North American Mission Board

Like the United Methodist Committee on Relief, The Southern Baptist Convention also has a voluntary organization active in disaster relief called The North

American Mission Board. The Southern Baptist Convention is an organization of Baptist churches within the United States and Canada. With support from its churches, the North American Mission Board provides disaster relief at home and abroad. For example, they gathered volunteers to assist in the 2005 Hurricane Katrina response efforts.

The North American mission board and disaster relief. According to an article published by Business Wire, 30,000 Southern Baptist Convention volunteers, organized within 600 units, were trained to assist in the response efforts in Katrina. The North American Mission Board had 1,200 volunteers located in 5 states that were affected by the hurricane with many more volunteers scheduled to arrive within the next few days. These volunteers would provide food, shelter, showers, and communication for victims of Hurricane Katrina. (“30,000 Southern Baptist,” 2005). These volunteers provided meals to victims affected by Hurricane Katrina. They worked in conjunction with Federal agencies and other VOAD agencies in the response efforts.

According to an article in the Sentinel (2007), The Southern Baptist Disaster Relief VOAD also assisted response efforts in California after many were displaced due to wildfires. “Southern Baptist Disaster Relief has been set up since the beginning of the fires and we are working with local governments and our national partners to ensure the best overall relief response” (“Southern Baptist Church,” 2007, para. 3). Similar to their response to Katrina, the North American Mission Board also had units of volunteers standing by to respond should further assistance be needed.

A good example of collaboration between VOADS and other agencies can be found in an article, from Business Wire (2004), showing NAMB partnering with Kintera, Inc. NAMB used Kintera software, during outreach efforts, after Florida was hit by

several hurricanes. The response to Florida's hurricanes was the one of the largest performed by NAMB, thanks to Kintera's online tools that allowed them to provide meals, communications, volunteers and funding to those affected by the hurricanes. ("North American Mission," 2004). The collaboration, between NAMB and Kintera, Inc., allowed for an effective response effort.

Similar to UMCOR, the North American Mission Board responds in coordination with other VOAD's and with local, state and federal entities in order to provide much needed assistance in emergency response efforts nationally. NAMB provides assistance to the Southern Baptist Convention, its local churches, in responding to disasters. ("Southern Baptist Church," 2007) In 2007, NAMB had over 75,000 trained volunteers and approximately 1,000 response units ready for disaster response. ("Southern Baptist Church," 2007). Similar to UMCOR and Convoy of Hope, NAMB also works collaboratively with public and VOAD agencies in disaster relief efforts.

The North American Mission Board and Disaster Preparedness. The North American Mission Board has developed a program called Disaster Ready Church. In this program, they developed a guide that provides "...steps to becoming a church that is prepared to offer aid in the event of disasters" ("Disaster Ready Church," n.d., p. 1). This guide is a comprehensive, multi-step framework that guides local churches through the disaster preparedness process. The guide includes hazard risk assessment, goals, objectives, plan development, plan review and approval and plan maintenance. According to NAMB, "Preparedness is an essential part of the plan and can be achieved through training for families within the local church and community" (North American Mission Board, n.d., p. 1). Similar to the Assemblies of God, NAMB's framework helps

local churches prepare for a disaster and provides a way to develop a clear plan on what to do in response to a disaster.

The Assemblies of God and Convoy of Hope

The Assemblies of God has partnered with a voluntary organization active in disaster called the Convoy of Hope. Convoy of Hope provides disaster relief both in the United States and internationally. They provide food, supplies, and volunteers in response and recovery efforts. The funding for Convoy of Hope comes from the AG Disaster Relief Fund. “When you give to the AG Disaster Relief Fund, you can know your contribution will be used to provide the maximum assistance in this great partnership effort of the Assemblies of God Disaster Relief and Convoy of Hope” (AG Disaster Relief Fund, n.d., para. 9). Convoy of Hope works in coordination with other VOADs, local, state and federal entities in response efforts. The Assemblies of God supports Convoy of Hope through their Assemblies of God Disaster Relief Fund.

Convoy of Hope and disaster relief. In an article written by the Journal Record staff, the “Convoy of Hope has partnered with an online non-profit charity organization HopeMob, which raised more than \$46,000 to support Convoy of Hope's tornado disaster relief operations in Moore” (Journal Record Staff, 2013, Para. 1). This was in response to a tornado that struck Moore, Oklahoma on May 20, 2013." Partnering with HopeMob is another example how working together with like-minded organizations really helps to be able to provide relief to disaster survivors in their time of need" (Journal Record Staff, 2013, Para. 2). The Journal Record staff illustrate the ability of VOADs to coordinate and collaborate with other agencies in response efforts.

In an article from PR Newswire (2004), Convoy of Hope collaborated with The Inspiration Networks in order “to supply more than one million pounds of water, food, clothing, bedding, and other supplies to the victims of Hurricane Charley” (“The Inspiration Networks,” 2004, para. 1). Approximately 50,000 victims were helped by Convoy of Hope during the relief efforts of Hurricane Charley. (“The Inspiration Networks,” 2004) President George W. Bush gave special recognition to Convoy of Hope, stating “I want to thank the people from the Convoy of Hope. Jeb and I had a chance to pass out ice and water and food supplies... We were there because the Convoy of Hope set up an aid station of compassion” (“George W. Bush Delivers,” 2004, para. 18). Convoy of Hope stayed down in the disaster relief area for an extended period of time to ensure that the victims of the hurricane could recover.

Convoy of Hope and disaster preparedness. Hope Begins Here is a disaster preparedness program by the Convoy of Hope. This program provides important information to local churches, and to individuals, on how to prepare for a disaster and develop a disaster plan. “HBH strategies provide valuable tools and resources to help families and local churches build their own resiliency[sic] to disaster and, as a result, strengthen their position from which to help others when disaster strikes” (“Helping Others Prepare,” 2010, para. 2). Hope Begins Here provided templates with descriptions on what to do for churches and individuals to use to develop a disaster plan.

Literature Review Results and Summary

This review of the literature suggests that on a large scale, Christian churches and their respective VOADs are prepared for a disaster. Members and groups from individual churches are volunteering with all three VOADs to respond as a larger entity. VOADs

are able to quickly respond to a disaster and coordinate with other agencies, both public and private. This literature review suggests that, in some sense, local churches may be prepared for a disaster. It is also apparent that research was warranted to discover whether local Christian churches are prepared for a disaster. If local churches are prepared, further research will be needed to find how well prepared they are.

Chapter III: Methodology

How well prepared are local Christian churches for disasters? From the literature in Chapter II, it has been established that through VOADs, local Christian churches have been prepared to respond to and recover from disasters. After an exhaustive literature search no evidence was found to suggest that local Christian churches themselves are prepared for a disaster. According to Creswell (2013), the best method for researching a question that has not been previously studied and little is known about the phenomena, is to utilize qualitative methods; therefore, the best method for studying how well local churches are for a disaster would be to utilize the qualitative descriptive method.

Background of Research Method

The literature review as detailed in Chapter II illustrated that Christian churches have been preparing for disaster; however, it also indicated that the churches have shortcomings in their preparedness. A qualitative approach was determined to be the best method for revealing exactly what each local Christian church is doing to prepare for a disaster. Research was performed using a qualitative descriptive narrative with semi-structured interviews.

The semi-structured interviews asked participants questions that gathered information regarding their specific church's history in disasters and disaster preparedness, what roles they provided during response operations, what they have done to prepare, and what has been learned. Each interview was then analyzed, coded, and interpreted using the method described by Creswell (2013).

Limitations

The research, for this thesis, was limited within the state of Arkansas. The author was the only researcher, so manpower and time added restrictions to this thesis. There is no control group for this study. Interviews were performed using the qualitative method, and only six churches were interviewed. Only three denominations were interviewed. Participants were English-speaking and had to be a member of the church and they had to be familiar with what the church was doing in reference to disaster preparedness. The participants were members of the United Methodist Church, Baptist churches connected to the Southern Baptist Convention, and Assemblies of God Church.

Setting and Participant Selection

Communities were selected based on their similarity of demographics and location within the state of Arkansas. These selections were further constrained by denominations located within the community. Both communities hosted the same three denominations. The denominations selected were United Methodist, Southern Baptist, and Assemblies of God. These denominations were selected for their connection with their umbrella VOAD organizations. One of the two towns had experienced a disaster within the last 10 years. For four of the churches, interviews were conducted over phone services. Two interviews were conducted at the church facility. Participant selections were restricted to leaders or members of the church who were familiar with the church's activities in relation to disaster preparedness. Church congregation sizes varied from 100 to 600.

Ethical Considerations

The Arkansas Tech University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved this research according to guidelines set forth by the university (Appendix A). These guidelines were created to ensure the protection of participants. Participants were verbally provided their participants' rights and participants gave permission verbally to be interviewed. A script (See Appendix B) was followed to ensure that participants knew the purpose of the interview, understood the interview was entirely voluntary, that the participants may refuse to answer any question or stop at any time, and the participants may withdraw consent at any time.

Protection of Participants Rights

The participant's name was not taken during the interview, only the participant's affiliation to the church. The names and location of the churches have been omitted from this thesis in the interest of the privacy of the participants. Participants were informed that their personally identifiable information, as well as identifiable church information, would be kept confidential and would remain under lock and key. Upon approval of the thesis, all identifiable documentation of both churches and interview participants will be destroyed.

Rigor and Credibility of Research

Interviews were conducted with a leader or member of each church. Four interviews were by phone and two were in-person at the church facility. Each interview was recorded using a voice recorder and lasted between five minutes and fifteen minutes. The interviews consisted of nine questions, three of which were demographic. The remaining six questions were geared towards encouraging the person being interviewed

to discuss what their church is doing to prepare for a disaster and to gather history on disasters that affected their church (see Appendix C).

Using the qualitative descriptive method, interview questions were developed to find how well prepared local churches are for a disaster. The qualitative descriptive method has four different aspects that “correspond with the four dimensions of the research process: conceptual, ethical, methodological, and interpretive” (Parse, 2001, p. 244). Research interview questions asked what the name, denomination and location of the church was, the interviewees affiliation to the church, size of the congregation, if the church has an individual or group in charge of disaster preparedness, what the church has done to prepare for a disaster, if a disaster has affected their church, what the resolution of that disaster was, what they learned from that disaster in reference to disaster preparedness, and if the interviewee was interested in learning and working on disaster preparedness. The answers were then used to gauge how well prepared the church was for a disaster. The six churches were then placed into one of three categories: Prepared with written plan, prepared but no plan, not prepared. Interview results were further divided into interest in disaster preparedness, whether they had experienced a disaster, did the disaster influence their interest in disaster preparedness. Whether they had experienced a disaster within the last ten years or not also was considered to see whether the disaster encouraged them to learn more about being prepared for a disaster.

Summary

The methodology presented here was used to study how well local Christian churches are prepared for a disaster. All interviews were conducted using the qualitative

method listed above. The descriptive narrative was used to code and decipher the information. The results of the interviews begin, on the next page, in Chapter IV.

Chapter IV: Results

From the literature search, it was determined that VOAD organizations of Christian churches are prepared to respond to disasters. However, information on how well prepared local Christian churches are for disasters was not found. As noted in the previous chapter, interviews were conducted with local Christian churches in Arkansas. For the purposes of this thesis, and in the interest of the protection of participants' privacy, the participants' towns are referred to as "Community A" and "Community B." The churches are referred to only by their denomination and town designation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three denominations in each town and helped provide insight into how well prepared the churches are, what they are currently doing to prepare, and what past experiences may have influenced their church's focus on disaster preparedness.

Communities A and B

Both communities participating in this study are located in Arkansas and are comprised of similar demographics. Both communities had the same three denominations within their borders. Only one community, Community A, had experienced a disaster within the last ten years. A tornado had struck Community A and caused extensive damage, within both the community and to local churches.

Community A: United Methodist Church. The participant for the United Methodist Church of Community A was the pastor. Their average congregation size, in regular attendance, was reported as 132. The church facilities were recently affected by a tornado that impacted their community. The church had to rebuild, and the church is still working on the recovery process. As an example of the continuing recovering process,

the pastor reported that the church recently sorted a storage container that held supplies that were donated to the church and the community immediately following the tornado. The community is still recovering from the disaster. The pastor reported the church has no written disaster plan in place for their church.

Community A: Baptist Church. The participant for the Baptist Church of Community A was the pastor as well. Their average congregation size in attendance was approximately 350. The church has a group within the church that is in charge of disaster preparedness. Additionally, the church is affiliated with the American Red Cross and is a designated shelter for their community. They do not have a written disaster plan for the church.

Community A: Assembly of God Church. The participant for the Assembly of God Church of Community A was the children's pastor. The average congregation size, in regular attendance, for the church was approximately 300. The children's pastor reported that the church does not have a committee that is in charge of disaster preparedness. It was noted that a temporary committee, comprised of members of the church, was created when the tornado struck the community, but it is no longer active. The church has no written disaster plan in place. The Assembly of God Church of Community A did, however, participate in a training course, conducted by city officials at the church, on how to setup a volunteer center should a disaster strike again. The training course occurred during the recovery process.

Community B: United Methodist Church. The participant for Community B's United Methodist Church was the pastor. The church has an average congregation size, in regular attendance, of approximately 450. The pastor reported the church has a

committee that focuses on disaster preparedness. Additionally, the church is designated as a tornado shelter for their community. The committee in charge of disaster preparedness, at the church, has also conducted preparedness training, for their members and youth, so that the church can respond quickly to a disaster. The pastor noted the church's disaster plan is outdated and they hope to have it updated within a calendar year.

Community B: Baptist Church. The participant for the Baptist Church of Community B was the pastor. The church has an average congregation size, in regular attendance, of approximately 400. The pastor reports the church currently has an actively working committee that is in charge of disaster preparedness. This committee is currently developing the church's disaster preparedness plan and, according to the pastor, the plan should be completed this year. The church is a designated American Red Cross shelter for their community.

Community B: Assembly of God Church. The participant for Community B's Assembly of God Church was a designated church member. The average members in regular attendance, at the church, is between 400 and 600. The church does not have a committee in charge of disaster preparedness. They do, however, have members trained in self-defense and first aid who are there to respond should something happen at this church. The church participates in relief activities within the state and internationally and the church leader reports they do not have a written plan in place.

Church congregation size: Community A vs. Community B

One question in the demographic section of the interviews asked the size of the church's congregation. All six churches interviewed had similar congregation numbers, with a range between 100 and 600. The demographic questions were asked to ascertain

whether congregation size had an influence on their disaster preparedness. The Table below illustrates congregation numbers according to the research participants.

Table 1

Size of church congregations in Community A and B

<u>Denomination</u>	<u>Community A</u>	<u>Community B</u>
United Methodist	132	450
Southern Baptist	150	400
Assemblies of God	300	400-600

Note. Numbers based on regular attendance.

According to the table above, Community A's churches do have lower attendance records compared to Community B. Research indicated that congregation size did influence how well prepared churches were for a disaster. Community A's churches were not working on disaster preparedness. Further explanation of how congregation size influenced church preparedness will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

Who is in charge of disaster preparedness? What is being done to prepare?

Each church was asked whether they had a group or committee in charge of disaster preparedness. This was asked to ascertain who, if anyone, may be in charge of disaster preparedness for their church. Community A churches did not have anyone currently in charge of disaster preparedness, while Community B churches did have a group in charge of disaster preparedness. There was, however, an exception, as Community A churches did have a group of people in charge during a disaster recovery situation that occurred within the last three years. These groups have since been disbanded and are no longer actively working on preparedness, response, or recovery operations. The table on the next page illustrates the differences.

Table 2

Denominations of communities interviewed and whether they have someone in charge of disaster preparedness.

<u>Denomination</u>	<u>Community A</u>	<u>Community B</u>
United Methodist	No	Yes, still active and working on preparedness
Southern Baptist	No, Deacon body is in charge	Yes, still active and working on preparedness
Assemblies of God	Yes, No longer active	Yes, still active and working on preparedness

According to participants in Community A's United Methodist Church, those who were in charge of disaster preparedness for their church had since either moved away or were no longer actively working on preparedness. Interview results showed little evidence of the recent disaster influencing their focus on disaster preparedness; however, it did have an effect on their attitude towards disaster preparedness. To recover from the disaster, the churches in Community A affected by a disaster relied on their VOAD organization to assist them in responding to the disaster. The results of how disasters affected the participants' churches will be further explained later in this chapter of the thesis.

Community B's churches all have committees or groups in charge of disaster preparedness. The United Methodist Church has a committee, comprised of congregation members who have a work history in emergency management and public safety that is in charge of all preparedness, response, and recovery operations for the church. The church has a written disaster plan in place and are planning to begin updating their plan within the next year.

Community B's Southern Baptist Church has a mission group in charge of disaster preparedness, response, and recovery operations. They coordinate with the American Red Cross, with the fire department, and with the North American Mission Board to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. The pastor reported the church is currently working on their written disaster plan.

The participant for the Southern Baptist Church also discussed a preparedness exercise that was conducted at their church by Community B's fire department. This was a live exercise where congregation members actively participated as victims and responders for a hypothetical crisis event. The exercise helped congregation members see what it would be like should a disaster happen at their church.

Community B's Assembly of God Church currently has a response team in charge of disaster preparedness, response, and recovery operations. These response teams of the church are trained in cardio-pulmonary resuscitation and first aid. They also are working on a plan of what to do during an active aggressor situation at their church. It was reported that the church currently has a plan in place on what to do in the event of a disaster.

Has a disaster affected your church? What was the resolution of the disaster?

Community A experienced a tornado within the last 3 years. Community B regularly experiences weather related risks, however, nothing was elevated to a disaster within the last 10 years. The United Methodist Church of Community A was directly struck by the tornado which caused extensive damage to their church facilities. Their main building was damaged beyond repair. Their parsonage was also damaged, which displaced the pastor temporarily until repairs were made. This church was the only

church that was directly damaged by a disaster. The pastor of the United Methodist Church of Community A stated that they did not have a plan in place. The church relied heavily on UMCOR and their property insurance to help them recover because they did not have a disaster plan at the time. The other two churches of Community A had congregation members who lost their homes, but their church was not directly affected. The churches did, however, organize volunteers to assist their congregation members and their community in the response and recovery process. Participant interviews revealed that the church congregation members worked together to help themselves and their community recover, but after recovery, they did not work on disaster preparedness. None of Community A's churches have a written disaster plan in place.

Community B's churches have not directly been impacted by a disaster; however, the Southern Baptist Church did assist the community during an ice storm that caused power outages. According to the participant, the Community B Southern Baptist Church is a designated American Red Cross shelter, and they opened their doors to provide food, supplies, and shelter to those who were affected by the ice storm. The church remained open until the power within the community was restored.

Lessons Learned from the Disaster

Community A's church participants stated they learned a lot from the tornado. According to the participant from the United Methodist Church, property insurance is extremely important. The church learned the significance of disaster relief and the importance of making sure it is done right. The United Methodist Church received so many items from donations that it delayed their ability to respond. In fact, they are still sorting through donations years after the disaster struck.

The Southern Baptist Church participant had a similar issue with materials being donated, stating that it was sometimes more than they could handle. This difficulty caused problems in their relief efforts, according to this participant. Volunteers from the church assisted in sorting supplies so that they could find needed items more easily. The church is not currently working on disaster preparedness. Most of their focus has been on disaster relief efforts.

The Assemblies of God in Community B coordinated with Community B's City Hall to have a preparedness course held at their church. The participant noted that they "learned a lot about how to prepare for a disaster should one strike" and what to expect in a response and recovery effort. Activities for disaster preparedness, however, are not currently being held at their church. Most of the focus for Community B's Assembly of God Church is still on recovery efforts that are happening within the community.

Interest in continuing disaster preparedness

One common interest among both Community A and Community B was to continue learning about disaster preparedness. Every participant verbally expressed interest in continuing disaster preparedness efforts and in learning more about disaster preparedness. The churches of Community B are currently working on disaster preparedness plans and are continuing to learn about disaster preparedness. Churches of Community B were already learning and continuing to work on their disaster preparedness by establishing plans and training personnel on how to respond to disasters. The Southern Baptist Church of Community B also is working with someone who specializes in disaster preparedness for churches so that they can develop a written plan on what to do should a disaster strike. Interestingly, Community A showed limited

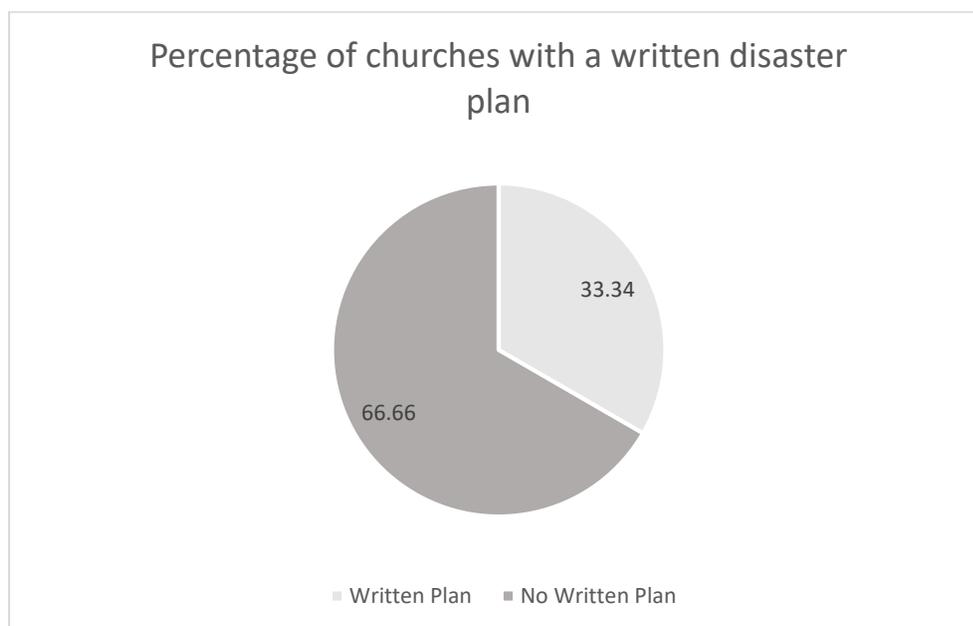
interest in disaster preparedness, with the United Methodist Church being the only one showing interest.

Summary

Participant interviews revealed that churches in Community A and B have experienced natural disasters, but most do not have a plan in place on what to do should a disaster strike. Churches have had to rely on other entities and their respective VOADs in order to get assistance after a disaster. The figures below show the results of the findings of the interviews in reference to how well these local Christian churches are prepared for a disaster.

Figure 1

Percentage of the churches interviewed who have a written disaster plan

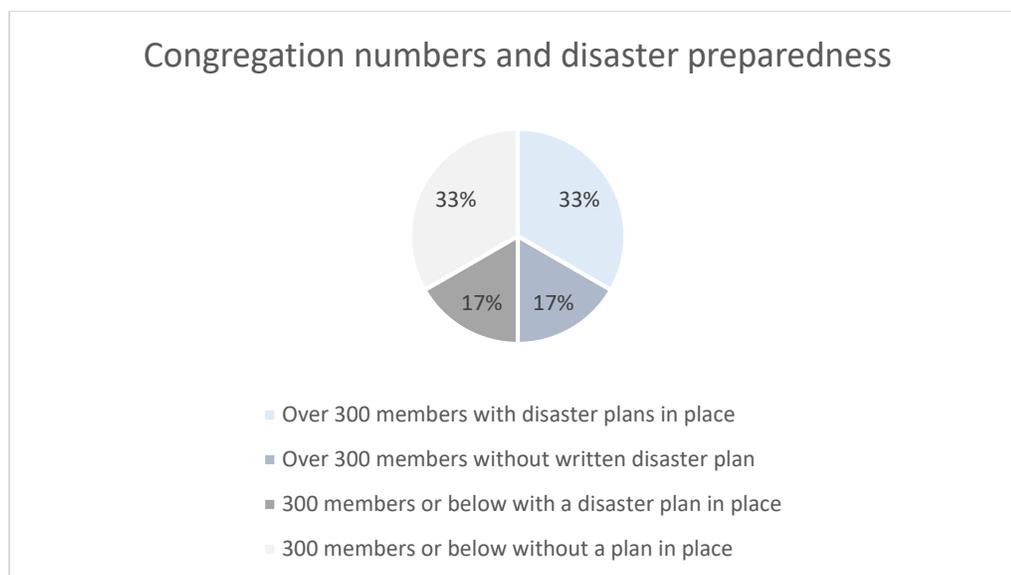


Only two of the six churches have a disaster plan in place. Therefore, over sixty-six percent of participating churches do not have a disaster plan regarding what to do should

a disaster strike their church. While there is interest in developing a plan, no disaster plan exists for two-thirds of the churches in Communities A and B.

Figure 2

Percentages of churches who have a written disaster plan in place based on congregation numbers of the church.



The figure above indicates that a majority of churches with over three hundred in attendance do have a disaster plan in place. With local churches whose numbers are under three hundred, the likelihood of a disaster plan in place is decreased. This suggests the number of volunteers available could affect the likelihood of a church developing a plan on what to do in the event of a disaster.

All the Christian churches interviewed were somewhat informed on disaster preparedness. In Community A, this was mainly due to the tornado that struck the community. In Community B, churches had committees or teams working to learn more about disaster preparedness. There was some confusion for both Community A and B's participants, however, when asked who they would call to learn more about disaster

preparedness. When asked who within their community or organization they could call for information on disaster preparedness, only one of the churches interviewed knew who to call to learn more about disaster preparedness.

Chapter V: Discussion

Summary

In this study, I examined what local Christian churches are doing to prepare for a disaster. The results of the findings show that local Christian churches, in Arkansas towns of similar demographics, are only somewhat prepared for a disaster. Local Christian churches in Arkansas still have a long way to go in order to have a well-developed disaster plan in place.

Nationally and Internationally, UMCOR, the North American Mission Board, and the Convoy of Hope are organized and prepared for a disaster. These VOADs work in conjunction with the NVOAD, other VOADs, and government agencies to respond to disasters and help those affected recover. In the towns studied, 39% of churches interviewed showed promise in their disaster preparedness. Churches that experienced a recent disaster that impacted the church had increased interest in learning about disaster preparedness, but failed to show an increase in actively working towards a disaster preparedness plan. The interview results support the idea that churches do have the potential to be prepared, but will only be able to do so if volunteers and leadership take the time to focus on it.

One interesting part of the findings was the polarization between those who were working on disaster preparedness and those churches that indicated they were not. The results of the interviews indicated that a church was either working diligently on disaster preparedness or a church had no focus whatsoever on disaster preparedness. For those churches without an active church group working on a disaster plan, the participants stated that the church was not doing anything in regards to disaster

preparedness. Perhaps this may be attributed to the lack of volunteers who are knowledgeable on disaster preparedness.

There appears to be a correlation between the number of congregation members and whether they have members working on disaster preparedness. All churches within Community A reported that their church did not have anyone actively working on disaster preparedness. Their congregation numbers are three hundred or below. All three churches in Community B reported having a disaster preparedness, response, and recovery team. The congregation numbers for Community B were between 300 to 600 regularly attending members, and they have congregation members volunteering for disaster preparedness, response, and recovery teams.

In regards to response and recovery operations, local Christian churches, in the 2 Arkansas towns studied, displayed an innate ability to come together in order to help the community they serve. This is supported by the connection between the local churches and the VOADs to which they are connected. Local churches also show room for growth in preparedness activities.

Limitations of Study

This study was limited by the location of participants and within the denominations chosen for the interviews. Only two Arkansas towns were selected for participation in this study, which further limits the generalizability of this research. There is a possibility that churches in other communities and states could potentially answer differently the questions posed in this study.

Recommendations for Further Research

Further research into the subject of local Christian churches and disaster preparedness will be needed in order to verify the findings of this research and gain a broader picture on what local Christian churches are doing to prepare for a disaster. This future research could potentially expose flaws in the planning process and support an informed approach to disaster preparedness. For example, research into local Christian churches and disaster preparedness in other areas of the nation could point out certain mistakes in the participant's churches' current disaster plans. It could also potentially assist in "bridging the gap" between denominations working on disaster preparedness and small denominations who are not actively working to develop disaster plans.

Recommendations for Practice

Local churches are "significant sources of social capital for their members and communities" (Muller et al, 2014, p. 132). For this reason, it is imperative that local churches develop a disaster plan so that the church can quickly help those in their community impacted by a disaster. Their disaster plan should cover the church's "aspirations, principles of action, and often specific courses of action" (Berke et al., 2010, p. 370). The disaster plan for the church should include what the church does for its members and the community, what they desire to do for their members and community during disaster response and recovery efforts, and what specific actions they will take in the event of a disaster in order to carry out their aspirations and essential functions so the church may recover and resume normal activities. In addition, the disaster plan must be tested and maintained (Berke et al., 2010). The judicatory levels of the local churches studied will need to initiate a disaster preparedness project, with assistance from their

VOADs. It would be most advantageous for all churches in the judicatory to be required to participate and develop a disaster plan, since the results of this study showed that many of the churches studied did not have a written disaster plan in place and showed little interest in developing one.

Conclusion

This thesis researched Arkansas local Christian churches and disaster preparedness in order to find out how well prepared local churches are for a disaster. The findings showed that there is ample room for improvement and further research will be needed in order to gain a better perspective on what needs to be done to correct the imperfections of the current emergency response process for local churches. This thesis also serves to boost awareness of the importance of disaster preparedness for local Christian churches, which will hopefully inspire local churches to revisit disaster preparedness and establish a disaster plan. If local churches are able to develop a disaster plan, it will help local emergency managers in their response effort to a disaster and provide much needed support for the community.

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Appendix A

From: Tiffany Henry
Sent: Monday, September 19, 2016 1:45 PM
To: ajsmith620@atu.edu
Cc: Sandy Smith; Jack Tucci
Subject: IRB Approved

Mr. Smith,

Your IRB application is approved with an approval code of Smith_091916 and an expiration date of 9/19/19.

Thank you,

Tiffany A. Henry

Coordinator of Sponsored Programs and University Initiatives
Arkansas Tech University
1509 N Boulder Ave
Administration 207
Russellville, AR 72801
[479.880.4327](tel:479.880.4327)

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Appendix B

Local Christian Churches and Disaster Preparedness:

Are they prepared?

Interview Consent Form / Interview Script

Hello, my name is Andrew Smith. I am a graduate student at Arkansas Tech University, and I am conducting research on Local Christian Churches and disaster preparedness. I would like to interview your senior pastor, or whomever is in charge of disaster preparedness for your church. The interview is part of my research for my Master's Thesis. The purpose of this study is to determine what local Christian churches, in Arkansas, are doing or what have they already done to prepare for a disaster? Disasters, for the purposes of this study, will include natural disasters, manmade disasters, and other crisis events that had a deep negative impact on the church and its congregation. The results of this study will be used in my thesis research to determine how well prepared Arkansas local Christian churches are for disasters.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. You may reach me by the contact information below. Thank you so much for your participation.

By selecting "agree", you indicate that you have read the above interview purpose and consent and you voluntarily agree to participate. If you do not wish to participate, you may select "disagree" below. Your participation would be greatly appreciated. Should you agree to an interview, you may discontinue the interview at any time and you don't have to answer any question you feel uncomfortable answering.

Agree

Disagree

I would like a copy of the completed thesis

Researcher Contact Information:

Andrew J. Smith

501-844-5468

asmith108@atu.edu

ajsmith620@gmail.com

Appendix C

Interview Template for Local Churches

Identity and Demographics Questions

Question 1:

What is the name, denomination, and location of your church?

Question 2:

What is your affiliation to the church?

Question 3:

What is the size of your congregation?

Research Questions

Question 1:

Does your church have a committee or group that focuses on disaster preparedness, response, or recovery operations?

Question 2:

What has your church done to prepare for a disaster? Do you have a plan in place?

(Get them to elaborate. What specifics?)

Question 3:

Has a disaster ever affected your church?

Question 4:

What was the resolution of the disaster or crisis event? How did your church recover?

(If the church is still recovering, get explanation of what their church is doing to recover from that disaster or crisis event.)

(Get details about how the recovery was structured, such as organized volunteer groups, committees, mission outreach, supply gathering, or anything else your church did in response to that disaster or crisis event.)

Question 5:

If they answered yes to question 4,

What has your church learned about disaster preparedness from the disaster or crisis event? Would having a plan on how the church will respond to disasters have helped the church in their response and recover efforts? If you had a plan in place, how did it help?

Question 6:

Is your church interested in working on disaster preparedness for your church? If so, how soon would you start working on disaster preparedness? Do you know where to start on the disaster preparedness project? Who would you contact for help on planning for disasters?

Question 7:

How well informed is your church on disaster preparedness?

Question 8:

(Are there any questions that I have that may have come up during the interview process)

Question 9:

Are there any comments or questions that you may have?

*Remember to Say: **Thank you so much for your participation!***

