

# Bridges of Love Ministry Society's FAITH EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS INITIATIVE (FEPI)



**Disaster Preparedness is just one of many tools to connect the church with the community. During a catastrophic event, churches that are prepared to respond to the needs of the community, display Christ's character which is observable to a watching and hurting world. Please allow Bridges of Love Ministry (BofL) to answer questions about the Faith Emergency Preparedness Initiative (FEPI) shedding light for an endeavor, we know is important to God's heart. Matthew 22:36-40**

## **1. What is Bridges of Love Ministry and what is its mission?**

Bridges of Love Ministry Society is a CRA Canadian Registered Charity. Marg Pollon founded this ministry in 2003 to provide tools and resources for the local church, to connect, showing God's love with their community. In 2005, the focus changed from poverty issues to pandemic preparedness and then in 2007, expanded to include any hazard. The vehicle has changed, but the message has remained constant, **LOVE is ACTION!**

## **2 How did Bridges of Love's Faith Emergency Preparedness Initiative start?**

Knowing a Pandemic was over-due, Dr. Tim Foggan, a Burnaby doctor, invited BofL to mobilize churches to be ready to assist, if an Influenza Pandemic became a reality. After BofL made connections with members of the Faith, Public, and Private sectors, a FEPI Advisory Council formed to support churches helping neighbours. This collaboration across the sectors, showed the power of civil society working towards a common goal, where relationships of trust fostered.

## **3 Is FEPI based on a Biblical model?**

Yes, Bridges of Love's Faith Emergency Preparedness Initiative was modelled after Nehemiah's strategy. Nehemiah was broken-hearted, due to the state of the wall around Jerusalem. The wall, which was protection against their enemies, was in a state of disrepair. After praying for God to provide what was needed to repair the wall, he spoke to the King who supplied what was necessary to rebuild. He then mobilized the people of Jerusalem to each work on their piece of the wall. They accomplished a monumental task in just 52 days (Book of Nehemiah).

## **4. Why was Nehemiah's story an inspiration for FEPI?**

Bridges of Love's plan is on a parallel track to what Nehemiah undertook in his city. Communities have many different denominations located within their districts. Can you imagine if each one of these local churches was willing and ready to take a piece of their wall, to care for, should there be a major crisis in their community? Church members are a disparate group with a broad range of racial, ethnic, and cultural differences, with unique religious characteristics. Despite these differences, churches can achieve a noteworthy cohesion and unity of purpose under trying circumstances. During times of stress, traditional barriers between denominations evaporate, as they focus on God's agenda.

## **5. Why a local church response when disaster strikes?**

- a. Churches who are already integrated into their community with trust in place, know their neighbours—people, resources, organizations, etc.—enabling them to work more effectively than those who are unfamiliar with the terrain. Also, this identification with the local community imbues the church with dedication and steadfastness to serve its community in times of need.
- b. Local churches in the community are already on the scene or close by. The combination of local presence, independence from bureaucratic restraints, and smaller size enables the church to act quickly. Often commitment of resources can be based on quick and informal discussions with church boards and councils.
- c. Many churches are already engaged with their communities providing day-to-day care for those in need before a disaster occurs. They are already involved in community services of some type and thus are able to adapt to the crisis conditions and surge their capacity to meet the increased demands.
- d. Disasters 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.
- e. Much of the emphasis of emergency planning in communities has commonly been on the mobilization and reinforcement of resources. And, indeed, procedures for this purpose are important, but uncontrolled mobilization and over-response are common problems where coordination of response is a critical and crucial factor. Churches can fill the gaps when the geographic scales, intensities, and durations of catastrophic events, overwhelm the existing disaster response resources and first responder manpower.
- f. Churches that are designed for peak attendance over short periods have excess physical capacity at other times. Many have dining halls, basements, family life centers, or large meeting rooms that can serve as shelters. This excess physical capacity when coupled with the manpower available from volunteers to staff facilities proves a powerful force. And most importantly...
- g. Churches have a double-mandate, of both loving God and their neighbour. Their mission is 'people' so are responsive to whatever the need may be.

## **7. How does the Faith Emergency Preparedness Initiative assist when disaster strikes?**

As FEPI church partners, each share information regarding their facility, resources, 24 hr. contact information, and volunteers - activities they already engage, that can be of value when disaster strikes. Churches have day-cares, food banks, clothing depots etc. that can all be accessed to help communities when needs arise. Having this information already catalogued before an event happens, greatly increases the speed and effectiveness of a local church response. Planning before disaster strikes allows for a coordinated response and minimizes the impact on individuals, families, and communities.

## **8. Do Municipalities or Emergency Agencies traditionally ask for Church assistance?**

In larger centres, some local churches have been used as Reception Centres. Prior to a disaster they have gone through the assessment process to ensure their facility is adequate to handle this requirement. Normally, the emergency agency staff take over for these activities, so it is only the building that is utilized.

In Calgary, BofL signed a Letter of Memorandum with CEMA (Calgary Emergency Management Agency) in 2011. One 'Call' to Bridges of Love's Coordination Centre to activate the FEPI churches was the process. This formalized agreement has not been carried forth, however, with changes of staff and protocol.

BofL's desire is to be integrated into the emergency management structure. This will ensure FEPI is accepted and trusted as a viable entity to complement the work of the professional emergency agencies.

## 9. Does the local church have to do or have anything special to be a FEPI Partner?

No. Bridges of Love does not ask any church to change, add, or develop activities that they are not already doing. Every church has something to offer to assist their neighbours during times of disaster. Some churches have aging populations who may feel they cannot engage with this initiative. Everyone can pray which is the most important activity they can offer or perhaps they can be a phoning communications hub etc. There is a place for every church to serve through this initiative.

## 10. Is there an example for how FEPI helped during the 2013 Alberta Flood?

Certainly, we have many examples, but here is an example that involved many people. During the height of the flood recovery efforts, Bridges of Love was asked to find accommodation for 24 volunteers who were coming to aid in the Calgary recovery efforts. Here is a letter received after their help from FEPI churches.

*“During the Alberta flood of June 2013, we were privileged to make the acquaintance of Marg and Tom Pollon and Bridges of Love. Our church (Church of God in Christ, Mennonite) was looking for accommodations for volunteers to help with the flood restoration and cleanup in the Calgary area. The volunteers were travelling from BC, AB, SK and MB. After many attempts to locate a facility in Calgary we decided to contact Samaritan’s Purse. We were excited to hear they knew of a ministry called Bridges of Love that they thought could help us. We contacted Marg and she immediately went to work on finding us what we needed. She made many phone calls to find us a church (building) where the volunteers could sleep and be served meals and also arranged for cots to be brought in. The second morning Marg and Tom graciously brought us breakfast for 15 – 20 people. This was not a request from us but rather kind and caring folks giving from their personal resources. From then on, they also arranged for numerous meals to be served to the volunteers. After a few days that group of volunteers went home but within a short time we had another group looking for accommodations again. Marg again went to work and located another church for us which filled our needs. We were blessed to be able to work with such compassionate and caring people and know God will bless them as they minister to the needy through Bridges of Love!”*

We also received a note from the second church in SW Calgary who accommodated the flood volunteers...

*“Our guests left this morning, and it has left a small hole in my heart. We really loved having them (CDS) and we as a church are the better for it. It was good that we were able to help them at this time. I made a small friendship with four of the women who were responsible for caring for the team. I will truly miss them. I am also very grateful to Red Deer Lake United Church for their support of a meal on Thursday evening. Wonderful all around. Thank you for trusting us with this request ...”*

Due to church information stored in BofL’s FEPI database **prior** to disaster, the response was immediate and effective. Many hands working together with Christ’s LOVE shining brightly! The FEPI process and structure worked as anticipated ~ Churches helping Neighbours.

## 11. What are the benefits to becoming a FEPI Church Partner?

Building relationships of trust with one’s community is a great benefit and outcome when becoming a FEPI church. This is an opportunity to engage with the community, letting them know the church is their Muster Point for communication and as a safe refuge of hope. Each FEPI church receives a Muster Sign to display in their window, so community members know the local church is their place to gather, in times of crisis.

A FEPI church engaged their youth group, sending them out to the neighbourhood with magnets containing city emergency numbers and information, to share about their church. The youth had a wonderful time getting to know their community and neighbours were grateful for the information received. Unbelievers who see the church in **action**, displaying Christ’s **love**, may make the decision to follow Him, and become part of your congregation.



## 12. Can any church become a FEPI Partner?

Yes, any church that shares BofL's [Statement of Faith](#), can become a FEPI Partner.

## 13. How can Bridges of Love coordinate all the FEPI churches across Alberta?

BofL cannot coordinate all regions! Broadening its programs across Alberta necessitated a new plan! For that reason, an Associate FEPI Church coordinates the program for the community it represents. Since the FEPI database is now on-line, the church information can be accessed, by the Associate lead church.

## 14. How does a church become a FEPI Partner?

Complete BofL's [FEPI Church Contact & Resource Assessment Form](#) found on Bridges of Love's website (<https://www.bridgesoflove.net/fepi-resources>). This information is catalogued in our system until needed. Only the FEPI Associate has access to this portal unless prior permission has been given.

## 15. Is there a cost to become a FEPI Partner?

BofL has three levels for FEPI Bridge Partnership depending on congregation membership size.

- < 100 members: \$100 per year (Peace Bridge Partner)
- 100 to 200 members: \$200 per year (Walterdale Bridge Partner)
- > 300 members: \$300 per year. (High Level Bridge Partner)

*Even though Bridges of Love would appreciate a financial commitment assisting with our operating expenses, no church will be turned away, who wish to participate!*

## 16. If there are additional questions, who do we contact?

BofL is happy to answer additional questions. Please feel free to contact our office by:

- a. Telephone - 403.649.0087
- b. E-mail - [margpollon@bridgesoflove.net](mailto:margpollon@bridgesoflove.net).
- c. Chat-line - FEPI Church Resources page or
- d. Personal visit - #6, 609 Centre St. SW High River, AB T1V 2C2.

## SUMMARY

**Thank you for your time to learn about Bridges of Love's Faith Emergency Preparedness Initiative (FEPI). We do not wish to give the Pastor one more activity to look after, however, as we understand their plates are already over-extended. We are, therefore, seeking enthusiastic church members who see the possibilities for this endeavor ~ not only for the good of their church but for the care and love for their community. Bridges of Love is happy to share with your members, for greater understanding and engagement. Thank you!**

