**Diocese of Des Moines**

**Crisis Communication Annex**

**April 15, 2019**

The Diocese of Des Moines asks each parish to have a communication plan in place in the event of a crisis or disaster. Amid confusion and pain, people look for clear, accurate and consistent information.

**Goal:** This plan is designed to provide guidance regarding when and who to contact at the Diocese of Des Moines in a crisis. This plan is also designed to provide guidance to parishes to thoughtfully and quickly communicate with key stakeholders during an emergency.

# In Case of Emergency

1. Contact the police or fire department if the situation warrants their help.
2. Contact the key emergency response person for the parish. (Roles and responsibilities explained below.)
   1. When providing space in the church for an event, be sure the event organizer knows who to contact in case of emergency. The emergency contact name and number should be available in a designated place.

## When to contact the diocese

The Diocese of Des Moines should be contacted for the following events or for any event as identified within the parish emergency preparedness plan:

* Loss of life
* Significant injuries
* Major property damage to church or parish school
* Significant property damage to homes within a community
* Technology loss
* Damage to sacramental records
* Serious illness that may require cancelling Masses
* Significant theft or vandalism
* Any issue that will likely garner media attention

## Who to contact at the diocese

Your primary point of contact at the Diocese of Des Moines is the Director of Communications, Anne Marie Cox, who can be reached at 515-333-8387.

If you cannot reach her, please contact Norm Bormann, Director of Property Management, who can be reached at 515-229-8008.

These are cell numbers and are on 24/7. If you cannot reach either, please leave a message on their voice mail systems. Anne Marie or Norm will alert the appropriate diocesan staff of the situation. Please let either of them know if you need immediate assistance or if no additional help is needed at that time.

A parish may address communication needs on its own if it so chooses following the guidelines outlined below. The Parish may also contact diocesan communications director Anne Marie Cox for assistance.

# Roles and responsibilities

In the event of a disaster, there are clear roles and responsibilities for leadership at both the parish and diocesan level.

## Diocese

The Diocese of Des Moines can be an advocate for parishes and schools by:

* Working with LMC and Catholic Mutual Insurance when needed
* Crafting a message and assisting with communication during an emergency
* Notifying the appropriate ministry/department for assistance and/or support services
* Connecting the parish/school with their local county emergency manager

## Catholic Charities

Catholic Charities can connect parishes or schools that need local assistance resources and volunteers through Red Cross, United Way and county emergency management agencies.

# Parish – What to consider

A parish should consider the following:

### WHO? Audiences/Stakeholders

Who do you want to communicate with? Key leadership? Neighbors of your property? Everyone?

### WHAT? Goal/message

What message do you want to convey? Key facts? What will happen as a result (Mass moved to another church or time, school/RE cancelled or postponed? Ask for prayers for those who are suffering as a result of the emergency? Offer a prayer and reassure parishioners/stakeholders?

### WHEN? Timing

Do you need a message out immediately or within a few hours or day?

### HOW? Delivery

Do you have a way to reach your key stakeholders (leadership cellphone numbers, email addresses, local media, texting service). If your computer system is down, the diocese can tap into your ParishSOFT database to pull email addresses and get a message sent to your parishioners.

# Assemble a Parish Team

To successfully execute a plan, consider coordinating a team to address the following:

### Pastoral Care

Pastoral care is the primary and foundational concern. This person will visit with the families of those who died or who are injured, or suffered due to the emergency.

### Assessor

This may be the pastor, a deacon or other representative of the parish. This person assesses the damage, updates the pastor and spokesperson, and begins making calls to the diocese and insurance representatives. Damage may include property, injury, loss of art (windows, statues), etc. Sister Jude Fitzpatrick has the latest protocol for property damage. She can be reached at 515-237-5048 or [jfitzpatrick@dmdiocese.org](mailto:jfitzpatrick@dmdiocese.org).

### Spokesperson

You are welcome to refer all media calls to Anne Marie Cox, spokesperson for the Diocese of Des Moines, 515-333-8387, [acox@dmdiocese.org](mailto:acox@dmdiocese.org). You may also want to designate a local spokesperson, in preparation for emergencies.

* Media may be looking for a visible sign of the church (like clergy wearing a collar) though the spokesperson may be someone other than the priest or deacon.
* Only one spokesperson at a time should be providing public information during an event to ensure that the message content is clear and consistent.
* This person should only communicate regarding what he or she knows and should not speculate about what happened, how many are injured, etc. Emergency personnel (police, fire, hospital) can provide some of the information to the media. Refrain from repeating rumors or word-of-mouth. Use wording such as “This is what I know at the moment…”
* It is okay to admit you do not have all the information reporters seek in the immediate aftermath of an incident. Avoid “No comment.” Use phrases such as:
  + “At the moment, my primary concern is for the safety/health/condition of our parishioners. I’d be happy to get back to you on that.”
  + “Here’s what we know at this time.”
  + “That’s a good question. Perhaps the police chief/fire chief/mayor/hospital could help you answer that.”
  + “I’m afraid I can’t help you with that. But what I do know is that we are a strong, faithful community. We will get through this together.”
* The spokesperson should have key statements prepared in advance that he/she wants to communicate. Examples:
  + “The church building has been in our community for 100 years and is a treasure. But we know that God’s people comprise the church. While we mourn the loss of our church building, we are thankful that no one was injured.”
  + “It is a tragedy that violence came into our church. We ask the community to keep those who were injured in prayer. We also ask that the perpetrator(s) also be kept in our prayers.”

# Suggestions for Parishes

The following details should be included in parish emergency response plans:

* Contact information for key staff/parishioners/volunteers
  + In the event of an emergency, the pastor should have readily available contact information for key stakeholders.
* Backup important records and store copies off site
  + If something happened to your computers, would you be able to pull up your files on a different computer? If a fire or flood would destroy onsite backup files, would there be a recent version stored offsite that could be used?
  + If a fire destroyed your paper files, would you be able to continue operations?
* Establish a clear transfer of authority and responsibility for essential functions to others
  + If the pastor became injured or ill and could not fulfill his responsibilities, contact the Bishop’s Office for sacramental needs, 515-237-5039.
  + If the pastor is unavailable for a period of time due to illness or vacation, there should be someone delegated to handle events that may arise in his absence. Are there specific responsibilities that someone else can take on?
* Establish a backup plan for worship in the event an emergency occurs that renders the existing worship space unusable.
* Know your vulnerable parishioners (i.e., disabled, homebound, physically frail) and how to contact them. In some emergencies, the parish may want to send parishioners to their homes or apartments to see if they need help, offer pastoral care, help them relocate, etc.
* Develop a plan to communicate important information to parishioners quickly, using email, phone or text. Include a plan for delivery of messages in multiple languages, if necessary.

**Reminder: Key diocesan contacts are:**

Anne Marie Cox, 515-333-83837, [acox@dmdiocese.org](mailto:acox@dmdiocese.org)

Norm Bormann, 515-229-8008, [nbormann@dmdiocese.org](mailto:nbormann@dmdiocese.org)

Sister Jude Fitzpatrick, 515-237-5048, [jfitzpatrick@dmdiocese.org](mailto:jfitzpatrick@dmdiocese.org)