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1. INTRODUCTION

The Alberta Faith Community has recognized a requirement for a coordinated approach to emergencies and disasters that could occur causing a significant impact on communities in our province. An influenza pandemic specifically could have an overwhelming effect; adding increased pressure on the existing emergency/health systems making it difficult to maintain a sustained level of care.

The Faith Emergency Preparedness Initiative Advisory Council will be a key component in developing an enhanced level of individual community preparedness and developing a capacity for coordinated assistance to established emergency management structures.

2. PURPOSE & SCOPE

The goal of the FEPI Advisory Council will be to facilitate the development of an integrated network of faith communities to complement and enhance performance with existing non – secular emergency management organizations. As Faith Communities collaborate with a sharing of resources and expertise, the impact of disasters on individuals and communities, could be significantly reduced.

The Advisory Council does not propose to supercede existing plans or procedures but to complement existing processes. Nor does it propose to function in a command and control capacity. This coalition proposes to guide the development of a protocol for faith communities located in the Alberta region in order to communicate and, coordinate their activities during a major emergency, thereby providing a collective forum for decision making and providing a base for implementation.

The intention of the FEPI Advisory Council is to focus on the general consequence of any major emergency whether it is natural or human caused; to be ready with an appropriate response to assist physically, emotionally and where invited spiritually with the established emergency management structure in Alberta.

2.1 Aim

To strengthen the emergency preparedness and response relationship between faith community members and their local governments and, as a result, initiate the development of an atmosphere of cooperation and trust between these constituencies. Ultimately greater understanding, shared responsibilities, increased collaborative accountability and activities, will lead to an integrated action - orientated partnership.

2.1 Planning Assumptions & Considerations

Major emergencies pose problems for resource management that are different from those in routine crisis events. Significant emergency responses may require the use of resources (personnel, facilities, supplies, and equipment) from multiple organizations and jurisdictions and may also require the use of non-traditional resources. Much of the emphasis of emergency planning in many communities has commonly been on the mobilization and reinforcement of resources. And, indeed, procedures for this purpose are important. Uncontrolled mobilization and over response are common problems in emergencies. When these situations occur, coordination of response is a critical and crucial factor.

Communication difficulties are often hard to separate from coordination difficulties, and the greatest coordination difficulties are inter-organizational. Many of the communications problems are those related to inter-agency information sharing. Frequently, the means for communication exists, but for a number of reasons, persons are hesitant to communicate with others outside their own organization. Inter-organizational communication is fostered by those factors which promote trust in other organizations and familiarity with how they function. These include: informal contacts, joint planning and training, preplanned agreements for the division of disaster responsibilities, and the use of similar terminology, procedures, and performance criteria. Inter-organizational networks, common systems, and computer networks also contribute to effective communications.

The Faith Emergency Preparedness Initiative's desire is to reduce the possibility of duplication of effort and any resulting waste of resources that come from uncoordinated faith community responses to the needs of disaster victims as identified within the activated emergency management structures.

3. Guiding Principles

1. The FEPI Advisory Council will adhere to existing Canadian Emergency Management arrangements, meaning that the management of the emergency will be controlled at the lowest level possible (i.e. individual, municipal, provincial, and federal).

2. The technical component of responding to an emergency is managed by the appropriate level of government.
 - It is recognized that Local Governments in Alberta are first responders to an emergency or disaster and they manage the disaster response within their jurisdiction, for its duration.
 - In the event, however, of a major catastrophe such as a Pandemic, where perhaps a large sector of the 'First Responders' are unable to fulfill their duties due to illness or fatigue, the Faith Community will have the capacity to fill in where needed.

3. The coalition response framework can be scaled up or down depending on the severity of the emergency; and:
 - The coalition will provide a forum for the open and free flow of non confidential information and includes, but is not limited to, available resources to aid disaster victims, planned or developing programs in disaster response and recovery and general information on the mandate and purpose of an NGO's disaster response role.
 - The framework provides a structure for the sharing of information and cooperation in meeting the needs of specific victims and evacuees. Communities who subscribe to these guidelines agree that information on specific individuals, families or other persons is not for public knowledge.
 - Communities will not use disaster events to solicit members or donor recognition.
 - In instances of prolonged victim distress arising from a disaster Communities agree to cooperate fully in the assessment of, provision of resources for, and meeting of victim needs. However, no Community is required to share resources that they do not normally provide or do not have.

4. Participants and Roles

ADMINISTRATOR

Administration, in the initial phase, will be provided by Bridges of Love Ministry. These duties will include the scheduling of meetings, forums and related events as well as interim chairpersonship of the coalition's coordinating committee.

STAKEHOLDERS

Primary stakeholders are faith communities located in the Alberta region. While the initial focus will be within the Christian communities the coalition is not intended to be exclusionary of any faith or denomination.

PUBLIC SECTOR PARTNERS

Primary preparedness and response partners are identified as:

1. Relative Municipal Emergency Management / Preparedness organizations (MEMOs)
2. Alberta Emergency Management Agency (AEMA)
3. Public Safety Canada - Alberta (PS ABRO)
4. The relative provincial Health Authorities (HAs)
5. Alberta Health and Wellness (AHW)
6. Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)

RESOURCES

Potential resource organizations include; but are not limited to:

1. Alberta NGO Council ([NGO Council of Alberta](#))
2. Samaritan's Purse
3. NeighbourLink Calgary
4. Alberta Funeral Services Association
5. Other Private Sector and Non - Profit organizations

5. Conclusion

Developing a coordinated regional faith community preparedness and response capacity has been identified by the FEPI Advisory Council as potentially beneficial to stakeholders, partners and resource organizations alike. The Coalition recognizes a requirement for a coordinated approach to emergencies and disasters that could occur which would have a significant impact regionally. Disasters and emergencies such as an influenza pandemic; a foreign animal disease; a catastrophic earthquake in British Columbia or even a major terrorist event similar to September 11, 2001 could have an overwhelming effect regionally and it is intended that the activities of the faith community; during such major events, be coordinated and linked to the existing and appropriate emergency management structures. The availability of faith community resources in support of the non - secular emergency response will provide an enhanced capacity to the relative emergency management organizations to respond to the needs of disaster victims.