

A Preparedness Story Carolyn Thalman

I'd like to share two stories of a potential disaster with you. They tell a very different story of Preparedness and to me, the differences are striking.

Several years ago I responded to a tornado in Texas. As is our practice, my colleague and I worshiped on Sunday in a church in the effected area. It was a large beautiful church in park-like setting with big trees surrounding the building. The sanctuary windows were clear glass, allowing the beauty of the setting to enhance the beauty of the sanctuary. As the service began, a weather front, just like the one that had caused the tornado several days before came through the area. The wind howled and the trees outside the sanctuary blew and twisted in an alarming way. My colleague and I looked at each other and said, "Where's the basement?" as we looked around for a safe place to go. Fortunately, the front passed quickly and there was no tornado. After the service, we met with the Pastor and the Mission Committee to talk about how they could help their neighbors who had been impacted by the previous tornado. The first question that I asked the pastor was this: What would you have done if the tornado warning sirens had gone off at 11:00 this morning? He looked at me quietly for a minute and then said, "I don't know." They were clearly not prepared.

I shared that story at our Annual Conference. Afterward, another member of the team came up to me and told me this story.

I was visiting and worshipping in a church in another tornado prone area of the country. In the middle of the sermon, the pastor stopped the sermon and said, " We have a tornado warning. Everyone go to their assigned places." The congregation evacuated the sanctuary and moved to interior hallways and rooms in an orderly manner. Members assisted each other and visitors as they saw the need. In a few minutes the all clear was sounded and the congregation returned to the sanctuary and resumed worship. Afterward, I asked about the interruption. I was told that an usher, knowing the potential for severe weather existed was monitoring the situation. When the tornado warning was issued, he signaled the pastor from the back of the sanctuary with a swirling finger motion and the plan was put into effect. Fortunately in this case as well, there was no tornado

But in both cases, if there had been, which congregation would have been less impacted by the consequences of the storm? Preparedness matters.