

Preparing the Church for Crisis Care

Practical Action Steps to Help Your Church Respond Well

Purpose

Churches care deeply about people in crisis—but may not be adequately prepared for when crisis arrives. This guide offers **practical steps** to help churches respond with steadiness, compassion, and shared care when people face illness, despair, displacement, or overwhelming decisions.

This framework is not prescriptive. It's an invitation to prepare thoughtfully as you live out Micah 6:8: *doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God.*

Why Preparation Matters

Crisis usually arrives without warning. By the time someone reaches out, a person may already be experiencing a high-level fear and confusion.

Preparation helps churches:

- Respond calmly instead of reactively
- Protect dignity and reduce isolation
- Stay within pastoral limits while offering real, practical support
- Avoid placing unsustainable pressure on pastors or families

Crisis is rarely just personal—it is often shaped by isolation, financial strain, language barriers, or fear of unfamiliar systems. Preparing ahead allows churches to reduce these pressures rather than unintentionally add to them.

Suggested Action Steps for a Crisis-Ready Church

1. Know Where to Refer People

Action: Maintain a current list of trusted local supports.

Include:

- Mental health professionals and crisis services
- Hospice and palliative care providers
- Pregnancy and post-abortion support
- Housing, food, transportation, and emergency financial resources

- Services accessible to newcomers, migrants, refugees, those living with disabilities and culturally diverse communities

Why it matters: Clear referrals reduce fear, avoids delay, and remind people they are not alone.

2. Identify and Train Crisis Care Leaders

Action: Designate and train a small group that is responsible for crisis response.

Prioritize training in:

- Suicide awareness and risk response
- Mental Health First Aid
- Boundaries and responsibilities related to MAiD
- Basics regarding hospice and palliative care

Also decide in advance:

- Who takes the lead during a crisis
- When and how concerns are escalated (e.g., suicide risk, abuse, consent issues)
- How capacity and substitute decision-making questions will be handled

Training builds confidence, reduces fear, and helps leaders respond with humility rather than control. There are low-cost or free online resources available with information you can use to prepare your team.

3. Share the Weight of Care

Action: Build care teams so that support never rests on just one person.

Care teams can assist with:

- Meals and practical helps
- Rides to appointments
- Hospital or home visitation
- Companionship, prayer, and follow-up

Key principle to communicate to those in crisis: Receiving help is a benefit of belonging, not an indication of failure.

Sharing care allows for appropriate support to continue over a prolonged time and prevents overburdening or burnout.

4. Treat Practical Needs as Pastoral Care

Action: Pay attention to material and medical realities—not just spiritual language.

Pastoral care includes helping people access:

- Stable housing
- Food security
- Financial support during crisis
- Medical, mental health, and palliative care

Some suffering cannot be prayed away. Relieving practical burdens can significantly reduce fear and despair. Hospice and palliative care, often ease pain, loneliness, and crisis pressure.

5. Prepare for Social and Cultural Vulnerability

Action: Identify groups that face added barriers and plan intentionally to support them.

Begin by asking: *What makes seeking help harder for people here?*

Simple steps include:

- Identifying culturally competent services
 - Helping people navigate complex systems
 - Offering care generously, without suspicion
 - Developing a clear plan to extend hospitality to newcomers and the culturally isolated
-

A Final Encouragement

Crisis moments are not interruptions to ministry—they are part of it.

When churches prepare ahead of time, they quietly resist a culture that equates worth with independence or strength. They become places where people are met with presence, shared care, and hope lived out in action.

Ask God for one strategic step your church can take now.

Even small steps in preparation can make a profound difference when someone finally says, *“I’m not okay.”*